

1. *What is the Promised Land? What connections are there between the Land and the Kingdom of heaven?*

Note: For the sake of brevity in this essay, we shall refer to "The Promised Land as simply "The Land" and "The Kingdom of Heaven" shall be called "The Kingdom."

In this first question we are asked to compare the Land with The Kingdom. We will do so by examining the following categories of comparison: 1) Their Definitions, 2) Their Main Feature(s), 3) Their Entry/Possession, and 4) Their Future Aspects

I. Their Definitions

A. The Promised Land

The actual words, "The Promised Land" appears only once in the Scriptures, in Hebrews 11:9. According to the New American Standard Bible (NASB), Hebrews 11:9 reads: "By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise..." The Greek phrase rendered "the land of promise" (*gain tais epangelias*, γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας) literally says, "a land of the promise." Hence the verse indicates that Abraham lived as a resident alien in a land of the promise.

We are used to speaking about the land of the promise in terms of *the* land of *the* promise. However, this rather unusual wording in Hebrews 11 should not confuse us. The context of this passage makes it clear that the land in reference is the land of the ancient Canaanites, a literal piece of real estate on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

The "promise" referred to in this phrase is one of the solemn promises granted to our father, Abraham, in Genesis 12:1-7. Among other things, God promised to Abraham and his descendants a piece of literal land, then occupied by the Canaanites, as their national homeland.

B. The Kingdom of Heaven

The term "The Kingdom of Heaven" (*he basileia ton ouranon*, ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), and its various grammatical variants, is a term used 32 times in the Scriptures and found only in Matthew's Gospel. The expression "The Kingdom of God" (*he basileia tou Theou*, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) and its various grammatical forms appears to be a phrase that is used synonymously with "The Kingdom of Heaven."

The apparent reason for Matthew's use of "The Kingdom of Heaven" and its absence from the other Gospels might lie in the possibility that only Matthew may have been written originally in

Hebrew.¹ If this fact, stated by the Anti-Nicene writer Papias, is true then it seems clear that by utilizing Hebrew, Matthew most likely first wrote his work to a Jewish audience. Religious Jewish people both in Matthew's day as well as today are reluctant to say the word "God" (*elohim*, אֱלֹהִים) the Lord (*YHWH*, יְהוָה), or any other of the names for God, for fear that in doing so, they might violate Exodus 20:7 and take God's name in vain. Hence, they often substitute other words for God's names, such as the word "Heaven."

What is this Kingdom? It seems evident that "The Kingdom of Heaven/God" is a *spiritual* kingdom where God is the absolute sovereign and which has spiritual, unseen benefits and characteristics. This is in contrast with the concept of the Land, which is a geographical entity.

According to Hebrews 11:9-10, Abraham was also seeking this spiritual Kingdom in addition to His earthly inheritance of The Land. We read in 11:10 that Abraham "was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." As the context plainly shows, on the one hand, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, were granted the gift of a physical inheritance, the Land of Canaan. However, Hebrews 11:10 indicates that heaven, a spiritual kingdom, is meant, too. One could say that the earthly Land is a foretaste of God's heavenly country.

II. Their Main Feature(s)

A. The Land

The Land is a genuine geo-physical entity. It has borders, both natural and political. One description of the borders, for example, is in Numbers 34:1-12. The Word also has physical descriptions of the Land. We see one such description in Deuteronomy 8:7-9:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.

The plain reading of the text would dictate that one interprets this passage, and others like it, in a most literal way — to be a literal description of a beautiful land with literal hills and valleys, literal fruit trees, and literal mineral resources, etc. It is only by changing one's method of interpretation, from that of a literal method to an allegorical method, can one imagine that hills and valleys, trees, and metals can mean something else. However, the context of this passage does not

¹ "Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could." Fragments of Papias *from The Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, VI, as recorded by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 39.

permit such an allegorical understanding, nor would it have made any sense to the original hearers of these words.

B. The Kingdom

When the Scriptures speak of the Kingdom, the descriptive language changes and is different from the language used to refer to The Land. Whereas, on the one hand, the descriptive language of the Land speaks in terms of boundaries, borders, and geographical features. On the other hand the descriptive features of The Kingdom is characterized by spiritual qualities.

One of the four best examples of this feature of the Kingdom language is found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. Both of these parallel passages present what is often called "Parables of the Kingdom." Matthew 13:1 informs us that what is to follow is a record of Yeshua speaking in "parables." Parables are not meant to be taken literally. A parable might be defined as "a brief story used to teach some moral lesson or truth". They might be considered to be allegorical snippets that teachers used to summarize spiritual truths. In keeping with this definition of parables, therefore, we see that Yeshua's instruction recorded in Matthew 13 and Mark 4 was intended to use literal objects to convey spiritual truths.

