

The Kingdom from God



Unlocking the Secrets

Dr Ross McCallum Jones

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Jesus the Messiah, who will return soon to reign over the earth. He came to teach and show us how to live and serve God acceptably. Then he graciously died in our place, so that our sins might be forgiven. He told his followers to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things would be added to them. I thank him for saving me at the age of twenty two. I can testify that I discovered the peace and joy and courage that the Holy Spirit produces in us, and that all the other things, all the necessities of life, and more, have fallen into my lap: a good wife, four sons, twelve grandchildren, a 50-year ministry in West Africa doing Bible translation and church-planting, good health, food, shelter, and an abundance of friends. I discovered the righteousness that is provided by God, and I have the assurance that I am a child of God and that I will inherit the coming kingdom of the Messiah. I am looking forward to the resurrection and sharing the Messiah's glory and reigning over the earth.

Praise God! I thank you, Lord Jesus!

Abbreviations

Genesis	Gen	Matthew	Mt
Exodus	Exod	Mark	Mk
Numbers	Num	Luke	Lk
Deuteronomy	Deut	John	Jn
2 Samuel	2 Sam	Romans	Rom
1 Chronicles	1 Chron	1 Corinthians	1 Cor
2 Chronicles	2 Chron	2 Corinthians	2 Cor
Nehemiah	Neh	Galatians	Gal
Psalms	Ps	Ephesians	Eph
Isaiah	Isa	Philippians	Phil
Jeremiah	Jer	Colossians	Col
Ezekiel	Ezek	1 Thessalonians	1 Thess
Daniel	Dan	2 Thessalonians	2 Thess
Hosea	Hos	1 Timothy	1 Tim
Micah	Mic	2 Timothy	2 Tim
Zephaniah	Zeph	Hebrews	Heb
Haggai	Hag	1 Peter	1 Pet
Zechariah	Zech	2 Peter	2 Pet
Malachi	Mal	1 John	1 Jn
		Revelation	Rev

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Introduction

This book stands or falls on the four theses presented below. If these interpretations are correct, this book will revolutionize your understanding of Jesus and the Gospels. It will make clear to you the mystery of why John the Baptist and Jesus went about preaching *the gospel of the kingdom*, why Jesus spoke in parables, and why he used cryptic expressions like *the kingdom of God*, *the kingdom of heaven*, and *the Son of Man*. More importantly, it will help you interpret the end times correctly, including a Scriptural view of the rapture and the millennium. But most of all it will help you appreciate the wonderful position believers have in their union with Christ, which culminates in our being co-heirs with the Messiah in his future earthly reign.

Before looking at the four theses I will present on the kingdom of God, let me warn you of some common misconceptions people have about this kingdom. The kingdom of God is a pre-church concept and it was Jesus' main topic in his preaching. Don't go to the apostle Paul for understanding; he doesn't say much about it. The kingdom of God is not "an inward power which enters the human soul and lays hold of it" (Adolf von Harnack). No Scripture teaches that. The kingdom of God is not to be identified with the church as per fifth-century church father Augustine. The kingdom of God is not about transforming the world by a slow and gradual permeation, as anyone can see today. The kingdom of God has its origin in heaven but is not to be equated with heaven. The kingdom of God is not a geographical territory like the UK, or the population belonging to such a territory.

First Thesis:

The kingdom of God, as preached by Jesus, is not primarily about God's sovereignty. It is not God the Father's kingdom; it is the kingdom of God the Son. It is an earthly kingdom established by God, the messianic kingdom of which the Lord Jesus Christ is king.

The term "kingdom of God", as used by Jesus, does not refer to God's eternal reign over the universe. There is a sense in which everything belongs to God, so that meaning cannot be ruled out completely, but the meaning Jesus gave to the expression will never be grasped, if the kingdom of God is regarded as God the Father's kingdom. It is rather the kingdom that comes from God in contrast to kingdoms set up by human rulers. It is an earthly kingdom with a human king, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus always used this expression to refer to his messianic kingdom, or by metonymy, to refer to himself as the Messiah. This implies that the kingdom of God cannot be equated with anything that existed before the Messiah arrived. The term "kingdom of God" does not occur in the Old Testament, however, nearly all of the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi, prophesied about it. Nor should it be equated with heaven, or the church. The kingdom of God is all about the Messiah and the kingdom which he will establish here on earth immediately following his physical return to earth. All the Old Testament prophecies relating to the Messiah and his reign from Jerusalem will be literally fulfilled, as the original prophecies were meant to be understood.

The Hebrew and Greek words for kingdom are complex and have several meanings, both concrete (territory), and abstract (kingship, rule, royal power). When coupled with predicates like "arrive", "is near", or "is among", the expression refers to the king himself, in whose person the kingdom resides. In other words, Jesus' message that "the kingdom of God is near" simply meant that the Messiah was near. This truth is often acknowledged, but even more frequently ignored.

Second Thesis:

The Gospels present Jesus first and foremost as the Jewish Messiah who will return one day soon to rule over the whole earth.

To the Jews of Jesus' day, the Messiah was a hugely important hope, even though he was an enigmatic figure, sometimes human, sometimes divine; sometimes a servant, sometimes a king. But what was in no doubt was that when he came, he would reign visibly over the earth, from the throne of David in Jerusalem. The Jews were expecting a peaceful and prosperous kingdom, which God would establish through his "Son", the Messiah. "Son" to them meant "regent", a man who would rule on earth on God's behalf. He would raise the dead and renovate the earth, and reign over all the nations of the world forever. This was the common view of the kingdom of God among Jews when they spoke of these things with Jesus.

The word "Christ" is a transliteration of the Greek word for Messiah, Χριστός, but the real significance eludes modern readers. Its current use is more like a personal name than the title of a Jewish king who would one day subdue all the enemies of Israel and bring in an era of universal peace on the earth. The Gospels are full of messianic designations: Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, King of the Jews and even Lord, but when we pray "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth", it doesn't register with many people that we are praying for the Messiah's return and reign on earth. God's kingdom can't come; it is eternal, he is always on the throne. It is the Messiah's reign that is expected and prayed for. His kingdom is eternal, because at the end of his reign on earth, Jesus will hand his kingship over to the Father, having done away with every opposing ruler, authority and power (1 Cor 15:24-25).

Third Thesis:

The primary meaning of "kingdom" in its biblical use is abstract, meaning "kingship" or "reign" or "government". In a concrete sense it sometimes means a geographical

domain, or the Messiah himself, or the monarchy. Only in a remote way does it relate to salvation, or a new life in Christ, or the Church, or heaven.

The biblical references to entering and inheriting the kingdom of God should be interpreted literally with the meaning of kingship in mind. For example, Jesus said, the poor in spirit are blessed, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them! (Mt 5:3). In what way does it belong to them? How can you possess a kingdom? It is not by entering the geographical domain of a kingdom as a subject, or by getting saved, or by finding a new life in Christ. It is possessed by a person who has become a ruler in the government. The Scriptures never say believers are entering the kingdom as subjects or citizens, but something far more glorious; they enter the government as sons of God and co-heirs with the Messiah. Because of their union with the Messiah, the saints will reign with him over the earth. They will sit at the royal table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the exciting teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God.

Fourth Thesis:

The kingdom of God has a secret aspect to it that was not revealed to the prophets. This secret is that it is the church, the community that Jesus the Messiah is calling out from every people and tribe and nation and language, who will rule with him in the kingdom of God. Most kingdom of God verses relate to the saints.

There are Old Testament prophecies concerning the Gentiles, but the mystery of the church was not known until it was revealed to the apostles. Paul, in Ephesians, speaks about God's secret plan regarding the Messiah, which is that both Gentiles and Jews who believe the gospel of the kingdom will share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. God's purpose is to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in God's space/time dimension. This is his eternal plan which he carried out through Jesus the Messiah. Don't think of the church as a building, or a congregation, or a denomination; think of church as the total community of God's people, those who in

Scripture are called the elect, the righteous, the saints, or simply God's servants.

Revelation 7:9 tells us about a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language. These people have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. God, according to his great love, mercy and grace, is presently saving people from all nations and cultures. They are the true believers from all times and places. They are saved through faith in the Messiah and are united to him. At Jesus' coming, they will be resurrected, they will receive the gift of eternal life, and they will reign with the Messiah throughout his reign over the earth and on into eternity. As co-heirs with Christ, these international saints are the government in the kingdom of God!

Interpretation

It is important to interpret the Bible correctly, firstly by treating it as God's infallible word. When reading or exegeting the Bible, the text should not be doubted. Textual scholars have examined the thousands of ancient manuscripts and have given us the best possible authorized text. God has told us that all Scripture, the Bible that he has preserved for us, is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). Jesus gave us another assurance; he said that heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will never pass away.

Where possible God's word should be taken literally and not spiritualized or allegorized. This is, of course, not always possible; the genre is important. Parables and metaphors are not to be taken literally. Nor can a prophet's visions be taken literally, but when you interpret the symbolism and metaphors, you will be left with a message that you should interpret literally. Genesis 1-11, Old Testament messianic prophecies, and Revelation 20, communicate a clear meaning when interpreted literally, a meaning that is in accord with related Scriptures. But there are many words in apocalyptic literature like the book of Revelation that have a symbolic meaning and have to be interpreted. And John's visions are like video clips that reflect reality but are not seen in the way that we normally perceive reality. So they need to be interpreted carefully, which doesn't necessarily mean they have

to be “spiritualized”. The unfolding of God’s words illuminates, providing understand to the simple (Ps 119:130).

The kingdom of God is a key term which occurs 162 times in the New Testament. It needs to be interpreted with great care so that it doesn’t cause misunderstanding instead of enlightenment. Thanks to my experience as a linguist and Bible translator over five decades, I have come into an understanding of the term which makes sense in every context, and it is truly like a treasure hidden in a field. However, it is a radically different concept to that held by your average churchgoer or pastor. Gabriel told Mary that the baby she would bear would be called the Son of the Most High God who would give him the throne of his father David and he would reign over the house of Jacob forever. An angel confirmed to the shepherds that he was the messiah. Jesus use of the term “kingdom of God” is always in reference to his messiahship or his future kingdom. One problem Jesus had, was preaching in a hostile environment, where he couldn’t talk plainly in public about the fact that he was a king and that he would rule the world one day. We can’t change the way Jesus spoke about it, but there is a good argument, which will be explained later, for interpreting “the kingdom of God” as “the kingdom *from* God”, and “the kingdom of heaven” as “the kingdom *from* heaven”. This puts the emphasis on the kingdom’s divine origin and allows us to interpret it as the kingdom of God the Son. It is Jesus who is king in the kingdom of God, not God the Father. This quote from Henry Alford, in his classic plea for a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, nicely illustrates what I mean:

I have become increasingly aware of a mismatch between what the earliest Christians believed about life after death ... and what many ordinary Christians seem to believe on the subject today.... and I have come to the conclusion that what we do and say on this subject is increasingly at odds with anything that can be justified from tradition.... My fear is that we have simply been drifting into a muddle and a mess putting together bits and pieces of traditions, ideas and practices in the hope that they will make sense. They don’t. There may be times when a typical Anglican fudge is a pleasant chewy sort of thing, but this isn’t one of them. It is time to speak and think clearly and to act decisively.

The ISV Translation

There are many Scripture quotations and references given in this book. If there are no quotation marks, it means that I have paraphrased the passage. For direct quotations, I have chosen to use the International Standard Version (ISV). It avoids archaic language and avoids being excessively literal or idiomatic. It has been described by independent critics as the most readable and accurate translation. I especially appreciate the emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah. The name “Christ” does not appear in the translation at all. The Greek word Χριστός, is always *translated* as “the Messiah”, rather than being *transliterated* as “Christ”.

This book is written with the desire that you might understand the Bible correctly, so I make no excuse for the copious Bible references. I would encourage you to be like the Bereans, who examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul told them was true (Acts 17:11).

Understanding the Background

God’s revelation throughout the Scriptures is progressive. The prophets saw bits and pieces about the Messiah and the kingdom, but they couldn’t put it all together. Sometimes he was a healer, sometimes he was suffering. Sometimes he was a servant, sometimes he was a king. But the time has come for the righteous to have a full understanding. Jesus told his disciples that the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven had been given to them, but not to others (Mt 13:11).

Most people didn’t understand Jesus when he went from village to village proclaiming the kingdom of God, speaking in parables and using expressions like “kingdom of God”, “kingdom of heaven” and “Son of Man”. Most people today are equally confused, whether unbelievers, churchgoers, pastors, and even theologians. But believers have a right to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. I trust that in this book you will find an acceptable way of interpreting the kingdom of God. None of these ideas are entirely new. Every scholar who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings new and old things out of his treasure chest (Mt 13:52).

Whose Kingdom Is It?

The first secret we need to understand is the meaning of the phrase “kingdom of God”. We are to be excused if we think of Old Testament passages that describe the sovereignty of God, like this one:

“To you, LORD, belongs the greatness, and the valor, and the splendor, the endurance, and the majesty, because all that is in heaven and on earth is yours. To you belongs the kingdom, LORD, and you are exalted as head over all. Both wealth and honor proceed from you, and you are ruling over them all. You control power – you control who is made great, and how everyone becomes strong” (1 Chron 29:11-12).

My understanding is that the kingdom of God expression, as used by Jesus, never refers to God’s sovereign rule over heaven and earth as we have it here in Chronicles. The “kingdom of God” expression is not used in the Old Testament, and it is never used in the New Testament with that meaning. Jesus spoke about the kingdom being near or coming, which is not suitable terminology for God’s eternal sovereignty. Jesus spoke of people entering and inheriting the kingdom, which again, is not suitable terminology for referring to God’s eternal sovereignty. Few people understand the meaning given to this expression by Jesus. The Gospels all start with emphasis on the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, and Jesus always used the kingdom of God expression to refer either to himself as the Messiah, or to his future earthly kingdom. “Christ” is a transliteration of the Greek word Χριστός, which is equivalent to the Hebrew word for “the anointed one”. It is not a surname, it usually means “the Messiah”, the promised Jewish savior and king, but the real significance of the word gets lost, and Jesus Christ just sounds like a name. Chapter 1 expounds the significance of the name Messiah.

Jesus’ Need of Secrecy

Jesus said he spoke in parables because he didn’t want everyone to understand what he was talking about. He himself made this clear. He wanted his disciples to understand, but there were others in the crowd whom he didn’t want to understand.

He was born the Messiah, the king of the Jews, but he could not publicize this fact in his teaching. The Jews were dominated by Rome who wouldn't tolerate a rival king, and among the Jewish leaders there were kings and leaders who did not want to tolerate a rival king. King Herod gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were under two years of age in an effort to kill this perceived threat, but Jesus had already escaped to Egypt. So when Jesus started preaching, he communicated with his disciples about his identity, but he wasn't so explicit about it in public.

There are three ways he got around this problem. One was to use the cryptic expression, "the kingdom of God". The second was to use another cryptic expression, "Son of Man", as a title for himself, which he used in the third person, so that people couldn't be sure if he was talking about himself or not. And thirdly he spoke in parables. Most of the parables are about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, which Matthew favors, and which is usually regarded as synonymous with the kingdom of God.

The revelation that the kingdom of God is the Messiah's own reign should not be so startling, because we are told that it is the kingdom of Christ, or the kingdom of God's beloved Son. And when you think about the alternative; that the kingdom of God refers to God's own reign, you run into unsolvable problems. How can you enter or inherit God's sovereignty over the universe? There are many references to the kingdom of God coming, and if you believe in an almighty, sovereign, eternal God, you should immediately realize that to talk about his kingdom or reign coming is an oxymoron. The kingdom of God is something smaller than that; it only relates to the government of this world.

Jesus taught people to pray: "your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". What are they to pray for? Should they think about the church, or Christian missions, or God ruling in our hearts? Or should they pray for Jesus to come back, and for his messianic reign to begin here on earth? The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the Messiah, the advent of which was the supreme desire of pious Jews. The Father reigns supreme eternally; it is not his kingdom that is coming. The prayer is addressed to the Father, but the kingdom we pray for is not his own, it is the kingdom that he promised (1 Chron 17:11-14, Dan 2:44).

What Kind of Kingdom Is It?

We are not given many details in the New Testament about the Messiah's earthly reign, and unless you are a premillennialist, you might find the concept of an earthly reign rather novel. How will the resurrected, glorified Messiah reign over sinners on an imperfect earth? And how will the righteous, who will be resurrected at his return, reign with him in their resurrected bodies?

Most of the teaching on the kingdom of God was given by Jesus while preaching to Jews who were conversant with the prophecies made by their prophets. They weren't hoping to go to heaven; that was never a biblical promise for them. They were like Job, who said he knew that his Redeemer lives, and that *in the end he would stand upon the earth* (Job 19:25).

The Messiah is a Jewish Savior and King, but his earthly kingdom is not only for Jews; the Gentiles will play a major role. If you haven't been taught to expect an earthly kingdom, you may find the concept has a stigma about it. How can resurrected people mix with ordinary mortals? Many Christians have grown up unconsciously with Platonic and Augustinian values. They instinctively feel that the spiritual is superior to the physical, that heaven is more desirable than earth. But Hebrew philosophy holds that God's creation is good. God created a perfect earth, and he walked with Adam in the garden of Eden. John tells us that the throne of God and the Lamb will come down from heaven to earth. God will once more live with humans in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:3).

Chapter 3 is about the Old Testament messianic prophecies and portrays the Messiah's kingdom as an earthly kingdom with Messiah reigning from Mount Zion, Jesus sitting on David's throne and reigning over the world with justice and righteousness and peace. Believers will be resurrected and transformed at his coming and will reign with him.

Robert Mounce (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 359), says that some commentators suggest that the millennium for the apostle John is not the messianic age foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, but a special reward for martyrs who have paid with their lives. He concludes by saying that John taught a literal

millennium, but its essential meaning may be realized in something other than a temporal fulfillment. There are other voices which deny the existence of an earthly millennium, and if that is true, my belief that the kingdom of God is Messiah's kingdom as described in Old Testament prophecies is wrong. But, no matter how strange some future events may seem to us, we must respect Scripture. Many of the Old Testament prophecies end with the solemn words: "I, the Lord, have spoken!" And what of the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary concerning her baby Jesus? Gabriel declared that he would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God would give him the throne of his ancestor David. He would rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom would never end (Lk 1:32-33).

Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom

There is a satisfactory answer to all these riddles, but it might necessitate a change in worldview, especially one's view of Jesus and what he came to accomplish. The kingdom is mentioned over fifty times in Matthew and mostly from the mouth of Jesus.

"From then on, Jesus began to announce, "Repent, because *the kingdom from heaven is near*" (Mt 4:17 ISV)

"Then he went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, *proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every disease and every illness among the people" (Mt 4:23).

"As you go, make this announcement, "*The kingdom from heaven is near!*" (Mt 10:7).

Gentiles tend to focus on the Gentile part of the gospel, and the spiritual side of salvation. God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son (Jn 3:16). They say, God does not only love Israel, he loves all the nations. In fact, he loves the nations so much that some say his love for Israel is history. Christianity is all about the gospel being preached in all the world, churches being established, and people being saved, but let us not forget our roots. Take Isaiah 9:6-7 for example, which we are reminded about at Christmas time:

For to us a child is born, to us, a son given; and the *government* will be upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*. Of the growth of his *government* and peace there will be no end. *He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

We love to embrace wonderful messianic prophecies like this one and apply them to Jesus as we visualize him. But, what about his government and his rule from the throne of David? We somehow cast that aside or spiritualize it. But, in fact, we have here a prophecy of the kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus preached about. Jesus is presently seated on the right hand of the Father in heaven, but until he is installed on David's throne in Jerusalem, we cannot claim that the kingdom of God has come, or that Jesus is king over the earth. True, he is seated at the right hand of the Father on his throne, but we are never told anywhere in the Bible that Jesus is reigning or will ever reign over the earth from the Father's throne in heaven. As Son of Man and Son of God, that is not his role. He only becomes King of kings and Lord of lords at his return, when he conquers his enemies at Armageddon (Rev 17:24, 19:16) and begins his reign on earth.

When the Lord's Supper ended, Jesus said to his disciples that he was *conferring a kingdom on them*, just as his Father had conferred a kingdom on him, so that they might eat and drink at his table in his kingdom and *sit down on thrones to govern* the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk 22:28-30). The kingdom Jesus was talking about is the messianic kingdom. It is an earthly kingdom (Rev 5:10), and the king is none other than Jesus himself.

The Saints will Rule the World

As a fitting climax to this introduction to the kingdom of God, consider the wonderful vision that the prophet Daniel had. In his vision he saw someone like a "Son of Man" coming accompanied by heavenly clouds. He approached the Ancient of Days (the Father) and was presented before him. Dominion was bestowed upon him, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and

languages were to serve him. His kingdom would be an everlasting dominion that would never be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14). Don't be fooled by statements that Jesus rules in our hearts and that his kingdom is fulfilled in this way. It is not biblical. Jesus announced to his disciples that all things had been handed over to him by his Father (Mt 11:27), and that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him (Mt 28:18). Although written over 2500 years ago, Daniel was talking about things relevant to the end of this age. He spoke about Antichrist and the Great Tribulation period that will occur immediately before the second coming of Jesus. It is from this passage that Jesus took the title "Son of Man" and used it to refer to himself. The significance of that title is discussed in chapter 2.

And finally, to whet your appetite a bit more, listen to what an angel told Daniel, when he asked about the meaning of the vision. The angel said that *the kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints of the Most High*. The Messiah's kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve him and obey him (Dan 7:27). When did you last hear a sermon preached on that passage? Are you numbered among those saints? Is your name written in the Lamb's book of life? Is it your destiny to inherit the kingdom of God and to reign with Christ over this earth? If so, it would be nice to know the details. Many churches today are so confused about the future events that will precede and follow the glorious return of the Messiah Jesus, that the preachers and teachers are afraid to proclaim the wonderful truths that God has revealed to us in the Bible. Let us get informed and be prepared for that event.

The night is almost over and the day is near (Rom 13:12).

1

The Significance of “Messiah”

*But who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, “You
are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”*

Matthew 16:15-16

What does the word “Messiah” mean? What is the significance of the title? When Christians read the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they usually read them from a Christian perspective which does not always give them an accurate picture of what is going on. It may come as a surprise to some people to know that there were no Christians or churches in the time of Jesus. You must wait for the book of the Acts of the Apostles for that. Jesus did say he would build his church, meaning his community, but that was to be done through the apostles and others in the future. Jesus is presented to us in the Gospels as the Messiah of the Jewish religion, who was eagerly awaited by the faithful. He is the fulfillment of the good news that was prophesied in the Old Testament. The background of the Gospels is very Jewish.

It is good to look for Jesus everywhere in the Bible, but there are dangers in reading the Old Testament and even the Gospels from a narrow Christian perspective. You can misinterpret what the writers were communicating. It can also result in spiritualizing and allegorizing passages according to preconceived ideas instead of taking texts at face value. So let us put on our messianic glasses and see what was really said about Jesus. That will help us understand why he talked so much about the kingdom of God, and what it was he was really talking about.

Older versions of the Bible rarely use the word “Messiah”. The King James Version (KJV) mentions Messiah only twice, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) seven times. The earlier New International Version (NIV) version only mentioned Messiah twice, but the 2011 edition uses “Messiah” seventy four times. Recent translations tend to translate Messiah more frequently. The ISV translates Messiah 546 times, and never uses the word “Christ”. Their reason is “in order to emphasize the unique claim made by the New Testament writers, that the things about which they wrote pertained to Jesus as the claimed fulfillment of the hope of Israel’s Messiah.”

Jesus’ Messianic Consciousness

From the age of twelve, maybe younger, Jesus was aware of his unique relationship with the Father. At the very beginning of his

ministry at around thirty years of age, he was aware of his messiahship. He quoted a messianic prophecy while preaching in the synagogue of his home town Nazareth, saying:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me to tell the good news to the poor – Luke 4:18

But if Jesus knew he was the Messiah, the awaited Jewish king, how was he to teach people about his own identity and his mission without being arrested as a political activist? His strategy was to talk in parables and to use vocabulary that was cryptic.

In Mark 8:27 Jesus asked his disciples who people thought he was. Most people seemed to think he was a reincarnation of one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked his disciples who *they* thought he was. Peter answered: “You are the Messiah” (Mk 8:29). Then Jesus warned them not to tell anyone. Immediately after that he began to teach them that the Son of Man would have to suffer a great deal and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes. Then he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again (Mk 8:31). This was not quite what they expected of their awaited Messiah and Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Their Messiah, according to the Jewish prophets, was first and foremost a king!

The Messiah and His Kingdom

The message of John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry was that people should repent, because *the kingdom from heaven was near!* (Mt 3:2). The kingdom of God was also central to Jesus’ teaching from beginning to end. As soon as he was baptized, he started preaching that the kingdom of God was near (Mk 1:15).

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke says that Jesus had shown himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to the apostles during a period of forty days and *telling them about the kingdom of God* (Acts 1:3). At the end of the book of Acts we find Paul imprisoned in Rome, where he continued *to preach about the kingdom of God* and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah (Acts 28:31).

If we feel that this concept is not so relevant today, maybe it is because we have not understood Jesus properly. He came to his own people, Israel, but they didn't receive him. So he sent his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations throughout the world, saying that *this gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed* throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end would come (Mt 24:14). The gospel is not only about the cross and forgiveness of sins; there is also the gospel of the *kingdom*.

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born again, or born from above, he would not see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). Then he rephrased it, saying that unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). Nicodemus expressed incredulity about the expression "born again," but he didn't have a problem with the expression "kingdom of God". What can we assume about his understanding of seeing the kingdom of God, and entering the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not to be interpreted geographically as a location like the United Kingdom, but rather a "reign". To "see" the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5) does not mean to see the reign in action, but to *experience* it (the kingship). The same verb (see) is used in Acts 2:27 where God says he would not let his Holy One see decay. Sometimes translations are too literal; kingship and decay are abstract concepts that cannot be seen with the eye. The sight needs to be interpreted as knowledge or experience. To see or experience the kingdom is clarified for us by Jesus when he says we need to enter the kingship. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he/she has had a spiritual transformation, a spiritual birth. Entering the kingdom is an interesting concept. What can it mean? It is not the church, heaven, or paradise. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man like Simeon who was devout and eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. He didn't seem to have a problem with the concept of entering the Messiah's future messianic reign. His problem was with the concept of being "born again" or being "born from above".

The next question is: What does it mean to experience or enter this future kingdom? The biblical word kingdom means reign or kingship, not a territory. As a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus quite likely had the hope of participating in the government of the Messiah's kingdom, if the Messiah arrived in his lifetime, not

entering it as a subject or a citizen. That is the implication of entering a “reign” or “monarchy”.

A fragmentary text from the Dead Sea Scrolls known as the the *Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521)* was written during the first century BC and says that the saints “will be glorified on the throne of an eternal kingdom”, and that “heaven and earth will obey the Messiah”, and “all that is in them will follow the instructions of his saints”. This was the Jewish expectation when Jesus came on the scene. (*The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition, 2:1045*)

Most references to the kingdom of God or the kingdom from heaven in the New Testament are in the Gospels and on the lips of John the Baptist and Jesus. Most scholars regard these terms as synonymous, but the “kingdom of heaven”, (translated “kingdom from heaven” by ISV), may emphasize the heavenly origin and nature of the kingdom. It is only used by Matthew, and parallel passages in the other Gospels use “kingdom of God”. Jesus, of course, doesn’t have a kingdom in heaven; that is the Father’s domain. As the promised descendant of David, Jesus’ kingdom is on earth.

Why are the epistles relatively silent on the subject? Kingdom terminology has more to do with the Messiah and his future reign on earth than with the church. People talk of building or extending the kingdom, but they are not using biblical terminology. The Bible never talks about building the kingdom of God. However, Jesus did say he would build his *church* (Mt 16:18), and in the next verse he told Peter he would give him the keys of *the kingdom of God*, so there is a connection. There is something going on right now, secretly, which is very vital for each one of us. During the past two thousand years God has been working out his plan for every people and nation. According to Jesus’ parables about the kingdom of God, the Sower is continually sowing the seed and reaping a harvest, while his enemy (Satan) is busy sowing weeds. The yeast is continually permeating the dough, and the mustard seed is becoming a large tree. People from every corner of the earth are discovering the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure. The treasure and the pearl of great price refer both to Jesus himself and the kingdom of God that believers in Jesus are going to inherit. The kingdom’s net is catching all kinds of fish: peoples of different

tribes and cultures, and speakers of languages from every corner of the earth.

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God. He is our Savior, and he talked about the future of those who would be saved. He could have talked about paradise, eternal life (as John does in his Gospel) or heaven, but he chose to talk about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a phrase that contrasts with the kingdoms of this earth. They are corrupt kingdoms and empires with all their pride and oppression. The Messiah's rule will illustrate how kingship should be handled, because the kingdom of God is an earthly kingdom.

The kingdom of God is a thousand-year reign, when Jesus the Jewish Messiah will reign from his earthly throne until he has put all enemies under his feet, as taught in Matthew 19:28 and Revelation 20:4. We don't know all the details. What we do know is that when Jesus returns to this earth, the dead saints will be resurrected, the living saints will be changed, and they will all reign with the Messiah over this earth. This is the beginning of eternal life, because after resurrection we can't die again; mortality will have put on immortality. We have the guarantee of eternal life, because we believe in God's promise, but eternal life really begins with glorification at the resurrection, when humanity becomes immortal.

The Messiah in the Gospels

Matthew calls his Gospel a record of the life of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt 1:1). He emphasizes the fact that Jesus is the awaited Jewish Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός, Christ, is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Mashiach*, Messiah, who was generally believed to be the son of David, a descendant of Abraham. The first verse of Psalm 110 is a command from the LORD to David's Lord (the Messiah), to sit at his right hand until he subdues his enemies. It is the Father who subdues the Messiah's enemies, culminating in the defeat of Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet at Armageddon. Only then will the Son sit on his throne in Zion and rule the world. While ruling, the Son will bring into submission every rule, authority and power, and then hand back his kingship to God to

the Father (1 Cor 15:25-26). Psalm 110:1 is quoted four times in the New Testament (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk 20:42, Acts 2:34) and it is alluded to in the epistles of Paul and Peter and in Hebrews. Jesus quoted it and then asked the Jewish scholars why David called the Messiah his Lord, when he is actually his descendant. They had no answer, because they couldn't agree to his divinity. In his Pentecost address, Peter quoted the verse and then declared that all the people of Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made this Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:34-36). In adding the title "Lord", Peter put Jesus on a par with God. The full title, the Lord Jesus Christ, was clearly an affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord (Yahweh/Jehovah) and Messiah.

Mark begins his Gospel by saying that his book was the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. He immediately introduces Jesus as "Messiah" and "Son of God", both of which are messianic titles.

Luke quotes the angel's words to Zechariah about the son who would be born to him, John the Baptist, saying that he will go before the Lord with the spirit and power of Elijah *to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord* (Lk 1:17). This alludes to Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6, which contain the words of the last messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels announced to shepherds that their Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born that very night in the city of David (Lk 2:11). So the early emphasis in the Gospels is that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he preached, saying that people should repent, because the kingdom of heaven was near (Mt 3:2). When Jesus began his ministry, he went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the *kingdom*, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Mt 4:23). Whose kingdom is that? Religious Jews would have understood that this was none other than the kingdom of their awaited Messiah.

Jesus began his ministry in his home town Nazareth by quoting a messianic passage from Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me to tell the good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18).

John began his Gospel by concentrating on Jesus' deity, but in the same chapter, Andrew found his brother Peter and told him that they had found the Messiah (Jn 1:41). Likewise, Philip went and found Nathanael and told him that they had found the man about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote (Jn 1:45). When Nathanael met Jesus, he exclaimed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn 1:49). And what was John's declared purpose for writing his Gospel? He tells us near the end of his book that he had recorded the miracles, so that people might believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him they might have life (Jn 20:31).

Did you get the message? It is not only that we might believe in Jesus and have life, but that we might also believe that Jesus is the Messiah. That is the purpose of all the Gospels, and we should build our theology from there. Jesus is the Messiah, and he is returning to set up his kingdom here on earth as promised by the prophets in the Old Testament. Each Gospel makes it clear very early that the subject of their biographies is none other than the awaited Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός is mentioned over fifty times in the Gospels and over five hundred times in the New Testament. To the Jews ὁ Χριστός was a title meaning "the Anointed One", a translation of the Hebrew word for "Messiah". The anointing was made by pouring oil on the head, and the person anointed was consecrated for religious service as a prophet, priest or king; in Jesus' case, all three. Many Christians today understand Christ as a personal name rather than a title.

The teaching concerning our future reign with the Messiah in his kingdom should not be confused with that of our present status of being "in Christ", who is now seated at the right hand of God. Paul said, that in Christ, God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realm (Eph 2:6), and that as we have been raised with the Messiah, we should keep focusing on the things that are above, where the Messiah is seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:1). Being raised with Christ and being seated in the heavenly realms is our present spiritual position "in Christ", but sitting with Christ on his earthly throne at the renewal of all things, and reigning with him there, is a different matter. That is a part of our future glorification.

The Synoptic Gospels were written to give us a summary of Jesus' life and teaching, and to answer the question: "Who is this person?" The Gospel writers quote the Hebrew Bible extensively and identify Jesus as the Messiah, a mysterious person who is the subject of many prophecies; mysterious in the sense of his divine titles. He was generally regarded by the Jews of that era as a savior who would rescue Israel from their enemies and rule over them as their king with righteousness and justice. He would also have a profound influence over the nations of the world, the Gentiles.

Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ, giving evidence that he was a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and a descendant of David, the most revered king of Israel, and one to whom God had made the following promise:

When your life is complete, and you go to join your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one who will come forth from your body, and I will fortify his kingdom. He will build a temple (house) dedicated to my Name, and I will make the throne of his kingdom last forever – 2 Sam 7:12-13.

Although the promise was fulfilled in part by his son Solomon who built the temple in Jerusalem, it is regarded as a messianic prophecy. It is David's greater Son who would build his house (church community) and rule forever. God will establish David's line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure (Ps 89:27-29). The "house" that the Messiah builds is the messianic community, the church that Jesus said he would build, which ultimately becomes the royal household in the kingdom of God. God's household is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). We are presently being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus the Messiah (1 Pet 2:5). As God's children, we are heirs of all things including the government of the world.

In Matthew 2:1, astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem to look for the new-born *king of the Jews*. When the Jewish king Herod heard about it, he had all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and surrounds killed, fearing a rival. In Luke 1:32-33, an angel appeared to Mary and told her she would bear a

son and call him Jesus. The angel said that her son would rule over Israel forever. In other words, he would be the Messiah! He would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High, and *God would give him the throne of his ancestor David*, and his kingdom would never end.

John the Baptist's father Zechariah also prophesied about Jesus emphasizing his Davidic ancestry. He said that God had raised up a mighty Savior for them *from the family of his servant David*, just as he had promised through his holy prophets (Lk 1:68-70). So Jesus is identified very clearly in these early chapters of Matthew and Luke as the Messiah, the awaited king in the line of David. He is also called "the Lord," and what other man apart from the Messiah could be called Lord?

The main question discussed in this book concerns Matthew's expression "the kingdom of heaven", or "kingdom of God" as it is expressed by other New Testament writers. My aim has been to show that this expression does not refer to God the Father's kingship which is universal and eternal and cannot logically be regarded as "being at hand" or "near". Neither can his kingship be inherited or entered. The phrase regularly refers to the Messiah's kingship, the kingship that comes from God, the kingship that has been established by God the Father, the kingship of his beloved Son. In contrast to God's sovereignty over all, this kingship is exercised on earth when a human king rules for a limited time. He will rule from Jerusalem and his kingship is to be identified with that promised to the "Son of Man" and the saints in Daniel 7:13-14, 27 and in Revelation 20:4-6.

When Jesus performed his public ministry for three years while training his disciples, he had a challenging task. He was born Messiah and Lord, but he couldn't declare that publicly. When his disciples realized the truth about his identity, he told them to tell nobody. He was the Messiah, the promised king of Israel, and his message was about his coming kingdom, but he could only communicate that in his teaching by using ambiguous language. He talked about himself in the third person as the Son of Man. And his coming kingdom he called the "kingdom of God", which in Greek could mean God's kingdom (genitive), or the kingdom which has a divine origin, the kingdom from God (ablative).

With this understanding, let us look at what Jesus said when the Roman governor Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews (Jn 18:33). Jesus initially avoided the question but eventually gave him a clearer answer. He said his kingdom did not *belong* to this world. If it did, his servants would have fought to keep him from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. Then Jesus said: “But *for now*, my kingdom is not from here.” “So you are a king?” Pilate said. Jesus answered: “You say that I am a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is committed to the truth listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37). Jesus had his kingdom alright, but its origin was not from this world, just as he was not from this world. He is the man from heaven and his kingdom was from heaven, granted to him by God. But his kingdom is of this world, because he will reign over the earth. My point here is that Jesus was and is a king, but his kingdom is not from here, it is from God. The expression “kingdom of God” refers to his reign on earth and not to the sovereignty of the Father. Jesus had to talk in parables and use cryptic expressions, but we will get a clearer picture, if each time we read about the kingdom of God, we interpret it as Messiah’s coming kingdom.

Did people recognize Jesus to be the Messiah? They were divided, and there was doubt. The leaders initially didn’t take Jesus seriously, but his miracles worried them. Even his disciples were confused. On the one hand, he was a miracle worker, a healer and undoubtedly a prophet. The demons, who often called Jesus “Son of God”, also encouraged the belief that he was the Messiah. But on the other hand, there was evidence against it. Jesus was a poor itinerant preacher, nobody’s concept of the messianic king. Secondly, Jesus himself spoke of the Son of Man in the third person which suggested that the Messiah might be another person. And added to that he usually spoke of the kingdom of God as something in the future. Hinting that he was the Messiah, he said to people: “the kingdom of God is near”, or “the kingdom of God is among you”. On other occasions Jesus’ speech made it clear that he was the Messiah. He told people they had to believe in him and give themselves wholeheartedly to him. He said, for example, that whoever acknowledged him before people, he would acknowledge before God (Mt 10:32). That statement was majestic, but it didn’t have clear political implications.

The Messiah in Acts

The title “Christ” meaning “Messiah” occurs over five hundred times in the book of Acts and the epistles. In addition, the kingdom of God is referred to about twenty eight times in the New Testament books following the Gospels. Luke declares in the last verse of the book of Acts that Paul continued to preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). Yet in Paul’s 13 epistles he only refers to the kingdom fifteen times, including related expressions, for example, the kingdom of the Son whom he loves. Only once (1 Cor 15:24-25), does he talk about Christ’s reign on earth, but six times he talks about inheriting the kingdom of God. Otherwise, his main concern seems to be on the present condition of Christians and their church communities, on their relationship with God and their relationships with each other.

So what do the references to the kingdom of God in Acts and the epistles relate to? Do they teach a future messianic kingdom, or do they somehow equate it with the churches? Paul told the Colossian believers that God had qualified them *to share in the inheritance of the saints* in the kingdom of light. He had rescued them from the power of darkness and brought them into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves, through whom they have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:12-13). “The kingdom of the Son whom he loves” is of course the Messiah’s kingdom. This verse is often quoted to show that the kingdom of God has already begun, or been realized, and is a present reality. Yes, we are saved, our sins are forgiven, we have been adopted as God’s children, we are members of the royal family, we are a kingdom of priests to serve our God. But we not yet reigning! We are justified, but not yet glorified. God has begun a good work in us, but it won’t be perfected until the day Jesus Christ returns.

Being “in Christ”, we are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph 2:6), but that status we have is for our own personal edification. The world cannot and does not recognize it. Christians have already entered the monarchy, and we are waiting until Jesus comes to see how that will evolve. It is expressed in a past context because all our status blessings come to us when we are born from above. However, there is no reason to call this “realized eschatology” as many do. “Realized” means that something is present as *reality*.

That is not true of the kingdom of God. In the spiritual realm, we have been delivered from the devil's power, we are new creatures in Christ, and we live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once a person is born again, he becomes a child of God and immediately shares in the life of God that belongs to the future. But Messiah's kingdom is not a spiritual experience. It has not yet arrived in the real world; the Messiah is not yet seated on his earthly throne. Paul speaks about the Messiah who is in us as our glorious hope (Col 1:27). We have a relationship with God, we experience new life, we know that we are "in Christ", but the glory is still to come. Jesus is on the throne in heaven, but he is also waiting for God to subdue his enemies (Heb 10:13), culminating in Armageddon. His reign on earth has not begun, and nor has ours.

Luke said that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). What did he talk to them about? Was he talking about the church which hadn't begun yet? Or Messiah's kingdom, which as we now know, was still millennia away in the future? The two are connected, of course, because the true church consists of those who will inherit the kingship. Jesus' conversation on the road to Emmaus may give us an idea of what he was talking about. He told them that the Messiah had to suffer these things before he entered into his glory. Then, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *he explained to them all the passages of Scripture about himself* (Lk 24:26-27). And later he told his disciples that *everything written about him in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled* (Lk 24:44).

There we have it from the mouth of Jesus himself. *All the Old Testament messianic prophecies must be fulfilled.* For example, Isaiah 11:10 which Paul quotes in the book of Romans, says that the Messiah *would arise to rule over the Gentiles*, and they would hope in him (Rom 15:12). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would raise a banner for the nations and assemble the dispersed of Israel and gather the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa 11:12).

Peter told a crowd at Jerusalem that the Messiah must remain in heaven until it was time for him, as Messiah, to restore everything to perfection. They should repent and turn to him to have their sins blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the

presence of the Lord and so that he might send Jesus to them, whom he appointed long ago to be the Messiah. *Peter said that Jesus had to remain in heaven until the time for restoring all things*, which God had announced through his prophets (Acts 3:19-21).

Philip also preached the good news about the kingdom of God and about the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:12). In the Gospels, the teaching about the kingdom of God to a Jewish audience was one thing, while in Acts and the epistles the preaching of the gospel and salvation through the death of Jesus Christ was another. Perhaps in Philip's preaching to the Samaritans we are seeing a blending of these messages.

Paul and Barnabas preached to Jews and Gentiles in Galatia and told them that they must endure many hardships before they enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). What does Paul mean here by entering the kingdom of God? Is it a synonym for "being saved"? Is his message now a blending of Messiah's kingdom and the gospel message? Or is he focusing on the future? The kingdom of God normally refers to the Messiah's future kingship or reign, and Paul is saying that it is normal for Christians to experience suffering in this life before they are glorified in the next. F. F. Bruce's commentary on this verse is: "No cross, no crown".

The Messiah in Paul's Epistles

"Christ" has evolved into a personal name in the epistles, where Jesus is often referred to as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, and the Lord Jesus Christ. There are only scattered references to the kingdom in Paul's epistles and the emphasis has sometimes moved from Christ's future reign to the implications of that reign on the present Christian life.

Paul declares that the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy produced by the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17), and that the kingdom of God isn't just talk, but also power (1 Cor 4:20). However, neither of these statements prove that the kingdom has been realized; they teach timeless truths about the kingdom. The resurrected saints who will constitute the monarchy will all be Spirit-filled believers exhibiting the fruit of the spirit; love, joy, peace, goodness etc. If

that is what the messianic kingdom of God is going to be like, then it should be reflected in our present relationships. Paul usually refers to the kingdom as future, especially in regard to inheriting it. He said that wicked people *will not inherit* the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). His clearest messianic kingdom statement comes in this chapter on the resurrection.

