

Luke 4:42-44

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After a day and night of healings and deliverances from demon-possession, Jesus retreats from the crowds in search of solitude. He tells them that He must continue preaching the Kingdom of God in other cities.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 4:23-25 and Mark 1:35-39.

Luke continues his narrative after *Jesus* spent the previous evening healing people of physical ills and delivering others from demon-possession (Luke 4:40-41),

When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them (v 42).

Luke's phrasing of *when the day came* could mean that *Jesus* spent all night healing and casting out demons or simply that *Jesus* did this at the beginning of the next *day*. Considering that *the crowds were searching for Him*, it might have been that *Jesus* was up most or all night. Regardless, *Jesus left and went to a secluded place*.

Mark's Gospel gives us more insight into what *Jesus* was up to when *He* found some peace and quiet. *He* "went away to a secluded place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35). After the miraculous and tiring events of the previous day, *Jesus* needed to commune with *God* the Father and renew His strength from *God* the Spirit in prayer.

This did not deter *the crowds* who *were searching for Him* (v 42b).

Who can blame them? *Jesus* had amazed them with His teaching, authority, and His miracles of healing. *He* was proclaiming the good news about *the kingdom of God* (v 43). Many in *the crowds* likely hoped *He* could be the Messiah.

Mark's Gospel reports that "Simon and his companions" searched for *Jesus* and are the ones who found *Him* after *He* had *left* to find seclusion (Mark 1:36-37). Mark 1:38 makes it seem that *Jesus* was speaking to Simon and "his companions" when *He* made His statement about preaching *the kingdom of God to the other cities*. From this it seems that Simon was speaking on behalf of *the crowds*. Perhaps Luke does differentiate Simon from among *the crowds who were searching for Jesus* at this point, because Simon has not yet decided to follow *Jesus* as his disciple (Luke 5:1-11). Mark probably mentioned Simon because Simon Peter was the apostolic source of Mark's Gospel.

It appears that they found *Jesus* because Luke describes that they *came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them* (v 42b). They did not want *Him* to leave. *The crowds* wanted *Him* to continue doing amazing things for them (Luke 4:36) and teaching amazing things (Luke 4:32),

But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also" (v 43a).

The message that *Jesus* was teaching was about the *kingdom of God*. Gospel means "good news." The Good News was spiritual as well as political. *Kingdom* is a political word, and *God* is a spiritual word. *Jesus* was announcing its arrival and describing what it was like. It was good and unlike anything anyone had ever heard. It would have been far different than any other earthly kingdoms that Luke's Greek Gentile audience would have been accustomed to. For that matter, it would be far different from the kingdoms that the Jews understood as well.

The kingdom of God which *Jesus* preached was based on the principles that were the exact opposite of the kingdoms of this world. The principles of *Jesus's kingdom* are to serve everyone, including those who are beneath us, instead of lording over them. It is a *kingdom* that submits to and relies on God's power and seeks His will instead of our own strength and desires. *Jesus's* message known as the Sermon on the Mount is where the principles of *the kingdom of God* are most clearly taught and concentrated (Matthew 5-7).

A Comparison of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven

Interestingly Luke uses the term *kingdom of God*, as Mark does in his Gospel (Mark 1:15), as they communicate *Jesus's* message to their Greek and Roman audiences, while Matthew uses the expression "kingdom of heaven" to communicate it to his Jewish readers (Matthew 4:17).

It follows that these terms are functionally synonymous. Both expressions refer to the divine and Messianic authority of *Jesus* that was foretold by the prophets. The kingdom of heaven and *the kingdom of God* each share the core promise that the Lord will establish a physical, political government upon the earth with Himself and/or His Messiah as its King. This *kingdom* will eternally prosper under His administration of divine laws.

Moreover, many of the teachings and parables Matthew records *Jesus* saying about the kingdom of heaven are also said by *Jesus* about *the kingdom of God* in Mark and Luke's narratives. Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15 are two examples of this phenomenon. A few other examples where "kingdom of heaven" is used in Matthew while Mark and Luke use *kingdom of God* are:

- The Disciples were granted to understand Mysteries of *the kingdom* (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10)
- *Jesus* explained *the kingdom* in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:24; Mark 4:26)
- *Jesus* explained *the kingdom* in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31; Mark 4:30, and Luke 13:18)
- *The kingdom* belongs to children (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:15, and Luke 18:17)
- Entering *the kingdom* as a child (Matthew 19:23; Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:24)

But even though these passages functionally describe the same prophetic reality, have similar usages, and share the same core meaning, *the kingdom of God* had different cultural connotations from "the kingdom of heaven." These different cultural connotations are subtle but important. The respective terms were most likely chosen and implemented based upon the author's intended audience.

Matthew, whose primary readers were Jews, chose the term “kingdom of heaven” because it was more appealing to the Jewish sensibilities. Mark, Luke, (and even John) may have used the term *kingdom of God* because it was more relatable to the Gentiles, who were their primary readers.

There are three ways each term conveyed the same core meaning, but did so more effectively to each culture.

The first reason for the cultural difference relates to how Jews and Gentiles speak of *God*. Jews revere *God*'s name and are not inclined to speak directly of *God*. The term “kingdom of heaven” is less direct than *kingdom of God*, and is therefore more agreeable to Jewish sensibilities. Gentiles expected to speak directly of *God*.