Accordingly, Yeshua talks about the characteristics of The Kingdom by comparing it to: a sower (Matt. 13:3-30), a mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32), leaven (Matt. 13:33), a hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44), a pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46), and a dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50). While these objects are surely physical, they are utilized to convey the spiritual truths of The Kingdom.

As we can see from the biblical evidence, there are vast differences between the concept of The Land and the concept of The Kingdom. They appear to be entirely different entities. These differences are further accentuated when we examine how one took possession of the Land and how one "takes possession of" or enters the Kingdom.

III. Their Entry/Possession

A. The Land

The Land was a grace gift from God, promised first to Abraham and then to his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. The Land, being a piece of real estate, was intended to become the national inheritance and homeland for those physical descendants.

Genesis 15 recounts how this promise was dramatically confirmed to Abraham. In 15:7, God told Abram: "I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." It seems

obvious that Abraham considered this to be a literal promise and the context shows no indication that it was not meant to be a literal promise. Indeed, in the next verse Abram seeks confirmation of this promise when he asks the Lord, "O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it?"

The method that God chose to answer Abram's request was the strongest possible way that God could have provided assurance that He truly meant His promises in a most literal way. Based on the contemporary covenant-making customs, God instructed Abram to sacrifice a series of animals, halve them, and separate them into two rows with a path between the rows. The procedure was that each of the covenant-making parties was to walk between the rows of sacrificial animal pieces. The symbolism was simply this: "just as these animals were slaughtered, so may it happen to me if I fail to keep my part of this covenant."

Notice what God did in the process, however. Instead of both He and Abram walking through the sacrifices, He causes Abraham to sleep, making him completely passive. Then, represented by a "flaming torch," God Himself passes through the pieces. This dramatic action indicates at least two dynamic truths. First, God truly meant His promises. If He would fail to keep those promises, including the promise of a literal homeland to Abram and his descendants, He vowed that the same thing would happen to Him as what happened to the sacrificial animals. Because this would have been impossible to occur to the Eternal God, then by the same token, it would have been impossible for any of His sacred and literal promises to fail to transpire with Abram and his descendants. In other words, Abram would have understood this to be the strongest possible way for God to confirm His promises.

Secondly, by virtue of the fact that it was only God who passed through the sacrifices, we can be assured that the fulfilment of these promises was dependant totally on God and not in any way dependant on Abram or his descendants. It was most certainly an unconditional covenant. Thus, Abraham was provided with indisputable assurance that there would be a literal land, which would become not only his possession but also that of his descendants.

Biblical history clearly attests to this reality. For example, it was to this literal land that God promised to take the children of Israel after they were redeemed from Egyptian slavery. In making these declarations, God referred to the land as that land which He promised to their forefathers. Accordingly, we read that when God instituted the observance of Pesach to Israel, he told them in Exodus 13:5 that they were to go to the "land sworn to their forefathers."

Moreover, when Israel arrived to this Land, they were instructed by God to take it by force. They were to make warfare with the sinful inhabitants there. Although the Land was theirs by solemn oath from God, they were nevertheless told to drive out the Canaanites by military force, thus taking possession of the Land. Deuteronomy 31:3-8 summarizes this when it says:

The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said. And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

For examples, please see Deuteronomy. 7:1-9 and 9:1-6.

B. The Kingdom

Entry into and possession of the Kingdom is entirely different than that of the Land.

According to Matthew 4:17, one must repent in order to be part of the Kingdom. In addition, Mark 10:15 I tells us that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Matthew 7:21 informs us that only those who do the Father's will are the ones who will be in the Kingdom and it will be difficult for a rich person to enter the Kingdom (Matthew 19:23). Finally in John 3:3 Yeshua declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born from above."

In short, the methods of entering God's Kingdom are drastically different from that of entering or possessing the Land. Repenting, becoming like a little child, doing the Father's will, and being born from above are all spiritual actions. Why is this so? It is because the Kingdom is spiritual. It is just as Paul summarizes it in Romans 14:17 when he writes: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

IV. Their Future Aspects

We have been demonstrating that the biblical evidence indicates that the Land is very different from the Kingdom. One is physical; the other is primarily spiritual. However, the Bible also seems to indicate that

in the future the two concepts will come together, the Land and the Kingdom will be one and the same. How can this be?

