

## CHAPTER I

### THE MEANING OF "THE KINGDOM OF GOD"

(1) The great theme of Jesus' teaching was the Kingdom of God. (2) From the fact that this Kingdom was in his time an object of eager expectancy to the Jews generally, (3) and that he must have wished his words to be intelligible to them, we may infer that, however different in some ways his view of it might have been from theirs, there must have been much in common between the two views. (4) In calling it sometimes "the Kingdom of the Heavens", he was simply using a customary reverent synonym for "God". (5) The word "Kingdom" in the Gospels means primarily kingship, or royal sovereignty. (6) The meaning of the Kingdom of God for men is therefore in the first place their submission to Him as King: (7) in this intensive sense the term was used both by the Rabbis and by Jesus. (8) But inasmuch as the King is in this case also the Father, His "Kingdom" involves a personal and filial relation to Him. (9) Furthermore, the word can also be used extensively to denote the realm, i.e., the group of those subject to the King. (10) It is thus a social entity, as well as an individual condition; and, inasmuch as the realization of this social ideal is a matter of growth, (11) the Kingdom often figures as an eschatological concept.

(1) A rough count shows that Q reports sixteen references on the part of Jesus to the Kingdom of God, L seven, Mk. thirteen, and M twenty-six. According to Mk. i. 15 = Mt. iv. 17 he began his public work with a declaration concerning it; and in his numerous allusions to it in the course of his teaching, it usually stands in the forefront of the argument. In Lk. xvi. 16 (Q or l?: cf. Mt. xi. 12) he himself indirectly depicts it as the main theme on which he—and apparently John the Baptist also—had preached. Therefore m and l were not misrepresenting the facts when, referring to Jesus in the third person, they spoke as if the Kingdom was his normal topic (l:—Lk. iv. 43, viii. 1 [unless L], ix. 11—cf. Acts i. 3; m:—Mt. iv. 23, ix. 35, xiii. 19). Q informs us that its nearness was the main burden of the missionary-addresses of the Disciples (Lk. x. 9 = Mt. x. 7); and here again the later editors furnish supplementary notices to the same general effect (Lk. ix. 21; Lk. ix. 60 l

[unless Q<sup>1</sup>]; Lk. x. 11 1; Mt. xxiv. 14a m). There can, therefore, be no doubt as to its central importance in Jesus' whole world-view.<sup>2</sup>

(2) However rare may be the occurrence of the actual phrase "the Kingdom of God" in Jewish literature, there is abundant evidence to show that the idea of it dominated the minds of the people generally, particularly those large sections of it for whom eschatology was of prime importance.<sup>3</sup> While all agreed that in some sense God was King already, and while the thought of His Kingdom as a purely-religious concept survived, as we shall see, among certain of the Rabbis, it was as a glorious future state for the nation, a state soon to be miraculously and catastrophically brought in by God, that the rank and file of the people (including not only the Apocalyptists, but also many of the Pharisees) mostly pictured it. Less than a century before Jesus' ministry, the author of the seventeenth 'Psalm of Solomon' had written, "But we will rest our hope on God our saviour, because the power of our God (is) for ever with mercy, and the Kingdom of our God (will hold sway) forever over the nations in judgment" (Psa. Sol. xvii. 3); and in the sequel he gives a full picture of the hoped-for Messiah of the seed of David.<sup>4</sup> The gospels indicate how much the notion of the coming Kingdom was in the air. John the Baptist may have proclaimed its nearness as part of his announcement of the terrible judgment and winnowing which the one stronger than he was shortly to undertake (Mt. iii. 2 Q or m).<sup>5</sup> Godly men like Joseph of Arimathæa were "on the look-out for the Kingdom of God" (Mk. xv. 43 = Lk. xxiii. 51), in the same way that Symeon was "on the look-out for the consolation of Israel" (Lk. ii. 25), and others "for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk. ii. 38). A man who had been listening to Jesus talking at table volunteered the remark, "Happy is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Lk. xiv. 15 L). The Pharisees once asked Jesus to tell them when it was coming (Lk. xvii. 20 L). As he approached Jerusalem, people 'thought that the Kingdom of God was on the point of appearing' (Lk. xix. 11 1 or L). When he rode in triumph into the city,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Manson, *Teaching*, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. L. Schmidt in *T.W.N.T.* i. 584f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Schürer, *G.J.V.* ii. 628f.; Bousset, *Relig. des Jud.* (1926), 213-218; Moore, *Judaism*, i. 401, 423; Von Rad in *T.W.N.T.* i. 565-569.