The ethics and qualities of life in the kingdom we hope for are also the ethics we should aspire to in our Christian lives. Sanday and Hedlam in *The International Critical Commentary on Romans* (p. 391) say: “The phrase (kingdom of God) is used normally in St Paul of that messianic kingdom which is to be the reward and goal of the Christian life ... Hence it comes to mean the principles or ideas on which that kingdom is founded, and which are already exhibited in this world.”

He then makes the significant statement that mortal bodies made of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and that what decays cannot inherit what does not decay (1 Cor 15:50). Paul is here declaring the necessity of *resurrection* before entering the Messiah’s reign. The resurrection will take place at Jesus’ return immediately before believers inherit the kingship. This is in accordance with Revelation 20 which makes it very clear that the resurrection of the righteous will occur before the millennial reign of Christ on earth begins. The rest of the dead don’t come to life until the thousand years are over and take no part in the kingdom. This is clear evidence that the kingdom of God is not present now. It follows Christ’s return and the resurrection.

Paul calls his evangelistic team members, fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Col 4:11). Messiah’s reign is the goal, the climax towards which all Christian work is heading. Souls won for the Lord will enter their glory there and receive their rewards there. Paul urges the Thessalonian Christians to live in a manner worthy of God who calls them into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12). This verse does not mention the kingdom of God specifically, but “his kingdom” is obviously the same thing, and as argued throughout this book, it does not refer to God’s universal reign, or his rule in our hearts, but Messiah’s earthly reign that originates from God. The tense here indicates what God habitually does; he calls people to enter his Son’s kingship and glory. This is their ultimate destination.

In making a solemn charge to Timothy, Paul does so, based on future realities; the coming of Jesus to establish his messianic kingdom and to judge the living and the dead. He says:

“In the presence of God and the Messiah Jesus, who is going to judge those who are living and those who are dead, and in view of *his appearing and his kingdom*, I solemnly appeal to you” (2 Tim 4:1).

This verse refers to the future events described in Revelation 19-20, the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the white throne judgment. In the same chapter, Paul said that the Lord would rescue him from every evil attack and *would take him safely to his heavenly kingdom* (2 Tim 4:18). What does he mean by “heavenly kingdom”? The NIV commentary suggests heaven itself, but Messiah’s reign is on earth, not heaven. The BAG Greek lexicon states that the Greek word for “heavenly” can mean something that is there, that belongs there by nature, or that comes from there. Messiah’s kingdom has its source in God, so it is commonly described as heavenly or coming from heaven. Paul said that the Jerusalem that is above is our mother (Gal 4:26). That is the heavenly kingdom that was his hope, the New Jerusalem which will come down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2). This is the future home of the royal household after the resurrection. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come (Heb 13:14).

The Messiah in Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles

There are only four references to Messiah’s kingdom in these epistles, but it is significant that these authors also interpret it as a future earthly kingdom. Quoting Psalm 45:6, the writer of Hebrews says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is a righteous scepter” (Heb 1:8). He interprets the king to be the Messiah, the Son of God, whom God appointed heir of all things and whose kingdom was always regarded as being on earth. Then he tells the Christians that they have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb 12:22), and since they are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful (Heb 12:28). Receiving the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting it and ruling as

co-heirs with the Messiah during his millennial reign. This heavenly Jerusalem is the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God.

James says that God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him (James 2:5). See also James 1:12 where he says that it is the person who has stood the test who will receive the crown of life; the victor's crown that endures for eternal life.

Peter says that Christians should confirm their calling and election, for in this way they will be generously granted entry into the *eternal* kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah (2 Pet 1:11). Peter is probably alluding to Daniel 7, where it says that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth would be given to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom will be an *everlasting kingdom*, and all authorities will worship and obey him.

The Messiah in Revelation

The Messiah is mentioned seven times in Revelation in the ISV. The term kingdom of God does not occur at all. Nevertheless, the book is entitled “the revelation of Jesus Christ (the Messiah)” and he is referred to under many titles and names, including “Jesus” fourteen times. The climax of the book is the arrival of Messiah's kingdom to which the following four verses refer:

Rev 1:5b-6a Jesus, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, has made us a *kingdom*, priests for his God and Father. The New English Bible (NEB) interprets “a kingdom” in a more meaningful fashion as “a royal house”. The primary meaning is “kingship”, but here it is not abstract; it refers to those who will reign, the monarchy or royal household who are sometimes called the “sons of the kingdom”.

Rev 5:10 The Lamb (Messiah) has redeemed people to become a *kingdom* (royal house or monarchy) and priests for our God, and *they will reign over the earth*. This repeats what was said in the previous reference with the all-important information that the saints will reign *over the earth*. The kingdom of God (messianic kingship) originates from heaven, but the reign is on earth. The

Messiah, Jesus, will rule *over* the whole world together with his royal household, the saints, who are redeemed by his blood. I prefer the translation *over the earth*, because there is no scriptural evidence that the Messiah or the saints will be living *on* the earth. The redeemed, in their resurrection bodies, will rule over the earth from the New Jerusalem.

Rev 11:15 The blowing of the seventh trumpet signals the climax of the book, when *the world's kingdom* becomes *the kingdom of the Lord* and of his regent, the Messiah, who will rule forever. This is a central verse and reflects the climax of the book. This kingdom belongs to planet earth and is most certainly an allusion to Daniel 2:44 and 7:14. The world's kingdom is in the singular, because dominion and rule over the whole world passes from the tyrants to the Messiah. All earthly kingdoms will come to an end.

Rev 12:10 A loud voice in heaven declares that the salvation, the power, *the kingdom of our God*, and the authority of his Messiah have now arrived. Again, this is the climax. There was war in heaven, and Satan, who had led the whole world astray, was hurled down to earth together with his demons. The time has arrived for God's kingdom to be manifested, and for the authority of his regent, the Messiah, to be enforced. The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book about the end of the present age, climaxing with the return of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, his victory over his enemies, and the beginning of his reign over the earth.

Jesus' Titles in Revelation

We will now check the terminology used in Revelation to describe Jesus' person and his victory as Messiah.

Rev 1:5 Jesus the Messiah, the witness, the faithful one, the firstborn from the dead, and *the ruler over the kings of the earth*.

The Messiah will rule over the earth (5:10) for one thousand years (20:4, 6). He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Without a millennial rule, these are but empty titles. "May he rule from

sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the end of the earth. May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him (Ps 72:8, 11).

1:8 The Alpha and the Omega, who is, who was, and who is coming, *the Almighty*.

1:17-18 *The first and the last* (cf. Isa 44:6, 48:12), the living one.

2:18 The Son of God.

3:7 The one who is holy and true, who has the key of David.

The key to the house of David is mentioned in Isaiah 22:22. Keys are symbols of authority and in this context keys to the messianic kingship, the Davidic throne. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus said he would give the keys of the kingdom to Peter.

3:14 The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation.

5:5 *The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*.

The Lion imagery originated from an early messianic prophecy in Genesis 49:9-10. Jacob blessed Judah saying he was a lion's cub. *The scepter would not depart from him*, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the one comes who owns them both, and *to him would belong the allegiance of nations*. "Root of David" is better translated as "Shoot or Scion of David". A scion grows out of the root or stump of a tree or plant, even when thought to be dead, and symbolically it refers to the Messiah who came from the royal line of David, son of Jesse, one thousand years after David, and four hundred plus years after the last Judean king. Another prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2 says that a *shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse*, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

5:12 The Lamb who was slain (cf. Isa 53:7)

11:15 *His Messiah*.

Father and Son share the throne, but the pronoun remains singular because members of the Trinity are one. The Lord is sovereign over all, the Messiah is his regent on earth. cf. Ps 2:6 where the Lord installs his regent on Mount Zion.

14:14 *The Son of Man*.

The one “like the Son of Man” is Jesus, an allusion to Daniel 7:13. This is the title Jesus frequently used for himself in the Gospels.

17:14 *Lord of lords and King of kings.*

19:11 *Faithful and True.*

19:13 *The Word of God.*

19:16 *King of kings and Lord of lords.*

22:13 *The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

22:16 *The root (scion) and descendant of David, the bright morning star.*

This final name comes from a messianic prophecy given by Balaam son of Beor in Numbers 24:17:

I can see him, but not right now,
I observe him, but from a distance.
A star streams forth from Jacob;
a scepter arises from Israel.

While the immediate reference is to king David, here in Revelation it relates to David’s greater son. F. F. Bruce, in *The Revelation to John* (p. 666), writes that “in the Qumran texts Numbers 24:17 is a recurring testimonium of the messianic warrior of the end time”. The star was a familiar symbol in Jewish writings for the expected Davidic king. The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over, the new eschatological day is about to dawn. The Star of David, known in Hebrew as the Shield of David or Magen David, is a generally recognized symbol of modern Jewish identity and Judaism.

A Summary of Jesus’ Teaching about His Messiahship

1. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, Peter declared that he was the Messiah, and Jesus told them to keep it to themselves.
2. Immediately after that, at the transfiguration at Caesarea Philippi, Peter, James and John saw Jesus in his messianic glory, but they told no one at that time what they had seen.

3. At his trial before the high priest, Jesus declared himself to be the Messiah.
4. When the Samaritan woman spoke of the Messiah, Jesus told her that he who was speaking to her was the Messiah (Jn 4:26).
5. Jesus referred to God as his Father (Jn 5:17), and himself as the Son (Jn 5:19-23). "Son of God" was a messianic title found in Psalm 2:7-8 where the Lord said: "You are my son, today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your possession, the ends of the earth as your possession." The writer to the Hebrews quotes these verses and relates them to Jesus (Heb 1:5).
6. Jesus said that the Father had given him authority to judge, because he is the Son of Man (the Messiah) (Jn 5:27).
7. The "I AM" pronouncements in John's Gospel identify Jesus with the divine name Yahweh and numerous verses which attribute deity to the Messiah in the Old Testament.

"I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35).

"I am the bread that came down from heaven" (Jn 6:41).

"I am the light of the world. He who follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12, cf. Isa 49:6).

"Unless you believe that I AM, you'll die in your sins" (Jn 8:24).

"Before Abraham was, I AM!" (Jn 8:58). The Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone him for blaspheming.
8. Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was via the Mount of Olives, a significant messianic landmark. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:12), and it is to this same mountain that the Messiah will descend when he returns (Zech 14:4). Jesus rode on a donkey to fulfil a messianic prophecy from Zechariah 9:9, cf. Mt 21:4-5. The crowds shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is *the coming kingdom of our father David*" (Mk 11:9-10). The crowds recognized the significance of this messianic event, but the Pharisees rejected Jesus as their Messiah (Lk 19:39). Jesus went to the temple where children shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Mt 21:15). Belief in him as the Messiah was growing.

9. Jesus questioned the Jews about why they accused him of blasphemy when he called himself the Son of God? (Jn 10:36). God promised David that he would establish the throne of his descendant forever and that he would be his father and he would be God's son (2 Sam 7:12-14). Based on this promise, Son of God became a messianic title.
10. The crowd told Jesus that they had learned from the Old Testament that the *Messiah* remains forever. So why was he saying that the *Son of Man* must be lifted up? (Jn 12:34). The crowd is equating the expressions "Messiah" and "Son of Man".
11. Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17 leaves no doubt as to who Jesus believed himself to be. He called God, "Father", and referred to himself as, "Son". He said he had been granted authority over all people (Dan 7:14, Ps 2). The connection between Daniel 7:14 and Matthew 28:18-19 is significant. Daniel said, dominion, glory and a kingdom had been bestowed on the Messiah, so that all people, nations, and languages would serve him. In Matthew, Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him, so, his disciples should go and disciple people in all nations.

This is the Great Commission, the church's marching orders. Jesus gives eternal life to all those whom the Father has given him. Inheriting eternal life is the Johannine equivalent of inheriting the kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus. Having finished his work, Jesus is now returning to the glory he had with the Father before the world began. He said that those whom the Father gave him now know for sure that he came from the Father and believe that he sent him. He states that all he has is the Father's, and all the Father has is his. Complete unity. The believers have the word and Jesus asks for protection for them from the evil one. He doesn't mention his messiahship, or the kingdom of God explicitly, but rather prays for his disciples and those who will believe in him through their message. He prays for their unity and says he has given them the glory that the Father gave him. That glory is regal, and it is eternal. He has given them eternal life and their glory is in being co-heirs with Christ and ruling with him. Their ultimate glorification is expressed in Revelation 3:21, where Jesus said the conquerors will share a place with him on

his throne, just as he conquered and shares a place with the Father on his throne.

12. In John 18:33 Pilate asked Jesus if he was king of the Jews. Jesus replied that his kingdom was not *from* this world. He didn't say that it didn't belong to this world. The Greek preposition ἐκ "from, out of" indicates that his kingdom does not have its origin in this world, not that it won't be manifested in this world. He admitted that he was a king, and that he was born for that reason.
13. John said his purpose for writing his book was so that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him they might have life (Jn 20:31).
14. After the Last Supper, Jesus promised his disciples a share in his rule in his future kingdom. He conferred *kingship* on them, just as his Father had conferred *kingship* on him, so that they might eat and drink at his table *in his kingdom* and sit down on *thrones* to govern the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk 22:29-30).

The evidence given in this chapter is more than sufficient to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the coming king promised by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus will return to this earth, and this time he will reign as king over the earth and fulfil all those promises that gave the Jews their hope and expectation.

2

The Significance of “Son of Man”

I continued to observe the night vision - and look! - someone like the Son of Man was coming, accompanied by heavenly clouds. He approached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages are to serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion - it will never pass away - and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14

The Meaning of “the Son of Man”

“Jesus” was the name given by Mary to her baby, meaning “the Lord saves”. In the first chapter we saw that Jesus was known as the Messiah, of which the Greek form is “Christ”, meaning “the anointed one”. In this chapter we will look at a title that Jesus often used for himself, the “Son of Man”. This is a messianic title taken from Daniel 7, and it is used only by Jesus, except for Acts 7:56 where Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which immediately reminded him of the Son of Man vision in Daniel, and so he called him “the Son of Man”. Jesus used the title to speak of himself in the third person, enabling him to speak about the Messiah without explicitly claiming to be the Messiah himself. He used the “kingdom of God” expression in the same evasive way. Unfortunately, the church at times has missed or neglected the significance of Jesus being the Jewish Messiah. “Christ” has become a personal name, and Jesus’ future reign on earth gets interpreted in a vague, heavenly or spiritual, non-literal manner. He is no longer the eagerly awaited Jewish king. The terms “Messiah”, “kingdom of God” and “Son of Man” are pervasive throughout the Gospels and cannot be ignored. To do so is to miss the point of why the Gospels were written (Jn 20:31).

“Son of Man” itself is a vague expression. What could it refer to? It is Jesus’ most common title for himself and used 81 times in the Gospels. It is obvious from Mark 8:38 that Jesus used the title to refer to himself, and he meant it as a messianic title.

“If anyone is ashamed of *me* and *my* words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the *Son of Man* will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father’s glory.”

And again in Mt 16:13, 15

“When Jesus had come to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the *Son of Man* is? ... He asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

The Greek word for “man” is ἄνθρωπος which means human being rather than a male. John Piper, in a paper called “Why is Jesus called “Son of Man”? makes the following observations: “Let me give a common understanding and then a more sophisticated historical understanding. The common understanding is that “Son

of God" implies his deity—which it does—and that "Son of Man" implies his humanity, which it does too. He was a son of man, that is, a human being. And he is the Son of God, in that he has always existed as the Eternally Begotten One who comes forth from the Father forever. He always has, and he always will. He is the Second Person of the Trinity with all the divine nature fully in him. The more sophisticated and important historical insight is that the term "Son of Man" doesn't merely align him with humanity. It is taken from Daniel 7 to which chapter John alludes frequently. And in that chapter the Son of Man is a very exalted figure. It was Jesus' favorite self-designation."

Jesus didn't refer to himself often as Son of God, but rather, as Son of Man. He said, for example, that even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people (Mk 10:45). He frequently called himself Son of Man. The reason he did so was because "a son of man" is a phrase that could be interpreted as "a human being" and would cause no offence. But those with ears to hear could hear Daniel 7, in which he was claiming for himself a very exalted role in the history of redemption. And he meant to do it.

Jesus' conversation with the man born blind is an example (Jn 9). After healing him, he heard that he had been thrown out of the synagogue. Jesus knew that he must have expressed some faith in him, so he sought him out and asked him if he believed in the Son of Man? The man asked who he was so that he might believe in him. He had already told the Pharisees that he believed Jesus was a prophet, but he didn't know more than that. When Jesus told him that he was speaking to the Son of Man, the man born blind immediately believed in him, called him Lord, and worshipped him.

Jesus was very subtle in that he was constantly revealing his identity to those with eyes to see and ears to hear, but he wasn't revealing it so blatantly that everybody would come and make him king. He had to be very careful in disclosing his identity. He performed miracles and then told people not to tell anybody. He would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in others. Only when he was on trial for his life, and the Jewish high priest asked him in Matthew 27:63 if he was the Messiah, the Son of God, did Jesus respond, saying: "You have said

so. Nevertheless, I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” He confessed his deity and messiahship before the Jewish Sanhedrin even though he knew he would be crucified for it.

Jesus is the king in the kingdom of God, but in the Gospels, he did not want to openly declare that he was a king, until he did so before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (Mt 27:11). Rather he spoke about the Son of Man, a veiled way of talking about himself.

The Son of Man in Daniel 7

The messianic prophecy from which this title sprang is certainly Daniel 7:13-14, the text quoted at the chapter heading. This prophecy is about a world ruler whose kingdom, given to him by God, would last forever. By using the title “son of man”, Jesus was claiming to be this exalted person. The Greek expression is definite, he was *the* Son of Man, the son of man that people had heard about, the one spoken about by Daniel, the one whom many interpreted to be the Messiah. This is a remarkable passage because it refers to a human being who is given great authority, a person whom people of every language would serve and worship, and it is clearly stated that he will have been given an everlasting earthly kingdom and that all peoples, nations and languages will serve him.

The context of Daniel 7 is apocalyptic. Daniel describes four beasts he saw in a dream, which are interpreted as kingdoms, and especially the last beast, which by comparing Daniel 7:25 with Revelation 13:5-7 can be identified as the Antichrist and his kingdom, which is symbolically referred to as both Rome and Babylon. In the interpretation of the dream, we are told that the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan 7:18). Then the angel interpreting the vision for Daniel said that the court would convene, and the authority of the fourth beast would be removed, annulled, and destroyed forever. *Then the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth would be given to the people who are the saints of the Most High.* His kingdom would endure forever, and all authorities would serve and obey him (Dan 7:26-27).

By designating himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identified himself as the coming Messiah who would rule the world with his saints. Compare this passage from Daniel with what John saw in Revelation 20. John saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. He saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and the word of God, namely those who had not worshipped the Antichrist or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

The Coming of the Son of Man in Matthew

Daniel 7:13 is not only about the Son of Man, it is about the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. The following seven verses from Matthew are all in the context of the Messiah, Jesus, coming down from heaven to rule on earth at the end of the age.

Mt 13:41, 43 In the parable of the weeds, the reapers gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, while the wheat is gathered into the barn. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather and remove out of *his kingdom* everything that causes others to sin (stumbling blocks) and those who practice lawlessness. “Kingdom” here is geographical rather than meaning “kingship”. The time is the end of the age. The event is the second coming and especially the battle of Armageddon, when the armies gathered there are slain by the rider on the white horse. The Messiah has come to reign and the wicked are slaughtered (cf. Rev 14:19-20). Then the righteous will shine like the sun (cf. Dan 12:3) *in their Father’s kingdom*. The harvest at the end of the age begins with the Great Tribulation, a time when a good percentage of the world’s unbelieving population will be killed through warfare and God’s judgments. Receiving the mark of the beast will distinguish the evildoers from the righteous, including nominal Christians. When the wicked are removed, the resurrected righteous will be glorified in their Father’s kingdom, the kingdom that comes from God.

Mt 16:27 The Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and he will repay everyone according to what he has done. The righteous will be rewarded during the Messiah’s reign,

according to how each one faithfully served the Lord during his life. The wicked will be judged according to what they have done at the last judgment.

Mt 19:28 When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne *in the renewed creation*, his disciples will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel. Reigning with Jesus is a reward conferred on his disciples. The renewed creation is literally “the rebirth”, as the world’s surface will be almost destroyed during the Great Tribulation. In Acts 3:21 it is called “the restoration of all things.” In Revelation 3:21 a promise is given to those who conquer; the conquerors will share in Jesus’ throne, just as he conquered and shared in his Father’s throne.

Mt 24:27 Just as lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus’ coming will be clearly observed in the sky. Every eye will see him (Rev 1:7). This is what Ezekiel described, when in a vision he saw the Lord returning in glory, coming from the east with the sound of roaring water, the earth made bright with his glory (Ezek 43:2).

Mt 24:30-31 The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all “the tribes of the land will mourn” (Zech 12:12 ISV) when they see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven”, with power and great glory. He’ll send out his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they’ll gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another. These verses hardly need interpretation, but the bewildering interpretations in some commentaries makes a comment necessary. The expression “Son of Man” taken from Daniel 7:13 confirms that this is a description of the second coming. Daniel 7:14 says that he will be given authority, glory and sovereign power. All people, nations and people of every language will worship him. The elect (cf. Mt 24:22), are God’s chosen ones; the righteous, the church. This accords well with what Paul said:

We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.... The dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever – 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

This gathering of the elect by the angels from the four corners of the earth is Jesus' picturesque way of portraying the resurrection of the righteous and the simultaneous rapture of the living saints. From there they will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father, or as Daniel puts it, they will shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, like the stars forever and ever. That is, in their resurrected and glorified state in the New Jerusalem.

Mt 26:64 Jesus told the Jewish high priest that from now on he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus here brings together messianic prophecies from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14. It is a claim to both deity and messiahship and the members of the Sanhedrin will see him in these roles on judgment day.

Son of Man Verses

The title "Son of Man" was used by Jesus to show himself to be the Messiah of Daniel's prophecy. It is a term that lays claim both to a divine pre-existence and a true humanity. In each context it either points to the Messiah's present lowliness or his future glory. In the vision that Daniel saw, God gives glory and the kingdoms of the earth to him who appears before him in human form coming in the clouds of heaven, so that all people and nations might honor him.

In the following verses, the messianic expression "Son of Man" is replaced by "he/him, the Messiah" to illustrate the meaning that Jesus was talking about himself. Those with discernment would have understood Jesus as referring to himself like that, while those who didn't believe that he was the Messiah might have thought that he was talking about someone else. Parallel verses are not repeated, and sometimes only the relevant sentence is given. I am not suggesting that Bible translations follow this format; Jesus used ambiguous language for a reason.

Mt. 8:20 Jesus said foxes have holes and birds have nests, but ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, has no place to rest.

Mt 9:6 So that the scribes might know that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* had authority on earth to forgive sins, he told the paralyzed man to get up, pick up his stretcher, and go home.

Mt 10:23 Jesus told his disciples that when they were persecuted in one town, they should flee to the next, because they will not have gone through the towns of Israel before ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah* comes.

This verse implies that because of the persecution, described in 10:17-22, the towns of Israel would never be fully evangelized.

Mt 11:19 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, came eating and drinking, and people said he was a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!

Mt 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, is Lord of the Sabbath.

Mt 12:32 Jesus said whoever speaks a word against ~~the Son of Man~~ him, *the Messiah*, will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the one to come.

Mt 12:40 Jesus said, just as Jonah was in the stomach of the great fish for three days and three nights, so ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

Mt 13:37 Jesus said the person who sowed good seed is ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*.

Mt 13:41 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah* would send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes others to sin and those who practice lawlessness.

Mt 16:27-28 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, was going to come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to what he has done. He said some standing there would not experience death before they see ~~the Son of Man~~ him, *the Messiah*, coming in his kingdom.

This refers naturally to the transfiguration which occurred six days (and one verse) later.

Mt 17:9 Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about the vision until ~~the Son of Man~~ he, *the Messiah*, had been raised from the dead.

Mt 17:12 Jesus said Elijah had already come, yet people did not recognize him and treated him just as they pleased. In the same way, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to suffer at their hands.

Mt 17:22 While they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus told them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to be betrayed into human hands.

Mt 19:28 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, his followers will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Mt 20:18 Jesus said they were going up to Jerusalem, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to the high priests and scribes, and they would condemn him to death.

Mt 20:28 Jesus said that was the way it was with ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mt 24:27 Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* coming be.

Mt 24:30 Then ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land will mourn as they see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Mt 24:37 Just as it was in Noah's time, so it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes.

Mt 24:39 They were unaware of what was happening until the flood came and swept all of them away. That's how it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, appears.

Mt 24:44 So you, too, must be ready, because ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will come at an hour you are not expecting.

Mt 25:31 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes in his glory and all the angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

Mt 26:2 Jesus said the Passover would take place in two days, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to be crucified.

Mt 26:24 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going away, just as it had been written about him. How terrible it will be for that man by whom ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, is betrayed!

Mt 26:45 Jesus told them to keep on sleeping and resting. The time was near for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Mt 26:64 Jesus told the high priest that from then on, he would see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Mk 8:31 Jesus began to teach them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would have to suffer a great deal and be rejected by the Jewish leaders. Then he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again.

Mk 8:38 Jesus said if anyone is ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory.

Mk 9:9 On their way down the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, had risen from the dead.

Mk 9:12 Jesus told them that Elijah was coming first and would restore all things. Then he asked them why ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must suffer and be treated shamefully.

Mk 14:62 Jesus said, I am (*ἐγώ εἶμι*), and you will see ~~the Son of Man~~ *me, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Lk 6:22 Jesus said his disciples were blessed whenever people hated, avoided, insulted, and slandered them because of ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*!

Lk 11:30 Jesus said, just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be a sign to his generation.

Lk 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* will acknowledge before the angels everyone who acknowledges him before people.

Lk 17:22 The time will come when the disciples will long to see ~~the Son of Man's~~ *he, the Messiah's* reign, but they won't see it.

Lk 17:24 Just as lightning flashes and shines from one end of the sky to the other, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* be at his coming.

Lk 17:30 The day when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* is revealed will be like that (sudden destruction).

Lk 18:8 Jesus asked whether when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes, he will he find faith on earth.

Lk 18:31 Jesus said that everything written by the prophets about ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, will be fulfilled.

Lk 19:10 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, came to seek and to save the lost.

Lk 21:36 Jesus told his disciples to be alert at all times, so that they might stand before ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Lk 22:48 Jesus asked Judas if he was betraying ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, with a kiss.

Lk 24:6-7 Jesus told his disciples that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must be handed over to be crucified, and rise on the third day.

Jn 1:51 Jesus told his disciples they would see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn 3:13-14 Jesus said no one has gone up to heaven except him, the one who came down from heaven, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* who is in heaven. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, be lifted up.

Jn 5:27 Jesus said God gave him the authority to judge, because he is ~~the Son of Man~~ *the Messiah*.

Jn 6:27 Jesus said his disciples should not work for food that perishes but for food that lasts for eternal life, which ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will give them.

Jn 6:53 Jesus said, unless his disciples eat ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* flesh and drink his blood, they won't experience eternal life.

Jn 6:62 Jesus asked his disciples what their reaction would be, if they saw ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, ascending to heaven where he was before.

Jn 8:28 Jesus said when they have lifted ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, up, then they will know that he is the I AM, and that he does nothing on his own authority.

Jn 9:35 When Jesus heard they had thrown the beggar out, he found him and asked him if he believed in ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn 12:23 Jesus told them the hour had come for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be glorified.

Jn 13:31-32 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was now glorified, and God had been glorified by him. If God had been glorified by him, God himself also would glorify ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, and he would do it quickly.

3

The Messianic Prophecies

Therefore, we regard the message of the prophets as confirmed beyond doubt, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp that is shining in a gloomy place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. – 2 Peter 1:19

The Jewish Belief in the Coming Messiah

This chapter is important, because one of the main issues involved in interpreting the future correctly is one's attitude to the nation of Israel and the way one interprets the Old Testament prophecies. Sam Storms, in his 2013 book "Kingdom Come" gives the amillennial alternative to a premillennial interpretation of eschatology, or the last things. He says these OT passages are largely symbolic and that the fulfillment is found "in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the believing remnant, the Church" (p. 549). It is for this reason that chapters 1 & 2 have concentrated on Jesus in his role as the promised Messiah and the Son of Man. So make up your own mind as you read these OT prophecies. Are they all somehow symbolic, referring to Jesus and the church? Or are they to be taken literally? They predict a regathering of Israel to their historic land and this miracle has been happening in our generation, and over the past one hundred years. They also predict the coming of a Jewish Messiah as king of the entire world, and the subsequent establishment of a kingdom where the Messiah rules the world from Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the holy city that God chose as his own city, has been a constant source of contention between Jews and Muslims, and this disagreement will not go away. It is destined to be the focus of a rebellion of the nations against God, culminating in the battle of Armageddon. Jerusalem is the place where Jesus died and was resurrected, the place from where he ascended, and to where he will return, and the place from where he will rule the world with his saints. The Bible says that *The Messiah will rule over David's kingdom, sitting on David's throne*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness. That can mean nothing but the Messiah reigning over Jerusalem and Israel, and it is the zeal of the Lord of Hosts that will accomplish it.

All these things were predicted by the prophets as they were led by God's Spirit, and the apostle Peter encourages us to take notice of them (2 Pet 1:19 quoted on previous page). According to Jewish tradition, the messianic era will be one of global peace and harmony, an era free of strife and hardship, and one conducive to the propagation of the word of God. The following themes are common to these prophecies.

The return of Israel to their land

The battle of Armageddon
The coming and reign of the Messiah
The conversion of Israel
Messiah's reign from Jerusalem
Justice, righteousness, peace, and knowledge of the Lord
Messiah's kingdom is international and eternal
The saints will reign with the Messiah

The main Old Testament prophecies are now presented in the order of these topics. However, some prophecies cover more than one topic. It should be noted that these prophecies have never been fulfilled, except for those that predict details of the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and those that predict the regathering of Israel, which has happened before our very eyes. The selected verses relate to the kingdom of God, although it is never called that. Messiah's kingdom can be defined as God's rule on earth through his Son Jesus as regent, and his co-heirs, the elect children of God. Many of these prophecies are guaranteed by the expressions: "The Lord declares", "The Lord has sworn", or "The Lord will make it happen." I have highlighted in italics words that I see as being especially significant. The following passages in this chapter are my own paraphrase of the ISV translation, in order to reduce words and phrases that are not relevant to our purpose. Readers can check their veracity by comparing them with their favorite translation.

The Return of Israel to Their Land

The Jewish nation has been and will continue to be regathered from the four corners of the earth. Their fortunes have been restored; they are now one of the world's leading military powers. Jerusalem is destined to become the center of the world's stage at the battle of Armageddon, and after the Messiah's return, it will be the capital of his worldwide kingdom. Due to its immigrant nature, Israel is one of the most multicultural and multilingual societies in the world. The population of nearly nine million has migrated mainly from Europe, Africa and Asia.

The last question the disciples asked Jesus before his ascension was when he would *restore the kingdom* to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus implied that it was going to happen, but said it wasn't for them to know the time that the Father had fixed by his own authority.

Isa 11:11-12 At that time, the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people, from Assyria, Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and *will assemble the dispersed of Israel; he will gather the scattered people of Judah from the corners of the earth.*

Isa 14:1-2a The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel. *He will settle them in their own land,* and foreigners will join them, affiliating themselves with the house of Jacob. Many nations will take them and bring them to their land and their own place.

Jer 30:3 The time will come when the Lord will restore the security of his people Israel and Judah. *He'll bring them back to the land that he gave to their ancestors, and they'll possess it.*

Ezek 11:17 The Lord is *going to gather you from among the nations, assembling you from the lands among which you have been dispersed. He'll give you the land of Israel.*

Ezek 37:21 *Watch me take the Israelis out of the nations where they've gone and return them from every direction. I'm going to bring them back into their own land.*

Hos 3:4-5 Israel will dwell a long time without a king, without a prince, without sacrifice, without sacred pillars, and with neither ephod nor teraphim. *Afterward, they'll return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They'll come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the last days.*

Amos 9:11-12, 14-15 At that time the Lord will restore David's fallen tent, restoring its torn places. He'll restore its ruins, rebuilding it as it was long ago, so his people might inherit the remnant of Edom and all of the nations that bear his name. *He'll restore his people Israel; they'll rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They'll plant vineyards and drink the wine from them. They'll plant gardens and eat the fruit from them. The Lord will plant Israel in their own land that he gave them, never again to be removed.* This passage is quoted in Acts 15:16-17.

Armageddon and the Day of the Lord

When the Messiah returns, he will initially defeat the nations that surround Jerusalem at the battle of Armageddon, and then he'll rule over the survivors. The prophecies declare that all nations will gather to attack Jerusalem and will be judged there by God. Nations will attack each other, and many will be destroyed by a plague. At this time there will be a great earthquake, the most severe the world has known, and all the cities of the world will collapse. The Mount of Olives will split in two, Jerusalem will be raised up, while the rest of the land will become a plain. The ferocity of God's wrath is shocking. There is great slaughter and retribution against rebellious mankind when the Messiah returns to claim victory.

Ps 2:1-2 Why are the nations in an uproar, and their people involved in a vain plot? *As the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his anointed one*, they seek to throw off perceived shackles, and cast off their chains (the whole Psalm is relevant).

Isa 2:17-19 *Humanity's haughtiness will be humbled, male arrogance will be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. Their idols will utterly vanish. They will enter caverns in the rocks and holes in the ground to escape the terror of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty when he arises to terrify the earth.*

Isa 13:9-13 *The Day of the Lord is coming – cruel, with wrath and fierce anger – to turn the entire inhabited earth into a desolation and to annihilate sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations won't shine their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon won't shine its light. The Lord will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. He'll put an end to the pomposity of the arrogant and overthrow the insolence of tyrants. He'll make mankind scarcer than pure gold. He'll make the heavens tremble. The earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord* (the whole chapter is relevant).

Isa 24:19-23 *The earth is utterly shattered and split apart, and violently shaken. The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard and sways like a hut. Its transgression lies so heavy upon it, that it falls, never to rise again. At that time, the Lord will punish the armies of the exalted ones in the heavens, and the rulers of the earth on earth. They'll be herded together into the Pit and shut up in prison, and after many days they'll be punished. Then the moon*

will be embarrassed and the sun ashamed, for *the Lord will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem; and in the presence of its elders there will be glory.*

Isa 29:5-6, 8b The hordes of your enemies will become like fine dust, and the hordes of tyrants like flying chaff. Then *suddenly, in an instant, you will be visited by the Lord – with thunder, an earthquake, and great noise, with a windstorm, a tempest, and flames from a devouring fire. So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion.*

Isa 34:2-4, 8 *The Lord is angry against all the nations, and furious against all their armies.* He has doomed them to destruction and given them up to be slaughtered. Their slain will be thrown out; and as for their dead bodies – their stench will ascend; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. The valleys will be split, all the stars in the heavens will fall down, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll. All their starry host will fade away like leaves withering on a vine. For *the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for Zion's cause.*

Joel 2:1-11 *Sound the ram's horn in Zion! Tremble, all of you inhabitants of the land, because the Day of the Lord is coming.* A day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadows like the dawn spreading out to cover the mountains—a people strong and robust. Never has there been anything like it, neither will anything follow to compare with it. A fire blazes in their presence, and behind them a conflagration rages. *Before they come, the land is like the garden of Eden; after they leave, there is only a barren wasteland.* Nothing escapes them. As to their form, they're like horses, and how they can run! They leap like the rumbling of chariots echoing from mountain tops, like the roar of wildfire that devours the chaff, like an army firmly established in battle array. The people are terrified by their presence; every face grows pale. They run like elite soldiers, climbing ramparts like men trained for war. The land quivers in their presence; even the heavens shake. *The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will shout in the presence of his forces, because his encampment is very great; for powerful is he who carries out his message. Truly the Day of the Lord is great, and very terrifying. Who will be able to survive it?*

Joel 2:30 – 3:2, 12-16 I will display warnings in the heavens, and on the earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. *The sun will be darkened, and the moon will redden, before the coming of the great and terrifying Day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling. At that time, when I restore prosperity to Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. I will set out my case against them there, on behalf of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they scattered among the nations, apportioning my land among themselves. Let the nations be awakened and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; because I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, because the harvest is ripe. Come and go down, because the winepress is full. The wine vats are overflowing, because their evil is great! Multitudes, multitudes, in the Valley of Judgment! For the day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Judgment! The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will roar from Zion, and shout from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth will shake, but the Lord will be a refuge and strength for his people Israel.*

Zeph 1:14-18 *The great day of the Lord approaches. The sound of the Day of the Lord includes the bitter cry of the mighty soldier. That day will be filled with wrath, a day of trouble and tribulation, a day of desolation and devastation, a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadows, a day of trumpet and battle cry against fortified cities and watch towers. And the Lord will bring so much distress to people that they will walk around like the blind. Because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood will be poured out like dust and their intestines will spill out like manure. Neither their silver nor their gold will deliver them in the Day of the Lord's wrath; But the entire earth will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy, for he will bring the inhabitants of the earth to a sudden end.*

Zeph 3:8-9 The Day will come when the Lord stands up as a prosecutor, for he's *determined to assemble the nations and to gather the kingdoms, in order to pour out his indignation upon them. All the earth will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy.*

Then he *will return his people to a pure language so that they all call upon the name of the Lord, serving him with a united will.*

Hag 2:6-7 Once more, in a little while, the Lord will make the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land to shake. *He'll shake all nations, and the One desired by all nations will come.*

Zech 12:1-9 The Lord, who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundation of the earth, and who frames the spirit of man within himself, declares that he's *making Jerusalem an unstable cup toward all of its surrounding armies when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. He'll make Jerusalem a heavy weight, so that everyone who burdens themselves with it will be crushed, even though all of the nations of the earth gather against it.* The Lord will strike every horse with panic and every rider with insanity. He'll keep an eye on the house of Judah, but he'll blind every horse of the invading armies. He'll make the leaders of Judah like a torch setting fire to harvested grain. *They'll devour all the invading armies and Jerusalem will again be inhabited in its rightful place—as the real Jerusalem.* The Lord will deliver Judah first, so that neither the glory of the house of David nor the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem overshadows Judah. The Lord will defend those who live in Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them will be like David. The entire house of David will be like God. *At that time, the Lord will search out and destroy all of the nations who have come against Jerusalem.*

Zech 13:7-9 The Lord commands the sword to rise against his shepherd, against the mighty one who is related to him, to strike the shepherd, so that the sheep will be scattered. He added that *two thirds of the people living in the land would die, but a third would survive. The Lord will bring that surviving third through, testing them as if through fire, purifying them like silver, assaying them like gold.* They will call on his name, and he will answer them and say, these are *his people*, and they will say, *the Lord is their God.*

Zech 14:1-2, 12-15 A day is coming for the Lord, when Jerusalem's plunder will be divided in its midst. The Lord will *gather all the nations against Jerusalem, to lay siege against it. The city will be captured, the houses will be ransacked, the women raped, and half of the city will go into exile, but the remaining people will not be cut off from the city. ... This will be the plague*

with which the Lord inflicts all of the people who have attacked Jerusalem: he will cause their flesh to rot away, even while they're standing on their feet. He will cause their eyes to rot away in their sockets, and their tongues to rot away in their mouths. At that time, they will be stricken with a terrible panic from the Lord. Everyone will attack each other. Judah, too, will fight at Jerusalem. Then the wealth of the surrounding nations will be gathered up: gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance.

The Coming and the Reign of the Messiah

A ruling Messiah is promised, who will come to fight the nations attacking Jerusalem. The coming of the Lord, as depicted in Revelation 19:11-21 riding on a white horse, is very symbolic, but it does make it clear that at the end of this age the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven to Jerusalem during a time of warfare. He will empower the leaders of Judah and they will be victorious (Zech 12:6). He will descend to earth and set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4), which will split in two to form a great valley from east to west. The New Testament elaborates on this as we will see later.

Prepare the way of the Lord, cries a voice in the wilderness, make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isa 40:3-5). The glory of the Lord will be revealed (1 Pet 4:13) and all flesh will see it together (Rev 1:7). Zechariah says that the Lord will come with all his holy ones (saints and angels) (Zech 14:5b). The Lord told Ezekiel that his servant David would be king over Israel in the land that he gave Jacob (Ezek 37:24). His sanctuary would be among them forever. In the absence of Scriptures declaring that the Messiah will be physically present on earth during the millennium, and in light of Scriptures which indicate that there will be a bright light above Jerusalem (Isa 60:1-3), it is probable that the Messiah will rule the world with his saints from New Jerusalem, with his sanctuary in earthly Jerusalem, where the nations will come to worship.

Num 24:17 Balaam said, he could see him, but not right now. He observed him, but from a distance. *He saw a star streaming forth from Jacob; a scepter arising from Israel.*

Deut 18:15 *Moses told Israel that the Lord would raise up a prophet like himself for them from among their relatives. They*

must listen to him. Peter identified this prophet as Jesus the Messiah and said that heaven must receive him until the time for restoring all things about which the prophets spoke.

2 Sam 7:11b-16 The Lord promised David he would build a house for him. When his life was complete, *the Lord would raise up one of his offspring and fortify his kingdom*. He will build a house (royal household) dedicated to the Lord's name, and *the Lord will make the throne of his kingdom last forever*. He will be a father to him, and he will be to the Lord a son. *David's dynasty and his kingdom would remain forever, and his throne will be secure forever*. cf. 1 Chron 17:1-14, Ps 89:3-4. This prophecy was partially fulfilled by David's son Solomon, but according to Luke 1:32-33 it was also fulfilled by Jesus.

Ps 2:4-9 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord scoffs at the rebellious nations. In his anger he rebukes them, and in his wrath, he terrifies them. He said he *has set his King on Zion, his holy mountain*. This is the decree of the Lord spoken to the Messiah: *"You are my son, today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession*. You will break them with an iron rod, you will shatter them like pottery."

Ps 110:1-2, 5-6 The Lord God told David's Lord (the Messiah) that he should sit at his right hand (in heaven) until he makes his enemies his footstool. *When the Lord God extends his mighty scepter from Zion, he will rule in the midst of his enemies*. The Lord God is at the Messiah's right hand on his earthly throne and he will utterly destroy kings in the time of his wrath. He will execute judgment against the nations, filling graves with corpses. He will utterly destroy leaders far and wide. The first verse is the Father's invitation to the Messiah to sit at his right hand on his throne in heaven at the ascension. In the rest of the Psalm, the Messiah is seated on his Davidic throne as the Father's regent. cf. Rev 3:21.

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and *the government will be upon his shoulder* *Of the growth of his government and peace there will be no end. He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness*.