A. The King

We have seen how God gave the Land to Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to be their national inheritance and homeland. However, whose land is it?

According to Isaiah 8:8, 10, the Land of Israel, the Land of Promise, is really Immanuel's Land! Immanuel is Yeshua, according to Matthew 1:23. Thus, Yeshua, the King of Kings, is the rightful owner of the Land. He has merely assigned Israel to be its caretaker. If the Land truly belongs to Yeshua, then it is only reasonable that the inhabitants of the Land would be the happiest if they also were part of His Kingdom.

In fact, that is exactly what will happen some time in the future. According to Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19, some day the King of Kings will descend back to the Land and reign as its rightful King. In that day the Kingdom will be the Land because the King will be ruling from Jerusalem, in the Land.

B. The Union

One of the things that Yeshua taught His students to pray is that The Father's will "be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). Here Yeshua is relating a fundamental principle that is woven throughout the entire fabric of Scripture: That which is above is to be reflected here below. There is a realm of existence where God is that which is invisible to us. Is it important for us to know this realm and its characteristics. God has created several means to reflect that spiritual realm down here on earth. The Tabernacle is one such means. Exodus 25: 8-9 tells us that God instructed the Israelites to make a sanctuary for Him, "According to all that I am going to show you, *as* the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*."

Life in the Land is another such means. The Torah is replete with instructions to Israel on how to live in the Land. If they would follow this teaching, life in the Land would be a truly spiritual experience! (See Deuteronomy 4) In fact, it is possible to suggest that God gave the gift of the inheritance of the Promised Land to Israel for their physical reality to perfectly reflect the spiritual realities of the Kingdom of Heaven. When their national and personal lives did not match that heavenly spiritual reality, they suffered for it — just as the Torah indicated would happen to those who would break God's Covenant (See Deuteronomy 27-29).

This future union of the Land and the Kingdom is reflected in Hebrews 11:9-10. Verse 9 speaks about the Land of Promise, the literal Promised Land. However, Abraham, while seeking for and living in the

Promised Land, also understood his own relationship with the Kingdom of God. "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:10). He looked for the time that he understood would be when the two would become one, a time when the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven would come to earth and whose King would rule from a literal Jerusalem in a literal land promised literally to a literal nation of literal descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Summary

We have seen that there is both a literal Land of Promise and a spiritual Kingdom of Heaven/God. Both exist. They are not to be equated with each other because both have different characteristics. One is a literal piece of real estate that is given to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, serving as their national homeland. The other is a spiritual realm where God is the King and where those who enter must do so according to His spiritual qualifications.

We have also noted that some day the two shall become one. Some day God's spiritual Kingdom will become manifested on earth and have as its centre of rule a very literal and physical Jerusalem. Until that time, the Messiah desires His people to pray that God's Kingdom will be seen in the lives of all of His subjects, whether they live in The Promised Land or not.

It is within the borders of this Land that God designed humanity to have a demonstration of the reality that Heaven touches earth with no separation between the two. This was first shown in the Garden of Eden (*Gan Eden*, גן עדן). Then, it could have been seen in the Mishkan (Tabernacle), as well as in the Temple. All these were designed by God Himself so that His people would be taught the reality of Himself as the Place wherein His people dwell. The term "the place" is in Hebrew, ha-Makom (המקום). This word eventually became an ancient Jewish name for God. Then, in time, space and history Ha-Makom was manifested in the person of Yeshua the Messiah through whom Heaven walks upon the earth.

Through the Torah, mankind discovers the reality that Heaven touches earth. How Heaven touches earth is through Yeshua dwelling in all those born from above through His the finished work of atonement. In Messiah, as Ha-Makom, God's redeemed walk on earth and are, in Him, and seated with Him in the Heavens. Therefore, Heaven touches earth in a very real sense through Yeshua dwelling in all who by faith are in Him. Heaven touches earth as those who are the children of Light walk this earth. He, Yeshua, is seated now in the heavens at the Throne of God. He, Yeshua, is now dwelling in us within these temporary tents

of dwelling – these jars of clay, our bodies. He is in both places at the same time and there is no separation between the two. This is the reality that Abba wanted us to know from the very beginning, from Genesis chapters one and two.

We were created to dwell within Ha-Makom (“The Place,” biblical and rabbinic shorthand meaning “the intimate, special place within” God) above and below with no separation between the two entities. This truth, this reality will ultimately be displayed as the New Jerusalem descends from the heavens to dwell upon the earth within the borders of Immanuel’s land.