<sup>4</sup> On the predominantly eschatological idea of the Kingdom, cf. Wellhausen, *Einleitung*, 86-98; also Major in *Mission*, etc. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Streeter argues that, as the Matthæan account of John's coming was drawn from Q as well as from Mk., Mt. iii. 2 may well come from Q (in *J.T.S.* xiv. 550f. [July 1913], and *Four Gospels*, 205f.). But see below, pp. 240f.

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the crowds shouted with enthusiastic expectancy, "Blessed (be) the coming Kingdom of our father David!" (Mk. xi. 10 : cf. Lk. xix. 38 L and Mt. xxi. 9). Luke pictures the Disciples asking their risen Master, "Lord, is it at this time that thou dost restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6), the crucifixion having temporarily quenched their "hope that it was he who was destined to redeem Israel" (Lk. xxiv. 21 L). All this serves to show that, when Jesus spoke in public about the Kingdom of God, he was using a phrase that was already familiar to his hearers as a name for the great hope of the nation.

(3) Mindful of the radical differences between Jesus' conception of the Messiahship and the ideas of it entertained by the people generally (see above, p. 55), many modern scholars have confidently assumed and emphatically asserted that a similar gulf was fixed between his own view of God's Kingdom and that of his fellow-countrymen. As compared with the often grotesque beliefs of the apocalyptic writers, the ideas of Jesus doubtless were very unusual.<sup>1</sup> Caution, however, is necessary at this point. We observe, for instance, that, while the novelty of Jesus' views necessitated great reticence on his part in speaking about his Messiahship, he clearly felt no corresponding need for secrecy as regards the Kingdom of God. On that subject he was apparently quite prepared to run any risks of misunderstanding in which publicity of speech might involve him. May we not infer that his beliefs regarding the Kingdom were sufficiently close to those of his hearers to render it possible for him to convey his meaning to them without difficulty by means of the normal method of his teaching?

(4) The Kingdom is God's.<sup>2</sup> In Mk. Jesus is always represented as speaking of the Kingdom "of God". The usage in Lk. is the same, except that we get "Thy Kingdom" in Lk. xi. 2 L (if the reading is correct), "His Kingdom" in Lk. xii. 31 = Mt. vi. 33 Q, "the Kingdom" in Lk. xii. 32 L or 1 and (parabolically) in Lk. xix. 15 L, and "a Kingdom" in Lk. xxii. 29 L and (parabolically) in Lk. xix. 12 L. In Mt., on the contrary, we find Jesus' normal phrase is "the Kingdom of the Heavens": but the Marco-Lucan form, "the Kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Salmond in *H.D.B.* i. 751a; Stevens, *Theol. of the N.T.* 33; Dob-schütz, *Eschatol.* 18, 183; Charles, *Crit. Hist.* (1913), 376; Weinel, *Theol.* 61-66; A. T. Cadoux, *Parables*, 129f., 175; Manson, *Teaching*, 37, 273f.; Dodd, *Parables*, 22, 38n., 50, 105ff. See also above, pp. 16-18.

<sup>2</sup> We shall note in a moment the occasional assignment of the Kingdom to Jesus himself.

God", appears in Mt. xii. 28 = Lk. xi. 20 Q, Mt. xix. 24 = Lk. xviii. 25 = Mk. x. 25 (the readings in Mk. and Mt. are doubtful; but Mt. and Lk. may be based on Mk. x. 23), Mt. xxi. 31 M, and Mt. xxi. 43 M: "Thy Kingdom" appears in Mt. vi. 10 M; "His Kingdom" in Mt. vi. 33 = Lk. xii. 31 Q; "the Kingdom of their Father" in Mt. xiii. 43 M or m; "the Kingdom of my Father" in Mt. xxvi. 29 m (contrast Mk. xiv. 25).

