

LESSON 1

The Kingdom or Churches of Jesus Christ By Alonzo Nunnery

THE KINGDOM

The term "Kingdom," "Kingdom of Heaven," etc., as used in the Bible has various applications. Perhaps it is due to this fact that Bible students are so widely divided in their opinions about the meaning of the term.

Webster defines the term "kingdom" to be: "The rank, quality, state or attribute of a king; dominion; monarchy; kingship. (2) A state of monarchy, the head of which is a king."

From this definition it is clear that whatever God rules over as Head, Ruler, as a sovereign King, may properly be called God's Kingdom. In this sense the entire universe may be properly called the Kingdom, or Kingdoms, of God: for God rules over all things. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all," 1 Chronicles 29:11. "The LORD hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all," Psalms 103:19.

The earth and all that is in it may be spoken of as God's Kingdom. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein," Psalms 24:1.

The Jews as a nation might have been called God's Kingdom, as God had separated them from all others, giving them their laws and governors.

Heaven is called God's Kingdom, since God rules supremely over all the Heavenly host. "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen," 2 Timothy 4:18. Peter says: "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." (2 Pet. 1:11.)

From these Scriptures it is plain that the word Kingdom does not always apply to the same institution. We read of the kingdom of darkness, having reference to the rule of satan. But when we speak of any institution over which God rules and is its supreme monarch or king, we may properly call that institution the Kingdom of God, or even the Kingdom of Heaven.

Men -even preachers- often speak of the spiritual family of God, or the aggregate of the saved, as the Kingdom of God. I have never found a verse in all the Bible which conclusively teaches that the saved are called the Kingdom of God; not even so when all the saved are safely housed in Heaven, for even then the angels and all the Heavenly hosts will be members, or a part, of the Kingdom of God. A kingdom is composed of (1) king, (2) territory, (3) subjects. There is no one territory in which all the saved may be considered to occupy. Some of the saved are in Heaven, and some on earth. It cannot be said that there is a state or nation on earth

that could be called the territory occupied by the saved, over whom God rules. The saved are not related to God as servants or slaves, but as children or sons. "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Gal. 4:7. See also John 1:12-13; John 3:3-7; Gal. 3:26; 1 John 3:1 and 3:9; 1 John 4:7 and 5:7.) From these and many other Scriptures we know that salvation is effected by a new birth which makes the saved the real children of God.

True, a child is to be in subjection to his father, more perfectly so than any enslaved or hired servant but the relation between the father and the child is very different from that of a slave and his master, or even a hired servant and his master. God's children constitute God's family, whether they are on earth or in Heaven. "Of Whom the whole family in Heaven and in earth is named." (Eph. 3:15.)

Colossians 1:13

Some understand Paul (in Col. 1:13) to teach that salvation puts the saved person into the Kingdom of God. The verse reads, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son." This verse comes the nearest to conveying the idea that salvation puts the saved into the Kingdom, and is the best support of the theory that the saved constitute the Kingdom of God, of any Scripture that can be found in the Bible. If there was no Scripture that such a construction would contradict we might consider the foregoing to be the thought

in this verse. But, as shown above, salvation is a new birth. Scores of Scriptural references could be cited to prove this. No one will attempt to deny this.

Translation is not a new birth for the word has no such meaning. "Translate" as it refers to men in this instance has the idea of taking a person from one place and putting that same person in another place. The person may not be changed in such a translation in the least but he changes places.

Salvation is a new birth -a new creature is born. The Colossians as a Gentile race were considered aliens -strangers to the commonwealth- and foreigners; but now, after they had been saved and admitted into the Kingdom and service of God, Paul simply contrasted their former life as foreigners and aliens to the grace and government of God; having been in the kingdom of darkness and under the power and control of the devil these had been admitted or translated into the Kingdom and service of God.

You will notice that Paul declares these Gentiles had been delivered from the power of darkness before they were translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. To be delivered from the power of darkness -or the devil- is the same as to be saved. Hence, these Colossians had been saved before they were translated into the Kingdom of God.

We find this verse, while seemingly supporting the idea of Kingdom salvation, plainly teaches that they were saved before they were translated or before they entered the Kingdom of God's dear Son.