Isa 11:1-5 *A shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will bear fruit from his roots. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. He won't judge by what his eyes see, nor decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he will judge the needy, and decide with equity for earth's poor. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and the wicked will be killed with the breath of his lips. Righteousness will be the sash around his loins, and faithfulness the belt around his waist.*

Isa 32:1-2 *A king (the Messiah) will reign in righteousness, and rulers (the saints) will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind, and a hiding place from storms, like streams of water in the desert, in the shadow of a great rock in an exhausted land.*

Jer 33:14-17 *The Lord will fulfill the good promise that he spoke concerning Israel and Judah. In those days he'll cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he'll uphold justice and righteousness in the land. Judah will be delivered, and Jerusalem will dwell in safety. And this is the name people will call it: "The Lord is Our Righteousness". For the Lord says that David will never be without a man sitting on Israel's throne.*

Ezek 34:23-24 *Then the Lord will install one shepherd for them - his servant David - and he will feed them and be there for them and will serve as their shepherd. The Lord will be their God, and his servant David will rule among them as Prince.*

Ezek 43:2, 4-5, 7 *The glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. His voice sounded like roaring water, and the land shimmered from his glory ... The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the east-facing gate ... the glory of the Lord was filling the temple ... This is where my throne is, where I place the soles of my feet, and where I will live among the Israelis forever.*

Zech 14:3-11 *Then the Lord will go out to battle against those nations, waging war as in a day of battle. His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Then the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a very large valley, with half of the mountain moving toward the north and half*

toward the south. And then the Lord God will come, and all his holy ones will be accompanying him. At that time, flowing waters will run perennially from Jerusalem, half toward the Dead Sea and half to the Mediterranean Sea. *The Lord will be king over all the earth at that time. There will be one Lord, and his name the only one.* The entire land will become like the Arabah plain from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem. It will be raised up and inhabited where it is. People will live there, there will be no more destruction, and Jerusalem will be safely inhabited.

The Conversion of Israel

Paul's word in Romans is very relevant here. He told the Roman Christians that stubbornness had come to part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith. In this way, all Israel would be saved, as Isaiah had written, saying, the Deliverer would come from Zion; he would remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26). The context here makes it clear that it is the Jewish nation (Jacob) that will be saved and not the church. It can be ascertained from Revelation 11 that Israel, as a nation, will be ready for salvation at the Messiah's return. After the two witnesses ascend to heaven and an earthquake flattens one tenth of Jerusalem, the survivors give glory to God. God will pour out on them a spirit of grace and they will mourn for the one whom their ancestors had pierced. The Israelis will be born again of God's Spirit and be grafted back into that olive tree which is symbolic of the Spirit-filled people of God.

Jer 31:33-34 The Lord will make a covenant with Israel after those days, he'll put his law within them and will write it on their hearts. He'll be their God and they will be his people. *No longer will a person teach his neighbor or his relative. Instead, they'll all know him, from the least to the greatest.* The Lord will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

Ezek 36:24-27 *The Lord is going to remove Israel from the nations, gather them from all of the countries, and bring them all back to their own land.* He'll sprinkle clean water on them all, and they'll be cleansed from their impurity and from all of their idols. *The Lord is going to give them a new heart, and he's going to give them a new spirit within them.* He'll remove that rock-hard heart

of theirs and replace it with one that's sensitive to him. *He'll place his Spirit within them*, empowering them to live according to his regulations and his just decrees.

Ezek 37:23-28 Israel will never again defile themselves with their idols, with other loathsome things, or with any of their sins. The Lord will deliver them from all of the places where they have sinned *and then he'll cleanse them. They will be his people, and he will be their God. His servant David will be their king.* They will live according to his decrees, keeping his regulations and practicing them. *They will live in the land that the Lord gave to Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived along with their children and their grandchildren forever. The Messiah will be their everlasting leader.* He'll make a secure covenant with them, one that will last forever. The Lord will establish them, make them increase in population, and *will place his sanctuary in their midst forever.* He will pitch his tent among them and will be their God. They will be his people, and the nations will learn that the Lord is the sanctifier of Israel *when he places his sanctuary in their midst forever.*

Ezek 39:28-29 Israel will learn that the Lord is their God. He sent them into exile and then gathered them back to their land. *He won't leave any of them remaining in exile.* He'll no longer hide his presence from them *when he pours out his Spirit on them.*

Joel 2:28-32 It will come about at a later time that *the Lord will pour out his Spirit on everyone.* Their sons and their daughters will prophesy, their elderly people will dream dreams, and their young people will see visions. The Lord will pour out his Spirit upon men and women servants. He'll display warnings in the heavens, and on earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be given over to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and terrifying day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. *In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling.*

Zech 12:10 The Lord *will pour out on the house of David and on the residents of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplications, and they will look to the Lord whom they pierced.* Then they will mourn for him, as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him, as for a firstborn son. (cf. Mt 24:30, Rev 1:7).

Zech 13:1 *At that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for those who live in Jerusalem, so they can be cleansed from sin and ceremonial impurity.*

These promises concerning the conversion of Israel have never been fulfilled. It will happen in these last days, now that they are once again living in the land of Israel, and the greater son of David will be there for them. The order of events at Jesus' return is important. The resurrection of the church will occur before Jesus descends to Jerusalem. In rejecting Jesus at his first coming, Israel forfeited their right to the kingdom (Mt 21:43). They will be saved when the Lord pours out his Spirit upon them, but it will be too late for them to be included in the church. They will look on Jesus whom their ancestors had pierced, and they will mourn over him (Zech 12:10, Rev 1:7). They will be subjects of the kingdom during the millennium, while the church rules with the Messiah as the royal family. Their salvation as a nation is a separate act of grace to that of the church. Born-again members of the church have the promise of becoming heirs of the messianic kingdom, but when all Israel is saved, their promises are earthly. The land promised to Abraham will be theirs, and the Messiah's sanctuary will be in Jerusalem. The nations will come to worship the Lord in Israel, and their kings will bring their wealth to Jerusalem.

The Messiah's Reign from Jerusalem

The world will be ruled over by a human descendant of David, who is himself divine. He will rule from Jerusalem after the kingdoms of this world have been brought to a sudden and catastrophic end. The survivors of Israel and the nations will be the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom during the millennium on this present earth that he will restore. The saints who have been resurrected will inherit the kingdom and rule with the Messiah.

The Davidic monarchy is inextricably bound to Jerusalem and particularly to the hill called Mount Zion. Solomon built his palace with a throne hall and a hall of justice, but there is no mention of such structures during the millennium; all emphasis is on the temple. The Messiah and the saints will rule over Israel and the nations of the world from the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2).

There will be universal peace, justice and righteousness, and disputes will be settled peacefully. There will be universal knowledge of the Lord, with teaching coming from Jerusalem, and all nations will go to worship the Lord at his temple in Jerusalem. There will be a gradual restoration of the original conditions in the world, called a rebirth or renewal in Matthew 19:28, resulting in improved climate, productive land, taming of wild animals, less sickness, and longer lifespans. There will be an end of secularism, and no longer any distinction between holy and profane. At the end of the millennium all enemies and all curses will have been eliminated.

Jesus stresses that his throne will be glorious (Mt 19:28 and 25:31). His throne will be in the New Jerusalem which will shine with the glory of God above earthly Jerusalem.

Ps 2:6, 8 God the Father has set his Son (the Messiah) *on Zion, his holy mountain*. He tells him to ask, and he will give him the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession.

Ps 110:2 The Father will extend the Messiah's mighty scepter *from Zion*, and he will rule in the midst of his enemies.

Ps 132:13-14 *The Lord has chosen Zion, desiring it as his dwelling place*. It will be his resting place forever. He will live there, because that is his desire.

Isa. 2:2-4 In the last days, *the mountain that is the Lord's temple* will be established as the highest of the mountains and will be raised above the hills. All the nations will stream to it. Many groups of people will come, saying, *Let's go up to the temple of Jacob's God*, that we may be taught his ways, and let's walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed *from Zion* and the word of the Lord *from Jerusalem*.

Isa 4:5 The Lord will create over *the whole site of Mount Zion* and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and *the shining of a flaming fire* by night.

Isa 24:23 The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the *Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem* and there will be *glory* in the presence of its elders.

Isa 52:7-10 *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one who brings news of peace, who announces good tidings and*

salvation and says to Zion, “Your God reigns”. Zion’s watchmen lift up their voices and sing joyfully together, because they will see with their own eyes the return of the Lord to Zion. The ruins of Jerusalem will rejoice, because the Lord has comforted his people and redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see God’s salvation.

Isa 60:19 The sun will no longer be *Jerusalem’s light* by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will be *her everlasting light*, and her God will be *her glory*.

Isa 62 The whole chapter is an impassioned plea for the vindication of Jerusalem. God has worked with the rebellious descendants of Abraham for four thousand years and for the last two thousand years Jerusalem has been in the hands of unbelieving Gentiles. It is inconceivable that the world could come to an end without God finally revealing to everyone that Israel is his chosen race and Jerusalem is his chosen city.

Isa 62:1-7 For Zion’s sake *I won’t remain silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t stay quiet, until her vindication shines out like brightness, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations will see her vindication, and all the kings her glory; and people will call her by a new name that the Lord will bestow. Jerusalem will be a crown of splendor in the Lord’s hand. She’ll no longer be called “Deserted,” and her land will no longer be called “Desolate”; people will call her “Hephzibah” (my delight is in her), and her land “Beulah” (married) - for the Lord will take delight in her, and her land will be married. Just as a young man marries a maiden, so her sons will marry her. Just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so God will rejoice over her. I have posted watchmen on Jerusalem’s walls. May those who call on the Lord take no rest and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.*

Ezek 37:27-28 My dwelling place will be with them. I’ll be their God and they’ll be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when *my sanctuary is among them forever*.

Mic 4:6-8 The Lord will assemble the lame, and he’ll gather those whom he scattered, and those whom he afflicted. He’ll transform

the lame into survivors and the scattered into a strong nation. *The Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.*

Zech 2:4-5, 10-13 Jerusalem will be an inhabited city without walls due to the number of people and livestock in it. And the Lord will be *an encircling rampart of fire, and the glory in her midst.* The Messiah will *come and live among them. Many nations will be joined to the Lord at that time and will be his people. The Messiah will live among Israel, and they'll know that God has sent him to them.*

Zech 8:2-8 The Lord says he is *burning with jealousy about Zion. He'll return to Zion and live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called, "The City of Truth" and the mountain of the Lord will be called, "The Holy Mountain".* There will yet be old men and old women sitting in the parks of *Jerusalem*, each of them holding canes in their hands due to their old age! The city parks will be filled with boys and girls. They will play in the city's open parks. It may seem impossible to the survivors, but it is not impossible for the Lord. After having saved his people from the east and the west, he'll bring them back to live in *Jerusalem*. They'll be his people and he'll be their faithful and righteous God. This prophecy was partly fulfilled after the Babylonian captivity, but Keil comments, "Jerusalem becomes a faithful city for the first time through the Messiah, and it is through him that the temple mountain first really becomes the holy mountain" (p.312).

Zech 14:16-17 *All of the survivors of the nations who came against Jerusalem will go there yearly to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to observe the Festival of Tents. If any of the peoples of the earth don't go to Jerusalem to worship the King, there will be no rain for them.*

Justice, Peace, and the Knowledge of the Lord

Both Jew and Gentile will benefit from the ideal conditions under the reign of the Messiah. He will ensure that fairness and right prevail everywhere. Even wild animals will become peaceful as the curse is lifted from the world.

Isa 11:6-9 The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf and the lion will graze together, and

a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, and their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on viper's dens. *They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Isa 51:4-5 The Lord tells Israel that *instruction will go out from him, and his justice will become a light for the nations. His arm will bring justice to the nations; the coastlands will hope in him and wait for his help.*

Jer 33:15 In those days the Lord will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Messiah's Kingdom Is International and Eternal

Jesus' expression "the kingdom of God" is rarely geographical; it expresses the Messiah's sovereignty, his royal authority or kingship. But the messianic prophecies are clearly geographical. The rule is centered in Jerusalem and encompasses the whole world.

2 Sam 7:16 *Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain forever in my presence - your throne will be secure forever.*

This promise of an everlasting kingdom for the house of David became the focal point for many prophecies and influenced the development of the messianic hope in Israel.

Psa 2:8 The Father tells the Son he *will give him the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession.*

Psa 22:27-28 *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations will bow in submission to the Lord.* For kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Psa 72:8, 11, 17 May he rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him. *May his fame be eternal – as long as the sun – may his name endure, and may they be blessed through him and may all nations call him blessed.*

Ps 86:9 *All the nations that you have established will come and worship you, my Lord, they will honor your name.*

Ps 89:27-29 *I myself made him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. I will show my gracious love toward him forever, since my covenant is securely established with him. I will establish his dynasty forever, and his throne as long as heaven endures.*

Ps 89:35-37 *I have sworn by my holiness once for all: I will not lie to David. His dynasty will last forever, and his throne will be like the sun before me. It will be established forever like the moon, a faithful witness in the sky.*

Isa 11:10 *At that time, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Isa 60:3, 10a *Nations will come to your light, and kings before your dawn. Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. The whole chapter describes the peace and prosperity of the future glorified Zion and its political domination of the nations.*

Dan 2:44-45 *During the reigns of those kings, God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor its sovereignty left in the hands of another people. It will shatter and crush all of these kingdoms and it will stand forever.*

Dan 7:14 *To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all people, nations, and languages are to serve him. His dominion is an everlasting kingdom; it will never pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed.*

The Saints will Rule with the Messiah

A significant teaching about the coming messianic kingdom is that the resurrected saints (and those who are raptured) will rule with the Messiah. Daniel 7 is the main Old Testament passage that specifically refers to this reign. The Jews were accustomed to call themselves “saints”, especially in the Psalms and Daniel, in contrast with the heathen, but this passage refers to the very last days of this age when Antichrist, the little horn, is making war on the saints, which is further described in Revelation 13. In

Revelation 14:12 the saints are identified as those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to their faithfulness in Jesus. This is the consistent meaning of “saints” throughout Revelation.

Dan 7:18 *But the saints of the Highest will receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever.*

Dan 7:26-27 The court will convene, and the Antichrist’s authority will be removed, annulled, and destroyed forever. Then *the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints of the Most High.* His kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve and obey him.

Rev 5:10 You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Rev 20:4 They came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years

What impact did these prophecies have on Jewish thinking in Jesus’ day? Well known theological author N. T. Wright says: “Within the mainline Jewish writings of this period, covering a wide range of styles, genres, political persuasions and theological perspectives, there is virtually no evidence that the Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe. ... What, then, did they believe? They believed that the present world order would come to an end – the world order in which pagans held power, and Jews, the covenant people of the creator God, did not.” (The New Testament and the people of God [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 333). Wright continues: “The disciples were looking for the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes, for the story told so often in Israel’s Scriptures to reach its appointed climax. And the “end of the age” (Mt 24:3) for which they longed was not the end of the space-age order, but the end of the present evil age..., and the introduction of the (still very much this-worldly) age to come ... in other words, the end of Israel’s period of mourning and exile and the beginning of her freedom and vindication.”

4

Kingdom means Kingship

After this, Jesus traveled from one city and village to another, preaching and spreading the good news about God's kingdom. – Luke 8:1

The Meaning of the Phrase “Kingdom of God”

“The kingdom of God”, or “kingdom of heaven”, is mentioned fifty eight times in Matthew’s Gospel alone. It was Jesus’ main message; everywhere he travelled he proclaimed the kingdom of God. Even the apostle Paul, at the end of the book of Acts, was talking about the kingdom of God. Jesus said we should seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It must be an important topic. So why do so few people understand the kingdom of God? Take a minute to think about it. How would you explain it to someone? Who is the king in the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom present, past or future? Is it on earth or in heaven? What is our role in it as Christians? What does it mean to enter the kingdom of God? How can you inherit it? How can a kingdom come? Don’t we often pray “thy kingdom come”? What are we praying for? Over the past one hundred years there have been an estimated ten thousand papers and books written on the kingdom of God, and they give a variety of answers to these questions. I hope this chapter will clarify things for you.

It is my belief that the messianic prophecies from the Old Testament and the kingdom of God passages in the New Testament refer primarily to the Messiah and his coming reign on this earth; not to God’s sovereignty. Everything is from God, but this kingdom is not about God’s reign over the universe.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

In Daniel 2, Daniel explains the meaning of a dream that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had. He dreamt of a statue that represented four great empires, generally interpreted as Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. These were world empires, four powerful kingdoms from antiquity.

In the dream, a rock is cut out, but not by human hands. It strikes the statue on the feet and smashes it to pieces and then the rock becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. The rock is a fifth kingdom, the kingdom of God that will endure forever. Daniel said that God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people (Dan 2:44). That is the kingdom of God which we are studying. Note carefully that it is an earthly

kingdom, not a heavenly one. It is a kingdom established by God; it is not about God's own sovereignty. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the great God was showing the king what would happen in the future. The dream was true, and the interpretation he gave was trustworthy (Dan 2:45b).

The fulfillment of this prophecy will occur "in the days of those kings" (the ten toes of the statue) at the end of this present age, when a rock (the Messiah) cut out from a mountain (Zion) comes and destroys all those kingdoms. When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, loud voices in heaven will proclaim that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever (Rev 11:15).

When John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, they were proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. But they couldn't be too explicit about it, because they were under the domination of the Roman Empire, so they spoke about the kingdom rather than the king. The clearest prophecy about Messiah's kingdom in the Old Testament is from Daniel 7:13-14, the passage from there John and Jesus took their terminology. While Daniel was observing the vision, he saw someone like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and a *kingdom*, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will never pass away, and his *kingship* will never be destroyed. Daniel asked the angel to interpret the vision and he was told that the four beasts were four kings who would rise to power from the earth. But eventually, the *saints* of the Most High will receive the *kingdom* and possess it forever (Dan 7:17-18).

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, a title for the Messiah, but one that was not obvious to the uninitiated. In the same way, the kingdom of God is an expression that means Messiah's kingdom. It was used by both John the Baptist and Jesus to refer to the messianic reign, but without being explicit as to who the king was, which was a necessary precaution in the political situation in which they lived. Jesus did not travel around broadcasting the fact that he was the Messiah. He spoke of the Son of Man, and then he didn't directly call himself the Son of Man, he spoke of the Son of Man in the third person.

The kingdom is given to the Messiah by God, so the most appropriate way of translating βασιλεία του θεού, is “the kingdom from God”, the title of this book. It is not an expression that speaks of God’s rule in action, or his rule over the universe or in our hearts. This kingdom is a kingship given by God to “the Son of Man”, who is none other than Jesus the Messiah.

Daniel had a vision about four great animals or beasts that came up out of the sea, and that are generally interpreted as being the same empires represented by the statue in chapter two. The fierce fourth beast has similarities with the beast described in Revelation 13. Then comes the climax: The kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints. The Messiah’s kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve and obey him (Dan 7:27).

The Kingdom is not a Territory

We are used to hearing about the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Bible, and in modern times, we have the United Kingdom and the kingdoms of Jordan, Saudi Arabia etc. In English we instinctively feel that kingdom means territory. Many commentaries and English translations add to the confusion.

In Hebrew and Greek, the primary meaning of the word “kingdom” is the abstract meaning of kingship. It is the authority to reign as king, not a realm or territory. When translating the Bible for the Boko people of West Africa, we had no problem finding a word for kingdom in this abstract sense. It is a common word which means “a position of authority or rule”. Whether you are head of the household, chairman of the committee, chief of the village, or king over a region, the position you hold is your “kpala”. For a king, that means his kingship or his reign, but not his land. When a new king sits on the throne, he inherits that kingship.

Many who preach about the kingdom of God today don’t understand the expression. They talk about building, extending or benefiting the kingdom, expressions that are foreign to Scripture. Those verbs relate to the concrete idea of kingdom, rather than the abstract idea of kingship or reign. If “kingdom” means kingship or rule, how can you build or benefit it? Looking at some modern paraphrases, we find “the kingdom of God” translated as: “God’s

present reign in the lives of his people”, “that dynamic new life in Christ”, or “God's new society”. These interpretations not only miss the point; they take us away from the subject under discussion. While “putting faith in Jesus”, “living in heaven together with God”, “obtaining eternal life” and “living God's new way” are Christian concepts, they really have no correlation with the concept underlying the word “kingdom” or “the kingdom of God”. Salvation and all that pertains to it is a blessing found in the kingdom of God, but the basic meaning of “kingdom” is different to salvation and it should not be conceived of in that way. It just wasn't what Jesus was talking about!

Even in the epistles, where the growing community of Jesus the Messiah is in focus, the meaning of the expression “kingdom of God” does not change. The apostles were disciples of Jesus, and they had undergone a thorough instruction on the kingdom of God.

After Jesus was resurrected, he ascended to heaven, where he sits on the throne with the Father. He is building his church (his community) here on earth, and the powers of hell will not prevail against it. At his return, he will give those who have conquered by faith the right to share his earthly throne, just as he conquered and shares his Father's throne in heaven. He will invite the conquerors, saying: Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:34). This means nothing less than reigning over the whole world.

The Primary Meaning of “Kingdom”

The word “kingdom” as used in the Bible has a range of meanings which are often confused, and this is one reason why few people understand the true significance of the kingdom of God.

The Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew lexicon of the Old Testament gives several meanings for the Hebrew word for “kingdom” which is derived from the Hebrew triconsonantal root MLK “king”. Depending on the context, these meanings relate to

status:	sovereignty, dominion, royal power
office:	monarchy
action:	reign, rule
area:	realm, territory

The BAG (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich) Greek English Lexicon gives the meanings of βασιλεία, the Greek word for “kingdom” as:

1. kingship, royal power, royal rule, kingdom
2. kingdom (territory ruled over by a king)
3. the royal reign or kingdom of God

They define it as a chiefly eschatological concept, beginning to appear in the prophets, elaborated in apocalyptic passages and taught by Jesus.

Strong’s Bible Dictionary definition of “βασιλεία” is similar:

1. royal power, kingship, dominion, rule (not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom)
2. the royal power of Jesus as the triumphant Messiah
3. *the royal power and dignity conferred on Christians in the Messiah's kingdom*
4. a kingdom, the territory subject to the rule of a king
5. used in the New Testament to refer to *the reign of the Messiah*

Kingship, royal power and rule are what we should normally be thinking about when we see the word “kingdom” in the New Testament, but, for each occurrence of the expression “kingdom of God”, we must decide whether the verse is referring to the office of kingship, the person of the king or other royalty, or the government or monarchy of the king.

In this book we are primarily interested in the expression “kingdom of God” and its synonymous expression “kingdom of heaven’. However, there are also the following variations:

- “his kingdom” (Mt 13:41), referring to the Son of Man.
- “their Father’s kingdom” (Mt 13:43), referring to the righteous
- “my Father’s kingdom” (Mt 26:29). The parallel passage in Mark 14:25 has “kingdom of God’.
- “the coming kingdom of our ancestor David” (Mk 11:10)
- “the kingdom of the Son whom he loves” (Col 1:13)
- “his (the Lord’s) heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18)
- “the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:11).

All these expressions refer to the Messiah's future earthly kingdom. None of them relate to God's sovereignty, or to an imaginary kingdom in heaven, and none of them should be spiritualized and equated with the visible church.

Kingdom Is a Political Word

It is hard to conceive of a word that is more political than "kingdom". It is on a par with "government" and "politics". Separation of church and State may be desirable, but the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world fall into the same category. If "kingdom" refers to the office of a king, then it must have political overtones. The Jews were expecting a kingdom that was Jewish, political and geographical, with their own Jewish Messiah as king over a large area of the Middle East and ultimately over the entire world. When they heard the expression on the lips of John the Baptist or Jesus, that is what they would have envisaged. John and Jesus were Jewish prophets, preaching to a Jewish audience. Let us get out of our heads the idea that they were talking about Christianity. There were no Christians or churches around when John and Jesus preached; the church began at Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts 2:1-13.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus. He told his disciples that they knew the Spirit, because he was living with them, but that one day he would be in them (Jn 14:17). The Holy Spirit was with them while Jesus was around, but he was not in them until he was poured out at Pentecost. Paul defined a Christian as a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. He said, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). That's what it means to be a born-again Christian. Jesus' disciples were followers of a Jewish prophet, and they had a growing conviction that he was the Messiah. Even when Jesus was gathering his team of disciples, Andrew went and found his brother Peter and told him they had found the Messiah (Jn 1:41). This early conviction took a while to sink in as reality, and it wasn't until just before the transfiguration, when Peter, James and John saw Jesus in majestic glory, that Jesus asked the

disciples who they thought he was. Peter replied confidently that he was the Messiah (Mk 8:29).

The many pronouncements by the Old Testament prophets of a messianic kingdom have never been fulfilled. They are promises of an earthly kingdom which John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed. Most of these prophecies were not fulfilled in Jesus' day, nor since then. Isaiah gives us an idea of what the kingdom will be like when he said that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple would be established as the highest of mountains and would be raised above the hills, and all nations would stream to it, saying, Let's go up to the temple of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and we'll walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. *He will judge between the nations and decide disputes for many peoples.* They'll beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nations won't raise swords against each other, they won't even learn warfare any more (Isa 2:2-4).

And Isaiah prophesied again to Israel saying, a child would be born to them, a son would be given, and the government would be on his shoulders, and his name would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The growth of his government and peace will have no end. *He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David,* to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from that time onward and for evermore (Isa 9:6-7).

Postmillennialists believe Jesus will return after these things have happened. What happened to all tribulation and suffering as detailed in Revelation 6-19? *Amillennialists* consign these things to the "eternal state", a non-biblical term about a future of which we know nothing. Obviously, these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. The Old Testament messianic prophecies and the kingdom of God that John and Jesus proclaimed are future events. *Amillennialists* say that this kingdom should not be interpreted literally, and *post-millennialists* think that it is either here already or going to occur *before* the Messiah returns, which is hardly likely. Many antichrists have appeared; it is the last hour! (1 Jn 2:18). Is there anything here to suggest that these prophecies should not be taken literally? Is it not a logical thing for God to bring a kingdom into existence before the end of the world, where

justice and righteousness will reign, to show how things could have been, without wars and dictatorships and the greed and pride of world government leaders? One day soon Jesus will be King of kings and Lord of lords right here in this world. He is a king now in our estimation, but his enemies have not yet even started to be eliminated. He sits on the Father's throne in heaven ruling the universe, but he is not yet exerting his authority on earth, ruling it with a rod of iron.

Can these prophecies be spiritualized or allegorized in such a way that the prophesied earthly kingdom of the Messiah can be done away with? The nation of Israel is a key stakeholder here and the Middle Eastern geography has a significant role to play.

Some prophecies say unambiguously that the Lord himself will reign on earth, which led to the belief that the Messiah is in some sense divine. This may have been difficult for the Jews to understand, but since the incarnation, when Israel's God took on human flesh as the man Jesus, Christians can understand how the Lord God of Israel can reign as a man from Mount Zion. Isaiah said that on that day the moon will be embarrassed, and the sun ashamed; for *the Lord will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem*, and in the presence of its elders there will be glory (Isa 24:23). He also expressed how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one who will bring news of peace and announce good news of salvation and tell the people of Jerusalem that *their God reigns*. Their watchmen will lift up their voices and sing for joy, because they will clearly see *the return of the Lord to Zion*. The ruins of Jerusalem will break forth into singing, for the Lord will comfort his people and redeem Jerusalem. The Lord will bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see his salvation (Isa 52:7-10). This, of course, refers to the second coming of Jesus, not the first.

Differentiating the Two Kingdoms

You will not have a clear understanding of the kingdom of God if in the back of your mind you interpret it as God's kingdom, or the church, or heaven. Those who have spiritualized the kingdom have taught that the kingdom of God is God's universal rule, in spite of the fact that Jesus is portrayed as the king. In the Psalms, we read

about God's sovereign rule over the universe: The kingdom belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations (Ps 22:27-28). The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Ps 103:19). These passages refer to God's sovereignty over all things, but that is obviously not the kingdom of God announced by John the Baptist and by Jesus in the Gospels. It is true that in a genitive expression like "kingdom of X", you would normally expect X to be the king, but when we are talking about God who is a trinity of persons and the source of all things, we cannot be so dogmatic.

The apostle John saw a vision of God on his throne in heaven. The Lord God Almighty is king. The elders worshiped God saying he was worthy to receive glory and honor and power (Rev 4:11). Then the Lamb of God appears, standing in the middle of the throne, and all creation sings, ascribing praise, honor, glory and power to the one who sits on the throne *and* to the Lamb (Rev 5:13). What the Father does, the Son does, and vice versa. Even a singular pronoun is used to refer to them both in some passages: The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will worship him (Rev 22:3).

We cannot divide the Trinity. We can never talk about the Son to the complete exclusion of the Father. The kingdom of God, although it primarily belongs to the Son, will always have the nuance of coming from the Father and belonging to the Father. But my point here is that the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus and John the Baptist focuses on the earthly kingdom of the Messiah. They are never talking about God's sovereign reign over creation. It can be thought of as God's kingdom in the sense that it was the Father who anointed and appointed the Son as king, a kingdom for which God is responsible. But to appreciate the real meaning of the kingdom of God, it should be conceived of as the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah.

Furthermore, it is widely accepted among biblical scholars that the word "kingdom" in this phrase has as its primary meaning "kingship", as evidenced in the dictionary definitions above. The basic focus is on the actual rule rather than on the realm or territory over which one rules. If the kingdom of God is God's sovereign rule, how can Jesus talk about the kingdom of God coming? God has always been sovereign ruler over his creation.

And if the kingdom of God is God's kingship, how can we hope to possess or inherit it? Jesus said the poor are blessed, because the kingdom of God belongs to them (Lk 6:20).

Only a few New Testament passages refer to the kingdom which God possesses, that is, his own sovereign reign over the universe, while the expression "the kingdom of God", and its synonym "the kingdom of heaven", refer exclusively to a kingship *from* God or *from* heaven, a kingship God will establish among men on earth, a kingship of which the kingships of David and Solomon were a foreshadowing, a kingship which belongs to Jesus the Messiah.

Herman Ridderbos in "The Coming of the Kingdom", 1962, says, "A twofold distinction should be made. In the first place, the Old Testament speaks of a general and a particular kind of kingship of the Lord. The former concerns the universal power and dominion of God over the universe and all the nations and is founded in the creation of heaven and earth. The latter denotes the special relation between the Lord and Israel."

Confusion arises when people do not differentiate between these two kingdoms of God. I think it is clearer for us to think in terms of a heavenly kingdom and an earthly kingdom. God's throne is in heaven. He rules from there and is sovereign over the universe. The Messiah's throne will be on earth, and he will reign from there over the whole earth. The Messiah is the man, Jesus, and his authority comes from God the Father. Jesus is the king, and his kingship will be clearly manifested when he returns. God is ultimately reigning through this kingdom too, reflecting the subtle ambiguity of the expression, but that is not the focus. Theological studies about the kingdom of God that Jesus preached often confuse the issue by equating it with God's sovereignty as taught in the Old Testament. They are not the same thing. The end of the age prophecies in the Old Testament are not about God's sovereignty; they are messianic and reveal many facts concerning the kingdom which Jesus will establish on his return to earth. Many of the details are not repeated in the New Testament, so they should not be overlooked.

The Kingdom Is not God's Rule in Our Hearts

The NIV study Bible (1984) gives a common definition of the kingdom of God in its commentary on Matthew 3:2, the first occurrence of the expression in the New Testament. I quote:

The kingdom of heaven/God in the preaching of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels is the reign of God that he brings about through Jesus Christ – i.e., the establishment of God’s rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the overcoming of all the forces of evil, the removal from the world of all the consequences of sin – including death and all that diminishes life – and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace.

That definition is vaguely scriptural, but the focus is all wrong. It is not the rule of God that Jesus brings about in the hearts and lives of his people; it is about the future rule of Christ over this world. There is not one verse of Scripture that ties the kingdom of God to the idea of God ruling in our hearts and lives. And in saying that “the kingdom of God is the *reign of God* that he brings about through Jesus Christ” does not bring out the true focus of the expression; it does not help us to understand key kingdom of God concepts such as: Jesus Christ is the king; he will reign on earth; and the saints will inherit the kingdom.

The establishment of God’s rule in the hearts and lives of his people is not the focus. Overcoming all the forces of evil, and the removal from the world of all the consequences of sin, and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace are future events related to the kingdom, but this is hardly a definition.

What was John Calvin’s understanding of the kingdom of God? He says, “By proclaiming the kingdom of God, he (the Lord) was calling them to faith, for by the kingdom of God, which he taught was at hand, he meant the forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and utterly everything that we obtain in Christ.” (Book 3, chapter 3, section 19.) He makes it clear in his Institutes that his understanding of Christ’s kingship is that it is spiritual. He did not make a break from Augustine’s platonic thinking, and he has disassociated the expression from its Jewish messianic roots.

The expression “the kingdom of God/heaven” is the kingdom *from* God/heaven that God will establish among men on earth. The kingdom is from God, and a man, Jesus Christ, the descendant of

David, will be the king. It is a kingdom that we his followers can inherit, and we can't inherit God's universal reign.

Since his ascension to heaven, Jesus is often depicted as sitting at the right hand of God on his throne. He is there because he is God. Wherever the Father is, the Son of God is, and also the Holy Spirit. But this is not the kingdom of God of which Jesus often spoke. We are never told that Jesus is ruling from heaven. After his return, Jesus will rule on earth, on the throne of his ancestor David. This is the kingdom of God, a kingdom that comes from God or heaven, "the kingdom of the Son he loves." Since the time that Jesus stepped into history, there is salvation in no other name under heaven, and after Jesus returns as king, the kingdom which he will set up will be the only kingdom.

The Nature of the Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God has been variously described as universal, particular, political, spiritual, manifested and hidden. How do we make sense of these sometimes-contradictory statements? Jesus taught his disciples through the parables that the kingdom is worldwide as well as Jewish, and spiritual as well as political. In the present time the kingdom is only a prophecy, in the future it will be manifested at the King's return. Only in the coming age of the millennium can it be regarded as geographical, when the center of authority will be at Jerusalem.

The kingdom of God is Jewish in the sense that the king, the Messiah, is a Jew, his throne will be at Jerusalem, and the historical background and prophecies relating to it are to be found in the Jewish Scriptures, especially the Psalms and the Prophets.

The kingdom is political, because the Messiah will be a king and will demand total allegiance. He will rule from east to west and will function as lawgiver and judge. The kingdom is spiritual in the sense that many of the parables of the kingdom of God involve the sowing of the seed, the word of God, at the present time. It is by hearing the word of God, believing it, and being born again by God's Spirit, that people of all nations are becoming children of God and entering the royal family as children of God. There is no kingdom before the Messiah returns, but believers are being promised the status of royalty.

It is instructive to compare the kingdom of God and the Islamic State that classical Islam aspires to. Many Muslims are known to put Allah and the Muslim state first, before their non-Muslim country. Many Christians would also feel that their allegiance to God is primary. Christianity and Islam are both religions whose followers believe that God is supreme, their king. The significant difference is that many Muslims are trying to conquer the kingdoms of this world through “jihad”, whereas Christians believe that Jesus is the one who will usher in the kingdom when he returns.

Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus replied that his kingship was not from this world, it didn't have its origin in this world. He was not saying his kingdom did not belong to this world. His kingship was from God. He said if his kingship had its origin in this world, his servants would fight to keep him from being handed over to the Jews. But *for now*, he said, as the situation stands, his kingship was not *from here*. “So you are a king?” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:36-37).

Jesus kingdom will be established on this earth, but it is not in the same league as earthly kingdoms which have armies for conquest and defense. His kingship is from God, who will at the appointed time replace the kingdoms of the world with his own.

The kingdom is hidden (Mt 13:44) because it is not here yet, it is future. The church is very visible, but it is a religious institution, not a political one. The church's job is to make disciples of all nations. If we interpret the kingdom as kingship, it is here now and it is hidden, because it is not something you can see. Born-again believers become children of God; they are royal family in Messiah's kingdom. When Jesus returns, all will be manifested; Jesus and his people will then rule the world. His glorious throne will be visible at Jerusalem. It will become clear that the entire world is his domain. These are the concrete manifestations of his kingdom. But in this present age what do we have? There is no visible king, throne, monarchy or dominion, all is hidden. Jesus is seated on the Father's throne, *waiting* (Heb 10:13) for the day when the Father will make his enemies a footstool for his feet.

People want to compare the kingdom of God with the church. That is not easy, because “kingdom” is an abstract word meaning “kingship” or “reign”. In its personal form, we need to think of the king himself, or the monarchy, his royal family. Kingdom never refers to the subjects of a realm, but the sons of the kingdom is a biblical expression that refers to the royalty. Jesus said the meek, those people who submit to God, will inherit the earth. The saints from every time and place will be the government in the coming kingdom. They are the “sons of the kingdom”, the princes or the royalty, those who will rule with Christ. More about that below. Unfortunately, there are many in the visible church today who will not be part of the kingdom tomorrow. Jesus said that not everyone who says to him, “Lord, Lord,” will get into the kingdom (kingship) from heaven, but only the person who does the will of his Father in heaven (Mt 7:21).

Many Scriptures tell us that the Messiah’s kingdom belongs to this world. The king will sit on the throne of David. The Father told the Son to ask him, and he would give him the nations as his heritage, the ends of the earth as his possession. He will break them with an iron rod and shatter them like pottery (Ps 2:8). This doesn’t sound like a spiritual kingdom!

The Jewish Background to the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is sometimes contrasted with the Law and the Prophets (Lk 16:16). The latter expression speaks of God’s covenant with Israel, whereas the kingdom of God speaks of God’s new covenant with all nations, including believing Jews. What is a covenant? BAG defines the Greek word as meaning “a declaration of one person’s will, not the result of an agreement between two parties, like a compact or a contract.” So a covenant is a decree, where God alone sets the conditions. In God’s covenants he promises blessings which are dependent on the recipients’ obedience. In my African languages it was hard to translate this concept, but we finally settled on a word that means concern or commitment. The new covenant is a *decree of divine commitment* toward Christians, ratified by the shed blood of Christ, and dependent on their continuing faith and obedience. However, God’s gifts and calling never change (Rom 11:29), so

born-again Christians will remain secure in their faith. But their daily experience of God's blessings will vary according to their willingness to serve him.

The Jewish kingdoms of Judah and Israel foreshadowed Messiah's kingdom, but in Matthew 21:43, Jesus said the kingdom of God would be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will produce fruit for it. One kingdom parable (Matt 22:2-10) likens the kingdom of God to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (the Messiah). The initial list of guests (Israel) made excuses and became disqualified. After that, everyone was invited. Israel as a nation never really possessed the kingdom of God, they only had the promise of it. The mystery revealed to the apostle Paul is that, the Gentiles are now fellow heirs with believing Jews, members of the same body of Christ, and partakers of what was originally promised to Abraham (Eph 3:6).

Dining at the king's table was an important part of kingdom culture. The king did not rule alone, his ministers, who were usually members of his family and friends, ruled with him and the royal table was symbolic of that. Jesus told his disciples that he wouldn't drink again of the fruit of the vine *until* that day when he drinks it anew in the kingdom of God (Mk 14:25). There are other verses scattered throughout Scripture that refer to eating and drinking in the kingdom of God. It is encouraging to think of that possibility. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (Mt 22:2). Many will come from east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 8:11). Jesus promised his disciples that they would eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Lk 22:30). The Jewish tradition was strong on there being a banquet in the kingdom of God (Isa 25:6, Lk 14:15). Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb is a benediction given in Revelation 19:9.

Jesus' ministry was primarily to the Jews of his day. He was born as their king and was their promised Messiah, but he did not come to reign immediately, God had a plan to include the Gentiles in the ruling hierarchy. Under domination by Rome, Jesus had to use suitably veiled language to talk about himself and his future kingdom. We should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that the kingdom of God he spoke of so

frequently was his future reign on earth. That is why he told us to pray that God's kingdom would come, when his will would be done on earth (Mt 6:10).

A true understanding of the parables reveals how Jesus' gospel message would be preached in the world and would be embraced by those who believed in him. Through faith they would be saved and inherit the kingdom of God that the apostle John prefers to describe as eternal life. Salvation is all about sharing God's nature and becoming perfect, about being free from suffering and sadness, sickness and death, and about ruling with Christ over the earth.

The kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is earthly. Many theologians don't distinguish this reign from the biblical concept of God's sovereignty, and confusion results. God's kingship is an everlasting kingship that endures through all generations. That is not a kingship that you can talk about as "coming", or that we can "inherit". God's sovereignty is not something that one can inherit. It is not something that God can give or confer on people. The kingdom of God spoken of by Jesus is obviously something to do with human government. Man was created by God to rule the world; this was his original plan for them (Gen 1:26, 9:2, Ps 8:6-8, 115:16), and Messiah's kingdom will be its fulfillment.

Some commentators don't understand the abstract concept of "kingdom" and interpret it as a domain or a people. Because of that error they can't give a good explanation of what it means to enter the kingdom or to inherit the kingdom, or for a kingdom to be spoken of as coming. They spend time discussing God's sovereignty in the Old Testament. Although the kingdom was foreshadowed in prophecy, the expression "kingdom of God" does not exist there. They make much of Jesus' statement that "the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21) which is a poor translation. Jesus was talking to unbelieving Pharisees. How could the kingdom of God be within them?

Believers are often spoken about as being citizens in the kingdom of God, which is not taught in the Bible. In fact, that teaching ignores one of the greatest blessings of our salvation, our glorification as rulers in Christ's kingdom. The only reference in the New Testament to Christians being citizens is in Ephesians 2:19 where Paul calls the Gentile Christians fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God. Citizen is not the

best translation here, because the context does not refer to a city or a country. “Fellow citizens” in this context means that the Gentiles had become “natives”, or “insiders”, together with the Jewish saints, members of God’s household. The context does not imply that Christians are subjects or citizens in Messiah’s kingdom. Royalty are never referred to as subjects.

The Earthly Kingdom of God Predicted by Paul

Luke tells us in Acts 19:8 that at Ephesus, Paul went into a synagogue and held discussions for three months, persuading the Jews about the kingdom of God. Then, when Paul finally arrived in Rome near the end of his ministry, he spoke to Jewish Romans, and his message still centered around the kingdom of God. He explained the kingdom of God to them, trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets (Acts 28:23). Then in Acts 28:28 he told them that this message about God’s salvation had been sent to the Gentiles. They would become the heirs of the kingdom. Then Luke says that he continued to preach to the Romans about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

There are only ten references to the kingdom of God in Paul’s epistles, so his general emphasis and vocabulary have moved away from the Messiah’s future reign, as he understandably concentrated more on its present significance. He was a missionary, an evangelist and a church planter; his main concern was the spiritual health of his churches. Inheriting the kingdom was clearly a future event for him (1 Cor 6:9). When interpreting verses like this we need to ask what the precise meaning of “kingdom” is in the context. As we have seen, “kingdom” may refer to the reign, the kingship, the domain or the royal household. In Romans 14, Paul is talking about weak and strong Christians and the danger of judging one another. What connection does that have with the kingdom of God? Just this. Messiah’s future rule will be characterized by righteousness, peace, joy and power, and Christians, who have been made righteous by faith in the Messiah, who have peace with God, and who experience the joy of the Spirit, are the ones who will constitute the government in Messiah’s kingdom. So they need to learn kingdom values here and now and

not be fighting over irrelevant matters like what a person should eat or drink.