Much has been written on this variation between "the Kingdom of God" and "the Kingdom of the Heavens". Some have thought that Jesus used only one of them, and that the occurrence of the other was due to the preference of one or other of the Evangelists. It is certain in any case, from the occasional occurrence of "the Kingdom of God" even in Mt., that that formula at least goes back to the most primitive tradition. But it is not likely that the appearance of "the Kingdom of the Heavens" is solely due to the proclivities of M or m: it is more likely that Jesus occasionally used it, and that the proclivities of M or m account rather for its relative frequency in Mt. In regard to its meaning, it is not easy to give a precise explanation of the genitive  $\tau\hat{\omega}\nu\ \sigma\upsilon\beta\alpha\upsilon\alpha\upsilon\omega\upsilon\upsilon$ , namely, as to whether it expresses origin or quality or possession, etc. The probability is that "the Heavens" is here nothing more or less than one of those numerous Jewish equivalents for the Divine Name which saved a speaker from a too-frequent or too-familiar use of this latter (cf. Mk. xi. 30f. = Lk. xx. 4f. = Mt. xxi. 25; Lk. xv. 18, 21 L). The genitive  $\tau\omega\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  seems to be in the first place a possessive genitive, but precisely what it signifies we can ascertain only by a comprehensive study of Jesus' whole teaching on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

We may here take note parenthetically of the occasional description of the Kingdom as belonging to Jesus himself, or to the Son of Man. The usage is rare, and the authorities for it mostly inferior. m introduces it gratuitously in Mt. xvi. 28 (cf. Mk. ix. 1 = Lk. ix. 27) and in Mt. xx. 21 (cf. Mk. x. 37): and m or possibly M is responsible for it in the probably ungenue interpretation of the Parable of the Tares (Mt. xiii. 41). L has the idea in the Parable of the Nobleman (Lk. xix. 12, 15, 27) and on the lips of the crucified brigand (Lk. xxiii. 42);

<sup>1</sup> Cf., generally, Beyschlag, *Theol.* i. 41-43, 84f.; Stevens, *Theol. of the N.T.* 27f.; Dalman, *W.J.* 91-94, 217-219; Schürer, *G.J.V.* ii. 628f. (references to the lit. on the subject); Holtzmann, *Theol.* i. 249-252; Moffatt, *Theol. of the Gospels*, 63f.; Gloege, *Reich Gottes*, 49-51; Manson, *Teaching*, 118 n.1; K. L. Schmidt in *T.W.N.T.* i. 582f.

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only once does it occur in a non-parabolic saying of Jesus (Lk. xxii. 29f.). It is an early Christian conception, rather than a thought of Jesus himself (see 1 Cor. xv. 24; Col. i. 13; Eph. v. 5; Lk. i. 33; John xviii. 36; etc.).<sup>1</sup>

(5) God is frequently depicted and referred to in the Scriptures as "King", and the appellation remained in use down to New-Testament times, although the only Gospel-document to represent Jesus as using it is M (Mt. v. 35, xviii. 23, xxii. 2, 7, 11, 13). The Aramaic word מַלְכוּת, represented by βασιλεία in the Greek of the Gospels and by "Kingdom" in English, meant primarily, not "realm" or "royal domain", but "kingship" or "royal sovereignty". It is therefore a simple abstract noun designating the state and dignity of God considered as the King.<sup>2</sup> "Kingdom", therefore, which normally means in English "realm" or "royal domain", is not a very good word to use in translating the Gospel-term βασιλεία; if, for lack of any obviously-suitable alternative, we continue to use it, we must bear in mind that it represents in the first place "royalty" rather than "realm".