Daniel 2:44

There are others who believe that the kingdom referred to in Daniel, 2:44, and other places, has reference to the thousand years' reign of Christ on earth. The thousand years' reign of Christ on earth, or the millennium, has nothing to do with the setting up of the Kingdom which we are to study in this volume. If in the second coming of Christ, He shall set up a Kingdom on earth, at Jerusalem or any other place, that would not disprove our contention that Jesus Christ did while on this earth set up a Kingdom over which He, or the God of Heaven, rules as monarch or king, and that this Kingdom or government is composed of the Churches of Jesus Christ. If I can prove from the Bible that the Lord Jesus did set up a Kingdom or government while He was on earth, and that that Kingdom is composed of the Churches of Jesus Christ, I have succeeded in my contention.

Let it be clear that I do not contend that the word Kingdom refers to the Churches of Christ every time that it occurs in the Bible, but I do contend that the word Kingdom as used in certain places in the Bible refers to the Churches of Christ and the origin of the Churches.

In Daniel, 2:44, we read: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

Daniel could not have in mind the Kingdom of which David spoke when he said: "Thy kingdom ruleth over all," for that kingdom was already in existence at that very time.

Daniel could not have had in mind the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved for he himself was saved, as were his companions and many others. So, even if we were to admit that the saved constitute a kingdom or that the kingdom is the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved, neither of these could be the kingdom to which Daniel had reference.

Daniel could not have had reference to Heaven, the kingdom to which Paul and Peter referred, as above quoted; for Heaven already existed. Enoch had been taken to Heaven, so also had Elijah.

Daniel could not have had in mind the second coming of Christ or a kingdom to be set up on earth at the coming of Christ (if such a kingdom is to be set up) for Daniel specifies the exact time in which the kingdom referred to was to be set up, and history corroborates or proves that the prophecy of Daniel was indeed fulfilled at the exact time mentioned by Daniel.

Before leaving this point let us remind the reader there is NOT one word or verse in the Bible that says, or supports, the theory that the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved people constitutes a kingdom or is called a kingdom. Why should anyone presume to say for the Lord that which the Lord never said?

It is conclusive that to find a kingdom to which the prophecy of Daniel would apply we must find a kingdom,

government or some sort of an institution, set up by the God of Heaven, over which He rules as supreme monarch or king, which has been set up or will be set up since Daniel made that declaration. We know that God has not made a new earth or a new Heaven. He has not set up a political kingdom or government on earth since that time, nor has God set up a new reign of grace in the hearts of the saved.

A careful study of the subject convinces us that no other institution or government or kingdom has been set up on earth by the God of Heaven excepting the Churches of Jesus Christ. At the time Daniel made this statement there were no such institutions on earth as what we now call Churches of Christ. There were no churches of any faith on earth in days of Daniel; but we now have many hundred different denominations, each calling themselves churches of Christ.

We were not left to guess as to whether or not Jesus Christ or the God of Heaven set up a Church. Jesus says: "Upon this rock will I build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," (Mat. 16:18.) Now, if we can prove that Jesus, or the God of Heaven, rules over the Churches as supreme monarch or king then we have proven that the God of Heaven did set up a Kingdom or government after Daniel made his prophesy. And since the God of Heaven has set up no other Kingdom or government on earth since that time, if we prove that the God of Heaven does rule over the Churches then we have located the Kingdom prophesied of by Daniel.

In John 13:13, Jesus says: "Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am." In verse 16, Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you: the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither is he that is sent greater than He that sent him." Here the Lord positively declares Himself to be "Lord and Master," evidently meaning Lord and Master to His Churches.

Taking Webster's definition of a kingdom -i. e., a sovereignty, with a Lord, king or ruler- we have located a Kingdom in the foregoing, since Jesus declares Himself to be Lord and Master, Ruler. Paul declares Jesus to be Head and Ruler over His Churches. "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all," (Eph. 1:22-23.) Not only Webster, but, so far as we know, all scholars without an exception so define the term "Kingdom." If the meaning of the word "Kingdom" means a sovereignty or government over which a king or monarch rules as supreme Lord or king, then the Churches of Jesus Christ constitute a Kingdom, for the Bible is very plain. Jesus says He is "Lord and Master" and Paul says that Jesus is here "Lord or Ruler" over all things to the Church.