When Paul declares that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom (kingship) of the Son he loves (Col 1:13), he is talking about our status. We are already part of Messiah's kingdom, but as heirs, because we haven't come into possession of it yet. In a similar way, John taught that being born again guaranteed entry into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). Our future glorification involves resurrection and being welcomed into the messianic monarchy. That is our hope, not our present experience.

Paul's clearest messianic kingdom statement is in 1 Corinthians 15:24-25. After the Messiah has reigned over the earth and put every ruler, authority and power in submission to him, then comes the end (of the world), when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father. Seated on his Father's throne in heaven, Jesus is not presently doing away with these evil powers. He will only do that here when he rules from Zion (Ps 2:6-12). The subjects of his kingdom are the wicked survivors of the Great Tribulation, people who chose to follow Antichrist. He will rule them and their descendants with a rod of iron; it will be a theocratic reign, not an age of grace.

Paul argues that as we are God's children, we are his heirs, and co-heirs with Christ. That is our status, but nothing is inherited until the time comes to inherit. The meek will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5), but the time has not yet come. If we prove our faithfulness by sharing in his sufferings, we'll also share in his glory (Rom 8:17). Paul said he endured everything for the elect's sake, so that they, too, may receive salvation through the Messiah Jesus, along with eternal glory. If they endure, they will reign with him (2 Tim 2:10, 12a). This salvation includes eternal glory that we will receive when we reign with the Messiah. Paul urges the believers to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls them into his kingdom (kingship) and glory (1 Thess 2:12). "His kingdom" is obviously the messianic reign, not God's universal reign, and the glory of participating in the messianic government and monarchy. The tense here is present (calls), or rather habitual; it is what God habitually does, he calls people to enter the glory of his Son's royal family.

Paul places his charge Timothy “in solemn eschatological perspective” (ESV Study Bible). It is Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead. He will return (his appearing) and his kingdom is the ultimate reality (2 Tim 4:1). This solemn warning is in harmony with the future events described in Revelation 19-20: the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the white throne judgment. Paul says the Lord will rescue him from every attack and take him safely to his heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18). The kingdom is clearly future for Paul, but what does he mean by a *heavenly* kingdom? The NIV commentary suggests heaven itself, because in verse six Paul says, “the time of my departure has come.” But is heaven ever described in Scripture as a “heavenly kingdom”? Paul mentioned Messiah’s kingdom in verse one, and he referred to the Messiah’s appearing in verse eight. The BAG Greek Lexicon defines the adjective “heavenly” as “something that is there in heaven with God, *or* that belongs there by nature, *or* something that *comes from there*’. Just as the kingdom of God is better translated “kingdom from God”, so here, the heavenly kingdom is the kingdom that comes from heaven. That is what Paul was looking forward to, not an intermediary state in heaven about which we know very little. Other things described as “heavenly” because of their heavenly origins are:

The heavenly man - Jesus (1 Cor 15:48-49)

A heavenly calling - from God (Heb 3:1)

The heavenly gift - the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4)

A better country, a heavenly one - the city God has prepared for them (Heb 11:16).

The heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22) - that comes down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2).

The Kingdom in Hebrews, James and Peter

There are another ten references to the kingdom of God in the books of Hebrews to Revelation, and it is instructive to see that all these authors interpret it as an earthly messianic kingdom. At least, many scholars think so.

Quoting Psalm 45:6, the writer of Hebrews interprets the king to be the Messiah, the Son of God. He calls him God and says his throne is forever and ever, and the scepter of his kingdom is a

righteous scepter (Heb 1:8). He makes the important observation that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). Receiving the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting it and ruling with the Messiah during his millennial reign.

James said that God chose the poor in the world to become rich in faith, and to become heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him (James 2:5). With his godly Jewish background, he, the Lord's brother, had a strong faith that we would be heirs of the messianic kingdom.

Peter tells the recipients of his letter that if they confirm their calling and election, they will be generously granted entry into the eternal kingdom of their Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah. Entry into the eternal kingdom is the logical outcome of entry into the monarchy, which occurs when one is born of water and Spirit (Jn 3:5). This entrance into the earthly kingdom at Jesus' coming follows immediately after the resurrection, as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 15:50). The saints will rise and meet the Lord in the air at his coming and thereafter they will be always with the Lord. According to my understanding, our abode and throne from the moment of resurrection, will be in the New Jerusalem, from where we will rule over the world.

Summary Teaching on the Kingdom of God

1. The "kingdom of God" in Jesus' teaching regularly refers to a future, earthly, messianic kingdom and not to God's sovereignty over the universe. Jesus used the title "Son of Man" from the book of Daniel to speak of himself in the third person and avoid making it explicit that he was the Messiah. In the same way he used the expression "kingdom of God" to speak of his coming kingdom and to avoid being regarded as a threat to Rome or the Herodians. He spoke more openly to his inner circle of disciples, but to the crowds he spoke in parables and he used these cryptic expressions, cryptic here meaning obscure, secret or enigmatic.
2. "Kingdom" is not to be interpreted as a geographical domain. It should normally be understood as meaning "rule" or "kingship" or "government". However, you can't have a kingdom without a king, and sometimes the expression stands for the king himself (Mt 3:2, 4:17, Lk 11:20, 17:21). When the kingdom of God is

spoken about as coming, the focus is on the king; an abstract concept like “rule” or “kingship” cannot come by itself.

3. The Greek genitive expression “of God” often expresses origin rather than possession (see the following chapter). This is a kingdom which has its origin in God and thus contrasts with the kingdoms of this world that have their origin in human politics. It is not to be confused with God’s sovereign rule over his creation; it is the Messiah’s reign. The expression “kingdom of God” never occurs in the Old Testament. On Jesus’ lips, it refers to his messianic kingdom.
4. The kingdom of God is a rule on earth, not in heaven, and a man, the Messiah, is the king who is worshipped, not God the Father. He will rule from Jerusalem over a regathered people of Israel fulfilling the messianic prophecies made by the prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi. The resurrected and raptured church will be united to him and will rule with him, fulfilling the promise of their glorification. The Messiah will rejuvenate the earth and human society. The existence of this kingdom will vindicate both Israel as God’s chosen nation, and the church as the people of God.
5. The kingdom of God as taught by Jesus is a future reign which will start when he, as the Messiah, returns to earth in glory. Amillennialists teach that as Jesus is now on the throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the kingdom of God is already present. It cannot be denied that Jesus is on the throne, and that he rules over all, but the throne he shares in heaven is his Father’s throne. The Messiah created all things, and he holds all things together (Col 1:17), so his rightful place is on God’s throne, but this is not the “kingdom of God” that Jesus proclaimed. The Messiah’s future reign on earth has not yet begun. There are two thrones; the Father’s throne in heaven and the Davidic throne on earth, so there are two kingdoms. There are also two resurrections, one of the righteous to life (Lk 14:14, Jn 5:29, 1 Cor 15:23, 1 Thess 4:16, Rev 20:5) and the other of the wicked to condemnation. They are separated by the thousand-year millennium. There is only one day of personal judgment, the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, although the Day of the Lord which is simultaneous with the Messiah’s arrival, is also a great time of judgment on the

nations who rise up against God. The righteous are not judged (Jn 5:24, Rom 8:1), but will be rewarded for their service (Mt 16:27, 1 Cor 3:12-15, 2 Cor 5:10, Rev 22:12).

6. I see no evidence for a theology of a realized kingdom of God. When Paul says that the Father has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves (Col 1:13), he is thinking about our *position* in Christ; *we are delivered* from the dominion of darkness, we are saved, our sins are forgiven, we have become children of God, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and we are *heirs of the kingdom*. This may be realized theology, but it is not realized eschatology. We are not yet reigning with Christ over his earthly kingdom. Paul does not write much about the kingdom of God; his focus is on evangelism and church-planting and pastoral affairs. But he believed that the kingdom of God was a future event (1 Cor 6:9, 15:50, 2 Thess 1:5), as did Luke (Lk 22:18, Acts 14:22) and Peter (2 Pet 1:11). Paul said we must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God. We are not reigning yet; Paul said, if we endure, we *will* reign with him (2 Tim 2:12). And Jesus promised to give the conqueror authority over the nations (Rev 2:26). John saw the elders and the living creatures singing praises to the Lamb, saying that he had made (past) them a kingdom and priests for God, and that they will reign (future) on the earth (Rev 5:10).
7. A kingdom does not exist on earth without a visible king. Only when Jesus returns will the kingdom from God be made manifest. According to Jesus' parables, the fulfillment of the Great Commission is resulting in a harvest of souls from every tribe and nation, and it is this multitude who will reign together with Christ on earth. The church age is sometimes referred to as the not-yet-fully inaugurated kingdom of God, but without Christ's physical presence on earth, the kingdom cannot in any way be described as inaugurated. The saints will reign with Christ on earth, but the kingdom won't be inaugurated until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (Rom 11:25) and they have been resurrected.
8. Entering the kingdom from God is not entering a geographical area as a citizen or subject; it is entering Messiah's government. Believers are called sons of God; they are sons of the kingdom,

which means, princes. The many millions of God's people from every nation will make up one great royal family, the monarchy. This is why the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her sons could sit on his right and left in the kingdom. Taxes are not paid by the king's sons, so Jesus told his disciples that they are exempt from the temple tax (Mt 17:26), the inference being that the disciples belonged to the royal household.

9. Inheriting the kingdom is winning a place in Messiah's government. The kingdom is given to believers, conferred on them; they are not subjects. And of course, they can't inherit God the Father's kingdom, the kingdom they are inheriting is here on earth.
10. The great chapter on the resurrection teaches us that the Messiah was resurrected first, and at his coming, *those who belong to him* will be resurrected. Then at the end, after he has ruled and destroyed every ruler and power, he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24-25). There we have it; the Messiah must reign on earth. It is the kingdom from God which John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed, the kingdom described by John in Revelation 20 as a thousand-year reign. After this reign on earth during which Christ subdues all opposition with an iron fist, he will surrender his messianic kingship to his Father, so that God may be all in all.
11. In Revelation 19-20 John lists for us the events of Jesus' return and reign up to the end of this world.

19:1-5 A great multitude in heaven, presumably the saints, praises the Lord for his judgment of the immoral world system and the destruction of Babylon.

19:6-10 Again John heard the tumult of a multitude praising God because the Messiah has begun to reign. The resurrection has not been announced, but the Lamb has come to claim his bride, the church, who is dressed in fine linen, bright and pure. The marriage supper of the Lamb is nowhere described, and it may be simply a symbolic of describing the union of Christ and his church as they meet in the air at the resurrection of the righteous.

19:11-14 He then returns to earth with the armies of heaven, those saints who are wearing the fine linen, white and pure, those who are chosen, called and faithful (cf. 17:14).

19:15-16 He completes his judgment by slaughtering the armies that surround Jerusalem at the battle of Armageddon and ruling the survivors of the nations with a rod of iron.

19:17-18 A call to carrion birds to enjoy God's great supper; to eat the flesh of the dead armies who came to oppose God.

19:19-21 The Antichrist and the false prophet are captured and thrown into hell.

20:1-3 Satan is bound for one thousand years.

20:4-6 John sees the saints who will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2) sitting on thrones and the souls of the martyrs (Rev 6:9) who came to life and reigned with Christ for one thousand years.

20:7-10 The release of Satan after the thousand years, his final unsuccessful rebellion and consignment to hell.

20:11-15 The resurrection of the remaining dead, the white throne judgment, and the end of this present creation. Death and Hades annihilated.

The central thesis of this book is that the kingdom of God is Messiah's future reign. He is Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the holy Trinity. As such, he is always sovereign, so we are told many times that he is seated at the right hand of God. But to the Jewish prophets he was son of God, he was God's regent, he would reign on earth in God's place. The "kingdom of God" phrase is deliberately ambiguous. If we think of Jesus as God, then it is the kingdom of God, but if we think of Jesus as a human Messiah, appointed by God, as the Jews understood him, then the phrase is better understood as the kingdom from God. It does not have its origin in human politics like the great kingdoms of this world, it is a kingdom established by God.

5

The Kingdom of God Is Messiah's Kingdom

My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But for now, my kingdom is not from here.

– John 18:36

βασιλεία του θεού

These three Greek words which are normally translated “kingdom of God” could be translated differently, but in looking at 50 English Bible translations, I have not found one in which the translators have had the courage to come up with a more meaningful phrase. But it is not all the fault of the translators; I believe that Jesus deliberately used a cryptic expression, because he had enemies who would not appreciate what he wanted to communicate with his disciples. To know the truth about the kingdom we need to study Jesus’ words very carefully. He told his disciples they had been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom from heaven, but others hadn’t, because to those who have some faith and understanding, more will be given, but those who don’t have such knowledge won’t understand anything (Mt 13:11-12).

The Bible is the word of God and as such, it is not always easy to understand. It is a library of sixty-six books written by many authors over a period of fifteen-hundred years. It is God’s revelation to mankind about himself and his plan for the world. When it comes to prophecy and a subject like the kingdom of God, it becomes rather complex. But the miraculous thing is that with all those authors and that long period of time, the Bible is wonderfully consistent; it doesn’t contradict itself. All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16).

Some people call the kingdom of God a metaphor. A metaphor does not have a literal application, it is left to the imagination and other Scriptures, to find the true meaning. Is the kingdom of God that Jesus taught so vague, or does it have a literal application? The problem starts when people try to equate the kingdom with the church or heaven. If the kingdom exists *today*, it is surely imaginative, because there is no visible king, no earthly throne, no domain or realm. When you spiritualize the kingdom of God, you end up robbing Scripture of its meaning. Jesus taught us that he would usher in a literal kingdom when he returns in his Father’s glory (Mt 19:28, 25:31).

βασιλεια is the word translated “kingdom’. The primary meaning is abstract, meaning sovereignty or kingship. The active meaning is reign or rule. It refers to the power, rule or authority of a royal person, usually a king. A secondary meaning is the territory ruled over by a king; his domain, as in the United Kingdom, which is a country, but that meaning is rare in the New Testament.

θεοῦ is the word for God in the genitive case, and in this expression, as in most contexts where it occurs, it refers to God. From the lips of Jesus, it refers to God the Father.

του is the definite article and it is also in the genitive case. It usually means “of the”, but there are many possibilities, including “from the”.

The full expression βασιλεία του θεοῦ does not refer to God’s kingdom as expressed in Psalm 145, which speaks of God’s majesty and sovereignty. The kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus, is not God’s kingdom! It is a kingdom that is coming, that you and I can inherit. This can’t be said of God’s sovereignty. We cannot become God, and we cannot inherit his authority. The genitive case in Greek is quite complex. In different contexts, it has various shades of meaning. The general meaning of the genitive is that there is an intimate connection between the two words that it connects, in this case “kingdom” and “God”. But what is that connection? One common use of the genitive is to express “source” or “origin”. In that case the meaning would be “the kingdom from God”. Jesus is the king, the coming Messiah, so it would seem preferable to think about “the kingdom from God” rather than the kingdom of God. It is the Messiah’s kingdom that is coming, and which, by virtue of our union with him, we will one day inherit.

It will clarify our thinking about the kingdom of God immensely, if we think of it as the kingdom that comes from God rather than the kingdom that belongs to God. Having said that, it is also true that everything belongs to God, and sometimes that may be relevant. Some theologians distinguish the universal kingdom or reign of God from the particular kingdom or reign of God. Jesus’ use of the expression is always in the particular sense. He is not referring to God’s universal sovereignty. He is the Messiah, he is the obvious king in the kingdom of God, and the kingdom he is referring to is here on earth. So I believe we are justified in translating “the kingdom of God” as “the kingdom that comes from God”, or simply “the kingdom from God”. The particular kingdom we are talking about is the kingdom of this world, which Jesus is coming to rule over.

“Του θεοῦ” Often Means “from God”

Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament, tended to replace the genitive of source with a prepositional phrase, particularly “ἐκ” plus a genitival phrase. But the genitive form of one noun was an exception. θεοῦ “God” was commonly used as a genitive of source, without the preposition, since one of the main attributes of God is that He is the source and origin of everything that exists. This means that many of the θεου phrases in the New Testament give a more accurate meaning when interpreted as “from God”. This variant of the genitive case is called the ablative, which indicates a movement away from something. In του θεου expressions the true genitive gives the meaning “of God” (possession), while the ablative gives the meaning “from God” (source). In the New Testament, many of the “of God” expressions refer to God’s attributes: mercy, grace, love, greatness, glory, anger, wisdom, will; his mental processes and communication: word of God, thought, command, promise; or his people: children, sons, servants, heirs, church, flock, angels; or other things closely associated with him: his temple, house, mountain, throne, or his mouth, hand, or name. These are true genitives.

A look at other “of God” expressions in the New Testament illustrates that they are ablative in meaning. John the Baptist directed people’s attention to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). The implication is not that the lamb belonged to God, but that God had provided a lamb as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world, just as he provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac (Gen 22:13-14).

Jesus told some Jewish leaders that they didn’t have the love of God in them (Jn 5:42). This “love of God” is not God’s love. Leon Morris (The Gospel of John p 332 fn. 120) says that “God is at once the Author and the Object of this love”. Love is a gift of the Spirit. Here it means the love that God gives us, or our love for God, but not God’s love for us.

On another occasion Jesus said the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn 6:33). This “bread of God” isn’t God’s own bread, it is the bread provided by God, or the bread that comes down from God, Jesus.

John said that some of the Jewish authorities believed in Jesus but did not confess it, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (Jn 12:43). This is also a “του θεου” expression

(praise of God), translated correctly by NIV as ablative: they loved human praise more than praise *from* God.

Rom 10:3 says that the Jews were ignorant of the righteousness that comes *from* God (ISV) while they try to establish their own; they had not submitted to God's means to attain righteousness. Compare the KJV translation, "God's righteousness". Paul is not talking about God's own righteousness. It is the righteousness that God provides for us that they were ignorant of. When Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:11), it is not God's personal armor we are to put on; it is the armor God has provided for us to stand up against the devil, the armor *from* God.

What about God's peace, which goes far beyond anything we can imagine (Phil 4:7)? Obviously, we are not talking about God's personal peace, but the peace that he gives us. It may be obvious when we think about it, but a more specific translation like "the peace that God gives" would be more helpful. This reminds one of Nehemiah's words (Neh 8:10) to the people, when he said the joy of the Lord was their strength. It is joy from the Lord, the joy that he gives us, that gives us our strength, not his personal joy.

To hammer home this point that "του θεου" expressions often have the ablative meaning of "from God", let's look at the expression "gospel of God" in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Is that good news about God, or is it good news *from* God, as the Good News Bible translates it? I think you'll agree with the latter.

These genitive constructions don't teach us that God is possessor of the lamb, love, bread, armor etc., but rather that he is the source of these things. In the same way, the kingdom of God is the kingdom *from* God. It creates a problem when we interpret the kingdom of God as God's own kingly rule, or his universal reign over all creation, because his rule is eternal. How can we talk about it coming? On the other hand, if we interpret the kingdom of God as meaning "the kingdom *from* God", then we will have no such problem.

When the kingdom of God comes, it will fulfil numerous Old Testament prophecies in which the Messiah is the king. One cannot deny that God the Father is always king in a general sense, but that is not the meaning of this phrase.

Seeking His Kingdom and His Righteousness

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves whether the possessive pronoun “his” is truly possessive, or whether it may relate to source and origin, especially when it relates to God. For example, in the statement “The Lord has made his salvation known”, it is not the Lord who is being saved, it is salvation that finds its source in him. Another example is, “your kingdom come” (Mt 6:10). This does not refer to the Father’s own eternal kingdom, but the reign of his Son, whom he will install on Zion, his holy hill (Ps 2). Jesus is asking us to pray for his return and his kingdom on earth. Only then will God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

During Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount address, he told his disciples that they didn’t need to worry about their lives and their basic needs. He had already told them that they couldn’t serve both God and riches. Then he told them to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything else would be provided (Mt 6:33). How does one seek the kingdom of God? What has the kingdom of God got to do with our economic security? The messianic kingdom was the Jewish hope, so Jesus’ audience would have had a better idea of what Jesus was referring to. But what about the Gentiles, how are we to go about seeking the kingdom? Paul teaches about a mystery, the previously unknown fact that Gentile and Jewish Christians are now united in God’s new family as equal heirs with one another and with the Messiah. We are all heirs of the kingdom that the Messiah will establish at his return, of which he was already inviting people to be a part. The Messiah and his kingdom are our hope, not some ethereal existence in heaven. Jesus said we enter the kingdom when we are born again of God’s Spirit as God’s children. That is what we need to seek. Those who are heirs of the kingdom while they are in this world, and rulers of it in the future age, don’t need to worry about earthly riches, their riches are stored up for them in heaven.

Jesus was drawing their attention away from worrying about clothes and food and drink, away from thoughts of present earthly riches. He wanted them to focus on future glory and present security. They should trust in God who cares for them today, and follow Jesus the Messiah, and all these basic needs would be provided.

Jesus wants us to know that if we believe in him, we will share in his kingdom. In Matthew 5:3, 10, 19-20 he mentioned the sort of people the kingdom belongs to, and those who will be great in the kingdom. The kingdom in these contexts is the *monarchy*. In a kingdom you have the ruling class and the *hoi polloi*, the masses. The focus here is not on giving God first place in your life, or on being concerned about the church, or missions and evangelism, or about God's will for the world, which are all wonderful aims in life, but on securing your place in the messianic monarchy. Once you know you are in the royal family, you will be confident that you will be looked after. Messiah is not yet reigning, but those who have been born from above can know now that they are co-heirs with Christ and will one day reign with him.

Jesus traveled around preaching the good news of the kingdom, which he mentions fifty-four times in Matthew's Gospel alone. He talked to his disciples about entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom. He was the Messiah, a king, and he had a kingdom! So his command to his Jewish disciples, and to us, is to discover the truths about the Messiah and his kingdom, to get on board and make it the center of our lives. This is a more specific way of talking about salvation. Jesus is the king, he was born "king of the Jews". He was teaching and healing and saving people and performing miracles, but the most important outcome was that his disciples should understand that he was the Messiah. We need to understand that he alone is the one who makes us righteous in God's eyes, and that he gives those who believe in him the right to be called children of God. Seek and find the kingdom and gain all. This has nothing to do with helping God rule the universe.

A parallel passage to Matthew 6:33 is Luke 12:31, and it is followed by the words that Jesus' little flock should not be afraid, because their Father was pleased to give them the kingdom (Lk 12:32). When a person is born again, he enters the kingdom of God. He doesn't enter a geographical area, or a reign, he enters Messiah's royal family, he becomes a co-heir with him! Jesus said we should seek that dignity. Those who have faith and are born again enter it. They enjoy the dignity of this wonderful status immediately, and when Jesus returns, they will inherit the government in Messiah's kingdom; they will actually reign with Christ over the

world. When they enter the royalty, authority is conferred on them. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that they had a glorious future waiting for them. The Father was pleased to give it to them. So it was irrational for them to be worrying about earthly needs like clothes and food. Messiah's coming kingdom should be foremost in our thinking. By God's grace, we are going to be royalty. We are God's children! If that is true, won't he take care of our present, basic necessities of life? Paul said that those whom God had predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom 8:30). Jesus is calling out people from all over the world to join him in this greatly exalted position, the messianic royalty, which is our glorification. The answer to all our needs is in finding the kingdom and the righteousness that come from God. The Messiah is coming back, and the greatest destiny one can experience is to be made righteous in God's eyes, to share in his divine character, and to enjoy eternal life in the messianic kingdom.

The Righteousness from God

In Matthew 6:33, it is God who is the origin of the kingdom, and it is God who is the source of righteousness also. We are not being told to seek God's personal righteousness, or to live righteously (New Living Translation), but to seek the righteousness that God provides through faith in Christ. We are not being told to go around looking for God's kingdom, but rather to seek the King himself, because when people find Christ, they inherit both his kingdom and the righteousness that comes by faith. Our thesis is that "the kingdom of God" as preached by Jesus, regularly means Messiah's kingship, and not God's sovereignty; so, the command to seek the kingdom of God must concern the Messiah. Jesus told people not to worry, but rather to trust God for their needs. The answer to all our needs is in finding the kingdom and the righteousness that come from God. Earthly kingdoms result in oppression and poverty, but Messiah's kingdom is the domain where we find peace with God, salvation, eternal life and a royal future. We will have all that we need. He will be our sufficiency. There will be no more pain, sickness, sorrow or death.

Martin Luther found his peace with God when he discovered this righteousness while reading Romans 1:17. In the gospel, God's righteousness is revealed altogether from faith, as it is written: the righteous will live by faith. He realized that God's righteousness is not that which makes God righteous; it is the righteousness that God imputes to people because of their faith. He realized that our righteousness before God was not a result of good works; it is a gift from God. And so, Paul told the Ephesians that it was by grace they had been saved through faith. It didn't come from them; it was the gift of God; not the result of their deeds, so that no one could boast (Eph 2:8-9). Seeking God's righteousness is seeking the righteousness that comes *from* God, as Paul emphasized when talking about Jewish beliefs. He said they were ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God and were trying to establish their own. They had not submitted to God's means of attaining righteousness (Rom 10:3).

Understanding "kingdom" as "kingship" or "reign" throws light on whether the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated or not, as some people claim. Messiah's reign on earth is clearly future but sharing in his kingship is a present reality. We are "in Christ" and share his status. We are "saved", and "made whole". We have been made right with God, we have found the righteousness that comes from God, that which he imputes to those who trust in him. But we are not yet reigning. Rather, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken.

The Two Divine Thrones

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached that God had raised Jesus to life, and that he had been exalted to the right hand of God. We can confidently say that Jesus is on that throne. However, that is simply a way of saying that the Son of God was back where he had been before, sharing God's throne and sovereignty, but now as a God man. God's throne is not the same thing as the throne of David, or of David's son, the Messiah.

When Jesus returns, *God will give him the throne of his ancestor David*, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Lk 1:32-33). The Lord swore an oath

to David, a sure oath from which he will not turn back. He said he would place one of his own descendants *on his throne* (Ps 132:11, Acts 2:30). Isaiah predicted that a child would be born to Israel who would *reign on David's throne and over his kingdom* establishing it and upholding it from that time on and forever (Isa 9:7). Jeremiah said that the Lord would raise up to David a righteous Branch, *a King who would reign wisely* and do what is just and right in the land (Jer 23:5). Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord's servant, David, would be king over Israel and they would all have one shepherd (Ezek 37:24). John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, prophesied that through Jesus, God would save Israel from her enemies, so that they might serve him without fear. To this day, these prophecies have not been fulfilled, and they won't be fulfilled until the Messiah comes.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he sat down on the right hand of his Father. He sat on the throne of God's universal sovereignty, because he is God the Son. At the end of the book of Revelation, we find this same throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem that will come down to earth from heaven. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord coming from the east and entering the temple in Jerusalem and filling the temple. A voice from the temple told Ezekiel that this was the place of *his throne* and the place of the soles of his feet, where he would dwell in the midst of his people Israel forever (Ezek 43:6-7). When the Messiah returns, he will rule the world from the temple in the earthly Jerusalem. Isaiah said the Lord would create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night, and over all the glory there would be a canopy (Isa 4:5). The context suggests that this is the visible manifestation of the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven. The earthly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem should be regarded as one, but in different dimensions.

God said his servant David (the Messiah) would be king over Israel forever (Ezek 37:24). He will put his sanctuary among them, and his dwelling place will be with them. He will be their God and they will be his people. Then *the nations will recognize* that the Lord sanctifies Israel, he sets them apart.

All nations will come and worship the Lord at Jerusalem (Isa 66:22-23, Jer 3:17). The Father said he would make the nations his

Son's inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession. The Messiah will rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery. This earthly kingdom is what Jesus consistently referred to when he spoke of the kingdom of God. Don't confuse the two kingdoms, and you won't need to call the kingdom of God "realized" or "inaugurated" or "consummated". Jesus has not yet begun his *messianic* reign.

The Kingdom has not Yet Begun

Here are six reasons for believing that the kingdom of God is not yet present:

1. Jesus is now seated on God's throne, not the throne of David. Only when he is seated on David's throne here on earth can we say that Messiah's kingdom has arrived.
2. Verses that speak of the kingdom being near or having arrived are referring to Jesus' presence in the world, not to his kingdom. See section on metonymy below.
3. The petition, "your kingdom come", is a prayer for Jesus to come, because only then will the kingdom be established, and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This petition is eschatological, and it is in the aorist tense, which suggests that it is a single event, like the Messiah's arrival, not a whole series of events, like world evangelization.
4. Passages that speak of the ethics of the messianic reign or our status therein are timeless. The fact that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the monarchy of his beloved Son (Col 1:13) implies only that the coming kingdom and our royal status in it are sure.
5. It is at his return and during the messianic reign that the Messiah's enemies will be subdued, not during the present age. The Father told him to sit down until the time comes (Ps 110:1). So he waits (Heb 10:13). John describes our present situation as one where we know that we are born of God, while the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19).
6. Nowhere in the New Testament is the claim made that Jesus is currently reigning. Many verses refer to his status and

authority (as God), but not to him actually ruling over the earth. However, he is not inactive. He is on the Father's throne and he holds everything together by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). He intercedes for us in his role as priest, and he is building his church through the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations. But the apocalypse is still future. One day the Messiah will be revealed to the world. Only then can we say that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah (Rev 11:15). Then the kingdom from God will be established and he will rule forever.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

When one has a true understanding of the kingdom of God, it brings new light to so much of the teaching of the New Testament. The gospel (good news) that Jesus preached was not the same as the gospel that Paul preached. Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. It was about faith in Jesus and forgiveness of sins. But Jesus was preaching before the cross, and he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. His good news was that the king had arrived (Mk 1:15).

The gospel, as originally preached by Jesus, had the connotation of good news from God, and in the minds of his Jewish audience, the "good news" would have meant the coming of the Messiah to reign (Isa 40:9-10) and salvation for Israel (Isa 52:7). Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 and applied it to himself, saying that, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because the Lord had appointed him *to bring good news* to the poor, and then he told them (Lk 4:21) the Scripture was fulfilled as they heard it. The good news was that the Messiah had arrived. It was not yet time to speak about the cross which we usually associate with the gospel. The expression "gospel of the kingdom" occurs seven times in the New Testament. It was the essence of Jesus' message. He went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom* (Mt 4:23). Speaking to the Pharisees one day he said the Law and the Prophets were until John, but since then, *the good news about the kingdom of God* was being proclaimed, and everyone entering it was under attack (Lk 16:16 ISV).

Messiah's kingdom was the good news Jesus preached; it was the gospel! During the week before the crucifixion, Jesus spoke about world evangelism in the distant future, and he continued to speak in terms of the gospel of the kingdom, saying, this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt 24:14).

As the gospel of salvation through faith promises entry into the kingdom, the two gospels become one. When Philip went to Samaria, he told people about the Messiah (Acts 8:5). Crowds listened intently to him and they believed and were baptized, as he proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:12). He wasn't talking to them about the church or heaven, but about the Messiah, who would one day return to rule on earth together with the saints.

Benefits of the Gospel

In the book of Romans, after giving his treatise on salvation and being made right with God, Paul speaks about the benefits of the gospel. He said there is now no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus (Rom 8:1). As believers in Jesus, their sins are forgiven. Later in the chapter he says that as they are now children of God, they are also heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah. They will be glorified with him. Paul considers that the sufferings of the present are not worth comparing with the glory of the future. Even the creation is eagerly awaiting the unveiling of God's children (Rom 8:17-19). The glory that we will share with the Messiah is firstly the resurrection, followed by the glory of reigning in his earthly kingdom. That is how God's children will be revealed to all creation in their resurrected bodies. In these immortal bodies, they will be easily recognized as God's adopted children. Creation won't be resurrected or glorified, but it will be set free from corrupting bondage in order to share the freedom of the glory of God's children (Rom 8:21-23). As Luther said, the creature now serves to its own harm the wicked, but then, delivered from corruption, it will serve the children of God in glory. We are sure to enjoy the wonder of all God's creation during the millennium.

Comparing 1 Corinthians 15:23 and Revelation 20:4-6 suggests that the resurrection of the righteous, called the first resurrection, occurs at Jesus' second coming, one thousand years before he hands the kingdom over to the Father (1 Cor 15:24). The millennium will be an era of reversal of the ravages of the curse on this world. The Messiah's throne will be at Jerusalem, and the whole earth will be his glorious kingdom. The messianic feast will symbolize the full enjoyment of blessing in this perfected kingdom. During the thousand years, all enemies and remnants of the curse will be demolished; the last one to be eliminated being death (1 Cor 15:26, Isa 25:6-8).

The new heavens and new earth prophesied in Isaiah 65:17-25 describe the millennium, the only future world the prophets knew about. Isaiah said that the one who dies at a hundred years will be thought a mere youth (65:20), and people will build houses and live in them (65:21). They won't toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune (65:23). Revelation 21:1 is best interpreted as John's brief glimpse of the millennium, while 21:2 – 22:5 are a symbolic description of the bride of Christ, the church which is glorified at the second coming, and rules with the Messiah during the millennium. Isaiah's vision of the millennium is described by Jesus as the new age or world, a time when the Messiah will sit on his glorious throne and his disciples will rule with him (Matt 19:28). The apostles called it, the time when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), and the time of universal restitution (Acts 3:21), and Paul called it the time for creation to be set free from corrupting bondage. When Jesus said the meek would inherit the earth (Mt 5:5), he is obviously talking about the present earth, not another planet that his listeners knew nothing about. Similarly, when the elders and living creatures said that the Lamb had made the saints to be a kingdom and priests for their God and that they would reign over the earth (Rev 5:10), they were referring to them ruling over this earth.

Miracles and the Kingdom from God

There are several passages which indicate that the purpose of miracles was to help people believe that Jesus was the Messiah. After Jesus healed the demon-possessed man who was blind and

mute, the crowds were amazed and kept asking whether he might be the Son of David (Mt 12:23). A similar healing resulted in people exclaiming that nothing like that had ever been seen in Israel (Mt 9:33).

Jesus claimed that his exorcisms were proof of his messiahship. He said that as he drove out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God (he, the Messiah) had come to them (Mt 12:28). It seems that Jesus used his healing ministry to encourage faith in himself as the Messiah as he went about Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness (Mt 4:23).

The apostle John also emphasized this connection in his Gospel between Jesus' healing ministry and faith. He turned water into wine and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him (Jn 2:11). When the people saw the signs that he did, they kept saying that this was the prophet who was to come into the world (Jn 6:14), and that when the Messiah comes, he wouldn't do more signs than this man has done (Jn 7:31). When Lazarus fell ill, Jesus said that it wouldn't end in death, it was for God's glory, so that the Son of God might be glorified through it (Jn 11:4). Then many Jews who had come with Mary and had observed what Jesus did believed in him (Jn 11:45). Lazarus was the reason why so many Jews were defecting to believe in Jesus (Jn 12:11). In a summary statement of Jesus' ministry, John said that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that weren't recorded, but these were recorded *so that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Messiah*, the Son of God (Jn 20:30-31).

Luke makes the same connection in the book of Acts. When Peter preached to Cornelius' friends, he said that God had sent the good news of peace through Jesus the Messiah. He had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and because God was with him, he went around doing good and healing everyone who was oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:36-38).

The New Heaven and the New Earth

The apostle Peter tells us about the destruction of the present world at the coming of the Messiah. He said, the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire and are being kept for the

day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed (2 Pet 3:7). He is speaking about the Day of the Lord when a great earthquake will destroy the cities of the world, associated destruction of the world by fire, and the destruction of the armies at Armageddon. When he says the heavens will disappear with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by fire, it sounds like the end of the world, but when we compare it with the opening of the sixth seal, we find similar language. There it says that the sky receded like a scroll rolling up (Rev 6:14), but then in the next verse we find people hiding in caves, so it is not the annihilation of the planet. After talking about the destruction of the world by fire, Peter says that in accordance with his promise (Isa 65:17), we wait for a renewed sky and earth, where righteousness is at home (2 Pet 3:13). It is the same world, but a righteous one.

In this future context, the renewed heaven and earth is nothing else but the kingdom of God, as prophesied by Isaiah, Messiah's millennial rule after the second coming. This messianic kingdom is established by God, with the Messiah, Jesus, as the king. According to 1 Corinthians 15:24-25 and Revelation 20:4-5, the Messiah will reign on earth for one thousand years while he subdues his enemies, the wicked and the lawless, both human and demonic. The Messiah will transform the sky and earth, as prophesied by Isaiah. The former things won't be remembered or come to mind. He will transform Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy (Isa 65:17-18).

The Demise of the Present Heaven and Earth

Messiah's kingdom on earth will eventually terminate with the last judgment (Rev 20:11-15). Death and everything that is evil will be obliterated. The earth and the heaven (the universe?) will flee from God's presence, and no place will be found for them. That definitely sounds like the passing away of the physical creation as prophesied by Jesus, when he said that heaven and earth would pass away, but his words will never pass away (Lk 21:33).

At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth, and he promised to shake it once more; this time the sky as well as the earth (Heb 12:26-28). "Once more" signifies the removal of what can be shaken, that is, what God has made, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Revelation 6:14 and 16:20 have already spoken about islands and mountains “fleeing” and being “removed from their place’. At the end of the Messiah’s millennial reign, the earth will have served its purpose, and it is appropriate that at the last judgment, when the wicked are finally thrown into hell, that the physical creation should come to an end. There is no future heaven and earth promised; Revelation 21:1 refers to the renewal of the present earth by the Messiah after the destruction of the Great Tribulation.

All we are left with is God and the Lamb and the community of God’s people as described in Revelation 21:2 – 22:5. The redeemed from every tribe and nation and language living together in union with God in the holy city with the river of the water of life and the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit. They will see God’s face and worship him and rule with him forever.

6

When Kingdom of God means Messiah

*If I drive out demons by the power of God, then
the kingdom of God (=Messiah) has come to you.*

Luke 11:20

Metonymy

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God in a present context, he was often talking about himself. This is a figure of speech called metonymy; the substitution of the name of an attribute for that of the thing meant. For example, crown for the monarch, turf for horse racing, the golden arches for McDonalds, or the White House for the US government. In this case the word “kingdom” is a substitute for the king.

When John the Baptist and Jesus called Israel to repentance, the reason they gave was that the kingdom of God was near. As you can't have a kingdom without a king, what they were really saying was, for security reasons, a coded way of saying that the Messiah himself was near. Below are some verses where the expression “kingdom of God/heaven” is best interpreted as a substitute for the Messiah himself. Read the following verses while interpreting “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” as “the Messiah” and you will find that it clarifies the meaning.

Mt 3:2/4:17 Repent, because the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is near.

Mt 10:7 As you go, make this announcement: The ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is near.

Mt 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking ~~it~~ him.

Mt 12:28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come to you.

Mt 13:52 That is why every scribe who has ~~been trained for the kingdom from heaven~~ become a disciple of the Messiah is like the master of a household who brings both new and old things out of his treasure chest.

Through his instruction Jesus' followers become his disciples and scholars of the Christian message.

Mt 18:23 That is why the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah may be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

This parable teaches the need of forgiveness among God's people. We must all appear one day before the judgment seat of the Messiah. It is more to do with the Messiah than with his kingdom.

Mt 19:12 Some men are celibate from birth, while some are celibate because they have been made that way by others. Still others are celibate because they have made themselves that way for the sake of the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah.

Mt 20:1 The ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

Mk 9:1 Some people standing here will not experience death until they see the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah arrive with power.

Compare the parallel passage: "before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Mt 16:28). The disciples saw a glimpse of the majestic Messiah at the transfiguration, which happened a week later.

Mk 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a highly respected member of the Council, who was waiting for the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Lk 4:43 I have to proclaim the good news about the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah in other cities.

Lk 9:2 Then he sent them to proclaim the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah and to heal the sick.

Lk 9:27 Some people who are standing here won't experience death until they see the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah (in his glory).

Lk 10:9 Heal the sick that are there and tell them the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come near them.

Lk 10:11 But realize this: the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come near.

Lk 11:20 But if I drive out demons by the power of God, then the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come to you.

Lk 17:20-21 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah would come. He answered them; the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is not coming with a visible display. People won't be saying, look, here ~~it~~ he is, or there ~~it~~ he is, because now the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is among you.

Lk 18:29-30 There is no one who has left his home, wife, brothers, parents or children because of the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah who will not receive many times as much in this world, as well as eternal life in the age to come.

Lk 19:11 Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because the people thought that the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah would appear immediately.

Lk 21:31 When you see these things taking place, you will know that the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is near.

Lk 22:18 From now on I will never drink the product of the vine until the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah comes.

Lk 23:50-51 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and righteous man ... and he was waiting for the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah.

Acts 1:3 After he suffered, he showed himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during a period of forty days and telling them about the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah.

He probably told them what Moses and the prophets said about himself and his reign, as he had done on the road to Emmaus.

The Coming of the ~~Kingdom~~ Messiah

In most of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, the focus is on the promised Messiah. It is mainly Daniel that focuses on the kingdom, because Nebuchadnezzar's dream and his own visions were about the kingdoms of this world and the final world kingdom which would be given to the saints to rule (Dan 7:27).

When John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness, he told people to repent, because the kingdom of God was near (Mt 3:2).

By metonymy, the word “kingdom” represents the king. It was the king who was near! Jesus said that if he drove out demons by the Spirit of God, that was evidence that the kingdom of God had come to them (Mt 12:28). It was a veiled way of saying that he, the king appointed by God, had come to them. At the end of his ministry, when Jesus knew it was time for him to be condemned as the king of the Jews, he publicly declared before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, that he was indeed a king.

When we pray for God’s kingdom to come (Mt 6:10), we are really praying for the Messiah to come and establish his kingdom, the kingdom from God. Only when Jesus comes to reign on earth will God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He will rule the whole world and bring in an era of justice and righteousness and peace that the world has never known. In praying that prayer, we are also praying for all that must necessarily happen before the Messiah returns, including the evangelization of the nations.

Postmillennialists believe something different. They think that Jesus will return after the millennium. For them, it is the gospel that will change the world and bring in an era of peace and righteousness. The gospel *will* be preached in all the world and millions of people *will* be gloriously saved and transformed, but history shows us ever so clearly that the gospel doesn’t change the world. Governments by and large are godless and are characterized by pride and greed and corruption. The problem is that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. How can we have a millennium while Satan is so active? The book of Revelation teaches us that the world’s history will culminate in the Great Tribulation and the rule of a satanically inspired Antichrist, resulting in God’s judgment of the ungodly at the battle of Armageddon and the pouring out of his wrath on the ungodly world. It is out of the night and darkness of that time, that the Morning Star will arise to usher in a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The Messiah was predicted long ago. He is the king appointed by God to rule the earth. When looking at passages that speak about the coming of the kingdom of God, the precise meaning becomes clear if we ask the question, “Is this passage talking about the kingdom as embodied in the person of the Messiah (metonymy), or

is it talking about the establishment of his kingdom at a future time?”

One day Jesus told some of his disciples they would not die until they saw the kingdom of God arrive with power (Mk 9:1). This passage is a riddle for most readers. The disciples died and where is the kingdom they would see? Jesus said they would see an open manifestation of his power as the glorified Messiah. If the kingdom of God phrase is taken literally, we are left wondering when this event occurred in the lifetime of his disciples. In the parallel passage in Luke, it simply says, they wouldn't die before they saw the kingdom of God (Lk 9:27). Matthew makes it more explicit by saying, they wouldn't die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Mt 16:28).