(6) Such being then the etymological significance of the word, we may next ask what are the ideas so inseparable from that of royal sovereignty that we may safely say of them that no one—ancient oriental or modern westerner—could naturally speak of royal sovereignty without implying them. Surely it would be meaningless to speak of a "King" or a "Kingdom" unless one implied the existence, beside the King, of subjects, of laws laid down by him for their guidance, and of rewards and punishments bestowed by him for obedience and disobedience respectively. For those who had no doubt that both God and men existed, the reality of God's Kingdom would mean in the first place the obedient submission of men to His Law.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Moffatt, *Theol. of the Gospels*, 64f.; Weinel, *Theol.* 50; K. L. Schmidt in *T.W.N.T.* i. 581f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dalman, *W.J.* 94; Moffatt, *Theol. of the Gospels*, 62; Strack-Billerbeck i. 183; Weinel, *Theol.* 53; H.-D. Wendland, *Eschatologie*, 15-19; K. L. Schmidt in *T.W.N.T.* i. 579f.; Dodd, *Parables*, 34 with n., 38 n.; V. Taylor, *Sacrifice*, 8. Gloege (*Reich Gottes*, 51-65, 72, 84, 154-159) lays stress on the idea that God's rule is event ("Geschehen") and activity.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Holtzmann, *Theol.* i. 293 n.2; Strack-Billerbeck i. 172f. ("... Auf Grund vorstehender Gedankenreihe wird man den rabbin. Begriff der מַלְכוּת zu definieren haben als die Herrschergewalt, die Gott durch die Offenbarung seines Namens u. sei es Willens über seine Bekenner ausübt.—Dass es sich bei der מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם in der Tat zunächst um Bindung der Gewissen im Gehorsam gegen Gott handelt, mit andren Worten, dass die מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם zu allererst ihre Stätte in den Herzen der Menschen hat, zeigen auch folgende Sätze. . . . Die Gottesherrschaft realisiert sich eben

(7) Rabbinic literature contains a number of allusions to the Kingdom of God as a Divine discipline, the yoke of which a man may take upon himself by confessing belief in and love for the One God, and submitting whole-heartedly to the Mosaic Law.<sup>1</sup> In the teaching of Jesus there is at least one saying which appears to demand a similar interpretation of the idea of the Divine Kingdom: "Every scribe who has been made a disciple to the Kingdom of the Heavens is like a householder", etc. (Mt. xiii. 52 M). The passage looks original: and it renders the same interpretation probable in the case of some other passages where it is perhaps less obligatory. Thus, "no one who has put his hand to the plough, and looks back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk. ix. 62 Q or L), and, "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will certainly not enter into it" (Mk. x. 15 = Lk. xviii. 17 = Mt. xviii. 3b): on one interpretation of Lk. xvii. 21 L (*ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν*), that saying also ought to be added here.

(8) Just as the Danielic idea of Messiahship was for Jesus fused with, and thus profoundly affected by, the Deutero-Isaianic idea of the Servant of the Lord, so his picture of God as King was fused with and profoundly affected by his thought of Him as Father. It is, of course, true that the Jews of his time were familiar with the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God: but it is clear that with Jesus the doctrine was far more determinative of his whole outlook than it was of theirs, and this partly because of his more sensitive estimate of the human parental relation, and because of his own personal self-consciousness of being God's "Son" in some unique sense (see above, pp. 27-33). Needless to say, he betrays no consciousness of any inconsistency or tension between the two concepts of Fatherhood and Kingship: but the fact that the former was so living a reality to him meant that the Kingdom of God, when viewed in the intensive aspect just described, was seen to involve a personal relationship of confidence and affection between God and man, and not simply a submission on man's

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überall da, wo sich ein Mensch bewussterweise dem Willen Gottes im Gehorsam unterstellt"), 173-178 (quotations in evidence of the foregoing); Manson, *Teaching*, 130f.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dalman, *W.J.* 96-98; Strack-Billerbeck i. 173 ("Der Mensch kann das Joch der Gottesherrschaft auf sich nehmen, er kann es aber auch von sich werfen. Man nimmt es auf sich, indem man sich zum Monotheismus u. zur Tora bekennt . . ."), 176-178, 608-610 (to recite the Sh'ma' is to take on the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, etc.); Otto, *Kingdom*, 37f.; Kuhn in *T.W.N.T.* i. 570-573

part, however willing, to God's authority. When, therefore, he spoke about "entering the Kingdom of God", he must have had in mind, among other things, the adoption by the individual disciple of an attitude of warm filial love towards God, involving of course complete and implicit obedience to Him, such as he had himself all through his life adopted. It seems that this aspect of his teaching belonged for the most part to the closing months of the Ministry and to the conversations he then had with the Disciples.<sup>1</sup>