This Kingdom is the "Kingdom of God" because Jesus was declared to be the God of Heaven manifest in flesh or the body. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory," (1 Tim. 3:16.) In John 14:10, Jesus says: "Believest

thou not that I am in the Father, the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." Since Jesus declared that the words that He spake were the words of the Father and the works that He did were in fact the Father doing the work, and since Jesus declared that He would build His Church then it follows that it was in fact the God of Heaven building or setting up the Church.

Therefore, since a Kingdom is composed of a king, and Jesus was a king (John 13:13 and Matthew 27:11.) The people whom Jesus claimed to be their Lord and Master were His subjects. And since the Churches are composed of those subjects and Jesus is Lord and Master or king over the Churches, the Churches in the aggregate constitute a Kingdom. And since the God of Heaven has Not set up any other institution or government on earth since Daniel declared that the God of Heaven would set up a Kingdom and now that Jesus being the God of Heaven did set up a Church, and since Jesus does rule over all His Churches as Lord and Master, head or king, we are surely justified in saying that the founding of the first Church on the mountain by the Lord Jesus in person was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. And the setting up of the churches of Jesus Christ was the setting up of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This position is fully sustained in what our Saviour said to Peter at the time Jesus declared He would build His church. The entire verse reads: "And, I say unto you that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and, the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it, and I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and, whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in Heaven and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19.)

It is certain that our Lord never built one institution and then gave Peter the keys to an entirely different institution. The expression, "bind on earth" plainly shows that Jesus was talking about an institution which existed on earth. As shown above the God of Heaven had not at that time, nor since then ever set up any other institution or government on this earth. So again we are driven to the conclusion that the Kingdom mentioned in Matthew 16:19 was to be composed of the Churches mentioned in verse 18.

Luke 17:20-21

Some think the words of Jesus in Luke 17:20-21, teach that the term "Kingdom" means the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved. If Jesus meant it so in this Scripture (but He did not) this would not disprove our position. The term "Kingdom" is not limited to any one institution -as shown above- or government over which God rules. The verses in Luke 17:20-21 read: "And when He was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold the Kingdom of God is within you."

You will notice that Jesus was answering the demand of the Pharisees. We know that Jesus did not mean that the reign of grace

or salvation was in these wicked Pharisees whom Jesus often denounced as devils, liars and hypocrites. Jesus told these Pharisees that they were of their "father, the devil, and the lust of him ye will do." He even asked them how they could escape the damnation of hell.

What proves too much proves nothing. If the words, "Kingdom is within you," refers to salvation or the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved, then these wicked Pharisees were saved when Jesus said they were not saved, and had but little chance to escape the damnation of hell. If you will look in the margin of your Bible you will (or might) find that the words "within you," may be translated, instead of within, "among you."

The Jews were expecting the Kingdom of God to come in great display subduing all the enemies of the Jews, re-establishing the kingdom of David and making the Jews the possessors or managers of this kingdom. Jesus simply rebuked this vain idea of the Kingdom and declared that the Kingdom was not to be with show and display, but as He had said in Matthew 5: 3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of God." Then Jesus reminded these Pharisees that the Kingdom was even then among them and they had not observed it. Perhaps from no other reason than they had and did have such a misconception of what the Kingdom would be.

Romans 14:17

Sometimes Romans 14:17 is quoted as proof that the term "Kingdom" means all the saved. The verse reads: "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." The American Standard version puts it: "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." As the reader will see from the context, Paul was correcting some misconceptions concerning meats that were being offered in sacrifice. He summed up the conclusion of all he had said by saying, in so many words, the purpose and principles of the Kingdom of God or the Churches is not eating and drinking. But the real principle and work of these Churches is to do right, teach the people to do right -not what they should eat nor what they should not eat- but to do right. The personal benefits of our labor in the Kingdom is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

There is no way to construe Paul's language in this Scripture to mean that the Kingdom is the reign of grace in the hearts of the people. We do not enter the Church for worldly gain - such as eating and drinking- but in the interest of righteousness or a righteous cause. We are not rewarded for our work in the Churches with worldly goods, such as meats and drinks, but we enter the Church because it is right. Its purpose and work is to build up the cause of righteousness. Our reward is not in worldly goods, but in joy and peace in the Holy Ghost. This is all that I can see taught in this Scripture. There are many Scriptures which

teach the Kingdom set up by the God of Heaven -as shown above- cannot be the reign of grace in the hearts of the believer. The Kingdom cannot be the aggregate of the saved.