An additional reason *kingdom of God* may have been more appealing than “kingdom of heaven” to Mark’s Roman and Luke’s Greek audiences is because in Greek and Roman minds, the term *God* was a more familiar and more specific term than “heaven.” The Gentiles had many gods. This phrase the *kingdom of God* (singular) reflected a claim that *God* is the One True *God*, and was therefore over all other gods. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” could have been heard by Gentiles to include the many pagan gods that dwelt in the heaven of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

Additionally, in the Greco-Roman pantheon, *heaven* was accessible to humans. By using the term *kingdom of God*, the message being communicated to the Gentile audience is that Jesus’s ministry and salvation extends down from heaven and onto earth. It extends beyond the Jewish nation to everyone!

The third and related cultural difference between the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew) and *kingdom of God* (Mark and Luke) seems to be the lens with which the dominion of the *kingdom* is viewed.

The “kingdom of heaven” focuses on *God*'s rule over the earth. We get a sense of this meaning in Jesus’s prayer to His Father in heaven, that,

“Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:10)

This phrase makes it clear that “heaven” is a place where *God*'s will is done. It is a prayer for *God*'s authority to become as apparent on earth as it is in heaven.

As a quick aside, the Gospels were written in the Greek language. *Jesus* most likely spoke to His Jewish audience in some form of Aramaic, which was the common tongue of Judea in the first century. Therefore, the Gospel writers would have translated *Jesus*'s words into Greek, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although, it seems likely that Matthew’s gospel was originally written and circulated in Aramaic, and later translated to Greek.

The Spirit inspired Matthew to translate *Jesus*'s expression as "kingdom of heaven" and Mark and Luke to translate *Jesus*'s same expression as *kingdom of God* to their respective audiences.

To learn more about this, see the Bible Says article: "The Four Languages of *Jesus*'s Judea."

The reason *Jesus* had to leave was that He needed to *preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also*. This primarily meant *other Jewish cities* around Israel—for *Jesus* was first a Jewish Messiah (Matthew 10:5-7, 15:24). Indeed, *Jesus* proclaimed the good news of *the kingdom of God* all throughout the predominantly Jewish *cities other* than Capernaum in the districts of Galilee and Judea. But *Jesus* also went to *other cities* that were less Jewish and predominantly Gentile and taught and worked miracles among them also. Some of these *other cities Jesus* travelled to during His earthly ministry included places such as:

- The Greek Decapolis located on the other side of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:28, Mark 5:20, 6:53, 7:31, Luke 8:26)
- Caesarea Philippi located north of Galilee (Matthew 16:13)
- Tyre and Sidon located northwest of Galilee

(Matthew 15:21, Mark 7:24, 7:31)

Interestingly, Luke's Gospel, which was written to Greek Gentiles, rarely mentions *Jesus*'s ministry in Gentile towns, while Matthew's Gospel, which was written to Jews, has the most descriptions of *Jesus* ministering among the Gentiles.

Perhaps Matthew was trying to demonstrate to His Jewish audience that the Gospel, which was likely beginning to spread rapidly among the Gentiles by the time Matthew wrote it, was not becoming corrupt by "going Gentile," but rather it was reaching its prophesied fulfillment through the Gentiles. Even *Jesus*, the Jewish Messiah, hinted at this as *He* worked miracles and proclaimed the kingdom among Gentiles.

Perhaps, Luke, who also wrote Acts where the ministry of Paul and his numerous missions among the Gentiles becomes the historical focus of the book's second half, was trying to emphasize the Jewish origins of their faith in *Jesus*, the ideal man to his Gentile audience by not featuring many of *Jesus*'s Gentile interactions.

Jesus explained the reason *He* had to *preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also*. *He* explained to *the crowds*: "*for I was sent for this purpose*" (v 43b).

God did not send *Jesus*, the perfect man and the Messiah only to Capernaum. *Jesus* was not *sent* to only heal people of physical illnesses or conditions or to cast out demons. *He was sent* to save the entire world (John 3:16) and make all things new (Revelation 21:5). He was sent to establish *the kingdom of God* on earth among all *the other cities also* (Luke 8:1, 17:21, Acts 1:6-7, Revelation 19:11-16). That was His *purpose* (Isaiah 49:6, John 18:36-37).

So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea (v 44).

This is Luke's summary of *Jesus's* ministry after that remarkable day in Capernaum.

He did not stop *preaching* the good news concerning *the kingdom of God*. And *He* did not remain only in Capernaum. *He kept on preaching in the synagogues* throughout *Judea*. Again, Luke is emphasizing how Jesus was bringing His message to the Jews—in their *synagogues*. This fits with the general pattern of *Jesus's* ministry so far as seen in Luke where *He* teaches *in the synagogues* (Luke 4:15, 16, 31).

In this context, when Luke writes *Judea* he is referring to the Roman province of *Judea*, rather than the district of *Judea*. The Judean province is the more general term that functionally included the entire area of Israel. It officially included the districts of Idumea in the far south, west of the Dead Sea, the districts of Judea and Samaria between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea, and the district of Galilee north of them.

The parallel passages in Matthew and Mark narrow this geographic region of *Judea* down to “all Galilee” (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:39). Therefore, Luke's phrasing of *the synagogues of Judea* is still technically accurate, even if Matthew and Mark are slightly more specific. The next chapter, Luke 5, begins with *Jesus* by the Sea of Galilee, so He is still in the district of Galilee (Luke 4:14).

Biblical Text

42 When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. 43 But He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” 44 So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.