Peter was one of the disciples Jesus was talking to, and he later testified in his second epistle to having been an eyewitness of Jesus' majesty. He said: “When we told you about the power and coming of the Lord Jesus the Messiah, we did not follow any clever myths. Rather, *we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when these words from the Majestic Glory were spoken about him: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with him.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.” (2 Pet 1:16-18)

The following passage in the Gospels is unfortunately often separated from Jesus' dramatic statement by a section heading and a chapter break. It describes the transfiguration, where Jesus appeared in supernatural majestic glory, talking with Moses and Elijah, and a voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son”, which to those disciples meant only one thing. Jesus was the prophesied messianic Son (2 Sam 7:12-14, Ps 2:7-8, Dan 7:13-14).

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. What they were really asking was when the Messiah would come. Jesus replied that the kingdom of God (the Messiah) was among them (Lk 17:21). An earlier NIV translation had “within you”, with “among you” given as an alternative translation. The Greek preposition means “in the midst”. This naturally means “within”, if you are talking about one item, but “among” if you are talking about many. Nowhere else in the Bible is it suggested that the kingdom of God is inside people, or in their hearts. That doesn't

even make sense. Kingship isn't something that you find inside a person. And here Jesus was conversing with unbelieving Pharisees, so he would not say that the kingdom of God was in *them*. But Jesus, the Messiah, was right there among them, and Jesus answered them in this evasive way, not wanting to openly declare to them his true identity.

Paul exhorted the Colossians to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts (Col 3:15). He is talking about the "peace" that Christ gives them, something quite different to saying that God rules in them, or in their hearts.

When Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 26:29 that he would never again drink the product of the vine until the day when he would drink it with them once again in his Father's kingdom, he was saying that he wouldn't drink it again until the messianic kingdom, which comes from the Father, is manifested. The parallel passage in Luke 22:18 says "until the kingdom of God comes". In other words, when Jesus returns to earth as the Messiah. This feast is not in some imaginary kingdom in heaven, it will take place here on earth, when Jesus confers kingship on his followers, so that they might eat and drink with him at his table in his kingdom and sit on thrones governing Israel (Lk 22:30). This feast should not be spiritualized. Jesus said he would drink wine once again when his kingdom was consummated. Isaiah was the first to describe this feast, saying: On this mountain (Mt Zion cf Isa 24:23), the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of well-aged wines (Isa 25:6).

In a present context, the kingdom of God often refers to the King himself. As a kingdom is a subordinate adjunct of the king; the kingdom is present in his person. The Messiah is the embodiment of the kingdom. That is the significance of metonymy. That is why Jesus could say: the kingdom of God is near, the kingdom of God is among you, or the kingdom of God has arrived.

The criminal on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom (Lk 23:42). He had faith in Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah. This verse has been variously translated as, "when you come to your throne" (New English Bible), "when you come as King" (Good News Bible), or "when you come to reign" (Moffat). The basic meaning of kingdom is kingship or royal rule, so all of those translations are valid.

The kingdom of God, by extension, also refers to the royalty, or the wider ruling class, as will be explained in the following chapter. Christians entering the kingdom of God enter the royal rule, the government of Messiah's kingdom. The kingship is given to them, conferred upon them. As children of God, they inherit it. They share the government in the kingdom of God. That is why Jesus said that he would share his throne with those who conquer, just as he conquered and shared his Father's throne (Rev 3:21).

John the Baptist proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near (Mt 3:2). In its commentary, the NIV study Bible definition of the kingdom of God is typical of current ideas that result in misunderstanding of what the kingdom of God is about. It says: "The kingdom from heaven began when God himself entered human history as a man. Today Jesus the Messiah reigns in the hearts of believers, but the kingdom from heaven will not be fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed."

This is an amillennial statement and all three of these statements are open to challenge. The Messiah arrived when Jesus was born, but not his reign. There is no Bible verse that teaches that Jesus reigned while he was on earth, or that he reigns in the hearts of believers. The kingdom of God is a political concept, not a spiritual one, and it will not be established until the Messiah returns to earth. A vast army of evildoers will be judged and defeated at his arrival at the battle of Armageddon, and remaining opponents, unbelievers who survive the Great Tribulation, will be brought into submission during his reign. The final enemy, death, won't be removed until judgment day at the very end of his reign.

The mistaken view that the kingdom of God is God's reign in our hearts is lamentable. The only verse that comes close to supporting this view is Luke 17:21 which says that "the kingdom of God is within you" (NIV 1973). The footnote suggests "among you" and most modern translations follow that interpretation. The New American Standard Version (NASB) has "in your midst", the New Living Translation (NLT) "is already among you", and the NIV (2011) was changed to, "in your midst". This is metonymy. It was Jesus who was in their midst, not the kingdom. In the next verse, following this discussion about the coming of the kingdom of God, he tells the disciples they will long to see to one of the days of the

Son of Man (the Messiah), but they wouldn't see it (because he wouldn't return in their lifetimes).

A major thesis of this book is that the kingdom of God should not be spiritualized; it is a literal kingdom, Messiah's future reign on earth. Any teaching suggesting that the kingdom of God is God's rule in our hearts, or that the kingdom of God is a present reality in the church has no scriptural foundation. What is significant about the present time is that God is secretly at work, through the preaching of his word, calling out a people for himself from all corners of the world, people who are entering Messiah's monarchy right now, and who will one day rule with him on the earth.

Metonymy in the Parables

Many of Jesus' parables are about the kingdom of God, and most of them relate to the Messiah's future kingdom. But in Matthew 13, the parables are teaching us about something that is going on right now. The primary meaning of the Greek word for kingdom is the abstract word "kingship", but we have already seen that by metonymy Jesus often used the expression "kingdom of God" to refer to himself. These seven parables are teaching us truths about the Messiah and his kingship, or the kingship of those who will rule with him, the monarchy.

The Sower (Mt 13:3-9, 18-23)

The seed is the message being preached by Jesus about the Messiah and his kingdom (13:19). The parable tells us different ways people respond to the Messiah. Some people don't get enough information (the seed on the path) and Satan comes and removes what they hear before they can thoughtfully respond to it. Other people's thinking is too shallow (the seed that fell on rocky places), and they don't allow the message to go deep and change their lives. Others respond to the message positively, but due to worries and the love of money, they don't persevere (the seed that fell among thorns). But when the message about Jesus is accepted by those

who have a noble and good heart, they are converted, they embrace the Messiah and his coming kingdom and become fruitful to varying degrees, eventually resulting in the evangelization of the world.

The Wheat and the Weeds (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43)

In this parable the Messiah is again sowing seed, but this time the seed he sows is not the message. The “seed” stands for the sons of the kingdom (13:38), the righteous, those who will constitute the royalty in the coming kingdom.

It would not be so surprising to Jesus’ Jewish audience to hear that the seeds he is sowing turn out to be people. See “Sons of the Kingdom” section in chapter 8.

The field is the world, meaning that the kingdom of God is not only for the Jews as his hearers would have expected, but for all nations. His enemy, the devil, also sows seeds, the weeds, which stand for the sons of the evil one; evildoers in general. Satan is also winning many souls to his side. The righteous and the wicked are mixed up in the world and they can’t be separated until the harvest (judgment) at *the end of the age*, the resurrection of the righteous and the slaughter of the wicked at Armageddon. This harvest at the end of the age is not the last judgment, but it is a great judgment that happens at the Messiah’s coming, as described in Revelation 14:14-20. The weeds are destroyed at the battle of Armageddon, that great winepress of God’s wrath, and from there the dead are cast into Hades until the last judgment (Isa 24:21-23). The good seed inherit the royalty. They are resurrected and receive the kingship.

This scenario is reminiscent of the people Daniel spoke about, when he said that many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the earth will awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who manifest wisdom will shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:2-3). These are the saints who receive the kingdom, inheriting it forever and ever (Dan 7:18).

The Mustard Seed (Mt 13:31-32)

The mustard seed is very tiny, but it can grow into a tree big enough for birds to perch. By metonymy the kingdom of God here refers to the royalty in Messiah's kingdom. The royalty started off as a very small group, Jesus' eleven disciples (Lk 22:29). On the day of Pentecost there was a band of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) who soon increased to three thousand, then five thousand, and since then the Lord has been adding people daily to the number being saved. One third of the world's population claim some adherence to the Christian religion. Only the Lord knows those who are his; now a very large number from all nations.

The Yeast (Mt 13:33)

The yeast stands for the message about the Messiah and his coming kingdom that is being proclaimed throughout the world. It is a powerful and penetrating message. Wherever it is faithfully preached, there are results. The powerful influence of the gospel message is invisible, just like yeast, a fungal substance that causes fermentation that permeates the medium in which it is found. The unbelieving world pays little attention to this spiritual activity, but when the task is finished, the gospel of the kingdom will have permeated the whole world, transforming people from every tribe, people, language and nation, born again into the royalty of Messiah's kingdom.

The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl (Mt 13:44-46)

What these seekers find is the Messiah himself and the status that results from receiving him (Jn 1:12). They become children of God and will constitute the monarchy during Messiah's reign. This is truly the greatest treasure one could find. The kingdom from God is priceless, an eternal treasure that can't be compared with any other possession. Only faith enables people to surrender everything they have, but in doing so, they will be glorified at the resurrection, and they will rule the world and possess everything.

The Fishing Net (Mt 13:47-50)

The kingdom of God is like a net, because the preaching about the Messiah results in many souls being caught, but as in the parable of the sower, not all who hear the message become genuine believers. At Messiah's coming, there is judgment and separation. The angels will gather the resurrected righteous, who will enter the kingdom as the monarchy, but the wicked will be thrown into hell. This is a warning to Christians to make sure that they are genuine God-fearers, and not nominal Christians to whom the Lord will say, "I never knew you".

The parable of the two sons, the tenants and the wedding banquet all teach that the Jews, for the most part, would reject Jesus as Messiah, and the monarchy, which was originally meant to be theirs, would be given to other tenants, the believing Gentiles. Messiah's kingdom will be a future reign on earth, but the royalty is developing in a secret, unseen way, until that day when God reveals who his children really are; millions of men and women and children from every nation, tribe, people and language.

The true church consists of born-again believers, who will be the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. The government will be on Messiah's shoulders, but he won't rule alone. In God's plan to glorify his saints, he has adopted them into his royal family, a royal priesthood who know him and serve and worship him.

The Growing Seed (Mk 4:26-29)

This is another parable about the kingdom of God, which by metonymy, is about the royalty. The growing seed teaches us about the mysterious way in which a believer is born again, matures, and finally glorified. The sower of the seed is the Messiah. The seed he sows are the sons of the kingdom, the royalty of his future kingdom. When he scatters the seed on the ground, they sprout (they are born again), they produce stalks and heads of grain (they develop and become fruitful), and they are harvested by the Messiah at the resurrection of the righteous.

Other parables, like the great feast, illustrate how the Jewish nation rejected their opportunity to inherit Messiah's kingdom, and how the Gentiles become the royalty in their place. The gospel of the kingdom, the good news that Messiah is coming to reign, will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations,

and then the end will come (Mt 24:14). The significance of the church, as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, is that they are the people being called out from every tribe and nation to be members of Messiah's royalty. All the Matthew 25 parables (bridesmaids, talents, sheep and goats) relate to the establishment of the kingdom at the second coming. Some of the bridesmaids weren't ready and didn't make it into the royalty. Those who received talents were rewarded according to their faithfulness in service, but one was excluded from the royalty and cast into hell because of his lack of faith. The sheep and the goats were judged and differentiated according to their attitude towards the Messiah's brethren (Christians), which points to their faith in Jesus, or their lack of it. Christians should do good to all people, but especially to those who belong to the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Their works don't save them, but their allegiance to Christ and his people is a proof of their faith.

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25:31-46)

This parable is notoriously hard to interpret. For centuries, scholars have found it hard to harmonize with other scriptures. I here present a solution. The first clue is that Matthew 24 & 25 are concerned with the end of this age, the Messiah's return to earth, not with the end of the world. This passage is a parable, like the other two passages of this chapter; the parable of the ten virgins, and the parable of the talents. Parables are not to be taken literally, but they do teach us important truths. The sheep and the goats are metaphors for the righteous and the wicked. The King gives his reason for how he distinguishes between those on his right who will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world and those on his left who will be excluded from the kingdom and sent away to eternal punishment.

The bulk of the parable concerns the attitude people have toward the King (Jesus) in this world, as illustrated by their attitude toward his *brethren*. The parable has nothing to do with caring for the poor, as it is often portrayed as doing. Jesus made it clear who his brethren were in Matthew 12:48-50, when he asked, who is my mother and who are my brothers? Then pointing to his disciples, he said, these are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does

the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. In condemning the wicked on his left, he points to the Christians on his right and says, inasmuch as you didn't help any of these, you didn't help me.

Two major events that will occur at his return are the resurrection and rapture of the righteous, and the defeat of the wicked (nations) who have gathered to fight against God and his people at Jerusalem. This is the separation that will take place; the righteous are resurrected to inherit the kingdom, while the wicked are condemned and destroyed at the battle of Armageddon. Jesus may be alluding to the prophet Joel who prophesied that the Lord would *gather all nations* and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and judge them there (Joel 3:2, 12). This parable is about these very nations.

The righteous are saved because of their faith, resulting in an affinity with Jesus' people, which has a practical outcome (Mt 10:41-42). They are invited to come and inherit the Messiah's kingdom (cf. the good seed in Matthew 13:43). The "goats", the followers of Antichrist who have come to attack Jerusalem, have no concern for Jesus and his brethren, in fact, they are fighting against them, persecuting and killing them.

The righteous will receive their rewards at the resurrection, and the wicked will receive their condemnation at Armageddon, and their eternal punishment at the last judgment. There will be no need of prolonged legal proceedings with prosecutors and lawyers. The Lord knows all, and his decision will be final.

7

Born again into the Monarchy

Jesus answered, “Truly, I tell you emphatically, unless a person is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” – John 3:5

How Does a Person Enter a Kingdom?

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). Entering a kingdom? What does it mean? If you fly to London, you will find yourself entering the United Kingdom, but this geographical meaning of kingdom is very rare in the New Testament and is not the meaning here. Could it mean entering heaven itself? If entering the kingdom of God means entering heaven, what does it mean to inherit the kingdom of God? Why did Jesus talk in terms of the kingdom of God? And why did John see fit to retain Jesus' terminology here, whereas elsewhere in his Gospel, he speaks of eternal life to describe the future blessed state? Nicodemus had faith (Jn 7:50-52, 19:39) and like Simeon, he was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel (Lk 2:25).

The BAG Greek Lexicon suggests that the verb "see" in John 3:3 means experience, experiencing Messiah's reign in action, whereas entering it is sharing in it. Leon Morris (*The Gospel according to John* p. 218) does not see any difference between "seeing" and "entering" the kingdom of God. He says that the kingdom of God must be taken in its dynamic sense of "reign" rather than realm (p. 214). It is "God's rule in action". But he doesn't explain what it means to enter "God's rule in action." That is a common omission. What does it mean to enter a kingdom? When reading God's word, it is important that we search for the meaning of an expression like this and interpret it correctly.

One day, when translating John's Gospel into an African language, I wondered about the meaning of John 3:5, so I asked my mother-tongue consultants what it meant in their language to enter into a kingdom. They replied without hesitation that it meant entering a government. They said someone who enters the president's "kingdom" would do so by becoming a minister in his cabinet. Entering a kingdom for them was not entering a geographical area, nor was it becoming one of the king's subjects, nor did it mean entering the church or heaven. This is the import of what Jesus was telling Nicodemus.

The kingdom of God opens up a new way of relating to God. It replaces the old way of the Law and the Prophets (Lk 16:16). It is a new covenant which replaces the old. The New Testament

doesn't completely replace the Old Testament; it builds on it and describes a new relationship with God. Theocracy wasn't God's original plan; he wanted to rule with humanity rather than over them. When God created mankind, he told them to be masters over the fish, the birds, and every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen 1:26-28). God originally created man to be ruler on earth, but because of sin and disobedience, things didn't work out the way they should have. But with the new way of the kingdom of God, man is once again given the opportunity of ruling the earth. There are many passages where the context makes it clear that those entering the kingdom of God are actually entering Messiah's government, and they will rule the earth with him (Dan 7:27, Rev 2:26-27, 5:10).

The Greek verb involved in "entering the kingdom of God" is literally "enter in", and as most people subconsciously think of the kingdom as geographical, they automatically think of it as entering a domain or realm. However, the kingdom is not geographical; it is not a place. And the Greek verb can be used figuratively, so it is wise to investigate. The BAG Greek Lexicon gives the figurative meaning for "enter in" as "come into, share in, come to enjoy, attain". So entering the kingdom of God can be translated as "sharing in the kingdom" or "attaining to the kingdom", both of which are more appropriate than "entering the kingdom". Even better is "sharing in Messiah's government".

Those who have experienced the new birth become sons of God. Being born from above, they are adopted sons of God, and as such, they become princes in the kingdom of God. They become members of the royal family in the messianic kingdom. Believers in Jesus are frequently called "sons of God". In this relationship, God is their Father, and Jesus their brother. When God created man in his own image, he made him ruler over the world and all that was in it. Man botched it, but God will fulfil his plan in the new world, the age to come. He has not put the coming world under the control of angels. He made man for a short time lower than the angels (ESV), yet he crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet (Heb 2:5-8, quoting Ps 8:4-8). When God put everything under him, he left nothing outside his control. However, at the present time we don't see everything put under man's control (Heb 2:8b). These verses are talking about man in general. Only in verse 9 does the focus move to Jesus. The future

world will be controlled by man, not angels. God has crowned man with glory and honor and put him in complete charge of everything there is. We do not see this happening yet, but verse 9 says that we do see someone who was made for a short time lower than the angels, Jesus, who is now crowned with glory and honor. Hebrews 2:11 emphasizes the relationship between Jesus and believers; both the one who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have the same Father, so Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. God has brought many children to glory, and now, through the Messiah, they are able to attain the original purpose for which God created them. God will put everything under their control.

Kingdom Means Kingship

The apostle Paul continually reminds us of our relationship with Jesus, by saying that we are “in Christ”. We are united to him spiritually, and being united to him, whatever he does, we are involved in it. Jesus is our great high priest and our king, and he has made us to be a royal priesthood. And if we endure, we’ll reign with him (2 Tim 2:12). This is in accord with the blessing on those who participate in the first resurrection. They will be priests of God and the Messiah and will rule with him for a thousand years (Rev 22:4-5).

Drawing on an Old Testament designation of Israel found in Exodus 19:6, the apostle John ascribed glory and power to Jesus, who loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Rev 1:5-6). This emphasis on being a kingdom of priests is repeated in Revelation 5:9-10 where it states that Jesus purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests for their God, and they will reign over the earth. The words, “made them a kingdom and priests”, are translated in diverse ways: KJV translates “made us kings and priests”, Weymouth, “formed us into a Kingdom to be priests to God”, Knox, “a royal race of priests”, NEB, “made of us a royal house”. These verses bring the cross and the church and the kingdom together. Jesus died on the cross for people from all

nations, so that they might rule with him on earth. They were ransomed, bought with his blood, then given royal authority.

Christians are never called kings in the New Testament. As the body of the Messiah, they are the royal family under his leadership. They will be his government in the kingdom of God. Peter says they are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people to be his very own (1 Pet 2:9). Keil and Delitzsch, in their ICC Commentary on Exodus 19:6, say that “kingship” is the primary and most general meaning of the Hebrew word for kingdom. Israel was to be a regal body of priests to Jehovah, and the *object* of Israel’s kingship and priesthood was to be found in *the nations of the earth*. The fulfillment of this promise won’t be attained until the kingdom of God is established, when the Israel of God, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is literally made a kingdom of priests to serve God (Rev 1:6). This kingship is not of a spiritual or figurative kind. It is defined distinctly by Daniel (Dan 7:27) as a worldwide kingship, given to the saints as the ultimate end of their calling from God. As a priest is a mediator between God and man, so the saints are called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the unbelieving nations of the earth.

Jesus promised Christians who overcome that they would rule the nations with firm authority. He said he would give those who conquer and continue to do what he commanded to the end authority over the nations. They would rule them with an iron scepter; shattering them like clay pots (Rev 2:26-27). Are Christians reigning like this now? Of course not! The kingdom has not yet been established. But the time is coming when they will rule this earth. That is our heritage “in the Messiah”. Paul said that God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realm, so that *in the coming ages* he might display the incomparable riches of his grace, that come to us through his kindness in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6-7).

Amillennialists don’t believe in a literal messianic kingdom on earth, so they are obliged to interpret the Scriptures figuratively. They say that we are ruling now. They talk a lot about the “intermediate” and “eternal” states, of which the Scriptures are silent. The Messiah is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, but there is no verse of Scripture which says that the Messiah is

presently ruling over the earth, and consequently, there is no verse that says that Christians are ruling here now either. The wretched state of our planet politically, morally and socially illustrates the weakness of the amillennial and postmillennial positions. It just doesn't make sense to claim that Christ is ruling now, when the world is in such a pitiful condition. When Jesus returns and sits on the throne of David and the world is filled with righteousness and peace and the knowledge of God, then, and only then, can we say that he is ruling on earth.

Paul says that Christians are predestined, called, justified and glorified (Rom 8:30). Our glorification has not happened in real time yet, nevertheless, it is certain in God's plan, because we are "in Christ", and he has already been glorified. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom 8:37). Paul says that being united to Christ, God has seated us with him in the heavenly realm, but that doesn't mean believers are reigning or glorified in real life. Their spiritual position gives them spiritual authority, especially when dealing with demon possession and other occult practices, but that can't be compared with their destiny of ruling the world.

No Scripture says that we are already reigning. In fact, Paul admonishes the Corinthians because of their attitude that they had already taken up royal power. He said he wished they really were kings, so that he could be a king with them (1 Cor 4:8). However, there are many verses that clearly express that we will reign with the Messiah in the future.

Ruling the Future World

Over five hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Daniel saw *our* glorious future in a vision. He was told that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations on earth would be given to the saints of the Most High. Saints are God's people, believers from all the nations, including Jews. Israel would have interpreted the saints of Daniel 7 as Israelites, but as this is a prophecy of the end times, the end-time saints will include God's people from all nations. God has exalted believers in Jesus to the point where he calls them his sons. He has united them to his Son, so that they might inherit all the promises and blessings conferred on him,

including his authority to reign over the world. When Jesus returns to earth to reign, those who are “in Christ” will be his fellow rulers. The Messiah will reign on earth during the millennium until he has done away with every opposing ruler, authority or power, including Satan and demons, redeeming the earth from its curse and all evil, and finally eliminating death itself. Then he will give the kingship back to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-25), the kingship that the Father gave him in Daniel 7:27: “To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages are to serve him.”

The saints in their capacity as the government in Messiah’s kingdom will rule the world (1 Cor 6:2), even angels (1 Cor 6:3), and they will rule over cities (Lk 19:17, 19). In this context, Jesus said that he who can be trusted with very little can be trusted with much (Lk 16:10). In the parable of the talents, the master tells the good and faithful servants to come and share their master’s happiness, he will put them in charge of many things (Mt 25:21, 23), in fact, he will put them in charge of *all* his possessions. He who conquers will share Jesus’ throne and be given authority over the nations to rule them with an iron rod. Because the saints are united to the Messiah, they will be involved in all his activities.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

There are only two verses in the New Testament that speak about a new heaven and a new earth. Peter says that according to God’s promise, Christians are waiting for new heavens a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). This is an obvious reference to Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, Old Testament passages that predict the earthly millennium. Comparing Isaiah 65:25 with 11:6-9 definitely makes it messianic. Revelation 21:1, 4 speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. John adds that there won’t be any grief, crying or pain, because the former things have passed away. Isaiah had said, the former things will not be remembered or come to mind. Isaiah’s new earth is a renewed earth, not a new planet. God says he will create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight and all humanity will come to worship before him (cf. Zech 14:16).

The verses that follow Revelation 21:1 describe the New Jerusalem, the eternal home for the Messiah and his bride, his community. In his great love for us, God has planned that the elect will continue to reign with him forever. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. This statement is symbolic. We don't need to ask whether there is one throne or two, it represents God's sovereignty; that of the Father over all, and that of the Son over the world. His resurrected servants will worship him and see his face and his name will be on their foreheads (Rev 22:3-5), symbolic of the fact that they are his people and he is their God. Their glorious future is at the same time service to their God and a union with him who is sovereign over all. They will reign, because they are members of the royal household.

An appreciation of the person of Jesus and our union with him helps us understand the glorious future that is waiting for us. These words of Jesus to his Father demand meditation:

So now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed. ... I ask not only on behalf of these men, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their message, so that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. *I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may be one, just as we are one.* I am in them and you are in me. May they be completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, which you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world – Jn 17:5, 20-24

Jesus said that unless a person is born from above, he can't see (experience) the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). The unregenerate will not *experience* the kingdom of God or enter it (Jn 3:5). John frequently speaks of life and eternal life, and in some places entrance into that life is equivalent to entering Messiah's kingship. If entering the government of the Messiah seems to be a preposterous thought, it is only because we have not fully grasped the nature of the glory that God has in store for us. The one who did not spare his own Son but offered him as a sacrifice for all of

us, will give us *all things*, along with his Son (Rom 8:32). Paul adds that no eye has seen, or ear heard, and no mind has imagined, the things that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9). On those who receive God's gift of eternal life, the very life of God is bestowed, that they may participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). The Messiah is in us as a guarantee of future glory (Col 1:27).

Being Least and Greatest in the Kingdom

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached against legalism, hypocrisy and externalism. He said that whoever relaxes one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:19). Being least or greatest in the kingdom refers to the future status of people in the royal family, the ruling class of Messiah's kingdom. Salvation is a gift of God through faith, you either have it or you don't. But greatness in the kingdom depends on obedience and on a personal righteousness that must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 5:20). Without the righteousness and humility that God provides, people will not enter the royalty. Jesus said that unless people change and become like little children, they'll never get into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:3). On the other hand, those who humble themselves like little children will be the greatest in Messiah's royalty (Mt 18:4).

Princes, not Citizens

Those who enter the kingdom through faith in Jesus are not citizens of that kingdom as many mistakenly believe and assert. Rather they are the royal family, sons of God. Nowhere in Scripture are believers called subjects or citizens of the kingdom of God. They are "sons of the kingdom", which means that they are princes. They are the rulers, not the ruled, they are members of the royal household. Jesus illustrated this when talking to Peter about payment of the temple tax. He asked his disciples from whom kings collect tolls or tributes; from their own children or from others. Peter said it was from others. Then Jesus said that the children are exempt, but as he didn't want to cause a fuss, he told Peter to throw his line into the lake and he'd find a coin in the

mouth of the first fish he caught. He should give that to them for the temple tax (Mt 17:24-27). The NIV Study Bible commentary aptly says that the implication was that Peter and the rest of the disciples belonged to God's royal household, but unbelieving Jews didn't.

Most references to citizens in the New Testament are to Roman citizens, but Paul said that believing Gentiles were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household (Eph 2:19). The Gentiles were strangers, foreigners and aliens in relation to God's people, Israel, but through the gospel the barriers have been broken down. Christian Gentiles can now be considered as equals with faithful Jews. The strangers have now become what we would call locals. The saints have full rights as members of God's royal household, they are not mere subjects in the Messiah's kingdom. Paul mentioned citizenship again (Phil 3:19-20). Some people in their fellowship had set their minds on worldly things, but "our citizenship", he said, is in heaven, and it is from there that we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippi was a Roman military colony and the Greek word for citizenship, *πολίτευμα*, denoted a colony of strangers. The Christians at Philippi formed a colony of people just like the Roman military formed their own colony. They are described as citizens of heaven, because they were waiting for their Savior to descend from there, and their names were enrolled up there, and the New Jerusalem is there (Heb 12:22). The saints are not subjects in the messianic kingdom; they are the rulers.

Salvation, Eternal Life, and Entrance into the Kingdom

Jesus' mission on earth is typically expressed as his coming to die for our sins, so that we might be saved and go and live with him in heaven. However, to restrict the purpose of the Messiah to his redemptive work is very short-sighted. Jesus said that unless we change and become like little children, we'll never get into the kingdom from heaven (Mt 18:3). Messiah's kingdom is our hope of glory. It is great to experience forgiveness of sins and to have assurance of salvation, but believers ought to have in the back of

their minds, at least, the thought that there is more to salvation than that. Paul said that we will rule the world one day!

A rich young man came to Jesus and asked what good deed he should do to have *eternal life* (Mt 19:16). Jesus knew his weakness and replied that he should go and sell what he owned and give the money to the poor, and follow him, and then he would have treasure in heaven (Mt 19:21). Heaven is the place where rewards, treasure, crowns, and inheritance are kept in store for the righteous (Mt 6:20, 1 Pet 1:4). Jesus then told his disciples that it's hard for a rich person to get into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19:23). It would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into *the kingdom of God* (Mt 19:24). His disciples were shocked and asked who could *be saved*. Jesus taught, and the disciples understood, that eternal life and being saved were synonymous with entry into the kingdom of God. Then Peter remarked that the disciples had left everything to follow Jesus, and he asked how this would be rewarded. Jesus replied that when he returned to sit on his glorious throne in the renewed creation (ESV, new world NIV), those who had followed him would also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel, and they would inherit eternal life (Mt 19:28, 29b).

Christians who live centuries and millennia later and who follow Jesus faithfully, will also receive their appropriate rewards and reign with the Messiah. Salvation is deliverance from sin, the world and the devil. Eternal life is an endless life with emphasis on its quality and knowing God. Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God enlightens us about the future activity of the righteous and where they will be. They will live in the New Jerusalem and will reign over the earth during the millennium.

Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom

Talking about the second coming and the resurrection of the dead, the apostle Paul said not all Christians would die, but we will all be changed, faster than an eye can blink, at the sound of the last trumpet. The Christian dead will be raised never to decay again. All Christians, whether dead or alive, will be resurrected and transformed at the same time (1 Cor 15:50-53). When the last

trumpet sounds, the dead are raised imperishable, and Jesus will begin his reign on earth. This is restated when the seventh angel blows his trumpet in Revelation 11:15. Voices in heaven declare that *the world's kingdom* has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever.

It is in the context of 1 Corinthians 15, the chapter on the resurrection, that Paul makes the important statement that flesh and blood (mortal bodies) cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, you cannot enter the kingdom of God unless you are resurrected. A perishable mortal cannot inherit the imperishable, or immortality or the image of Christ (1 Cor 15:49).

Michael Vlach's book, *He will Reign Forever*, is in agreement with much of what I present in this book, but in his treatment of this verse (p. 445), he says the Father's eternal kingdom is probably in view, because whether one holds a premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial view of the kingdom, there will be non-glorified saints in Messiah's kingdom, whether interpreted as the church on earth, or believers in heaven in the intermediate state.

This misunderstanding comes from not differentiating between the royalty and the subjects of the kingdom. Every kingdom has two groups of people. The general population under Messiah's rule are non-glorified people. They are not inheriting the kingdom; they are ordinary flesh and blood human beings who survive the Great Tribulation and who will be ruled over with a rod of iron. Then there are those who enter the royalty in Messiah's kingdom. To qualify for that, they must be born from above, and to enter it, they must be resurrected or transformed at the last trump. Many scholars continue to look at a kingdom as a domain and the people therein as the subjects. They haven't discovered the secret that "kingdom" means "kingship" and that the saints enter the kingship and are rulers in Messiah's kingdom. They are sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. They belong to the royal family and should never be referred to as subjects. The resurrected people Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 15:50-56 are those who will possess the reign, they are not subjects. The subjects of the kingdom of God will include the believing nation of Israel who are saved, but not resurrected, and unbelievers from the nations who survive the Great Tribulation and wars at the time of Jesus' return (Zech 14:16). The latter are neither saved nor resurrected. Both

Israel and the survivors from the nations will have “flesh and blood” bodies, while the saints, who are royal family, will have resurrection bodies. The Messiah will be king, and the saints will be his royal family, the ruling community who will live in the immortal and incorruptible New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven from God.

The apostle Peter wrote to fellow believers and said that they would be generously granted entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Messiah. He tells them to be eager to make their calling and election certain (2 Pet 1:10-11). It’s an eternal kingdom, because even when the thousand-year reign on earth is over, the kingship continues throughout eternity.

But that is not the whole story. Paul told the Colossian saints that God had rescued them from the power of darkness and had brought them into the kingdom (kingship) of the Son he loves (Col 1:13). Salvation is experienced in part right now. Our sins are forgiven, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we have been united spiritually to the Messiah. As sons of God, we are heirs, and co-heirs with Christ. We have been brought into the kingdom as royalty. That is our status, based on God’s promises. But the visible manifestation is yet to come. We are in Christ’s community, the church, but we have not yet entered the Messiah’s future reign on earth. We possess eternal life, but we have not entered the glory; we are only heirs of it. Paul told the Colossians they had died, and their life was safely guarded by the Messiah in God. He said that when the Messiah, who is their life, is revealed, then they too will be revealed with him in glory (Col 3:3-4).

This astounding part of the gospel, entering Messiah’s kingship, is a doctrine so few Christians understand. It is synonymous with salvation and eternal life, but it opens up a new vista of what our future life is all about. Those who don’t believe in it are left in the dark as to what the future holds. Their reign with the Messiah is relegated to the vacuous intermediate and eternal states. Just as it is important to understand how God makes us righteous and how he declares us to be vindicated, so also, it is important to know how we will be glorified. Our destiny is to reign with the Messiah over this world in supernatural, immortal, spiritual bodies, and then to reign with both Father and Son throughout eternity.

Entering the Family of God

What will glorification and eternal life in the kingdom of God mean to those who receive it? We have seen that it begins with the transformation of a flesh and blood, mortal, human body to an immortal, supernatural body that is appropriate for the children of God. The book of Hebrews says that it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering as part of *his plan to glorify many children*, because *both the one who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have the same Father* (Heb 2:10-11a). That's amazing! All who are being saved are described as having the one Father! All are God's children, brought to glory by the Messiah.

That is what salvation is all about, and that is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. That Jesus is not ashamed to regard them as his own siblings shows just how personal this family relationship is. Not only that, they even participate in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). God makes them fully like Jesus the Messiah! The apostle John urges us to understand what kind of love the Father has given us. We are called God's children, and that is what we are, but what we will be like has not yet been revealed. We only know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:1-2). Yes, we will be given the glorious honor of being like the resurrected, glorified, supernatural Jesus, the Messiah. We have received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. And if we are children, we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah, if in fact we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory (Rom 8:15b-17). This is the awesome future of all who receive eternal life as members of God's family. We will share in his glory.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Yes, Jesus is getting married, and believers in Jesus are the lucky bride! In Revelation 19:6b-8, just prior to the vision of the rider on the white horse, which depicts the second coming of the Messiah, a large crowd is heard shouting, "Hallelujah! The Lord our God,

the Almighty, is reigning.” The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. She has been given fine linen to wear, representing the righteous deeds of the saints. Then an angel told John that those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are blessed. This is reminiscent of a prophecy in Hosea 2:19-20, where God tells Israel he will make her his wife forever. He will make her his wife because of his faithfulness, and she will know the Lord.

This marriage supper is a messianic banquet, a part of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. It is mentioned several times in the Gospels, including parables that Jesus told, but it is first spoken about by Isaiah, and significantly, the location is Jerusalem. Isaiah said that on Mount Zion, the seat of God’s presence, the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of well-aged wines, and he’ll swallow up death forever. He’ll wipe away the tears from all faces, and he’ll take away the disgrace of his people *from the entire earth* (Isa 25:6-8). This celebration includes the abolition of death and the end of sadness. Isaiah also expresses the idea of marriage with God, when he told Israel that their Maker is their husband (Isa 54:5). He also told Zion that as a young man marries a maiden, so her sons would marry her, and just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so their God would rejoice over her (Isa 62:5). Such is the situation in the New Jerusalem.

One day someone eating with Jesus remarked that the person who will eat in the kingdom of God will be blessed (Lk 14:15). Jesus responded with a parable about the kingdom of God. Matthew’s version says a king prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out invitations to the banquet, but those invited made all sorts of excuses as to why they couldn’t come. The king represents God, the son is the Messiah, the invited are the Jews. The servants were then told to go out into the streets and lanes and invite all and sundry until the wedding hall was full. The original heirs, Israel, had forfeited their inheritance. Now, at this present time, Gentiles are coming from all over the world to take their places with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in Messiah’s kingdom. That is the future reward of the righteous. Feasting with the patriarchs may suggest sumptuous entertainment, but this feast is far more than that. This feast is in Messiah’s kingdom. This is not a geographical term, but administrative, meaning that they will have access to the king’s table where decisions are made,

because they are part of the ruling class. They are not only dining with him; they are ruling with him. The “children of the kingdom” are certainly not subjects.

In discussing marriage, the apostle Paul quoted from Genesis, giving the reason why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife. Then he said that this is a great mystery, because he was talking about the Messiah and the church (Eph 5:31-32). The relationship between the Messiah and his church is a perfection of union and love, and the future result for believers will be perfect bliss. The actual wedding banquet is not described in the Bible, but it must take effect immediately after the Messiah’s return. John saw a vision of the glorified bride in Revelation 21, which is a symbolic representation of the Messiah and his bride as the community of the New Jerusalem.

How and Where will the Saints Reign?

The sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven are given to the saints. Jesus has made them to be a royal family of priests for God. As royalty, they will rule over people. As priests, they will mediate between God and people. But where will they live? And what sort of existence will they have in their resurrected bodies? Jesus told his disciples he was going away to prepare a place for them, and he would come back again and welcome them into his presence, *so that they may be where he was* (Jn 14:3). The place that Jesus has prepared for us is the holy city, the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2 – 22:5). That is what Jesus was referring to when he said that the righteous would shine like the sun in their Father’s kingdom (Mt 13:43). Paul said that the Lord *himself*, in person, will come down from heaven and the dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first. Then believers who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And *so, they’ll be with the Lord forever* (1 Thess 4:16-17). The kingdom we will shine in is the Messiah’s monarchy. It is imperishable and will be inherited by the immortal, resurrected saints.

Our resurrected state will be very different to our present state. There will be no more sickness, death or sin. We will still be recognizable; our identity, gender, nationality and ethnic group

won't change. Jesus will always be a male Jew. Our service for the Messiah may be in the same geographical area where we served him during our lifetimes. For those who are used to thinking about a heavenly destination, a future reign on earth may take some time to adjust to. Jesus said that *those who are considered worthy of a place in that age* and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Nor can they die anymore, because they are like angels, and since they share in the resurrection, they are God's children (Lk 20:35-36). They have fulness of life in the family of God, and marriage is not appropriate any more. The resurrection mentioned is *from* the dead; it is a partial resurrection, not a general resurrection of all mankind. It is the resurrection of the righteous, and it is for those whom God considers worthy of it.

Entering and Acquiring the Kingdom

A key Old Testament verse concerning the future of the righteous is Daniel 7:27, which says that the sovereignty, power and greatness of all nations of the earth *will be given* to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom will endure forever, and all rulers will worship and obey him. This does not happen in heaven. There is a lot of teaching in the New Testament to support an earthly reign of the Messiah. People are spoken of as entering and acquiring the kingdom, which in this context means entering the royalty or acquiring the kingship. That is what Jesus confers on his followers (Lk 22:29).

In the following verses, I have interpreted the kingdom of God, or the kingdom from heaven, as referring to the Messiah's royalty or monarchy, the people who will rule with him. For example, the meaning of Revelation 1:6, which says that Jesus has made us to be a kingdom, is that Jesus has made us to be royalty; members of his royal household. Entering the kingdom is entering the ruling class. Being given the kingdom is being given the kingship or the right to rule; being appointed to government. I have retranslated the following verses with this meaning in mind. This process of entering the kingship occurs in two stages, a present exaltation which occurs when one is born again of God's Spirit (Jn 3:3-5), and a future glorification which occurs at the resurrection, when we

rise to meet the Lord in the air and to be welcomed into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first group of verses express the present exaltation that occurs when people put their faith in Christ. They immediately become children of God and co-heirs of the kingdom with the Messiah. Their sins are forgiven, and they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit among many other blessings. These are not all blessings of the kingdom of God; they are blessings which arise from being “in Christ”. One of the blessings is being exalted to the position of being a co-heir with Christ. These verses describe the exalted status of a Christian here and now, even though Christ has not returned, and the kingdom has not been manifested.

Mt 5:3 How blessed are those who are destitute in spirit, because the ~~kingdom of heaven~~ *messianic monarchy* belongs to them.

Mt 5:10 How blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, because the ~~kingdom of heaven~~ *messianic monarchy* belongs to them.

Mt 7:21 Not everyone who keeps saying to me, “Lord, Lord,” will get into ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*; but only the person who keeps doing the will of my Father in heaven.

Mt 11:11 Among those born of women, no one has arisen who is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least important person in ~~the kingdom~~ *Messiah's monarchy* is greater than he.

The status of one who is a member of God's royal family is greater than the status of John *as a herald of the kingdom*. John the Baptist will surely be in the monarchy.

Mt 16:19 I will give you the keys to ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*. Whatever you prohibit on earth will have been prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will have been permitted in heaven.

The keys are symbolic of the authority the apostles had in their ministry. Through preaching the gospel, they opened the door to people to become members of Messiah's monarchy. Historically and currently, this verse has been poorly interpreted. The kingdom

of heaven is not the church, it is Messiah's kingdom. When Jesus told his disciples that he would build his church, he meant a community, and as there were not yet any Christian churches, the disciples would have been thinking about Jesus as the Messiah, and about the group that he was forming as supporters of his rule. Jesus said in verse 18 that on this rock he would build his community. This refers to the declaration Peter made that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. That was the basis for him building a community. In verse 20 he strictly charged them not to tell anyone he was the Messiah.

Mt 18:1 Who, then, is the greatest in ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*?

Mt 18:3-4 Unless you change and become like little children, you will never get into ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in ~~the kingdom of heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Mt 21:31 Tax collectors and prostitutes go into ~~God's kingdom~~ *Messiah's monarchy* ahead of you!

Mt 21:43 ~~The kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce the fruit for it.

Mt 23:13 How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door to ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy* in people's faces. You don't go in yourselves, and you don't allow those who are trying to enter to go in.

Mk 9:47 It's better for you to enter ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.

Mk 10:14-15 Let the little children come to me, and stop keeping them away, because ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* belongs to people like these. I tell all of you with certainty, whoever doesn't receive ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* as a little child will never enter it.

Mk 12:34 You are not far from (entering) ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Lk 9:62 No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the ~~kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Lk 12:32 Stop being afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy*.

Lk 16:16 The Law and the Prophets remained until John. Since then, the good news about ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* has been proclaimed, and everyone entering it is under attack (ISV).

Lk 18:23-24 How hard it is for rich people to get into ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*! Indeed, it's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Lk 22:29-30 *I confer on you kingship*, just as my Father conferred kingship on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in *my monarchy* and *sit down on thrones to govern* the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jn 3:3, 5 Unless a person is born from above, he cannot see ~~the kingdom of God~~ *experience Messiah's monarchy*. Unless a person is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Col 1:13 God has rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* of the Son whom he loves.