Nor can the Kingdom be an invisible Kingdom as some teach, but is composed of people who live in the flesh, carnal men and women, tangible body.

Matthew 11:12

Not only that, but the Scriptures teach that even unsaved people may get into the Kingdom; not that such people have any right in the Kingdom or are proper subjects of the Kingdom, but the Kingdom being composed of men and women, living men and women who are in the flesh, wicked or unsaved people can and do get into this Kingdom. Jesus says: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," Matthew 11:12. The Standard version reads: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence taketh it by force."

The Kingdom spoken of here could not have been the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved, nor could it have been an invisible kingdom. Violent men could not see an invisible kingdom, and we know that violent men could not have forced themselves into the company of the saved, or into a saved state. But we can understand how, after Jesus had set up His Church, a body of men and women like you and I, that unsaved people could

force themselves onto this Church. You and I have seen this done in our own day, many times. It is not a thing uncommon to hear someone speak of another as having imposed himself on the church.

All these corroborating Scriptures and facts harmonize in the teaching that the Kingdom is composed of the Churches and that this Kingdom is a visible body of people in which unworthy men may impose themselves.

Matthew 13:47-50

Again, in Matthew 13:47-50 Jesus says: "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea - and gathered of every kind, which when it was full they drew to shore- and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be in the end of the world; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This illustration is a simple one. Just as we, by dragging a net through the water, may gather fish of various kind into the net, and when we have landed the net we cast away such as we do not want; so the Kingdom of God being composed of men and women received upon certain conditions, such as a wicked person may imitate or profess to possess, they therefore may get into this Kingdom, like bad fish get into the net. The Saviour shows us the fact that though they get into the Kingdom this will not permit them into Heaven, but will be cast away, just as

we would cast away bad fish. These wicked or unsaved people, though in the Kingdom, will at the coming of Jesus be cast into the lake of fire or hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 16:16

We will quote one more Scripture, which we think is sufficient to convince anyone who is open to conviction by the plain Scripture, that Jesus did set up His own Kingdom, and that the said Kingdom is composed of the sum and total of the Churches of Jesus Christ. That this Kingdom is a visible Kingdom and, being a government or Kingdom composed of men, wicked -may and do- get into this Kingdom, but their getting into the Kingdom will not permit them to enter Heaven, hence the Kingdom and the saved are not one and the same.

In Luke 16:16, Jesus says: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the Kingdom of God hath been preached, and every man presseth into it." Agreeing with this statement from our Lord, John said in the beginning of his preaching: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." As said by the Lord, there were no such institutions as Churches. The people had the law and the prophets, but since the preaching of John we have Churches. Before John, the Lord had prophets, and the devil had prophets. Since the days of John the Lord has Churches, and the devil has many churches. This shows that Churches had their origin since, or immediately following the preaching of John.

Jesus here declares that the Kingdom of God "has been preached since the days of John," and that men had been pressing themselves into this Kingdom. Men could not press into a thing that did not exist, therefore the Kingdom did exist at the time Jesus spoke these words. Men could not press or force themselves into salvation, but they did force themselves into the Kingdom of God. So the Kingdom and the saved are not one and the same; nor can the Kingdom be the reign of grace in the hearts of the saved for men could not force the reign of grace in their hearts. Nor could the Kingdom be an invisible kingdom, for men could not find an invisible Kingdom that they might force themselves into it, and could not force themselves into an invisible Kingdom if they should find one.

It shows a lack of Bible study to hear men speak and pray about men being "born into the kingdom." No such expression can be found in the Bible, and no such thought is taught in the Bible. So, much that we hear about "kingdom work," "the ongoing of the kingdom," "the building of the kingdom," and many other similar expressions, are words without knowledge, or scripture.

In the following chapter we will consider the word "Church" and some further evidence of the relation of the Church and the Kingdom. We will then proceed to show, and to prove, the origin of the Churches, or the Kingdom.