

What Is the Outer Darkness?

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As defined scholastically in my writings, the biblical *outer darkness* is the parabolic representation of the didactical reality that unfaithful believers will undergo in the permanent punitive (rather than preparatory or purgatorial) spatial experience of being in the millennial and eternal kingdom but never ever being allowed to enter the capital city, or the land of Canaan throughout eternity future, with the result that those submitted to this banishment will never ever be allowed to exercise rulership—or participate in any other misthological (i.e., reward related) functions, roles, or privileges pertaining thereto—over any part, sphere, or aspect of the millennial or eternal kingdom during the millennial age or for any part of eternity future, forever.

To unpack that definition just a bit, we may note that the outer darkness has been defined as a *parabolic representation* even though the first occasion of its usage (Mt 8:12) is not embedded in a parable, unlike the other two occurrences (Mt 22:13; 25:30). Nevertheless, even in its first occurrence the term implements word imagery that is not limited to literality and that is expanded upon parabolically in its two remaining usages, making a *parabolic representation* an apt description for this symbolism. This position is a mediation between those scholars who take the outer darkness as strictly literal, and thus as a description for Hell, versus those scholars who insist that the outer darkness has no association with Hell, being nothing more than a metaphorical description of unfaithful believers losing rewards within Heaven. The mediating position taken in my writings is that the outer darkness has literal associations in the fuller biblical context, but those implications must be understood, at least primarily, in terms of loss rewards within Heaven, not as any literal exclusion from Heaven or being cast into Hell. Any correlative associations with Hell are secondary. Believers are unconditionally secure from Hell. Unfaithful believers will not spend eternity, or even a millennium, in the literal fires of Gehenna or Hell.

As described in the biblical texts, the outer darkness involves an exclusion from both a place and an experience. Consequently, it has spatial and experiential ramifications. This imagery of the outer darkness juts up like the tip of an iceberg from the biblical text at a centralized location, the Gospel of Matthew, serving thematically as a fulcrum between the OT and NT in relation to reward issues, with tremendous underlying implications regarding the Reward City and Promised Land. Just as the Promised Land does not refer to all the land of the kingdom of Heaven, but only to some prime real estate within that realm that has been promised as a reward to faithful believers, the Reward City is also not the only city within the kingdom. Rather, it is the capital city promised as the millennial and eternal habitation of the faithful. This city is where the marriage of the Lamb will take place—the Bridal City. Since those cast into the outer darkness are cast out of the marriage festivities, it stands to reason, in harmony with other OT and NT texts, that those cast into the outer darkness are unfaithful believers cast out of the Reward City into other parts of the heavenly kingdom. Rewards and loss of rewards are judicial and eternal. Therefore, the exclusion of unfaithful believers from the Reward City is likewise punitive and permanent. Accordingly, one would deduce that those believers cast into the outer darkness are not part of the Bride of Christ. The Bride is not cast out of her own wedding! This deduction is in agreement with other inductions so as to conclude that those NT believers cast into the outer darkness will be part of the Body of Christ, but they cannot be part of the Bride of Christ.

As to kingdom exclusion and kingdom rulership, we must be careful how we define our terms. Translations generally translate the Greek word *basileia* spatially as *kingdom* when, according to the BDAG, *basileia* can also be translated experientially as *kingship*, *rule*, or *reign*. In fact, this regal meaning is the primary meaning. Will unfaithful believers be excluded from the *basileia*? Yes and no. All believers will enter the *basileia* in the sense of enter the *kingdom* (a territorial entrance), but not all believers will enter the *basileia* in the sense of enter the *kingship*.

In conclusion, the biblical imagery of the outer darkness is a pivotal and pictorial means used by Jesus to summarize material found in the OT, and expanded upon by His teaching and the rest of the NT, regarding the principle theme of Scripture—the kingdom. In harmony with material found in both the OT and NT, the Lord is teaching that a sharp, eternal distinction will exist (in terms of rewards within the kingdom) between those believers who are found to be faithful versus those believers who are found to be unfaithful at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment seat is just that, a judgment seat, not a mere rewards podium. In a nutshell, the outer darkness is a word picture of the loss of rewards, most notably entailing exclusion from three things: the capital city, kingdom rulership, and bridal intimacy.