James 2:5 God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to be heirs of the ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* that he promised to those who keep on loving him, has he not?

Heb 12:28 Since we are receiving a ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God in reverence and fear in a way that pleases him.

The second group of verses has a future reference, they describe the Christian's status after Christ returns and established his kingdom here on earth.

Mt 5:19-20 Whoever sets aside one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*. But whoever does them and teaches them will be

called *great in the kingdom of heaven* among *Messiah's monarchy*. Because I tell you, unless your righteousness greatly exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter ~~the kingdom from heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Mt 8:11-12a Many will come from east and west and will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ~~in the kingdom from heaven~~ in *Messiah's monarchy*. But the unfaithful heirs of that ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* will be thrown into the darkness outside.

Mt 25:34 Then the king will say to those on his right, “Come, you who have been blessed by my Father! Inherit the ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Lk 13:28-29 In that place there will be crying and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*, and you yourselves being driven away on the outside. People will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will eat in ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Lk 14:15 How blessed is the person who will eat in the ~~kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Acts 14:22 We must endure many hardships to get into ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Rom 14:17 ~~The kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 4:20 ~~The kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy* isn't just talk, but also power.

The Messiah will give his monarchy authority over the nations. They will rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like clay pots.

1 Cor 6:9-10 You know that wicked people will not inherit ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*, don't you? Stop deceiving yourselves! Sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy

people, drunks, slanderers, and robbers will not inherit ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

1 Cor 15:50 Mortal bodies cannot inherit ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*, and what decays cannot inherit what does not decay.

Gal 5:21 I am telling you now, as I have told you in the past, that people who practice such things will not inherit ~~the kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*.

Eph 5:5 For you know very well that no immoral or impure person, or anyone who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has an inheritance in the ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* of the Messiah and of God.

1 Thess 2:12 We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his ~~kingship~~ *monarchy* and glory.

God has called them into the kingship of which he is the source, but the focus here is on the Messiah's future reign and glory.

2 Thess 1:5 This is evidence of God's righteous judgment and is intended to make you worthy of ~~the kingdom of God~~, *Messiah's monarchy* for which you are suffering.

2 Pet 1:11 For in this way you will be generously granted entry into *the eternal* ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Messiah.

8

The Kingdom of God is our Inheritance

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah - if, in fact, we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. – Romans 8:16-17

Inheriting a Kingdom

According to the BAG Greek Lexicon, the verb “inherit” means especially, to participate in messianic salvation; more generally, to acquire, obtain or come into possession of something. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that believers are heirs of Messiah’s monarchy, not just its blessings. This authority is given to believers; it is conferred upon them. Being an heir of the kingdom should not be regarded as a vague expression of experiencing the kingdom of God. It means that we will literally inherit Messiah’s monarchy. We are joint heirs with the Messiah, as per this chapter’s text. His kingdom is not in heaven and it is not presently on earth. The glory in which we will share is our reign on earth for a thousand years followed by a reign throughout eternity (Dan 7:18, Rev 22:5).

Salome, the mother of James and John, had insight into this when she came to Jesus and asked that her sons might sit at his right and his left in his kingdom. There is evidence that she was Jesus’ aunt, the sister of Mary, which makes her request more understandable. If we compare the names of the women watching the crucifixion with Jesus’ mother (Mt 27:56, Mk 15:40, Jn 19:25), we find that in each case there are three women apart from Jesus’ mother. Mary Magdalene is mentioned every time. A third Mary is the mother of James and Joseph, who in John is called the wife of Clopas. The third woman is Salome, the mother of James and John, who is identified in John as the sister of Jesus’ mother. Note also that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother into John’s hands, in preference to his own brothers, and that John describes himself five times as “the disciple that Jesus loved”. All of this gives a high probability to the supposition that Salome was the sister of Jesus’ mother, the wife of Zebedee, the mother of Jesus’ disciples James and John.

An heir usually receives an inheritance after a testator’s death, but heirs in the context of being God’s children receive something from him as a possession. The Messiah is heir of all things, and according to Hebrews 2:8, so are believers. They are heirs of the kingdom of God and of the righteousness that comes by faith.

Entering Glory

The epistles often focus on the glory we will experience when the Messiah returns. All mankind has sinned and come short of the

glory of God, his holiness and perfection. We lost the glory that God created us for, but we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2). Paul said that we have been predestined for glory (Rom 8:30).

This glory means nothing less than the glory of the messianic monarchy. God calls us into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12). The Messiah will give us the right to share his throne. When he returns, he will sit on his glorious throne, and he will tell the righteous to take their inheritance, the monarchy prepared for them since the creation of the world (Mt 25:31, 34).

Our glorification is our adoption into God's royal family. The special kind of love that the Father has given us is that he has called us his children (1 Jn 3:1). As God's children, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17).

Our resurrection bodies will be raised in glory (1 Cor 15:43). When the Messiah appears, we also will appear with him in glory (Col 3:4). At the second coming, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil 3:21). Our inheritance is a glorified state in which we will reign with the Messiah over the earth for one thousand years. Our home, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, will come down out of heaven from God. We will be the bride, beautifully dressed for her husband, the Messiah. We will shine with the glory of God. Our glory is compared to that of pure gold and precious stones (Rev 21:2, 9-11). Daniel said, those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:3).

The Saints will Inherit the Kingdom

The saints are children of God, co-heirs with Christ, and they will share in his royal power and government. They will constitute the ruling class in the kingdom, the monarchy under Jesus. I disagree with George Eldon Ladd's statements in *A theology of the New*

Testament, p.111, when he says that “the church is the community of the kingdom but never the Kingdom itself”, and “they are not the kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men”.

Whereas Jesus spoke mainly about entering the kingdom, Paul and James speak of inheriting it. What they are inheriting is nothing less than the Messiah’s monarchy, and it is always spoken of in a future context. We have not yet come into our inheritance.

Mt 25:34 The Messiah will tell those on his right to come and inherit the monarchy prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

1 Cor 15:50 People with mortal flesh and blood bodies can’t inherit Messiah’s monarchy; those who have perishable bodies can’t inherit what is imperishable.

James 2:5 God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to become heirs of the monarchy that he promised to those who love him.

Sons of the Kingdom

We have seen what it means to enter the kingdom, and we have already established that the kingdom is not a territory, but rather kingship or the monarchy. Kingship is the dignity or rank or position of a king. What is a believer’s relationship to the kingship? A literal translation of Matthew 8:12 is “while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness” (ESV, NASB). The sons of the kingdom are often mistakenly thought of as subjects or citizens, but according to the BAG lexicon, sons of the kingdom are participants in the monarchy. These “sons of the kingdom” who will be cast out were the intended heirs, the Jewish nation, or more specifically the Jewish royal family, who were so intent on destroying Jesus and his followers. The NIV translates them as “subjects”, NRSV “heirs”, ISV “unfaithful heirs”, KJV “children”.

Another verse that mentions “sons of the kingdom” is Matthew 13:38 in the parable of the weeds, where it says that the field is the world; and the good seed are the *sons of the kingdom*; and the weeds are the sons of the evil one (ESV, NASB). KJV and NRSV

translate “children”, NIV “people”, and ISV “those who belong to the kingdom”. I feel that all these translations are inadequate; they don’t make clear that the “sons of the kingdom” are in fact sons of the king, and they constitute the royal family. The parable finishes with words that emphasize the sonship, saying that the *righteous* will shine like the sun in *their Father’s kingdom* (Mt 13:43). My justification for this interpretation is that kingdom means kingship, and sons are progeny or offspring.

In Hebrew there is a similar expression to the Greek “sons of the kingdom”; it is, “seed of the kingdom”. Here are some examples:

2 Kings 11:1 As soon as Ahaziah’s mother Athaliah learned that her son had died, she seized the throne and executed the entire *royal bloodline* (lit. seed of the kingdom).

Jer 41:1 In the seventh month, Nethaniah’s son Ishmael, the grandson of Elishama, a member of the *royal family* (lit. a seed of the kingdom) came.

Ezek 17:13 Then he took one of the *royal descendants* (lit. a seed of the kingdom), made a covenant with him, and put him under an oath.

Dan 1:3 The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring in some Israelis of *royal and noble descent* (lit. seed of the kingdom and of the nobles).

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the young Israelites of royal blood be trained to enter his service. Daniel and his three friends were among them. All versions are unanimous that the seed/offspring of the kingdom means the royal family, which supports my thesis that those who enter and inherit the kingdom of God are entering the monarchy as royal family and not as subjects who are being ruled over.

Believers are born from above to be heirs of the kingdom. They are relatives of the king; they are princes no less! In the parable of the tenants, the Jewish leaders forfeited their position, while those who believe in Jesus are consistently told that Messiah’s monarchy is theirs, it is given to them, or conferred on them. They receive it and inherit it. To understand that the faithful are merely subjects or citizens of the kingdom does not do justice to the meaning of these verbs.

To enter the kingdom is not to enter a geographical area or the sphere of Jesus' reign; it is entering his rule and authority. It is becoming part of his royal family. This is made clear by the vocabulary used, which points to the exalted position we have in the kingdom. Christians don't go around telling people, or even each other, that they are going to rule the world one day. Maybe that is because it is the meek who inherit the earth. But preachers don't talk about it either, and I believe the main reason is ignorance, and general confusion about what happens at Jesus' return. The main reason is that Jesus' expression, "the kingdom of God", has not been understood. When understood, everything becomes clear.

People of All Nations are Heirs of the Kingdom

There are not many verses which confirm that Gentiles will inherit the kingdom of God, because Jesus spoke mainly to Jews. But the following are sufficient to confirm that truth (Mt 8:11, 21:43, 2 Pet 1:11). People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the messianic kingdom (Lk 13:29). References to the kingdom in the book of Acts confirm that it was proclaimed to Gentile Christians (Acts 14:22, 28:31) and there are further references in Paul's epistles: (Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20, 15:50, Gal 5:21, Col 4:11, 2 Thess 1:5). In this book, the kingdom of God, in its future context, is interpreted as Messiah's reign, which will endure on earth for one thousand years, before the Messiah hands it back to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24).

Paul prays that the Colossian Christians might thank the Father, who enabled them *to share in the saints' inheritance* in the light. God rescued them from the power of darkness and brought them *into the kingship of his beloved Son* (Col 1:12-13). The Father has enabled us, made us fit, qualified us, because we are his sons, and he desires that we rule with his Son Jesus. Peter blesses the Father, because in his great mercy he has granted us a new birth, resulting in an immortal hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah to *an inheritance kept in heaven for us* that can't be destroyed, corrupted or changed (1 Pet 1:3-4). He is talking about Messiah's kingdom, as evidenced by many other verses that talk about us being heirs of God. In the following verse Peter says that

through faith we are being protected by God's power for a salvation that is *ready to be revealed at the end of this era*, when Jesus the Messiah, is revealed (1 Pet 1:5, 7). Jesus is king in the kingdom of God and the saints constitute his monarchical government. The apostle Paul said that by enduring, we will reign with him (2 Tim 2:12), and that the saints will rule the world and judge angels (1 Cor 6:2-3). The verb for "rule" is often translated "judge", but the BAG Greek Lexicon suggests that here it may have the broader sense of rule, when compared to Daniel 7:22. Kings run their own judiciary.

The kingdom of God is a pearl of great price and a hidden treasure because finding it is the greatest thing that could ever happen to a person. God has called us to his eternal glory in the Messiah (1 Pet 5:10). To him be power, rule and sovereignty forever.

Unfortunately, shallow Christian teaching emphasizes "going to heaven", which is not the Bible's emphasis at all. In the Living Bible there are 12 verses in the book of Hebrews that suggest that heaven is our destination, whereas in the Greek, the word "heaven" doesn't occur. Heaven is inserted to clarify the text according to current understanding. That is the problem with paraphrases of the Bible; they are in danger of confirming to readers the false ideas they have. Our citizenship may be in heaven (Phil 3:20), but heaven is not our hope. Biblical thought, in contrast to Greek dualism, always places us on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.

The Reward of the Saints

The promised reward of the saints, salvation, as it is often called, begins with the resurrection from the dead. The righteous dead will be raised when Jesus returns at the last trumpet and the world's kingdom will then become the kingdom of God and of his Messiah. Those who are resurrected from mortal life to immortality will immediately enter his monarchy and assist him in his reign over the earth.

The saints will not be judged in a criminal court, but there are many verses which speak of the Messiah giving rewards to the righteous for their faithful service (Lk 18:29-30, 1 Cor 3:8, 14, 4:5, 2 Cor 5:10).

Jesus told the parable of the coins, because the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. It begins with a prince (Jesus) going to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return (Lk 19:12). When he returns as king, he settles accounts with his servants and rewards one by giving him charge over ten cities, and another over five cities. These are appropriate rewards for servants who would be ruling with the king, as members of his monarchy. When are these rewards received? They are not received during this life or at death, but when Jesus returns to earth. The Messiah will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and *then* he will repay everyone according to what he has done (Mt 16:27, Rev 22:12). The parable of the sheep and the goats has a similar scenario. After the Messiah comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will separate the righteous from the wicked and then tell the righteous to come and inherit the kingship prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:3, -34). That their kingship was prepared for them from the foundation of the world indicates that it will take place in this world, and not in heaven.

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan

Satan gained authority over humanity and the earth in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve chose to listen to him rather than God. However, his doom was immediately pronounced by God, when he declared that one day, the offspring of the woman would crush his head (Gen 3:15). His existence, and that of demons and evil spirits throughout the world is very real. We may have doubts about this in the Western world, but in many countries, the existence of evil supernatural forces is not in doubt. It is clearly evidenced by the prevalence of demon possession and the effectiveness of black magic.

The Bible blames Satan for the origin of sin and suffering in the world. It was he who in the form of a snake tempted Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God and were driven out of the garden. In the book of Job, we see why Satan is called the "accuser of the brethren". In the Gospels, a large part of Jesus' ministry consisted of exorcisms and healing people who were afflicted by the devil. The apostle Paul said we used to be dead because of our offenses

and sins, that we once practiced as we lived according to the ways of this present world and according to *the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient* (Eph 2:1-2).

If the devil has this enormous power and authority, how does that relate to the kingdom of God? When Jesus was tempted by the devil before he began his ministry, it was in regard to kingdom authority. The devil took him to a high place and showed him *all the kingdoms of the world* in an instant. He told Jesus he would give him all that authority, along with their glory, because it had been given to him, and he can give it to whoever he wants. If Jesus would worship him, all this would become his (Lk 4:5-7). Jesus rejected the offer because the Father had his own plan and way of giving Jesus the kingdom.

During the last week before the crucifixion, Jesus told the crowd that the world was about to be judged, and *the ruler of this world would be expelled* (Jn 12:31).

Satan and his cohorts were judicially defeated at the cross, but they are obviously still very active in the world, trying to thwart God's purposes. Their expulsion was not immediate. That is something to remember when we, as God's children, are being tempted or persecuted, for our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil forces in the heavenly realm. There is no evidence that the activities of these evil forces have changed since the crucifixion. The New Testament makes it clear that he is presently active (Rom 16:20, 2 Cor 4:4, Eph 2:2, 6:12, 1 Pi 5:8). Satan is still as active as he ever was, he is not yet bound in the general sense. However, from my experience in Africa I believe that believers are protected from the activity of Satan and his demons. The apostle John said that as believers belong to God, they have overcome them, because the one who is in us (the Holy Spirit) is greater than the one who is in the world (Satan) (1 Jn 4:4). He also said that the Son of God protects them and the evil one cannot harm them (1 Jn 5:18).

A significant battle in this saga will occur in the final years of this present age, resulting in the manifestation of the Messiah's kingdom on earth, as described in Revelation 12. A war will break out in heaven. Michael and his angels will fight Satan, and Satan

and his angels will fight back, but he won't prevail, and they'll lose their place in heaven. That ancient serpent, the deceiver of the whole world, will be hurled down to earth, along with his angels. The outcome of Satan's defeat is that salvation is accomplished, the kingdom of God is established, as the Messiah arrives with power and authority. Christians will conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They will embrace martyrdom and not cling to their lives, even in the face of death (Rev 12:7-11). The blood of the Lamb symbolizes Jesus' death on the cross where he ransomed people for God and established their right to reign. The believers will share in the conquest over Satan because of their confession of faith in the face of martyrdom. His expulsion from the earth (Rev 20:2-3) and his demise (Rev 20:10) is still future.

G. Eldon Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* p. 173) says that their very martyrdom was their victory over Satan. It proved that his accusations against them were empty. This spiritual victory over Satan is won in the terrible experience of martyrdom. Since God's children are human, Jesus also became human, so that by his death he might destroy the devil who has the power of death, and that he might free those who are held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15).

How did Jesus destroy the devil? He did so by being born as a man, living a sinless life, and then dying as an innocent victim, our substitute. The world is condemned because of what they did to Jesus, and their prince is condemned with him. With his crucifixion approaching, Jesus said the ruler of this world would be expelled, and the ruler of this world is judged (Jn 16:11). The devil met his match in Jesus. When Jesus disarmed the rulers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross (Col 2:15). But the victory didn't come all at once. He conquered death when he rose from the dead, but death will be the very last enemy to be eliminated.

The Messiah's death on the cross has far-reaching benefits. Through the Son, God reconciled all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:20). Jesus' redemptive work on the cross has made possible a reconciliation between God and creation. Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, it will one day be restored to its original

condition and be “very good”, just as God created it. When will this happen, if not in the new world (Mt 19:28), when the Messiah and the saints rule the world in righteousness?

The redeemed are empowered by the Holy Spirit and have the ability to overcome sin and evil forces. The devil has been bound to some degree as far as the righteous are concerned, but he is still the prince of this world, and he will continue to do evil, and sow tares, and hinder Christian work, and deceive the nations, until the Messiah comes. Then he will be put out of action for one thousand years.

With three and a half years to go before the end of the age (Rev 12:12-14), Satan will be expelled from heaven, and his last strategy will be to empower the Antichrist, the dictator of a worldwide empire. He will give the Antichrist his power, his throne, and complete authority (Rev 13:2b). This final world dictator will be the most powerful and evil dictator that the world has ever known. The ensuing persecution of the saints will be the final suffering the church will endure before Christ’s return, and it will be extensive. The Antichrist will be allowed to wage war against the saints and to conquer them (Dan 7:21). He will exert his authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation (Rev 13:7); no country will be exempted. There will be many martyrs from all over the world in the last days. Christians will be called on to suffer for Christ in that last chaotic period of this age.

Our Heritage - the Order of Events in Revelation 19-21

Nine times in the passage commencing with Revelation 19:11 and finishing with 21:2 John said, “*and I saw*”. What did he see in these short video-clips?

- 19:11** He saw a white horse! Its rider is named Faithful and True - the second coming of Jesus, as he returns to earth to rule the nations.
- 19:17** He saw an angel standing in the sun, giving an invitation to birds of prey to feast on the carcasses of the defeated armies.
- 19:19** He saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army - Armageddon.

20:1 He saw an angel descending from heaven, holding the key to the bottomless pit - the binding of Satan.

20:4 He saw thrones and those who sat on them being given authority to judge - the saints reigning with the Messiah for one thousand years.

20:11 He saw a large, white throne with God sitting on it while the earth and sky fled from his presence – the last judgment and the disappearance of the present earth and sky.

20:12 He saw the dead, both unimportant and important - the judgment of the unbelieving dead according to their works.

21:1 He saw a renewed sky and earth – a one verse description of the restored world during the millennium.

21:2 He saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband – a description of the glorified church in her eternal home.

It is logical to interpret all these events as following the return of the Messiah in Revelation 19:11-21. Revelation 20 seems to be chronological, but I interpret chapter 21 as descriptions of the renewed earth and the holy city which are concurrent with Messiah's reign and which continue for one thousand years.

Jesus will return with power and glory and defeat his political enemies, who will at that time be at war against God's people, Israel, and oppressing Christian believers from all nations. When the Messiah returns, his coming will be visible for all the world to see, and his kingdom will be established. After Antichrist and his false prophet are defeated and Satan is imprisoned, Jesus and the saints will rule over all nations as prophesied in Daniel 7:18, 22, 27 and promised by Jesus (Mt 5:5, 19:28, 24:47, 25:21, 34). This is the inheritance God promised them, as Paul mentioned (Eph 1:14, 18) and which is stated in Revelation 20:4, 6, where the martyrs come back to life and rule with the Messiah for one thousand years as priests of God and the Messiah.

The saints John saw in his vision are described as those who were beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus. They represent all of God's elect, because they are those who have part in the first resurrection, otherwise called the resurrection of the righteous (Lk 14:14), those who belong to the Messiah and are resurrected when

he comes (1 Cor 15:23). All people from all ages who died in union with Christ will rise with their resurrection bodies at his coming, and they will reign over the earth as resurrected people. United to the Messiah, all that he is, they are, and all that he does, they do. They are heirs of the kingdom of God. See what kind of love the Father has given us. We are called God's children, and that is what we are! For this reason, the world doesn't recognize us, because it didn't recognize him either. We are already God's children, but what we will be like has not yet been revealed. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:1-2).

Reigning in the Millennium

In Revelation 20:2-7, John speaks of a thousand-year period six times. This is the millennium, which means one thousand years, from the Latin words *mille* and *annus*. Some people don't take the thousand years literally, others suggest that it won't take place on earth, but we should remind ourselves that a year is the time occupied by the earth in one revolution around the sun. There are no years in heaven! When Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss (20:2) so that he cannot deceive the nations, it reminds one of Jesus' words: "How can someone go into a strong man's house and carry off his possessions without first tying up the strong man?" (Mt 12:29). This victory over Satan and sin is due to the Holy Spirit, not to an inaugurated kingdom.

Satan being out of action, the Messiah will begin his thousand-year reign of justice and righteousness and peace without hindrance. Non-premillennialists who think that Satan is already bound must have many problems explaining Satan's current activities. Peter warns us that our opponent, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8).

Premillennialism is the most widely held view of how this world will end. In a 2011 poll conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals in US, 65 percent of evangelical leaders affirmed their belief in premillennialism, 13 percent in amillennialism, and 4 percent in postmillennialism. It is an article of faith for AOG ministers, and most Pentecostals and charismatics are

premillennial. Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is primarily the reign of God spiritually in people's hearts. I see no scriptural support for that. They see the kingdom as present in this age and visible in the church, wherever there are believers who commit themselves to Jesus as Lord. They think that the kingdom grows through the spread and influence of the gospel and that the preaching of the gospel will bring in lasting peace and righteousness. Many of them believe that most of the world will be converted by this means. Postmillennialism is sometimes described as optimistic amillennialism. Neither of them believes that Jesus is coming to rule over the earth. Postmillennialism tends to see the world and humanity as basically good, and that society can be converted, whereas the Scriptures teach that Satan is the god of this world, and that suffering and persecution are the norm for the Christian life and it is only going to get worse before the Day of God, when God intervenes to judge the wicked. We have been given the privilege for the Messiah's sake not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him (Phil 1:29).

Premillennialists believe that immediately after Jesus' return, there will be a messianic reign on this present earth as stated in Revelation 20. What will this reign be like? God has not revealed too much about it, but there are clues found in the Old Testament as well as the New. How are the resurrected saints going to live in their resurrected bodies during this time? And who else will be around? The vast army that fights at the battle of Armageddon will be struck down and killed at the coming of the Lord (Rev 19:21), but millions of unbelievers, maybe hundreds of millions, will survive the Great Tribulation, and they will continue to live on earth during the millennium. God said that on the Day of the Lord, he will make people scarcer than pure gold (Isa 13:12), so we should think of the world's population as a small fraction of what it is today. After the greatest earthquake the world has ever known, every island will disappear, and the mountains won't be recognized (Rev 6:14, 16:20).

The millennium is called a new age, or a new world, but it is not the end of this world. The world will increasingly become an ideal place as the Messiah restores it from its state of destruction. As a result of the upheaval during the Great Tribulation, there will be no more roads or bridges, and all the cities will be history. In John's vision of the renewed earth, there was no longer any sea.

The word “sea” has a figurative meaning in some contexts, referring to the turbulent, unruly nature of the nations (Isa 57:20, Dan 7:2-3), and that may be true of some verses in Revelation (13:1, 20:13, 21:1). It will be a completely renovated earth, and the sky will be somehow be different too. But Isaiah says people will build houses and live in them. They’ll plant vineyards and eat their fruit (Isa 65:21). At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released, and he will again deceive the unregenerate nations, called Gog and Magog. He will round up a mighty army from all over the world and march against the camp of the saints and the beloved city. The word “saints” in Revelation usually refers to Christians, but fire coming from heaven and consuming evildoers is reminiscent of several events that happened when Israel camped in the wilderness, so it seems best to interpret “saints” here as Israel, and the beloved city as Jerusalem. It is simply stated that fire came down from heaven and consumed the rebellious armies (Rev 20:9).

In Ezekiel 38-39, there is an extended prophecy about Gog and Magog. God says he’ll judge them with disease and bloodshed, he’ll shower him, his soldiers, and the vast army that accompanies him with a torrential flood, hailstones, fire and sulfur (Ezek 38:22). But what Ezekiel sees in these chapters is not a postmillennial battle; it is the battle of Armageddon. He sees a great horde of many nations coming from the north against a newly regathered Israel (38:8). He sees the great earthquake that will occur in Israel (38:19) before Jesus’ return. Gog’s armies will be carrion for birds (39:4), compare Revelation 19:17-21. He also speaks of the conversion of Israel as a nation (39:7, 22, 28-29). They will be burying the dead for seven months (39:12) and gathering their weapons for fuel for the next seven years (39:9). These details don’t agree with a postmillennial destruction of Gog.

There are prophecies in Romans 8:18-23 and Isaiah 65-66 that speak of the renewal of the world and the glorious messianic reign which complement what Jesus said, when he told his disciples that when he sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, they would also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The words of Romans 8 apply to the messianic reign and should be read with that in mind. Our hope is in the return of the Messiah,

in the resurrection of the righteous, and in the renewal of all things. The creation is waiting for the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Paul says that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation has become subject to futility. It is frustrated and not achieving its original purpose, but during the messianic reign, it will be set free from its corrupting bondage, and it will share the glorious freedom of God's children, who eagerly await release from the limitations of their present bodies.

God has not revealed everything about the conditions on earth during the messianic reign, but it will be glorious. The Messiah will be ruling from Jerusalem over Israel and all the nations of the earth, and the saints will be reigning with him. We know that creation will be set free from the curse of Genesis 3, which means a return to its original state when God made all things very good. Few details are given about how the saints will rule with the Messiah, but Jesus' promise to those who conquer is that he'll give them authority over the nations. They'll rule them with an iron scepter; shattering them like clay pots (Rev 2:26-27). This indicates the removal of corrupt governments and the firm implementation of righteous rule. It was a regular feature of Jewish eschatology that the followers of the Messiah would share in his final rule. In Rabbinical teaching, the Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:26) would be let down to earth during the messianic period. Abraham was looking forward to this city that had permanent foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10). Others were longing for a better country (Heb 11:16), one that was heavenly in origin.

Interpreting Revelation 21:1 – 22:5

I have come to the conclusion that the vision of the new heaven and the new earth and that of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5), are not to be interpreted as following on chronologically after the millennium, the last judgment and the dissolution of the planet, as described in Revelation 20. These two visions make more sense when interpreted as the renewed world under the Messiah's rule (Rev 21:1), and of his bride (Rev 21:2-22:5), the church, who will

rule with him during the thousand years. It was Isaiah who prophesied that there would be new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17-20), and his prophecy is very clearly a description of a renewed earth, during the Messiah's reign. There is no prophecy about a newly created planet in the Bible. Isaiah speaks of death occurring, and of the wolf and the lamb feeding together. There are only two verses in Revelation 21 that mention the earth. Verse one says that the first earth had passed away, and this is interpreted in verse 4 as the former things (old order of things NIV) having passed away. Alluding to Isaiah 60:3, 5, 11, John says that the nations will walk in the holy city's light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory to it (Rev 21:24). Yes, the unregenerate nations are still part of the new age, but they are not part of the New Jerusalem, they cannot enter it. They are there in the messianic kingdom, but they have no part in Messiah's monarchy.

Much of the description of the holy city is a symbolic description of the bride; the church, who in union with God, reign with the Messiah during the millennium.

At the end of the messianic reign, all remaining evil will be destroyed, including evil spiritual forces, Satan and death itself. Unbelievers will be raised and judged and consigned to hell. Then the Messiah will hand back his kingship to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). God the Father is the ultimate ruler within the internal relationships of the Trinity.

Sam Storms, (*Kingdom Come, an Amillennial Alternative*, pp. 136-137), states some problems he sees with the premillennialist position. For example, that:

1. the natural creation and physical death will continue beyond the time of Christ's coming
2. the new heavens and the new earth will not be introduced until one thousand years subsequent to Christ's return
3. unbelievers will still have the opportunity to come to saving faith in Christ during the millennium
4. unbelievers will not be resurrected, judged, and cast into eternal punishment, until after the millennium.

I have no problem with 1, 3 & 4 and see no biblical reference to a new heaven and a new earth, apart from the renewal of the earth during the millennium.

He thinks these things are denied by other verses in the New Testament, because in his amillennial view, everything comes to an end at the second coming. Suddenly, out of nowhere, death is defeated and swallowed up in victory, the eternal judgment occurs, creation is set free from its bondage to corruption, the new heavens and the new earth are introduced, and all opportunity to receive Christ as Savior terminates. That is a whole lot of things that must happen in one day! And add to that the battle of Armageddon, Jesus' dramatic return, the resurrection of the righteous, the rapture, the wedding feast of the Lamb ...

The Day of the Lord is mentioned many times in Scripture, and it is expressed in many ways: the day of God, the day of Christ, the great day, the last day, that day, the day. The general meaning is a decisive intervention of God in history; whether by judgment, blessing or redemption. The extent of time is indeterminate.

Salvation during the Millennium

We live in the church age, an age of grace, where God is calling people from all nations to be united to Christ and live with him throughout eternity. Before Pentecost God concentrated on the nation of Israel, but there was opportunity for people from other nations to trust in the Lord. Even before Abraham there were people who called on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26). Not everything is revealed to us, but we do know that ultimately, God does not want anyone to perish, but wants everyone to repent (2 Pet 3:9) and that salvation is through faith in Christ alone.

The millennium will be the climax of this world's history and the gracious and patient Lord we know is not going to reign over this glorious period without the inhabitants of the earth having the chance to be saved. Other evidence for that is as follows. The whole nation of Israel will be saved after the Messiah's return, at the beginning of the millennium, so that he will be reigning over a redeemed nation (Ezek 39:21-29, Joel 2:28-32). So there will be redeemed people during the millennium. The Messiah will rescue Israel from their enemies at his coming and he'll pour out his Spirit upon them. During the millennium, the earth will be filled with

the knowledge of the Lord and the temple will be called a house of prayer for all peoples. “It will come about in the last days that the mountain that is the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of mountains and will be raised above the hills; all the nations will stream to it. Many groups of people will come, commenting, “Come! Let’s go up to the temple of the God of Jacob, that they may teach us his ways. Then let’s walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-3).

The initial population of the world during the millennium will consist of unbelievers who chose Antichrist over Christ during the Great Tribulation. They took his mark on their bodies and worshiped the Antichrist and his image. They will be forced to submit to Messiah’s rule whether they like it or not. Over time the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9), and in that day the root of Jesse (the Messiah) will stand as a signal for the peoples – of him will the nations inquire, and his resting place will be glorious (Isa 11:10).

The Messiah will be present in the temple, but not visibly. God will install one shepherd for them, his servant David (the Messiah). God will be their God and his servant David will rule among them as Prince (Ezek 34:23-24). His throne will be in the temple that Ezekiel described, that is where he will place the soles of his feet and where he will live among the Israelis forever (Ezek 43:7). People will still be saved through faith as always. The fact that after Satan’s release from his prison, he is able to deceive the nations and gather them for battle against God’s people, shows that many people will remain unregenerate. Those who are regenerated will be resurrected and glorified at the last judgment.

9

Heaven is not Our Home

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who have been blessed by my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. – Matthew 25:34

Is Heaven Really Our Home?

It's unbelievable, but most Christians don't have an accurate idea about where they are going. They don't have clarity about what the Bible teaches is their destination. There are some Bible translations that give the wrong impression, especially those that we call paraphrases. It is not good to be too literal when translating the Bible, but on the other end of the spectrum, we have the paraphrase versions, for example *The Message* or *The Living Bible*, in which the interpretation is overly influenced by modern culture. The result is like a film made about a former era, but it all looks very 21st century. There is really only one destination for the redeemed, and that is "to be with the Lord".

Where are We Going?

Common Christian terminology would have it that when we die, we go to heaven, and that's it. When reading the *Living Bible*, I noticed several references to heaven which seemed unnatural in Heb 10:34, 11:10, 14-16. On looking up the Greek I found no heaven mentioned, rather it spoke of a city or country that the faithful were looking forward to.

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, he told the criminal who expressed faith in him that he would be with him in paradise that very day (Lk 23:43). Paradise is mentioned three times in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 Paul said he was caught up to the third heaven, which in verse four he defined as paradise. In Revelation 2:7 Jesus made a promise to everyone who conquers that he would give him the right to eat from the tree of life that is in God's paradise.

When Christians die, they go to be with the Lord. Paul said he couldn't decide between two possibilities; to continue living and serve God here, or to depart and be with Christ which is far better (Phil 1:23). He also said that if the earthly tent we live in is torn down, we have a building in heaven that comes from God, an eternal house not built by human hands (2 Cor 5:1). Many interpret this as referring to the resurrection body that we will receive at Jesus' return. Others feel that, as the text says we already have this building from God, it refers not to the

resurrection body, but to the home of the redeemed in heaven. Jesus said that his Father's house had many rooms and he was going to prepare a place for his disciples (Jn 14:2). Paul said that as part of our salvation in Christ, we have been raised up with him and seated with him in heaven (Eph 2:6). He also said that the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (Gal 4:26). The book of Hebrews has a lot to say about this city. God has prepared a city for people of faith (11:16). Christians have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), so they are looking for the city that is to come (13:14). Then in Revelation, John sees this city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It is a glorious place, and John sees it coming down from heaven to earth.

We can conclude from these verses that the holy city is the eternal home that God has prepared for us. Our spirits enter it at death, so that we are not left wandering around naked in space. The resurrection body doesn't come until later, when Jesus returns.

The Intermediary State - "Heaven"

Christian eschatology should not emphasize the "intermediate state" or the "eternal state", because the Bible does not use this terminology and says very little about these periods of time. The "intermediate state" refers to the spiritual state of believers between death and the Messiah's return to earth. The bodies of dead Christians decay in the grave or are burnt up by cremation; they exist as human spirits or souls only. Paul says that he would prefer to be absent from the body and home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). That is not saying that heaven is our home; the emphasis is on being present with the Lord. That is about all we know about this temporary stopover. It is not the final state of bliss and glorification. The martyrs John saw in Revelation 6:9-11 were there as disembodied spirits or souls. They ask how long it will be before God judges the wicked who remain on the earth. They were looking forward to something there, but they were told to wait until the number of their brothers is complete. John sees them again in Revelation 20:4; they are resurrected and reign with the Messiah for one thousand years. Their glorification is finally complete

Regarding heaven as our home or the final destination of the righteous is unfortunate, because it doesn't give scope to the imagination as the millennium does. The Christian hope, according to Paul, is our adoption as sons; the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23), which will materialize at the coming of the Messiah. Our hope should always be in the resurrection, the wedding supper of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, and a future on earth during the messianic reign.

Jesus said that as he was going away to prepare a place for us, he would *come back to get us*, so that we might be with him. It is a mistake to think that Jesus is coming back to earth for a momentary visit. If Christians go to be with the Lord at death, why does Jesus need to come back to earth to get us? Why couldn't the resurrection take place in heaven? Is there anything left in the grave that will form part of a resurrected person? The resurrection body is spiritual, but as Jesus showed us, he could appear on earth with a flesh and bone body (Lk 24:39). God has planned for us to have new bodies through resurrection, because we are not complete without a body. Resurrection will make him whole again. The inhabitants of heaven don't need bodies, bodies are designed for living on earth. That is why, when Jesus returns, he will give us our resurrection bodies, so that we can live on a renewed earth, and God will make his home among men and dwell with them in close proximity to the renewed earth (Rev 21:3).

Our earthly tent is temporary; the building from God is permanent. In the Father's house, a city, there are many places that Jesus has prepared for us. But what is it really? The jewels and pearls and streets of gold are symbolic, as are the tree of life and the river of life. They are symbolic of the glory and immortality we will enjoy, but our actual mode of existence at that time has not been revealed. No mind is able to conceive what God has prepared for those who love him.

The Great Tribulation – the Final Week

The first three and a half years of this horrendous "week" are described by the first four seals, trumpets and bowls. One quarter of the world's population will be killed during this time of warfare,

famine, and most probably, radioactive contamination. This is the time when the final world empire will rule the world as a coalition of nations. It will devour the whole world, trampling it down and crushing it (Dan 7:23). The smoke and nuclear contamination resulting from these wars will cause much devastation and suffering. The Antichrist will emerge as a powerful dictator after putting down three other world leaders. He will make a peace accord with many nations for seven years, but then in the middle of that time, he will break it. C. F. Keil in his commentary on Daniel interprets this as: That ungodly prince shall impose on the mass of the people a strong covenant that they should follow him and give themselves to him as their God.

In the second half of the seven-year tribulation, with the help of his public affairs officer, the false prophet, he will set himself up as God; the only person to be worshipped. Through a campaign of blasphemy, political injustice, social harassment, economic deprivation and murder, he will put an end to all organized religion, including Christianity and Judaism. He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship. He will sit down in the sanctuary of God and declare that he is God (2 Thess 2:4). But there will be political opposition. His empire is described as a mixture of iron and clay, a metaphor for instability. The “king of the South” (possibly a Muslim coalition) will engage him and the “king of the North” will storm out against him. The Antichrist will invade many countries including Israel, then reports from the east and the north (beyond the Euphrates) will alarm him. He will finally come to his end at Jerusalem at the coming of the Messiah. Together with the false prophet, he will be captured and consigned directly to hell. The fifth and sixth trumpets and bowls relate to this period. The locusts and horses that they describe are symbolic of modern warfare – bombs and missiles and tanks. The number of troops involved in the final battle of Armageddon is stated to be two hundred million, and a further one third of mankind is killed.

The Church during the Great Tribulation

Some people claim that the church is not mentioned on earth during the Great Tribulation, thus supporting their theory that

the rapture of the saints occurs before the tribulation begins. It is surely important for Christians to think about future events and to find out what to expect, whether we are going to experience the horrific years of the Great Tribulation or not. I believe one of the main reasons why God gave us the book of Revelation was to prepare the church for this time of persecution and martyrdom that will occur during these seven years. It was specifically written to God's servants *in the churches*, to show them what must surely take place (Rev 1:1). Whenever we see the word "saints" (12 times), or "servants of God" (10), or "those who hold to the testimony of Jesus" (9), it is Christians who are in focus. Many verses speak of Christians being persecuted and martyred throughout the Great Tribulation and their need of endurance (Rev 1:9, 6:9-11, 7:3, 12:17, 13:7-10, 14:12, 16:6, 17:6, 18:20, 24, 20:4). The presence of Christians during this time is evidence that the resurrection of the righteous and the rapture of the living will not occur until the day of Jesus' return.

Daniel makes several clear statements about the distant future (Dan 8:26). He was told that the Antichrist would speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Most High. They'll be given into his control for three and a half years (7:25), he will destroy mighty men and the holy people (8:24). However, after the three and a half years, when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things will conclude (12:7).

Paul seems to have this text in mind when he tells the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord will not come unless the rebellion takes place first and the man of sin (the Antichrist), who is destined for destruction, is revealed (2 Thess 2:3). The Antichrist will be an atheist who honors military might. He'll plunge the world into a war so horrific that a third of the world's population will be slain (Rev 9:18). The rebellion from the east and the north can be identified with the two hundred million strong army released at the Euphrates (Rev 9:13-16) and culminating in Armageddon at the Lord's return, when the Antichrist will come to his end. There will be continuous war during his reign, but when the Messiah comes, he will be killed by a word from his mouth.

No mention is made of people becoming believers during the tribulation, but that doesn't mean it won't occur. With that in mind

let us look at twenty passages that indicate that the church will pass through the Great Tribulation. Some of these verses refer to Christian martyrs whose souls were in heaven, but they are all evidence of the presence of the church on earth during the Great Tribulation.

Rev 6:9 When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of *those who had been slain because of the word of God and the witness they had borne.*

The inference is that the martyrs had died following the opening of the first four seals.

6:11 Each of them was given a white robe. They were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers was completed, who would be killed as they had been.

7:3 Don't harm the land, the sea, or the trees until we have marked *the servants of our God* with a seal on their foreheads.

The phrase "servants of God" in Revelation (1:1, 2:20, 6:11, 7:3, 10:7, 11:18, 19:2, 5, 22:3, 6) always refers to Christians.

The 144,000 sealed from all the tribes of Israel are on earth and at first sight would appear to be literal Israel, but it is a symbolic number ($12^2 \times 1000$) for the totality of the church, the Israel of God (Gal 3:29, 6:16). Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

7:9, 14 John saw a crowd so large that no one was able to count it! They were from every nation, tribe, people and language. They were standing in front of the throne and the Lamb. These are the people who are coming out of the Great Tribulation. *They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

This innumerable number of saints are from every nation. They are before God's throne in heaven and appear to have died as Christian martyrs during the Great Tribulation.

8:3 An angel was given a large quantity of incense to offer on the gold altar before the throne, along with the prayers of all *the saints.*

These prayers are prayed by the suffering saints on earth (cf. 5:8) and the martyrs, asking how long it will be before God judges and takes revenge on those living on earth who shed their blood (6:10).

9:4 The locusts could harm only the people who *do not have the seal of God on their foreheads*.

That is the faithful, those who were sealed in chapter 7.

11:8 Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where *their Lord* was crucified.

The two witnesses are messianic Christians – Jewish believers, of whom there were an estimated 350,000 adherents in the world in 2012 (Wikipedia).

11:13 One tenth of Jerusalem collapsed, seven thousand people were killed by the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and *gave glory to the God of heaven*.

Giving glory to God suggests repentance. Their response contrasts with that of the unrepentant unbelievers who curse God (16:9, 11, 21). However, their conversion awaits the Messiah's arrival, when he pours out his Spirit on them (Zech 12:10).

12:17 The dragon became angry with the woman (Israel) and went away to do battle against the rest of her children, the *ones who keep God's commandments and hold on to the testimony about Jesus*.

13:7 The Antichrist was allowed to wage war against *the saints* and to conquer them.

13:10 If anyone is to be taken captive, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed. Here is a call for endurance and faithfulness on the part of *the saints*.

Compare Jeremiah 15:2. God's people get caught up in God's judgments. Antichrist was given power to make war against the saints, but the age will soon come to an end, when the saints will be resurrected. So they are encouraged to be faithful and endure, and not submit to Antichrist.