(9) Our authorities tell us that, in Jewish literature at least, the phrase "the Kingdom of God" is always used in an intensive sense, never extensively of the group, realm, or territory over which God reigns.<sup>2</sup> However that may be, it is palpable that in the teaching of Jesus the term often has an extensive connotation. Sayings in which mention is made of "entering" the Kingdom, being "greatest" or "least" in it, seeing the Patriarchs in it (Lk. xiii. 28 = Mt. viii. 11 Q), shining out in it (Mt. xiii. 43 M), being gathered out of it (Mt. xiii. 41 M), or having it closed against one by others (Mt. xxiii. 13 [m or Q: cf. Lk. xi. 52]), cannot be naturally interpreted if "the Kingdom" must always mean only the royal sovereignty of God.<sup>3</sup> The mention of such sovereignty often brings to mind at once the thought of those over whom it is exercised. In passages in which that thought is to the fore, "the Kingdom" will be quite a good English equivalent of the Greek *ἡ βασιλεία* and the Aramaic מלכותא behind it.

(10) The Kingdom of God is thus for Jesus, in certain of its aspects, necessarily a society of human beings, and a growing society at that. Whatever else the Marcan Parables of the Seed (Mk. iv. 26-29) and the Mustard (Mk. iv. 30-32) and the Q-Parables of the Mustard and the Leaven (Lk. xiii. 18-21 = Mt. xiii. 31-33) may mean, they at least mean that the Kingdom increases in size, clearly by the multiplication of its members.<sup>4</sup> And forasmuch as these members are living on this earth, the

<sup>1</sup> Manson, *Teaching*, 37, 118-136, 161-164: after an elaborate analysis of all the relevant passages in the four Gospel-sources, Dr. Manson finds that, with the exception of Q, they all represent allusions to entering the Kingdom as late and esoteric.

<sup>2</sup> Dalman, *W.J.* 94: Strack-Billerbeck i. 183 ("Im Rabbin. findet sich keine Stelle, in der 'מלכות' oder 'מלכות' mit 'Reich (= Herrschaftsgebiet) Gottes' übersetzt werden müsste. Die Übersetzung 'Gottes herrschaft' oder 'Königtum' Gottes trifft überall, wie die oben beigebrachten Zitate zeigen, den richtigen Sinn . . .").

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Otto, *Kingdom*, 53f.; Flew, *Church*, 28-40, 120f. Per contra, cf. Gloege, *Reich Gottes*, 52-54, 67f., 84f.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Manson, *Teaching*, 133f.

Kingdom also is on earth ; and as its numbers grow, it too will necessarily grow (see below, p. 131 [5]). In spite, therefore, of all that has recently been written against the attempt to interpret the Kingdom of God as a social ideal or as an ideal society (see above, pp. 42f.), it clearly did approximate to some such thing. If we may trust two of the Parables in M, those namely of the Tares (Mt. xiii. 24-30) and the Drag-net (Mt. xiii. 47f.), the Kingdom on earth is sufficiently like a society to have worthy and unworthy members within it, though questions concerning reliability and exegesis would warn us to go cautiously at this point.

(11) But the growth of the Kingdom is not only a present fact : it has a future ; and it is with regard to expectations of its future that the idea of the Kingdom differs most widely from the modern idea of evolutionary progress. Even with the Rabbis, the intensive idea of the Kingdom did not exclude eschatological hopes : <sup>1</sup> and with Jesus the triumphant climax of the Kingdom's growth was a subject of such keen and many-sided interest that the study of it necessitates special inquiry along several lines.

<sup>1</sup> Dalman, *W.J.* 98-101 ; Otto, *Kingdom*, 38 ; and Strack-Billerbeck, as quoted above, p. 16 n. 2.