

The Two Kingdoms

By Ariel Berkowitz

There is a scene from C. S. Lewis' *The Silver Chair* where Prince Caspian is found, after a long search, bound up in servitude to an evil kingdom. His rescuers were astonished at his spiritual condition, giving every indication that he truly was part of a sinister kingdom. But they knew him better. They knew that, despite all appearances, his true self was, and would always, remain a subject to Aslan's kingdom.

This skilfully crafted story is a powerful illustration of the spiritual reality of everyone who has truly placed their faith in Yeshua the Messiah. There are three parts to this reality. The first part is that there are, indeed, two spiritual kingdoms. The second part is the fact that real believers are members of God's kingdom. The third part is that as members of God's kingdom, we have a new spiritual identity that is characteristic of that glorious kingdom. Let us explore these three concepts.

First, the Scriptures remind us of the reality that there are two spiritual kingdoms in this universe. Romans 5: 12–21 informs us that there is the Kingdom of Sin and Death and there is the Kingdom of Righteousness and Life. The first is the evil kingdom, the second is the Kingdom of God. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these are not equal kingdoms. There is no spiritual dualism in our universe. God's kingdom has no equal, no real competitor, although the other kingdom would like us to believe that it is equal to or even more powerful to God's realm. Yet, both kingdoms have many parallels. Taking our data from Romans 5, we can compare these two kingdoms in this way:

Verse	Kingdom of Sin and Death	Kingdom of Righteousness and Life	Verse
18	Sin (Disobedience) of Adam	Obedience of the 2 nd Adam: Yeshua	18
19	Made Sinners	Made Righteous	19
16	Judgment	Grace	15,17
16	Condemnation	Justification	16
17	Death	Life	17

Among other things, this chart visualizes the truth that there are only two kingdoms. There is no third kingdom. One is either in the Kingdom of Sin and Death or he/she is in the Kingdom of Righteousness and Life. There is no middle ground, no grey area. The moment one believes in Yeshua, one is immediately transferred from one kingdom to another. This is the second of the three parts to the reality as we have

stated above. One who truly trusts in the person and work of Yeshua is not only one who is forgiven of his sins, but he is also transferred from one kingdom to another. It is as the Scriptures states, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

Looking at the second row under the headings of the chart, we can see the truth of the third part of the reality of the two kingdoms. When one was a part of the Kingdom of Death, he had a certain specific identity. He/she was called a "sinner." It was not merely that one sinned, although that is certainly true. Rather, the emphasis is on the person's identity. He was called a *sinner*. In contrast, look at the identity of the one who is in Messiah. He is no longer called a *sinner*. Instead, Romans 5:19 indicates that he now has a brand new identity. He is described as a righteous person. The Greek of this verse is clearer. It indicates that the former sinner is now *constituted* righteous. He is not merely given the righteousness of Messiah to be worn like a piece of clothing that can be put on or removed, although it is true that the Scripture describes us as having been clothed in Messiah's righteousness. It is more. This life-changing truth is reiterated again in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where we read that God made Yeshua "sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

How can God declare a sinner to be righteous? To be true to Himself and His justice, God cannot simply say of that sinner that he is righteous, when in fact, he is not. That would be deception, inconsistent, unfair, and untruthful. To this, theologian John Murray insightfully declares

The mere notion of declaring to be righteous is seen to be inadequate of itself to express the fullness of what is involved in God's justification of the ungodly. In God's justification of sinners there is no deviation from the rule that what is declared to be is presupposed to be. He constitutes the ungodly righteous, and consequently can declare them to be righteous.ⁱ

Do not miss the full impact of this reality. Not only are we declared to be justified by God through belief in the Yeshua. But in order for God to make that declaration, He first radically changed us and gave us a new identity in the process. David C. Needham discusses this fundamental change in slightly different terms. In his book called *Birthright*, Needham rings out these amazing words of truth: A believer in Yeshua,

is not simply a person who gets forgiveness, who gets to go to heaven...[A believer] is a person who has become someone he was not before — he is a new creation.ⁱⁱ

In other words, in terms of our deepest identity, we are fundamentally and permanently changed. Not only are we declared to be righteous, but since we are members of God's kingdom, we have been constituted righteous and made into new creations. We are no longer

sinners, but believers in Yeshua “in terms of his deepest identity, is a saint, a born child of God, a divine masterpiece, a child of light, a citizen of heaven,”ⁱⁱⁱ says Needham.

Thus, we have seen that not only are there two spiritual kingdoms in our universe, but that one is either a subject of one or the other. Prince Caspian’s rescuers were able to deliver him from the clutches of the evil kingdom because they were aware that his deepest and truest identity was that he was a member of Aslan’s kingdom and not of that other, evil, kingdom which held him in bondage. They were not deceived by appearances. They knew who this Prince was and acted on that reality for his benefit.

Knowing our truest spiritual identity, therefore, can have life-impacting ramifications of each and every believer. It can help us to walk as ones who are part of God’s kingdom, despite how we feel or what our circumstances might be. It can also help us to treat others in the Body of Messiah with respect and grace — according to who they are in Messiah and not be put off by any flesh in which they might be entangled.

ⁱ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 122–123

ⁱⁱ David C. Needham. *Birthright*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1983, p. 47.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*