14:1 John saw the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! With him were 144,000 people *who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

Mount Zion is here equivalent to the New Jerusalem. The church sings a new song which nobody can learn except those who have been redeemed from the earth. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

14:12-13 This is a call for the endurance of *the saints who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to their faithfulness in Jesus.* A voice from heaven said, how blessed are the dead who die *in the Lord* from now on!

This is another plea to the church to endure. The severity of the persecution under Antichrist is described in Revelation 13. The blessing is pronounced upon those who are about to suffer martyrdom. They should not fear, because they will be blessed for surrendering their lives to the Lord.

14:16 The one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was harvested.

This picture of a grain harvest is the closest we get in Revelation to a description of the resurrection and rapture of the church. cf. Mt 24:30-31. In Mark 4:29 harvesting the grain with a sickle is a picture of the ingathering of the righteous.

15:2 John saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. Those (the church) who had conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name were standing on the sea of glass holding God's harps in their hands.

16:6 God gave those who worshiped Antichrist blood to drink because they spilled the blood of *saints and prophets.*

16:15 Jesus said he is coming like a thief. How blessed is the person who remains alert, and keeps his clothes on (spiritual diligence), because he won't have to go naked and let others see his shame.

17:6 John saw that the woman Babylon was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of *the witnesses to Jesus.*

18:20 Be happy about her (Babylon), heaven, *saints,* apostles and prophets, for God has condemned her for you.

God has judged Babylon for the way she treated the church.

18:24 The blood of the world's prophets, *saints*, and all who had been murdered was found in her.

The woman who is guilty of the murder of all the Christians is defined as the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. It is "Babylon", Antichrist's capital city, but it involves all the great cities of Antichrist's empire that are bound together by politics, commerce and entertainment.

20:4 John saw the souls of *those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God*. They came back to life (were resurrected) and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.

This is the first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, and presumably the resurrection of the entire church.

Two Resurrections

The Nicene creed (revised version 381) says:

"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. ... we look for the *resurrection of the dead*, and the life of the *world to come*. Amen"

When we harmonize the biblical teaching, we find that there are two resurrections, one of the righteous and one of the wicked. The righteous are resurrected at the beginning of the messianic reign, while the wicked are resurrected and judged at the end of it. Jesus said *those who are considered worthy* of a place in that age and in *the resurrection* neither marry nor are given in marriage. And since they share in the resurrection, they are God's children (Lk 20:35-36). "That age" and references to "the coming age" (Mt 12:32, Mk 10:30, Lk 18:30, Eph 1:21, 2:7) are interpreted by the BAG Greek Lexicon as the messianic age. References to the first resurrection are numerous, and in the following verses those resurrected are designated as the elect, the righteous, and those who are worthy (Mt 24:30-31, Lk 14:14, Jn 5:29, 11:25, 1 Cor 15:22-23, 2 Cor 4:14, Phil 3:20-21, 1 Thess 4:15-17, Rev 20:4-6). Jesus

was the first person to be resurrected. Lazarus was brought back to life, but strictly speaking, not resurrected, because he died again, while resurrected people are immortal. The holy people who came to life when Jesus died (Mt 27:52-53) also later died; they were not resurrected with immortal bodies. Revelation 20:4b-5 makes it very clear that there are two resurrections: “They came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years were over. This is the first resurrection”.

The Rapture

The living saints will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air at the second coming. It is not done secretly; it will be accompanied by a very loud and brilliant display of power and glory. There will be a loud roar like a waterfall (Ezek 43:2, Rev 1:15), and the sound of a loud trumpet (1 Thess 4:15). The angels will gather the elect from one end of the earth to another. It will happen very quickly; it is not a drawn-out affair. The dead in Christ will be raised first, and then the living saints will be changed (the rapture) (1 Cor 15:52).

The Lord will come like a thief in the night as far as unbelievers are concerned, but Christians are not left in darkness, so that the Day of the Lord will surprise them (1 Thess 5:4). They will be watching for the signs and will be ready for whatever eventuates. They won't be confused about it; they will know that the coming of the Lord and their being gathered to him *will not happen unless the rebellion takes place first and the Antichrist is revealed* (2 Thess 2:1-3). He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship and will set himself up in the Jewish temple (Mt 24:15, 2 Thess 2:4) proclaiming himself to be God. The phrase “temple of God” is found in Matthew 26:61, where false witnesses accused Jesus of saying he could destroy it and rebuild it in three days. Again, in Revelation 11:1-2 John is given a measuring rod and told to measure the temple of God and those who worship there, but not to measure the court outside the temple. These verses confirm that a third temple will be built in Jerusalem in the last days.

The second coming is not imminent, because the rebellion hasn't happened yet. Antichrist will appear on the scene at least seven

years before Christ returns, and he'll set himself up in the temple three and half years before he returns. So the church should be on the lookout for the rise of Antichrist and his worldwide empire. But her *hope* is in the second coming of Christ, the resurrection and the millennial reign on earth. Nobody knows the day when the Messiah will return, but Paul says that he will not return before the rebellion of humanity against God occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed (2 Thess 2:3). God has not left his people in the dark about this. In the parable of the virgins, the time came when the door was shut. Paul also makes it clear that there is a certain day when the full number of Christians will be complete, and that is the day when the Lord Jesus returns. After that moment, the door is closed to the monarchy; no others will be able to reign with Christ during his reign on earth.

But Israel will be saved after the Lord's arrival. Stubbornness has come to *part of Israel* until the *full number* of the Gentiles has come to faith, *then* all Israel will be saved as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion, he will turn godlessness away from Jacob" (Rom 11:25-26). When the Spirit is poured out on all Israel, they will be saved. Too late to be included in the resurrection, and too late to be a part of the monarchy; their role in the kingdom is a different one.

1. Church age until the age of grace finishes
2. Jesus returns and the church is resurrected and raptured
3. Israel is saved and reinstated as God's people on earth
4. The church rules the world with the Messiah

In the parable of the talents, Jesus taught that the kingship would be taken away from the Jews and given to a people producing its fruits (Mt 21:43). Israel would still to be saved, but they would miss out on the kingship. They will be saved when the Messiah, at his return, comes *to Zion* to save Israel from its enemies (Isa 52:8-10). Then Paul says, he will come *from Zion* (Rom 11:26) and banish ungodliness from Jacob. When Jesus pardons Israel for its sin of unbelief in him, he will renew his covenant with them, a prerequisite for them being renewed as God's people on earth among the nations.

Christians will not Suffer God's Wrath

We are called to suffer for Christ (Acts 14:22, Phil 1:29), but not to suffer God's wrath. God's seal on the foreheads of believers (Rev 7:3) doesn't guarantee protection from persecution or martyrdom; it is God's stamp of ownership guaranteeing their eternal security. Death will be transient because death has been conquered. Christians are not appointed to suffer wrath, but to experience salvation. Jesus will rescue them from the coming wrath, but the church will have to pass through the Great Tribulation. Jesus' prayer for his disciples is not that God would take them out of the world (as in a pretribulation rapture) but that he would protect them from the evil one (Jn 17:15). There are thousands of Christian martyrs every year. They lose their lives for Christ, but they have eternal life. They don't suffer God's wrath. There is no condemnation or punishment for those who are in Christ Jesus. The seal was put on God's servants so that they would not be affected by the calamities that followed the opening of the seals. Then, after the fifth trumpet the locusts were told not to harm those who had the seal of God (Rev 9:4). And after the first bowl was poured out, painful sores broke out *only* on people who had the mark of the beast (Rev 16:2).

The Millennium

The New Testament gives little detail about the Messiah's reign, but Revelation 20 repeats six times that it will last one thousand years and makes it clear that the righteous will reign with Christ during that time. Numbers are symbolic in Revelation, so one thousand years may be symbolic for a long time, but that doesn't mean it is not literal. Revelation 21:1 - 22:5 is often regarded as a description of the new heavens and the new earth, but on closer scrutiny, we find that only the first verse relates to the new earth. John saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. That is all that he says about the new earth. "Passed away" should be taken in the same sense as in verse 21:4, where it is the former things that have passed away. If the earth had disappeared altogether, there would be no need to say "and the sea was no more". In his vision he sees an entirely new picture of the earth; a new creation (Mt 19:28) of a world at peace, with no wicked people who are like the tossing sea (Isa 57:20).

The new heavens and earth that John saw is a vision of the world during the millennium. It is the new heavens and earth that Isaiah saw (Isa 65:17-25), the age of renewal of all things that Jesus spoke about, the liberation of the creation from its bondage to decay that Paul spoke about (Rom 8:21). The old order passes away under Messiah's rule. The sea is often a metaphor for the tumult and rebellion of the nations, in which case "no more sea" would reflect the peace and righteousness that the nations will experience under the Messiah's firm rule. Psalm 72 is messianic and anticipates a worldwide rule. All the kings of the earth will serve the Messiah as he rules *from sea to sea* (Zech 9:10). The earth and heavens flee from God's presence at the white throne judgment (Rev 20:11), when they have finally served their purpose. The unrighteous dead will be judged according to what they have done and then consigned to hell together with death and Hades. Only what is immortal will remain.

The rest of Revelation 21 is about the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven and is the abode of God and the redeemed. The holy city is a place, but it may not be in this space-time dimension. It is a very symbolic representation of the community of the redeemed. Consequently, there is little said about contact with the surrounding nations and the world, but there is enough to indicate that the New Jerusalem relates to the millennial era and corresponds in some way to the earthly Jerusalem. It is a picture of the saint's glorification, beginning from the time of the resurrection, and the marriage feast of the Lamb which celebrates their union with him.

Rev 21:2 – 22:5 describes John's vision of the New Jerusalem whose inhabitants are the immortal bride of Christ. It is symbolic of our eternal home. The New Jerusalem should be identified with the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), which is the abode of the departed saints after death and before resurrection, but which now comes down out of heaven. Earth is not mentioned as the destination of this city, or community, because it is in a different dimension, but it must relate to the earth in some way, because the city has descended from heaven, and God's dwelling place is now with man. Heaven has come down to earth! This is reminiscent of Genesis 3:8 where Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

The purpose of this vision is to portray in symbolic form the glorification of the saints in their relationship to the Messiah and to God during the messianic reign and on into eternity. It is the climax of the book and is fittingly left to the end of the book, before concluding remarks are made by Jesus and John. The descent of the holy city (Rev 21:2, 9-10) seems to be another way of describing the resurrection of the righteous. Before the descent, the bodiless spirits of the righteous are in the holy city in heaven. After the descent, the resurrected saints are in the holy city which is on or in close proximity to the earth. After the saints are resurrected at the Messiah's return, there follows the wedding of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-7), after which believers are eternally united to God. In Revelation 20:4 God's servants are resurrected and reign with Christ for a thousand years. In Revelation 22:4-5 they are in the New Jerusalem, worshipping God and the Lamb and reigning with him forever and ever.

The Old Testament prophecies give us many more details about the *earthly* messianic reign. The Messiah will rule from Mount Zion (Ps 2:6) with the saints. On earth there will be houses, vineyards and gardens (Isa 65:21-22), and the Messiah will rule over the unbelieving survivors of the nations (Zech 14:16) with justice and righteousness resulting in worldwide peace (Isa 2:4). The earth will be gradually regenerated with an ideal climate free of drought or storm. The curse will be removed, and nature will be at harmony with man, with no more thistles and thorns, and no more danger from animals, reptiles, insects, bacteria or viruses (Isa 11:6-9). Man will live progressively longer on earth as disease is eradicated (Isa 65:20).

When the righteous dead are resurrected, and the righteous living are raptured at the Messiah's return, they, in their new bodies, will reign over the earth with the Messiah (Dan 7:18, 22). Although John saw only those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus, these martyrs represent all the righteous, who come back to life in what is termed, "the first resurrection". They will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the royal family. The nations, who are the subjects of the kingdom, will bring tribute to the earthly Jerusalem (Isa 60:11-12) and serve God's people, but they won't enter the holy city (Rev 21:26-27).

The resurrection body is spiritual, supernatural, imperishable, glorious, powerful, and bearing the likeness of the man from heaven (1 Cor 15:42-44). We can say more about the resurrection bodies, except what Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 15. We shouldn't think of the resurrection body as being unsuitable for life on earth. Jesus appeared to people over a forty-day period in his resurrection body, before ascending to the Father's throne. They touched him, and he breathed and talked and ate with them. Jesus was recognizable by those who knew him, but at times he went unrecognized, which was something that he could control (Mt 28:17, Lk 24:15, 31, Jn 20:15-16, 21:4, 7, 12). Gordon Fee in his commentary on 1 Corinthians suggests that when the resurrected body is called "spiritual" (1 Cor 15:44), it is not in the sense of "immaterial", but of "supernatural".

The resurrected Jesus was supernatural in the sense that he could walk through walls and disappear into a different realm. The saints can expect the same of their resurrection bodies, because they will be like him. We are only given a symbolic representation of our home, the New Jerusalem, because it represents an existence in a different realm.; our mode of existence has not been revealed. The New Jerusalem is distinct from, but closely related to, the earthly Jerusalem. Paul spoke of both cities in 2 Galatians 4:25-26, the present city of Jerusalem, and the Jerusalem that is above, who is our mother.

The messianic promises of the Old Testament are not situated on a new planet, or in heaven, but on this present earth (Ps 2:6-8, 110:2, Isa 35:1-10, 49:8-23, 51:4-6, Dan 7:14, Mic 4:1-8, Zech 8:2-8). See also the following New Testament references:

Mt 19:28 Jesus told his disciples that when he sits on his glorious throne in the *renewed creation*, they would sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 3:21 The Messiah must remain in heaven until *the time of universal restitution, which God promised long ago through his prophets*.

Rom 8:19-21 The creation eagerly awaits the revelation of God's children, because it has been subjected to futility. One day it will *be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of God's children*.

2 Pet 3:12-13 *We are waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, when the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

Peter is not asking the faithful to look forward and hasten the end of the world. He uses the Greek word “παρουσία” which he used before (2 Pet 1:16, 3:4), where it refers to the coming of the Lord. The promise he refers to of a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells alludes to Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 65:17-25), which is about a new order of things on earth under the Messiah. The former things will not be remembered or even come to mind.

Eternal Life Is Kingdom Life

Life in the kingdom of God can be equated with eternal life, or simply life, as John refers to it. The eternal life for which we hope for and expect will initially be worked out on this earth in the messianic kingdom.

Matthew records Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats where kingdom life is equated with eternal life. After the king tells those on his right to come and *inherit the kingdom* (Mt 25:34), he says, those people will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into *eternal life* (Mt 24:46).

John’s Gospel only mentions the kingdom of God twice, when Jesus talks with Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again. But John makes up for this by referring seventeen times to “eternal life” and nineteen times to “life”. What is eternal life if it is not life in the kingdom from God? Living as a king and co-heir with Jesus will be exciting and glorious, but this life is also defined as knowing the Father and the one he sent, Jesus the Messiah. Eternal life is knowing God, being united to God through Christ in a relationship akin to marriage and reigning with him on into eternity. Believers have already crossed over from death to life (Jn 5:24).

The kingdom is also equated with life in Mark 9:43-47. Jesus said that it is better to lose a hand or foot or eye than to be thrown into hell. Better to “enter life” maimed, he said twice, but the third time

he said, “better to enter the kingdom of God”, thus equating “life” with “the kingdom of God”.

In Isaiah’s new heaven and new earth prophecies, the two eternal destinies, “heaven” and “hell”, are pictured as a new Jerusalem (Isa 65:18-19) and Gehenna (Isa 66:24, cf. Mk 9:48) on the outskirts, Jerusalem’s burning rubbish heap in the valley of Hinnon. John maintains the picture of hell in Revelation 22:15, saying that *outside* are dogs, sorcerers, immoral people, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

After the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told his disciples that it’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into the kingdom of God (Mk 10:25).

John’s final book, Revelation, is all about the final showdown, the events that will happen before and after Jesus’ return, leading into the earthly kingdom. The central verse is Revelation 11:15 where the world’s kingdom becomes the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, who then reigns forever and ever.

The time for Jesus’ return is drawing nearer with the return of Israel to their historical land and with globalization and world government on the increase. The scene is now set for the rise of Antichrist, the day of judgment at Armageddon, the salvation of Israel, and the millennium. As the end approaches, kingdom terminology becomes more relevant and precious to God’s people.

The New Jerusalem

I was going to entitle this section “the eternal state”, but New Jerusalem is the biblical term which expresses this idea. When the Messiah’s reign on earth comes to an end, he will hand the kingship he was given back to the Father. In doing so, the Son himself will become subject to the Father so that the Father may be all in all. Jesus will be the undisputed king over the earth during the millennium, the King of kings and Lord of lords, but when this earth disappears and all unbelievers are judged, the throne of God and of the Lamb will remain in the New Jerusalem. It is important to understand that the New Jerusalem is a

symbolic representation of the community of God and his people. When the world comes to an end, God and his people will remain. Where? In another dimension, traditionally called heaven.

When John saw his vision of the last judgment, he made a clear statement about the created universe. He said the earth and the heavens fled from God's presence, and no place was found for them (Rev 20:11). After the judgment, death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, and anyone whose name was not found in the book of life will be consigned to that same fate. That sounds like the end of the world and the whole created universe.

Scholars such as R. H. Charles, Theodore Zahn and G. R. Beasley-Murray interpret the vision of the New Jerusalem as millennial rather than the eternal state, but this relationship between God and his people is eternal, starting with the resurrection, when the saints enter eternity, and continuing on forever (Rev 22:3-4), so I think it is both millennial and eternal.

Rev 21:24 speaks of *the nations* walking by the light of the glory of God which shines from the New Jerusalem. Then John says that the gates are always open, and the kings of the earth bring their splendor into it (Rev 21:25-26). This fulfils the Isaiah 60 prophecy, which describes the glorification of the earthly Jerusalem and its temple as the nations bring their wealth to it. Then in Revelation 21:27 John reminds us that only those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life can enter the New Jerusalem. Time and eternity, earth and heaven, come together during the millennium. The saints will reign over the earth during the millennium, but they will live in the heavenly Jerusalem. The throne of God and the Lamb are there, but at the same time the Messiah will be seated on the Davidic throne in the earthly Jerusalem (Ezek 43:6-7).

God himself dwells in the New Jerusalem, and Jesus is referred to seven times as "the Lamb". The holy city is called "the wife of the Lamb", and there is mention of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and the Lamb's book of life. Father and Son are linked together in three ways: The glory of God gives the city light and the Lamb is its lamp, while the throne of God and the Lamb is mentioned twice. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are there, but there is a temple in the earthly Jerusalem, where the unregenerate nations come to

worship. The title “Lamb” occurs in Revelation twenty eight times. Although the Greek word is diminutive in form, it no longer had this meaning in the first century. It may rather designate the leading ram, who leads his flock to victory. He is the shepherd (Rev 7:16), who will “shepherd” the nations with an iron rod. The Lamb of Revelation is the glorified Christ, enthroned with God, and victorious over all opposing forces, whether human or demonic. In Revelation 5, he is the Lamb who was slain, and several verses speak of the blood of the Lamb who purchased men for God from every tribe and nation.

The New Jerusalem and the Earthly Jerusalem

1. At the Messiah’s return the Mount of Olives splits in two and Jerusalem is raised up higher than the surrounding mountains (Mic 4:1-2). Instruction proceeds from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem. The fountain that flows *from* the temple (Joel 3:18, Ezek 47:1-12, Zech 14:8) and the throne (Rev 22:1-2) is symbolic of spiritual blessings (cf. Rev 7:17, 21:6b, 22:17), but other changes indicate the renewal of the natural world (Isa 30:23, Jer 31:12, Ezek 47:8-9, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13-15), including the arid and hilly areas of Israel.
2. The New Jerusalem (the holy city) symbolizes the union of the Messiah and his bride; the union of God and his people. Once resurrected the church lives in that eternal community, whether during the millennium or after it. There is no temple there, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
3. Promises made to the conquerors in the seven letters include having the name of New Jerusalem written on them, sitting with the Messiah on his earthly throne, and having authority over the nations.
4. The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. It is not a part of this creation but is visible as a bright light positioned over the earthly Jerusalem. The holy city consists of its inhabitants; God, angels and the resurrected righteous. For John to see it in his vision, he was carried away in the Spirit to a very high mountain (Rev 21:10-11).

5. The unbelieving nations who survive the Great Tribulation will go to the earthly Jerusalem to worship the Lord year after year.
6. Alluding to Isaiah 60:11 which describes the earthly Jerusalem, the gates are never shut, day or night, and the kings of the earth bring their splendor to it. They cannot enter the New Jerusalem, which is only for the redeemed and is above the earth.
7. The redeemed have access to the tree of life (Rev 22:14) and are immortal. The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations on earth. They are ministered to by the redeemed, who are a kingdom of priests.
8. The last eight chapters of Ezekiel are a vision of a renewed temple, a division of land for the prince, the priesthood, the Levites and all the tribes of Israel. Jesus promised the twelve that they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel during the millennium. Israel will be God's people on earth supervising the temple worship.

The Essence of Eternal Life in Paradise

God is making everything new - no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, the things that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9).

Relationships - The triune God will dwell eternally with his redeemed people. They are his people, often called his children, and he is their God. They will live in the heavenly realm and see his face. There is no temple there, because God is present. They will serve him and will reign with him.

Light and life - The river of the water of life will be there to assuage every thirst. The tree of life will be there to give life and bear an abundance of fruit and complete satisfaction. Leaves are symbolic of health and well-being. There will be no night there, and no sun and moon will be needed, because God is light.

Bliss - There will be no curse there, or any effect of a curse. There will be no death, the saints are immortal. There will be no suffering; no tears or pain. There will be no unbelievers or

evildoers, and nothing impure, only those whose are enrolled in the Lamb's book of life.

Glory - The city will shine with the glory of God. The precious stones, gates of pearl, and streets of gold, are all symbolic of the glory that awaits God's people. It is the glory of wealth, royalty, health, wholeness, purity, sufficiency and happiness.

Kingship - He who overcomes will inherit all this. The saints will reign forever (22:5), an allusion to Daniel 7:18 where the saints inherit the kingdom forever.

The Creation and the New Creation

What does the future hold? Scientists are rather pessimistic about the future of the universe and wonder what people can do to ensure our eventual survival. I doubt that they can do anything apart from taking care of the environment. The future has always been, and will always be, in God's hands. The choice for us is between heaven and hell. For those who choose to follow the Savior a glorious future has been promised. We live in a space-time dimension; this physical universe is all we know. But we read in the Bible about God, the Creator, who lives in another dimension called heaven. We can't see him, because we don't live in that dimension. But what of the future? We have the promise of a renewed sky and earth, and the New Jerusalem. How do these places relate to our present earth? What will living be like in those new domains? What can we say about the continuity or discontinuity of the human person and the creation with its geology and flora and fauna?

The messianic kingdom will be a continuation of this present earth. The present world and its infrastructure will be totally devastated by warfare and earthquake during the Great Tribulation, but mankind and the creation will survive. The messianic government will be a theocracy, not the rule of God alone, but the rule of the Messiah and his kingdom of priests. He will restore the world and stamp out all forms of evil. The present creation is in bondage to decay and degradation; everything dies and

degenerates, the energy of the universe gradually moving towards disorder. Romans 8:21 says that the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. The curse will be lifted as the Messiah brings the earth back to an ideal condition. But what will this liberation lead to? The creation will not become immortal but will experience freedom from the bondage to decay. Godet, in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (p. 315), says that this liberty expresses the unchecked development of the free expansion of all the powers of life, beauty, and perfection, wherewith this new nature will be endowed. There is no resurrection or immortality here; the individual in the animal or plant world is merely the temporary manifestation of the species.

The rebirth or regeneration of nature during the millennium should not be confused with the glorification of redeemed humanity. Their glorification begins with resurrection which is a transformation of the body resulting in immortality. It is the beginning of the process whereby redeemed humanity attain supernatural bodies, are formally united to Christ, become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), and reign with the Messiah and God forever. Animals and the rest of the creation are not included. The creation is doomed to annihilation as the scientists predict, but it will happen in God's perfect timing. Before it is annihilated, it will be perfectly restored over a period of a thousand years. The unbelieving subjects of the kingdom will enjoy the renewal of the earth and liberation from its curse. They will bear children and build houses and plant vineyards. They will live longer and not suffer from disease, meteorological disasters, wars or famines. They will be ruled over by a firm but just government and will be taught the ways of God.

There are only two ultimate destinations for humanity; what is usually described as heaven and hell. After death, there are temporary stopovers that we know very little about; for the believer, it is called "being present with Lord", for the unbeliever, it is Hades, the place of departed spirits. At the resurrection believers will rise to life in the New Jerusalem, and from there they will rule over the earth. John reminds us that because of God's great love for us, we are now his children, but what we will be like in the future has not yet been revealed. But when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him in our resurrection bodies,

because we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2). After the millennium, believers will continue to reign with God, while unbelievers will be resurrected and condemned. It is assumed that the unregenerate will have the opportunity to surrender their lives to God during the millennium, but the redeemed never become the majority. There will a final rebellion of mankind against God, whose number is like the sand of the sea.

The resurrected saints in their immortal bodies will be living in the New Jerusalem, not on earth, nevertheless, they will rule the earth. As the royal family, they constitute the monarchy. They will no longer have children and will never die. The subjects of the kingdom are the survivors of the Great Tribulation, both Israel, who have been saved, and the nations, who initially at least, are unbelievers. Jerusalem will be the world capital and the Messiah will be king over the whole earth. During the millennium there will be one Lord and his name the only name; he will be the sole object of worship. There is no biblical evidence that the Messiah will be visible, apart from the light of the glory of God over Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem will be the center for worship and all nations will come there to bring gifts and pay homage to the king.

The saints will have bodies like Jesus' resurrected body and will appear on earth in their role as priests and rulers. We are not given details. The unbelievers will enjoy the ideal conditions on earth during those days, and presumably there will be the opportunity to be saved, but the rebellion at the end of the thousand years, when Satan is released from his prison, indicates that the majority will remain unregenerate. People will be buried when they die and resurrected at the last judgment. Believers will then join the elect in the New Jerusalem, while unbelievers are consigned to hell.

The Jewish generation that survives the Great Tribulation will be converted after Jesus' return, but this will be after the resurrection and rapture. The Messiah will pour out his Spirit on them and they will be cleansed from sin and impurity (Zech 12:10, 13:1). They will enter the millennium as God's redeemed nation, Israel. In their previous unbelief, they forfeited the kingdom (kingship), but they will serve God as priests and Levites at the temple, so that the nations can come and worship God in an acceptable manner.

Believers who die will be resurrected at the last judgment and join the elect in the New Jerusalem.

In the New Jerusalem there is no death; all the inhabitants are immortal. The holy city is the home of God, the Messiah, angels and the redeemed. The latter will enter this state when they are resurrected at the Messiah's arrival, and they will live and reign with him forever. They will reign over the earth during the millennium from the New Jerusalem. The city will be in a different space-time dimension and the saints will commute between the city and the earth in human form, just as Jesus did for forty days after his resurrection, and just as angels have always done. It will correspond to the earthly Jerusalem and hover over it, so that the two, in a sense, become one. It is the holy city, because God is there. The ultimate Jewish king, the Messiah, and his throne are also there. Its gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and its foundation are named after Jesus' twelve apostles. The redeemed have their names written in the Lamb's book of life and constitute the royal family. During the millennium, the nations will see the light of Zion's glory (Isa 60:3, Rev 21:24) and they will bring their wealth to it, but it will be destined for the temple in the earthly Jerusalem, because nothing impure can enter the celestial city (Rev 21:27). This city is a place where there is no more death or crying or pain. God said he is making everything new (Rev 21:4-5), a space-time dimension that is not made of matter. What is said in Revelation 21:2 – 22:5 does not describe the world during Messiah's reign, it describes the other-worldly New Jerusalem. Apart from its connection with Jerusalem as the city of God, the holy city shows no continuity with planet earth. The earth is temporary, the holy city is eternal. Jesus said the sky and earth will pass away, but his words will never pass away.

10

The Kingdom of God is not the Church

You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slaughtered. With your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Revelation 5:9-10

The Link between Kingdom and Church

The word “church” is usually used in the New Testament to refer to a local assembly of Christians. They didn’t have church buildings, so a church was simply a community of believers. Church, with a capital C, can refer to the body of all Christians who total about 33 percent of the world’s population. It can also refer to a large organized denomination like the Catholic or Lutheran Church. In the church there are true believers and there are nominal Christians. The latter group are Christian by name only and may constitute the majority of people who call themselves Christian. Through lack of commitment or lack of good teaching, they are not genuine Christians. Paul said that anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9), and, it is only those who are led by the Spirit of God who are sons of God (Rom 8:14). Only the Lord knows those who are his (2 Tim 2:19). If we want to talk about the church in its relation to the kingdom of God, then it must be understood that we are talking about born-again believers, those whom God knows are his. These people are often referred to in Scripture as the righteous, because they have been made righteous through faith, or the elect, because they are chosen by God.

John Bright in *The Kingdom of God* (p. 236) says, “There is no tendency in the New Testament to identify the visible church with the Kingdom of God,” and “The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, but the visible church is not that Kingdom”.

The church is related to the kingdom of God, but the connection is not obvious. Most Bible dictionaries and books about the kingdom of God do not define the precise connection. There are many theories, but they are vague and short on Scriptural backing. The common problem is that the authors begin with the premise that the kingdom of God is God’s rule, and so they have no monarchy for the saints to enter. They know that Jesus is the King, and that there are verses that describe the kingdom as “the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”, or “the kingdom of Christ”, or “the kingdom of his beloved Son”, and yet they persist with the belief that the kingdom of God is God’s rule. They don’t appreciate the fact that the kingdom of God, as Jesus used the term, typically refers to his future reign on earth; not God’s sovereign reign. Acknowledging that fact helps us understand that while the

church is a *present* reality, the kingdom of God is not, so direct connection between the two is less obvious. John Bright was correct when he said, the church, meaning the elect and not the organization, are the people of the Kingdom of Christ. I would go a step further and say that they are the *royal household* in the Messiah's kingdom. Bright also hinted at this on p. 220, when he said that those who heed the call have entered the kingdom, nay, *they are the kingdom*.

Heb 3:6 states that the Messiah is a Son in charge of God's household, and we are his household (family) if we persevere. Entrance into the kingdom comes through being born again or being born from above. Peter said that because of his great mercy God has granted us a new birth, resulting in an immortal hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead and to an inheritance kept in heaven for us that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed. Through faith we are being protected by God's power for a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of this era (1 Pet 1:3-5).

That will happen when Jesus the Messiah is revealed (1 Pet 3:7). The church community, that Jesus said he would build, are sons of the kingdom, and one day, they will come to life, or be raptured, and they will reign with the Messiah. James said that in accordance with his will God made us his children by the word of truth, so that we might become the most important of his creatures (James 1:18).

The Apostolic Authority

One day Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. Simon Peter answered that he was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16). Then Jesus told him how blessed he was, because it was God who had revealed that to him. He told him that on the basis of that confession he would build his messianic community, and the powers of hell would not conquer it. *He would give Peter the keys of the kingdom from heaven*; messianic community authority. Whatever he forbade on earth would be forbidden in heaven, and whatever he permitted on earth would be permitted in heaven. In Matthew 18:18-19, Jesus gave the same promise to all the disciples, and then he added, that if two of them agreed on

earth about anything they requested, his Father in heaven would do it for them, because wherever two or three come together in his name, he is there among them (guiding them). The keys of the kingdom given to Peter and the same promises given to all the disciples refer to their apostolic authority, especially as expressed in their writings and their preaching ministry. The books of the New Testament written by these men were “God-breathed”, their teaching and preaching was determined in heaven.

The Royal Household

Jesus is building his church, which is his community, God’s household. The idea of building a community is found in Ruth 4:11 where reference is made to Jacob’s wives Rachel and Leah, who through bearing children, built up the house of Israel. The community that Jesus is building constitutes his household, the royal family who will reign with him in his kingdom.

The church is the body of the Messiah, the totality of believers from every location and every age stretching from Pentecost to the day the Messiah returns in power and glory, the day when he will defeat his enemies and establish his kingdom. How do people enter the monarchy? The keys (means of entry) were given to the apostles who were trained by Jesus to establish the early church. They did this by writing the books of the New Testament, preaching the gospel, and through prayer. Jesus said, the gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt 24:14). What a responsibility Christians have! The Pharisees had the keys once, but they shut the door of the kingdom from heaven in people’s faces. They didn’t enter themselves, and they didn’t allow those who wanted to enter to enter either (Mt 23:13). The preaching of the gospel to the lost is the church’s number one mission in the world.

The connection between the church and the kingdom is this: True believers are the monarchy in the messianic kingdom. They gain that status when they believe, and they will exercise their authority when the Messiah returns and sets up his kingdom. His community will be resurrected and raptured, they will inherit the monarchy, and they will reign with the Messiah as the royal

household. By faith we are saved and become part of the messianic community. By adoption we become children of God, and that makes us princes in his kingdom. We are sons of the kingdom, co-heirs with Christ.

Jewish and Gentile Saints Are United

Jesus said that many will come from east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Abraham was a great man of faith and the first patriarch, but he and Isaac and Jacob and other people of faith from the Old Testament were not part of the church which started at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Paul said that if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of the Messiah, he doesn't belong to him (Rom 8:9). If born-again Christians are the royalty in the messianic kingdom, and if they are going to take their place with Abraham at the feast in the kingdom of God (Mt 8:11, Lk 13:28-29), it means that the patriarchs, and all who are called saints or elect or righteous in the Old Testament, have become one body with the Christian saints. In fact, they are the original root, and we have been grafted into their tree (Rom 11:24).

Within fifteen years of the Messiah's death, when he brought about their eternal redemption on the cross, his followers were called Christians. God planned something better for Christians in this dispensation of the gospel. Believers from all other eras, whether they lived before or after the flood, or before or after the law of Moses, are only perfected when grouped together with Christians (Heb 11:40). It is thanks to this dispensation of grace, which includes the Messiah's death for all nations on the cross, and his resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all believers, that past believers will be included at the resurrection. Many prophets and righteous people longed to see and hear about these things that the disciples were seeing and hearing from Jesus, but they didn't (Mt 13:17). Thanks to the ministry of Jesus and the apostles we have a fuller understanding. At the resurrection of the righteous we will all be the one people of God, in union with the Messiah.

Man was Created to Rule

It should not surprise us that we will be given the privilege of ruling with the Messiah. When God created humanity in his own image, he installed them as the earth's rulers saying, Let them be masters over the fish, the birds, the livestock, everything that crawls on the earth, and over the earth itself (Gen 1:26). This role is reiterated in Psalm 8:3-6 where the psalmist muses:

When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you set in place,
what is man that you take notice of him,
or the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little less than divine
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You gave him dominion over the works of your hands
and put all things under his feet.

In the New Testament the glorious fulfillment of man's sovereignty over the earth is revealed. God did not put the coming world under the control of angels. He put everything under the dominion of humanity and *left nothing outside his control*. At the present time we don't yet see everything put under him. But we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor and with everything in subjection to him. God has made the pioneer of our salvation perfect through suffering *as part of his plan to glorify his many children* (Heb 2:5-10). As Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor, so will redeemed mankind be crowned in the life to come, regaining the original purpose for which God created them.

Teaching about the church is concerned with relationships within the church, between the church and God, and between the church and the world. It is also concerned with the ministry of Christians under their Lord. The kingdom of God should not be thought of as being equivalent to church life. Teaching about the kingdom is concerned with the return of Jesus the Messiah to earth, his millennial reign over the earth together with his saints, and his political power over his enemies. The present age is the church age, because in it, God is calling out a people for himself and building his church. Believers are being united to the Messiah through his shed blood, they are justified and set apart as the children of God. The age to come (Mt 12:32, Lk 18:29-30, 20:34-36) or the coming

age (Eph 2:7, Heb 6:5), is the resurrection age; the new world where righteousness reigns. It is the kingdom age in which the Messiah will rule the nations with an iron scepter. The saints should eagerly await the kingdom age, because they will reign over the earth with him, and then together with the Father and the Son on into the future. The kingdom is the big picture of the Messiah's victory. The whole world will come to understand who Jesus really is, and that Israel and the church are God's people.

Some theologians think that the kingdom of God was inaugurated at the resurrection of Jesus, and that he can be envisaged now, sitting on the throne in heaven in his majestic glory. True, Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, but that is not the kingdom of God. The messianic kingdom is an earthly kingdom and it cannot be inaugurated until the Messiah returns to earth on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory and sits his glorious throne. Without Jesus' earthly presence, there is no messianic kingdom. Jesus said that in the future he would sit on *his* throne (Mt 19:28, 25:31). Zebedee's wife asked that her sons might sit at his right and left in *his* kingdom. The criminal on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when he came into *his* kingdom (Lk 23:42). Jesus promised the overcomers at Laodicea that they would sit with him on *his* throne (Mt 3:21). The messianic throne will not be in a palace, but in the temple. Jerusalem will be called *The Throne of the Lord*, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord (Jer 3:17). Many peoples will go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob (Isa 2:3). Ezekiel heard someone speaking to him from the millennial temple saying that this is where his throne is, where he places the soles of his feet, and where he will live among Israel forever (Ezek 43:7). God has anointed us and set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (of our inheritance) (2 Cor 1:21-22).

The Church's Future Glory

Who are the subjects in the future kingdom of God? As a kingdom of priests, the monarchy must rule and judge others. When the believers rise to life in the first resurrection and reign with the Messiah on earth, they cannot reign and be subjects at the same

time. The bulk of the armies that will gather around Jerusalem at Armageddon will be destroyed at the Messiah's coming, and then Satan will be bound for one thousand years so that he cannot deceive the nations that remain. It is the remaining unbelievers from all over the world, those who survived, who will be the first generation of subjects of the kingdom during the millennium (Ps 86:9, Isa 66:23, Zech 14:16, Rev 15:4). The Messiah will reign for a long time, renewing what was destroyed, restoring the world and its society to a God-fearing condition and liberating the earth from its bondage to decay. With Satan's evil influence negated, he will remove all opposing dominion, authority and power. Romans 8:18-23 enlightens us on this glorious era. Paul said that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children, because it has temporarily lost its purpose. But it will be set free from its bondage to corruption, in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children who eagerly await the redemption of their bodies. The deliverance of this world from frustration and bondage to decay resulting from the curses of Genesis 3 will take place during the millennium, after which the physical creation will be destroyed (Rev 20:11).

The millennium is a time when Satan is banned from the earth, and peace is restored to God's creation. Wildlife will no longer be wild, disease will be eliminated, people will live longer, justice will be restored, all who are opposed to God will be eliminated, and every false religion and ideology will be banished. The Messiah and the church will rule over all the earth during this time. There will be one Lord, and his name the only one (Zech 14:9).

The government will be a benevolent theocracy; there will be no more evil dictatorships, corrupt communism, liberal democracy, or greedy capitalism. Daniel says the time will come for the saints to take possession of the kingdom (Dan 7:22). The kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints of the Most High (Dan 7:27). This is the future reward for God's people, and their vindication. They will reign under the Messiah.

At the last judgment the remaining evils: Satan, death and Hades will be eliminated forever. The unbelievers, always stubborn in their unbelief, will die in a final rebellion, they will be judged and

cast into hell, pictured symbolically in Revelation as a lake of fire. In Revelation 22:15 the wicked are described as “outside”. They are outside of the New Jerusalem, outside of salvation. After the thousand years, at the last judgment, Jesus will give his kingship back to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). Creation will be dissolved, but the New Jerusalem, in which are the throne of God and of the Lamb, will continue, and the church will continue to worship him and rule with him forever and ever (Rev 22:3-5).

The Gospel

The gospel that Christians believe is the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Mk 1:1). The phrase “Son of God” is at the least, an honorary title for God’s regent, the Messiah. At most, it attributes deity, as several Old Testament prophecies seem to do (2 Sam 7:13-14, Ps 2:7, Mic 5:2). The gospel is qualified in various ways: It is the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24); the good news that salvation depends on God’s grace alone, his unmerited favor towards us human beings who are so undeserving.

It is the gospel of our salvation (Eph 1:13). Our salvation consists of so much: the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, regeneration, election, justification, being made righteous before God, union with the Messiah, being conformed to his image, and being adopted into God’s family. As for the future, it is a promise of resurrection, eternal life, and being made a kingdom of priests to reign with the Messiah on earth and throughout eternity. That is a glimpse of our salvation. Good news!

It is the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15). This good news results in peace with God for individuals, and it will result in there being peace on earth during the millennium, and the regeneration of all creation.

It is the gospel of the kingdom (Mt 4:23). Jesus preached that the kingdom of God (by metonymy, the Messiah himself) was near, and people must repent and believe this good news (Mk 1:15). It is the news that the Messiah has finally arrived in the person of Jesus. All who believe in Jesus are heirs of his coming kingdom; they will reign with him. The kingdom is the culmination of all history.

That is the crux of Jesus' message. The kingdom is the big story. The good news is that the world is finally going to turn out well. Satan, sin, death, sickness, suffering, sorrow, deception and corruption will all be banished. It is good news for all peoples.

The Church and Israel

When we think about the future, the coming of the Messiah and what follows, an important aspect to consider is where Israel fits in. The Old Testament messianic prophecies are all about the future of Israel, so they are an important stakeholder that cannot be ignored. Is Jesus coming back as the awaited Messiah to re-establish the Davidic kingdom over Israel according to the Jewish understanding of Old Testament prophecies? Or, has God finished with Israel? Or, is the Messiah setting up a kingdom on earth that will involve both Jews and Gentiles?

These are big questions for which Christians have different answers. Premillennialists believe Jesus will rule over an earthly kingdom after he returns, while others mostly believe he will not. And in the latter group are some church fathers and most of the Reformers, like Luther and Calvin. Throughout history there has tended to be an anti-Semitic sentiment which has been strong in some periods, resulting in prejudice which hasn't enabled theologians to think impartially.

Our authority is the Bible, and we don't need to go past Romans 11 to find the answers. Romans 9-11 is all about the nation of Israel, their election to be the people of God, and their relationship to the church. God chose to reveal himself to the world through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, the twelve tribes of Israel. Not all his descendants had faith, so not all are eligible for personal salvation. Paul said a person was not a Jew because of his appearance, nor was circumcision something just external and physical. Being a Jew, and being circumcised, were matters of the heart, brought about by the Spirit, not by a written law (Rom 2:28-29).

The nation of Israel is a chosen nation, but currently only a faithful remnant is saved, and as believers in Jesus, they are part of the church. The majority have turned their backs on the grace of God.

People must be born again. Paul said, if a person doesn't have the Spirit of the Messiah, he doesn't belong to him.

Israel and the church have the same purpose; they are both called a kingdom of priests, and they were both chosen to spread the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations. The culmination of their vocation is world government. Israel had the promise spoken by the prophets of ruling the world under the Messiah, and Christians also have the promise that they will rule with the Messiah.

When Paul winds up his argument in Romans 11, he teaches us that stubbornness has come to part of Israel *until* the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith, and then *all Israel will be saved, as it is written*, the Deliverer will come from Zion and remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26). The key point of this quotation from Isaiah 59:20-21 is that Jacob, Israel as a nation, will be converted at Jesus' return. God will renew his covenant with them as he promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). The new covenant that God will make with Israel after those days is that he'll put his law in their hearts. He'll be their God and they'll be his people. Jesus referred to this new covenant at the last supper when he said the cup represented the *new covenant* in his blood. It was initially promised to Israel and Judah, but in 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul applied it to the church. Hebrews 8 stresses the fact that the new covenant with Israel makes obsolete the old covenant of the law. The new covenant will be made with Israel on the day when the Messiah comes and pours out the Holy Spirit on them. They will look to Jesus, the one whom they pierced, and at that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness (Zech 12:10, 13:1). It is during the millennium that all Israel will know the Lord and not need to teach their neighbors to know him.

The unbelieving nation became enemies of the church as far as the gospel is concerned, but they are still loved by God because of election. God's call is irrevocable, unalterable. All Israel (both Israel and Judah) will be saved after the Messiah's return, including those who are not living in Israel. Romans 11 has in focus the nation Israel, so there is no way that all Israel can be

spiritualized and referred to the church. “Jacob” can only refer to Israel.

The Messiah’s salvation is for all, Gentiles as well as Jews, and they all have to find salvation through faith in Jesus. The apostles and other early Jewish believers formed the basis of the early church. In recent decades, there have been many more Jews believing in Jesus and forming messianic churches, especially in the United States. Jesus said that the gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations (including the Jews), and then the end will come. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are Christians (probably messianic preachers) who will come in the spirit of Elijah and Moses to preach repentance to Israel in the last days.

God has already gathered and will continue gathering the scattered nation of Israel in these last days. It is already a miracle that nearly seven million Jews, who had been scattered among the nations of the world for 1950 years, have returned to the promised land in these last days. Their language Hebrew has been revived. According to Wikipedia, “The process of Hebrew's return to regular usage is unique; there are no other examples of a natural language without any native speakers subsequently acquiring several million native speakers, and no other examples of a sacred language becoming a national language with millions of first language speakers.” Israel, as a nation, will be saved, and the Messiah will rule over them as his people during the millennium. They won’t be ruling with the Messiah as part of the New Jerusalem community; that privilege is only given to people of all nations who surrender to Jesus before his return.

The name “Israel” occurs three times in Revelation (2:14, 7:4, 21:12), but none of these references specify Israel in the last days. The book has about five hundred allusions to the Old Testament, estimates ranging from two hundred to one thousand, and Jerusalem is mentioned three times, but only in reference to the New Jerusalem which has Israel’s tribal names on its gates. The book of Revelation is of course written for Christians and is addressed to seven churches. So most of what we know about Israel in the last days is found in the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets.

The saints are from different backgrounds, but the holy people of God are not divided, whether in the church today or the kingdom tomorrow. The government of the world during the millennium will be upon the Messiah's shoulders, and his saints will rule with him. His royal household will consist of the saints from all ages up to the time of the Messiah's return.

During the millennium, the nations will still have their own social and political structures, their "kings" (leaders) are often referred to in the prophecies. Israel will also have its own structure as outlined in Ezekiel 44-45. Their leader is called "the prince". We are not given details about the messianic administration of the kingdom, but it is possible that the redeemed will rule the world under the Messiah in the areas where they previously lived and served the Lord.

The salvation of all Israel prophesied by Paul after the full number of Gentiles comes in is hinted at in Revelation 11, when the two witnesses prophesy in Jerusalem. After the witnesses are murdered and brought back to life and taken to heaven, there is a great earthquake, and the terrified survivors of Jerusalem give glory to the God of heaven (Rev 11:13). This suggests repentance. There is a stark contrast between their response and that of the unbelieving Gentiles who curse the name of God in response to the plagues. They'll refuse to repent and give him glory (Rev 16:9).

The Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will continue as a redeemed nation on the renewed earth, but they will not be resurrected or transformed as in the rapture. As long as the renewed heavens and earth endure (the millennium), so will Israel's descendants and their name endure (Isa 66:22).

Jesus promised the apostles that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the new world (Mt 19:28), which makes it clear that the church and the nation of Israel will both exist during the millennium, but as separate entities. The resurrected apostles will be part of the bride of Christ ruling from the New Jerusalem. The newly converted nation of Israel will be enjoying life on the restored earth. They will be recognized as God's own people and custodians of the temple at Jerusalem, where the nations will come year after year to worship the Lord.

When will Jesus Return for His Church?

Jesus and his friends were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, when Jesus prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. His friends asked him when this would be, and what would be the sign of his coming and of the end of the age? (Mt 24:3). Jesus told them about false prophets, wars and persecutions, and then he gave them the first real clue. He said the good news of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end would come (Mt 24:14).

The Joshua Project, which promotes world evangelization, give the following broad statistics in a 2017 report:

World population	7.47 billion
Followers of Christ	10 percent
Nominal Christian adherents	22 percent
Heard, no response	39 percent
Virtually no exposure	29 percent

Most of the unreached people groups are in Asia where 80 percent of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus do not personally know a Christ follower. As for Bible translation, there are 670 Bibles and 1,450 New Testaments in the 7,100 languages of the world, covering 90 percent of the world's population. Many other languages have portions of the Bible. Wycliffe Bible Translators plan to eliminate Bible poverty throughout the world within the next decade! The Jesus film has been translated into sixteen hundred languages which are understood by ninety-seven percent of the world's population.

In Matthew 24:15 Jesus referred to “the abomination of desolation” or “the destructive desecration”, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, which is generally interpreted as something idolatrous, possibly an image of the Antichrist. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, as Jesus predicted, but the nations will gather against it again before Jesus' return (Zech 12:3, 14:2). This will be during the Great Tribulation, also called the time of Jacob's Trouble. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk 21:24). There will be false prophets who will perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that is possible (Mt 24:24). Immediately before Jesus' return the sun and moon will be

darkened and stars will fall from the sky as graphically portrayed in Revelation 6:12-14.

Israel captured west Jerusalem in 1948 and east Jerusalem in 1967, but in 2019 the temple site remains in Muslim hands. In 2008 the Jerusalem Post reported that the Temple Institute had begun making garments and vessels to be used in the third temple when it is built. The United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2018.

Jesus hinted at what generation would see his return when he said that there would be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and on earth distress among the nations that are confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world, because the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Messiah coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Jesus said, *when these things begin to take place*, Christians should stand up and raise their heads in hope, because their *liberation (the transformation of their bodies), and the messianic kingdom are near* (Lk 21:25-31).

At the start of the 20th century, there were only a few dozen independent sovereign states on the planet; today, there are nearly two hundred! Israel became a nation in 1948. Most of the world's countries were born during this time; forty one states gained sovereignty from UK and France between 1956 and 1966, and eighteen from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia between 1990 and 1992. Jesus told us to look at the fig tree (Israel) and all the trees. As soon as they come into leaf, we are to know that summer, with its connotation of harvest and judgment, is near. The coming of the Messiah will be preceded by terribly destructive events: war, earthquake and the wrath of God. God's disappointment in not finding fruit on his fig tree (Jer 8:13, Hos 9:10, Joel 1:7) was again highlighted when Jesus cursed the fig tree that had no fruit (Mk 11:12-14) and in the following verses he cleansed the temple (Mk 11:15-17), because Israel had made God's house of prayer a den of robbers.

According to the theses discussed in this book, the saints are the heirs of the messianic kingdom. The saints include many Jews who were believers in Old Testament days, Jewish Christians in the early church, and messianic believers to this day. But the nation of Israel who will be converted after Jesus' return are too late to

be included in the church. Their conversion will occur after the rapture of the saints, and they will remain on earth as subjects of the messianic reign. Their inheritance is therefore somewhat different from that of the church. As believers, they will be grafted back into the olive tree, the patriarchs being the original olive root, representing God's elect people. Israel was broken off because of their unbelief and the Gentiles were grafted in because of their faith. Israel will be grafted back in again, because God's gifts and calling are irrevocable, beyond recall. But their resurrection will not occur until the last judgment. The Messiah will reign over all nations and Israel will be given top place among the nations, because Israel are his own people, and the Messiah will rule on David's throne from Jerusalem.

God has made two covenants with mankind. He made the old covenant with Israel through Moses at Sinai. Then he made the new covenant with the church at Jesus' first coming, which he will also make with Israel at his second coming. Individual Gentiles were integrated into Israel in the old dispensation, and individual Jews have always been part of the church. Their future is one. The old covenant Jews are included in the church and the new covenant Jews will be included after the second resurrection. Jesus said that many will come from east and west and will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in his kingdom (Mt 8:11). The church, which is comprised of believers from all nations, is hardly a parenthesis in God's plan, as some maintain. Rather, the church is God's primary redemptive purpose, God's way of extending the offer of his salvation to all nations.

Suffering and the Kingdom

The church needs to understand what Paul meant when he said that God has given us the privilege, not only of believing in Christ, but also of suffering for him (Phil 1:29). In my study of the book of Revelation, I see that the last generation of Christians is going to pass through enormous suffering and there will be many martyrs. We will certainly be protected from the wrath of God that is poured out on the world in the last days, but I am not convinced by pretribulation rapture arguments that exclude the church from

the persecution that Antichrist and his dictatorship will bring. Peter said that it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God (1 Pet 4:17).

Our attitude to martyrdom should be positive. The times will be unbelievably evil, and death will be preferable to life, knowing that in a very short time the Messiah will arrive, and the church will be resurrected, never to suffer or die again. If we are called upon to give our lives for the Lord, we will emulate our Savior who gave his life for us, and we should count that a great privilege as Paul said. If we are God's children, we are his heirs and co-heirs with the Messiah, provided *we suffer with him*, in order that we may also be glorified in him (Rom 8:17).

Following are verses from Revelation that warn us about the *sufferings of the saints* during the Great Tribulation.

1:9 I'm John, your brother and *partner in the tribulation*, and the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

2:10 Don't be afraid of what you are going to *suffer*. The devil will throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. For ten days you will have tribulation. *Be faithful until death*, and I will give you the crown of life.

3:10 Because you have obeyed my command to *endure*, I will keep you through the hour of testing that is coming on the whole world to test those living on the earth.

6:9-11 I saw under the altar the souls of *those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne*. They cried out in a loud voice, "Holy and true Sovereign, how long will it be before you judge and take revenge on those living on the earth who *shed our blood*?" They were told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers was completed, *who would be killed as they themselves had been*.

12:17 The dragon became angry with the woman and went off to *make war on the rest of her children, those who keep God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*.

13:7, 10 *The Antichrist was allowed to wage war on the saints and to conquer them. He was also given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.*

14:12-13 *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to their faithfulness in Jesus. How blessed are the dead, those who die in the Lord from now on!*

16:6 *You gave them blood to drink because they spilled the blood of saints and prophets.*

17:6 *The woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.*

18:24 *In Babylon was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who were slain on earth.*

20:4 *John saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony of Jesus and for the word of God. They didn't worship the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.*

11

How the Kingdom of God Comes

*May your kingdom come. May your will be done on
earth as it is in heaven. – Matthew 6:10*

The whole idea of a kingdom *coming* is a collocational clash in many languages. As the basic meaning of kingdom is kingship, an abstract noun, it is not natural to talk about it coming. You can't have a kingdom without a king, so it is more meaningful to talk about the coming of the king rather than the coming of his kingdom. As long as Jesus is in heaven, the kingdom on earth cannot be said to have come, or to have been inaugurated.

The inference of the words "your kingdom come" in the Lord's prayer is that the kingdom is not yet here. It is a prayer for Jesus' return, when his messianic kingdom will be established, and the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We can't pray for God's universal reign to come. God never stops reigning. This prayer only makes sense when we interpret it as referring to the kingdom from God, the kingdom that he is establishing on earth with his Son Jesus as regent. Let us look at other Scriptures where the kingdom is spoken of as coming.

The Foreshadowing of the Kingdom

Although the expression "kingdom of God" does not occur in the Old Testament, "throne of the Lord" occurs with reference to the house of David. King David said that out of all his sons, God had selected his son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord, ruling over Israel (1 Chron 28:5). In the same vein the Queen of Sheba told King Solomon that the Lord had set him on his throne to be king for the Lord his God (2 Chron 9:8). The throne belonged to God, but as an earthly throne, it was appropriate for a man to be the king. It was the throne that God established here on earth for the kings of Israel to rule on as his regents over his people. God spoke to David through the prophet Nathan about Solomon, saying that he would build a house for his name, and that he would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. He would be a father to him, and he would be his son (2 Sam 7:13-14). Although the words were spoken to Solomon, the ultimate fulfillment is in Jesus and in the kingdom of God that he proclaimed. As Isaiah prophesied: To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder (Isa 9:6). This is also reflected in Psalm 2:7-8, where the psalmist proclaims the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become

your Father. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession”.

Jesus and the apostles taught that the focus of the kingdom of God was not God's sovereign rule over the universe. Rather, it was a kingdom established by God in contrast to man-made kingdoms. The prophet Daniel spoke about someone like a Son of Man, who was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan 2:44, 7:13-14).

The kingdom of God has its roots in the kingdom of Israel, and in this kingdom, the king is always a Jew, a descendant of David. In the New Testament, the focus is not on God as king; he rules on earth through a man, his Son, whom he has appointed. Jesus didn't tell Pilate that his kingdom didn't belong to this world; he said that his kingdom was not from this world (Jn 18:36), it didn't have its origin here. The Greek preposition ἐκ indicates source. His kingdom will be in this world, but his authority to rule it is from outside.

Salvation includes so many blessings including forgiveness of sins, a new compliant heart, eternal life, adoption as a child of God, union with the Messiah, and being a joint heir with the Messiah. All of this will culminate in our glorification: the resurrection of the body and inheriting the monarchy in the messianic kingdom. Some of these blessings are ours already, but our inheritance should not be regarded as “realized eschatology”. We have blessings and the status we receive as believers in Jesus under the new covenant, but not the blessings that belong to the future messianic kingdom.

“Realized eschatology” should at least mean that the reality has been experienced in some sense. Paul says that we have already been glorified (Rom 8:30). Some expositors think that the past tense expresses the absolute certainty of the event to come. Others refer it to the eternal fulfillment of the decree in divine understanding. In either event, it is only by faith that we believe that believers are presently glorified or reigning. Visible glorification will start with our resurrection.

The Kingdom Draws Near

After Jesus' birth the Magi asked where was the one who had been born king of the Jews (Mt 2:2). Emmanuel wasn't far away. He was the Lord, the promised king, the son of David, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7. He was born *to be* king of the Jews one day, but to onlookers he was just a baby boy lying in an animals' feeding trough, born to poor parents, Joseph and Mary.

Jesus' Exaltation

After his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father on his throne in heaven. That is the figurative way it is expressed; it is really a metaphor. It means that Jesus resumed his position as sovereign over the universe, together with the Father. There is no talk of a coronation. Jesus has always been king on the heavenly throne. He is always seated in glory, the glory the Father gave him before the creation of the world. In John 17:24, Jesus expresses a desire that his followers see his glory and be with him where he *is*. As God the Son, this has eternally been his rightful place. We can get some appreciation of this by reading John's vision of the heavenly throne in Revelation 4-5. But this is not the kingdom of God. This is a vision of God's sovereignty. The reign of Jesus the Messiah on earth is in the future.

In the New Testament we are told many times that Jesus was exalted to that place of honor at the right hand of the Father. When Jesus was ascending to heaven, two angels stood beside the disciples and told them that this same Jesus, who had been taken up from them into heaven, would come back in the same way they had seen him go up into heaven (Acts 1:10-11). In Psalm 110:1-2 the Lord tells his regent, the Messiah, to sit at his right hand until he subdues his enemies and *extends his mighty scepter from Zion*. The Davidic king will rule in the midst of his enemies, forcing them into submission.

Ps 110:1 is quoted four times in the New Testament (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk 20:42, Heb 1:13), and there are another eleven references to Jesus being seated at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19, Acts 2:33, 5:31, Rom 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Pet 3:22). From the throne in heaven he holds all things together (Col

1:17), but we are never told that he is ruling over the earth from there. The Father told the Son to sit at his right hand *until* he makes his enemies a footstool for his feet. Jesus has been waiting since that time and he is still waiting (Heb 10:13). He will continue to wait until the Day of the Lord, when the Antichrist is defeated, and the kingdom of the world becomes the messianic kingdom (Rev 11:15). That is when his enemies will be defeated. That is the great day of judgment, and once judgment starts, salvation ends, so the Lord is being patient. He desires all everyone to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), not wanting any to perish (2 Pet 3:9).

Jesus spoke to the Sanhedrin about his coming exaltation, saying that they would see him seated at the right hand of the mighty God (Lk 22:69). After his resurrection and his ascension, the apostles preached boldly about Jesus to the crowds saying that he had been *exalted* to the right hand of God, so Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:33, 36). His earthly judges had rejected him as Lord and Messiah. His messiahship, that had been announced at his baptism when God said, “You are my Son”, was now confirmed by his resurrection. He was declared by the resurrection to be the powerful Son of God, the Messiah (Rom 1:4). The apostle Peter added his testimony before the Sanhedrin, saying that God had exalted Jesus to his right hand as Prince and Savior, in order to extend repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31).

The apostles had earlier asked Jesus when he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus didn’t deny that he would do that, but he commanded them to go and be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The fulfillment of this command was a necessary requirement before the end would come and the new age inaugurated (Mt 24:14). The Lord is building his church community; he is calling out a people from every nation and culture, a people who will be united to him, and who will rule with him during his messianic reign.

The Holy Spirit takes a major role in everything. Whatever one member of the Trinity does the other members are always involved. But we never read in Scripture about the Spirit sitting on the throne with the Father and the Son. Rather he is before the

throne (Rev 1:4, 5:4). However, the Holy Spirit has a major role in empowering the apostles and other servants of Christ throughout the church age, whether evangelists, missionaries or teachers, and in regenerating those who respond to the gospel with faith. In this way people from every tribe, language, people, and nation are being brought into the kingdom, and they will reign over the earth. The Messiah is presently on the throne in heaven from where he pours out his Spirit into our hearts. In this way he enlightens and teaches his people, he empowers his people for service, he guides them as the Good Shepherd. The Bible does not teach that the Messiah rules the church or individual Christians. I am not denying that Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth, or that he is head of the church, or that he is Lord and God. The emphasis of the New Testament is not on Jesus presently ruling, but on his future rule when he comes as king. In his present ministry, he is rather our comforter, our friend, our brother, our helper, our mediator, and our savior. At the same time, we acknowledge him as our Lord and our God.

When Paul taught about Jesus' exaltation, he said that God had raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm, where he is above every ruler, authority, power, dominion and every name that can be named, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come (Eph 1:20-21). He saw the messianic kingdom as a future event that follows his second coming and the resurrection of those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:24-25, 2 Tim 4:1). He must reign until he puts all enemies under his feet, including death.

Jesus' Enthronement on Mount Zion

When Jesus was born, he was born king, because that was his dignity and his destiny, but up until now he has not received his earthly messianic kingdom. The messianic kingdom is from God; it is not a worldly kingdom like the Roman empire. When he returns, he will rule from sea to sea and from the River Euphrates to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:10). It is at that time that the Lord will install him as king over all the earth and enthrone him in Zion (Ps 2:6-8). The Lord in this context is the Father, Jesus is the Son. The Father is sovereign ruler over the universe. The Son is the

Father's representative on earth. Vassal kings and regents were often spoken of as having a father-son relationship. A regent is someone appointed to administer a country because the monarch is a minor, incapacitated or absent. Jesus is the Father's regent during the millennium, because the world was created for mankind to rule (Gen 1:28).

God will become Jesus' Father in this respect when Jesus starts his reign (Ps 2:7). Psalm 2 has always been regarded as messianic, and it is evidence for the enthronement of Jesus on Mount Zion. The apostle Peter included Herod and Pilate among the kings that conspired against the Messiah (Acts 4:25-28), but the main fulfillment is future on the Day of the Lord.

This enthronement of the Messiah is what Daniel saw in his vision 530 years before the Messiah was born. Dominion was given to the Son of Man along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion would be an everlasting dominion that would never pass away, his kingship would never be destroyed (Dan 7:14). The context of Daniel 7 is Daniel's vision of the fourth beast and the small horn that had eyes like those of a human being and a mouth that boasted with audacious claims (Dan 7:8). It has a close correlation with Revelation 13 where the beast (the Antichrist) and the false prophet are permitted to wage war against God's holy people for 42 months during the Great Tribulation, and to conquer them before being slain by the rider on the white horse (Rev 19:11-21).

Jesus was not in the dark about his identity, nor his destiny, but there was one thing that he, as the human Messiah, was not to know and share; the date of his coming (Mk 13:32), which is also the time of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-7). He hinted at his future in a parable, when he said that a prince went to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return (Lk 19:11-12). His time in that "distant country" is now 1990 years! When the prince returns, he will reward his servants according to their faithfulness, and as for his enemies who didn't want him to be their king, they will be executed (Lk 19:27). This punishment will apply to all who reject his rule, but especially those armies who oppose him at the battle of Armageddon on the day of his return. They will be slaughtered in his presence.

The establishment of the kingdom of God is the central theme of the final book of the New Testament. It is the unveiling of the future events which will occur at the end of this age, especially the last seven years, otherwise known as the Great Tribulation, and the glorious return of the Messiah. He will come in the clouds, and every eye will see him, especially those who pierced him (the Jews), and all the tribes of the land (the Jews) will mourn because of him (Zech 14:10-12, Rev 1:7).

There are two passages in Revelation that signal the arrival of the kingdom. In Revelation 11:15, after the seventh angel blows his trumpet, loud voices in heaven declare that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah. Then in Revelation 19:11-16, John sees heaven standing open and a white horse whose rider is named Faithful and True. On his head are many royal crowns, and the armies of heaven follow him on white horses. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations which he rules with an iron rod. On his robe and thigh, he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

Satan Currently Rules the World

Despite the fact that the risen Jesus told his disciples that he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, he is not yet currently ruling this world as God's regent. It is not yet time for him to intervene. There is another power in charge down here, whom Paul calls Satan. He is the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). Paul warned Christians that their struggle was not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of the domain of darkness, and evil spiritual forces in the domain of the air (Eph 6:12). The whole world lies under the control of the evil one, his influence is widespread.

From the heavenly throne Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and in heaven he intercedes with the Father for the saints. All powers in heaven are in submission to him (1 Pet 3:22). Jesus is superior to them all, but he is waiting for the day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet (Heb 10:13). God will subdue the enemies at the climax of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns. The major defeat will be at the battle of

Armageddon, when God destroys the Antichrist and his evil empire. It is only after that battle that the Messiah will begin his messianic rule, and he will reign until he puts all remaining enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25).

The First and Second Comings of Jesus

Before Jesus' birth the kingdom was promised and predicted in many prophecies, where God said he had set his king on Zion, his holy mountain, and he would give him the nations as his heritage, the ends of the earth as his possession. The Lord has appointed the dominion of the world to his Son. The oldest proclamation of this decree is found as early as 2 Samuel 7:13-14, written over three thousand years ago, but this worldwide kingdom has never been established. There was a foreshadowing of it in the kingdom of Israel with David and Solomon, but that kingdom was cut down and it now remains for a shoot (the Messiah) to come up from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1).

With the birth of Jesus, we are told that the Messiah has arrived. Angels spoke to Zechariah, Joseph, Mary and the shepherds about the baby Jesus, and they left them in no doubt that this was the birth of the Messiah. Devout Simeon and prophetess Anna also announced that he was the Messiah, and he was called king of the Jews by the Magi (Mt 2:2). After his arrest, Jesus answered in the affirmative when asked by Pilate if he was a king (Mt 27:11). But the kingdom was not established at that time; the awaited Messiah was crucified.

In the visions that the apostle John saw, Jesus said three times that he would be coming soon! (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). This “soon” seems like a long time, but Jesus obviously wanted his disciples from all ages to be hoping expectantly for his return. For Jesus, his second coming is the next great visitation.

When being judged by the Jewish Sanhedrin, the high priest stood up and put him under oath before the living God to tell them if he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus replied curtly: “You said it!” Then he added that they would see him seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mt 26:62-64). This was a clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14 from where Jesus took the title Son of Man. But this prophecy is set in the last days, in

the time of Antichrist, and it is not until that time that Jesus will return. Jesus told Caiaphas that from that time on, he would be seated at the right hand of God (Lk 22:69). This is where Jesus is now, from the time of his ascension until the day he comes again.

When answering the disciples' question about the sign of his coming and the end of the age, Jesus referred them to Daniel 7 again, saying that immediately after the Great Tribulation and the darkening of the sun and moon, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, his sign would appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) would mourn, when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt 24:29-30). Luke says that there will signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and distress on earth among the nations who will be confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint from fear and apprehension because of what is happening to the world (Lk 21:25-27). The cosmic disturbances, whatever the cause, will produce tsunamis.

Old Testament prophecies about the Day of the Lord portray graphically the situation at that time (Joel 2:2,10, 30-31). There will be a large and mighty army, and blood and fire and billows of smoke. It will be a day of darkness and gloom, clouds and blackness. The sun, moon and stars will be blotted out, without a ray of brightness (Amos 5:20). The whole world will be consumed (Zeph 1:18). Then suddenly the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem (Joel 3:16). This may be the brilliance of the glory of God that will accompany Jesus. Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. The sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory (Ezek 43:2). The Messiah will return with his saints to Jerusalem before roaring forth to defeat his enemies at Armageddon.

Everyone will see Jesus' return, and not on mobile phones or TV, because communications will be down with all the destruction of the Great Tribulation; the warfare, the earthquake, the cosmic changes, and the wrath of God being poured out on the earth.

The theme of the book of Revelation is announced in the first chapter:

“Look, he is coming in the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen” (Rev 1:7)

The phrase “he is coming with the clouds” is from the messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14, the same passage from where Jesus took the title “Son of Man”. He will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mk 8:38), to establish his eternal kingdom, and all nations will serve him. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, or possibly, “namely, those who pierced him”. *Kai oitines* occurs again in Revelation 20:5, where it definitely has explicative force: “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony, *namely, those* who had not worshipped the beast”. John is alluding to Zechariah 12:10, where the Lord says, “they will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child.” Why would John say “*even* those who pierced him” when it is something prophesied and to be expected? I think it makes more sense to translate “*namely those* who pierced him”. The Jews at Jerusalem will be the focus of Jesus’ return; they are the ones whom he is coming to save. It is the Jews who pierced him (Jn 19:37), and it is they who will mourn for him.

The phrase “all the tribes of the land will mourn” (ISV) occurs in Matthew 24:30 and refers to Israel’s mourning at the Messiah’s coming. This translation is superior, because it fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10-12, where the Lord pours out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, and they look on him whom they pierced, and the land mourns, each clan by itself. By contrast, the nations of the world curse God (Rev 16:9, 11, 21), rather than mourning in sorrow and repentance.

In a vision John saw a white cloud, and on the cloud sat someone who was like the Son of Man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. He swung his sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped (Rev 14:14-16). This is a metaphor for the resurrection and rapture of the righteous. Another angel swung his sickle and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:17-20). This is a metaphor for the bloody destruction of the multitudes in the valley of judgment (Joel 3:12-14), the major theme of the book of Joel, which will be executed at Jesus’ coming (Rev 19:15). This harvest of the righteous and the wicked can be compared with John the Baptist’s words in Matthew 3:12, where Jesus is pictured with his winnowing fork in his hand, gathering his wheat into his barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Harmonizing Revelation 19-20 with Other Scriptures

In Revelation 20:2-7, the messianic reign is described with much repetition as being millennial. One thousand years is repeated six times! It is stated clearly that Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss for one thousand years, so that he might not deceive the nations anymore, *after* which he is released for a short time to go out to deceive the nations again. It is also stated clearly that the righteous dead come to life; they are resurrected to reign with Christ on earth for that same thousand years, and the rest of the dead do not come to life until the thousand years are over.

Those who remove the messianic age from the world's future history have to interpret this passage unnaturally.

1. They say that Satan is already bound, now, despite the fact that he is called the god of this world, and that our present struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
2. They say that Satan will be released before Christ comes again, whereas our passage says that the devil will be released and finally caught *after* the thousand years are over, and that he will be thrown into hell (20:10) where the beast and the false prophet are, they having been thrown into hell at Christ's return, before the thousand-year's reign began (19:20). The beast and the false prophet will be captured at the battle of Armageddon at Christ's coming, their armies will be killed with the sword (19:21) and left for birds to eat, while the final army that Satan will gather for battle after the millennium will be destroyed by fire that comes down from heaven (20:9). Granted that these battles both occur in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and both involve armies gathered from the nations, there still remain two battles one thousand years apart with different outcomes.
3. They say the first resurrection spoken of here is not a bodily resurrection of the righteous dead, but rather their regeneration, despite the fact that there are many verses scattered throughout the New Testament that speak of the resurrection of the righteous. In this passage, the resurrection occurs after their martyrdom at the hand of the beast, and those who participate in it are said to be blessed

because the second death has no power over them. They have immortal resurrection bodies and will rule with Christ for one thousand years.

4. They say there will be no glorious kingdom on earth with the Messiah sitting on the throne of David as many of the prophets predicted, no restoration of the creation as Paul predicted (Rom 8:21), and no restored nation of Israel (Rom 11:26-29). They say that Christ is ruling now. Granted that he is seated at the right hand of the Father and rules the universe, but there is no verse that says that Christ is now ruling the world, or that the saints are presently ruling the world.

There is no kingdom for the saints to inherit, despite the fact that we are told that they will reign on the earth (Rev 5:10). Jesus told the apostles they would sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28), and he told the churches (Rev 2:26-27) that he would give the overcomers authority over the nations and that they would rule them with a rod of iron. There is no scriptural teaching that the Christian church is the kingdom of God, or that there is a kingdom in heaven which redeemed mankind will rule over, or that there will be another creation which the elect will rule over. This aspect of the saints' glorification is effectively negated.

The following is a natural interpretation of the teaching given in Revelation 19-20.

1. *The Second Coming* (Rev 19:11-21)

A symbolical representation to be sure, but the Messiah will descend from heaven, and with justice he will judge and make war. The armies of heaven will follow him as conquerors (riding on white horses) and they are righteous (dressed in fine linen, white and clean). As verse 8 states that the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, this army consists of the recently resurrected and raptured saints as they come marching in. The kings of the earth have come to wage war against the Messiah, but he will conquer them because he is Lord of Lords and King of kings, *and those who are called, chosen and faithful are with him* (Rev 17:14). The Antichrist and his false prophet are captured and

are consigned directly into hell, while the complete army that dared to gather against the Lord and his Anointed one are killed in warfare and left for the birds to eat. This is the battle of Armageddon. This is judgment day for the nations of the world who rebel against God in their unbelief.

2. *The Resurrection of the Righteous* (Rev 20:4-6)

The first thing the returning Messiah does is to gather the resurrected and transformed saints to himself in the air (1 Thess 4:13-17). The resurrection and rapture of the saints, which precedes Jesus' descent to earth, is not seen by John, his vision is in heaven. He sees some of them sitting on thrones. They had come to life and had begun to reign with the Messiah for the thousand-year period, serving as priests of God and the Messiah. It is explicitly stated that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand-year period was over.

3. *The Binding of Satan* (Rev 20:1-3)

After the defeat of the armies at the battle of Armageddon, Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss, otherwise known as the bottomless pit. Isaiah describes the judgment of the whole earth, when the Lord will punish angelic powers in heaven, and the rulers of the earth on earth. They will be herded together into the Pit and shut up in prison, and *after many days* they will be punished (Isa 24:21-23, cf. 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6). The angel powers are demons or evil spirits. Isaiah says the moon will be embarrassed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord will reign on Mount Zion, and in the presence of its elders there will be glory. This prophecy is important, because it informs us that all the evil powers in heaven and on earth will be imprisoned. The armies opposing the Lord at Armageddon will be defeated, whether spiritual or human, and these evil spirits and the souls of the human opponents are together thrown into the bottomless pit, to be punished after many days. Meanwhile, the Messiah will rule over the earth from his glorious throne on Mount Zion in the presence of the "elders", who may be identified with the elders of Revelation 4:4, representatives of the saints, who will rule with the Messiah from the New

Jerusalem. It is the glory which emanates from the New Jerusalem, hovering over Mount Zion, that causes the moon to be confounded and the sun to be ashamed. They are outshone by the glory of the Lord.

4. *The Millennium* (*Rev 21:1*)

The millennial world is seen by John and described in one verse only. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and the sea was gone. At the last judgment (20:11), the earth and sky fled from God's presence, and no place was found for them. What John sees in this verse is not a new creation, following the disappearance of the first one, it is the renewed earth that the Messiah rules over before the last judgment takes place. God's original plan for his creation, that it would be ruled by humanity on his behalf (Gen 1:26), will be fulfilled by his Messiah and the redeemed. In the original promise of new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17-25), the context clearly shows that it is a promise of a renewed earth, not a new one. There is no promise or description of a new planet in the Bible! Peter says the heavens will be set on fire and disintegrate and the elements will burn up and melt (2 Pet 3:10). That might be atomic warfare, but it is not a total destruction. Despite the graphic description, Peter was looking forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, *according to God's promise* made by Isaiah.

In Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord refashions a new earth. The former things are not remembered. He transforms Jerusalem into a delight and its people a joy. The sound of weeping and of crying are no longer heard in it, nor an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years. People build houses and plant vineyards. The word "create" is better translated as "transform" (BAG). This is not a prophecy about a brand-new creation, but about a rebirth or regeneration of the world, as Jesus called it. Preaching in Jerusalem after Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to *restore everything*, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21). And Paul said that the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children (at resurrection), when

the creation itself will also be *set free from corrupting bondage* in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children (Rom 8:19, 21).

After the almost total destruction of the world which will occur during the Great Tribulation, the Messiah will restore it and establish justice and righteousness and eliminate the curse.

5. *The New Jerusalem* (Rev 21:2 – 22:5)

The brief vision of the transformed earth is followed by a detailed vision about the New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is a metaphor. It is described as a city with its walls, gates, foundations and streets in other-worldly glory. It is described as a community; the inhabitants of the city are the bride of Christ. It is a symbolic description of her union with the Messiah and with God. The saints are in their glorified state, which begins at the resurrection of the righteous and this city will be their home during the millennium and on into eternity (Rev 2:5). The earthly Jerusalem is the capital city of both Israel and the messianic kingdom, while the New Jerusalem that John saw in a vision coming down from heaven is in another space/time realm, but closely identified with the earthly Jerusalem.

Jesus will only descend once, but his descent from heaven to Jerusalem is described differently in Paul's prophecy (1 Thess 4:16-17), in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 43:1-5), and in Zechariah's prophecy (Zech 14:3-4). The Messiah comes to be glorified in his saints (2 Thess 1:10). He will be glorified by his union with his redeemed, holy and blameless people who will number in the hundreds of millions. The saints will be glorified in union with their Lord and Savior, who is now their King. Their glorification is their resurrection, their union with Christ, as symbolized by the wedding supper of the Lamb, and their status as the monarchy in the messianic kingdom, where they rule with Christ forever.

The nations on earth (survivors of the Great Tribulation) will have their own leaders. The role of the righteous who will rule over the earth with the Messiah is not specified, but in one parable, Jesus rewarded faithful servants by putting them in charge of five or ten cities (Lk 19:17). Paul clearly states that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2).

In his vision, John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2, 9-10). Although the city is symbolic in nature, its descent is an historical event, which is just another way of describing the return of Christ and his elect.

The description we are given in Revelation 21:2 - 22:5 symbolizes our glorification, especially our union with Christ as suggested by the word "bride". In 19:7 and 21:9 we are called the bride of the Lamb. But in Revelation 21:3 the emphasis is on God himself. He is going to live with us; we will be his people, and he will be our God. The throne of God will no longer be in heaven; the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and the city will come down out of heaven. This is our future; united to God for eternity.

How could, maybe a billion people, live in a huge cube like that? How can the saints serve God and rule the world, if they are all concentrated in that one city? The answer is that the New Jerusalem is a metaphor and the details are not revealed. What we do know is that the saints will reign with the Messiah (Rev 3:21), and they will reign over the earth for one thousand years (5:10). Our abode will be intimately connected with the earthly Jerusalem, from where the Messiah will reign. The earthly Jerusalem, as the capital city of his world-wide empire, will be a glorious place and in need of the world's resources. All nations will go there to worship God and his anointed Messiah and to bring their glory and wealth to it.

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride, will take place in heaven. The holy city which comes down out of heaven symbolizes the union of the church with a personally present Christ in glory and government (Rev 19:7-9). The descent of Christ will constitute the inauguration of the messianic kingdom (Isa 62:1-5, Zech 14:5c, 9) and the church will rest and feast and reign with her Lord.

The New Jerusalem is first mentioned in Revelation 3:12, where Jesus promises the overcomers that they will be pillars in the temple of his God, and he will write on them the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from his God, and his new name. The focus here is on belonging to God and Jesus and being a member of the messianic community and kingdom.

In chapter 19 the elders and living creatures worship God and cry “Hallelujah” because the Lord their God reigns. Then they rejoice and praise God, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the lucky bride is the church community that Jesus said he would build (Mt 16:18), people who are chosen by God from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Paul alluded to this marriage in Ephesians 5, where he said that husbands should love their wives just as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25). He goes on to speak of marriage as a union: a man leaving his parents and being united to his wife, an illustration of a profound mystery; the union between the Messiah and the church (Eph 5:31-32). God will dwell with his people, who will be united with him in mind and soul. They will be like him and will participate in his divine nature.

The messianic kingdom will be feudal in nature. The world’s population that survived the Great Tribulation and their descendants will constitute the subjects of the kingdom. They are unredeemed but will walk by the light of the holy city (Rev 21:24), and their leaders will come to the brightness of her dawn. Light has a figurative sense, but here it is probably literal. The glory of the Lord will rise on Jerusalem and his glory will appear over her (Isa 60:1-3). The Redeemer will come to Zion in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of Israel’s God (Isa 52:8-10). During the millennium, the nations of the world will flow to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the God of Jacob. They will learn his ways and walk in his paths (Isa 2:2-4). The Messiah will judge between the nations and settle their disputes. They’ll beat their swords into plowshares, and they won’t learn war anymore. These unregenerate nations will have their own leaders and will bring their wealth to Jerusalem, but they cannot of course enter the New Jerusalem. That privilege is only for those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21:27).

Jerusalem’s gates aren’t shut at the end of the day, because there is no night there (Isa 60:3, 11, 19-20). Only the redeemed can enter the New Jerusalem, so the nations and kings bring their wealth to the earthly Jerusalem which is bathed in the light of the New Jerusalem above it. The Zion of the millennium is the work of God’s hands, for the display of his splendor (Isa 60:21). The nations

will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

The land of Israel and their capital Jerusalem will be inhabited by the nation of Israel, who will be redeemed, but not resurrected. The people of Israel will be subjects in the kingdom, having forfeited their right to rule. Rabbinical teaching held that the Jerusalem above was the heavenly archetype (Gal 4:25-26), and that in the messianic period, it would be let down to earth. Hebrews also teaches that there is a heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). In Revelation the New Jerusalem is the holy city which comes down out of heaven from God (Rev 3:12, 21:2, 10). It corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem, but it is the eternal home of the resurrected and redeemed, and indeed of God himself. It is in a different dimension, but its light is visible above the earthly Jerusalem.

6. *Satan's Doom* (Rev 20:7-10)

When the thousand years are over, Satan is released from his prison and he again deceives the nations into rebelling against God and his people. They march from all over the earth to Jerusalem but are destroyed by *fire* from heaven. Satan and his evil forces are thrown into hell to be tormented forever. This spells the end of the forces of evil that have plagued mankind from the time when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden. This last judgment should not be confused with the battle of Armageddon, because it occurs one thousand years later. After Armageddon, the Antichrist and the false prophet were thrown into hell (19:20), then at the end of the millennium, Satan is thrown into hell where the beast and the false prophet are (20:10).

19:20 Antichrist and his false prophet are thrown into hell

20:2 Satan is bound for a thousand years and cast into the Pit

20:7 After the thousand years, Satan is released from the Pit

20:10 Satan is thrown into hell where the Antichrist is

This final rebellion of the nations is called Gog and Magog, the same term that Ezekiel uses when prophesying about the armies fighting at Armageddon. But those armies were fighting against an Israel who had recently returned to their land, and after their defeat they were consumed by birds. At that time there will be a

great earthquake in Israel which will cause everyone on earth to tremble. Mountains will be overturned, cliffs will crumble, and every wall will collapse. Gog's forces will turn on each other and God will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and his troops and all the many nations with him.

Israel is converted *after* the defeat of Gog (Ezek 39:7, 22, 27-29). Gog and Magog are symbolic names for distant armies from the far north who rebel against God.

7. *The Resurrection of the Wicked* (Rev 20:5)

In contrast to the righteous who are resurrected before the millennium, the rest of the dead don't come to life until the thousand years are ended. The following verses are the only ones which speak of a resurrection of the wicked as well as that of the righteous. (Dan 12:2, Jn 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Rev 20:5). The Greek word *ἀνάστασις* means a "rising" or a "standing up". When referring to the Christian dead it always means bodily resurrection (Isa 26:19, Rom 8:11, 1 Cor 15:35, 42-44, 50-53). Daniel says the dead will "awake". John says that all will come out of their graves, some to (eternal) life, others to judgment and condemnation.

When the wicked come to life at the last judgment, they are also resurrected bodily, because Jesus warned people to be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and *body* in hell (Mt 10:28). He also said that it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one hand, foot or eye than to be thrown into hell with two hands, feet or eyes (Mk 9:43-47). However, the bodies of the resurrected wicked will not be the same as those of the resurrected righteous. Bodily resurrection is a reward for the righteous, a part of their *glorification*. The righteous look forward to the *redemption* of their bodies, the freeing of their bodies from earthly limitations (Lk 21:28, Rom 8:23). This may include the limitation of time and space, as Jesus experienced after his resurrection.

8. *The Last Judgment* (Rev 20:11-15)

The judge is not named, but "he who is seated on the throne" is consistently God in Revelation. However, Jesus said that the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22).

The context is the very end of this world. John said that the earth and the heavens fled from his presence. When the judgment is over, death and Hades and anyone whose name was not found in the book of life, are thrown hell. The last judgment is mainly for the wicked but will include Israel and others who are saved after the Messiah's return. They will be resurrected at the last judgment and will join the rest of the elect in the New Jerusalem.

The church will be resurrected at the first resurrection; there is no evidence that they will be judged here. Jesus said that they have already passed from death to life, and Paul boldly states that there is no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus (Rom 8:1). The judgment seat of Christ is for all believers and can be compared to passing through a fire. The true value of all our attitudes and deeds will be made manifest and individuals will be rewarded accordingly. There is no punishment for sins; that is covered by the blood of Christ. Rewards may be withheld, and some will suffer loss; it is a divine assessment of each person's worth. The wicked are judged according to works, according to what they have done.

The judgment of the "sheep" and the "goats" in Matthew 25:31-33 where the righteous and the wicked are all judged at the same time is a parable, and as such, not all the details can be taken literally. The context is premillennial; Jesus is seated on his glorious throne in Zion and the righteous are invited to come and inherit the kingdom.

12

The Arrival of the Messiah

So keep on watching, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this: if the owner of the house had known when during the night the thief would be coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. So you too, must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you are not expecting him. – Matthew 24:42-44

Nobody can predict the *day* of the Messiah's return by relating events to a timetable, because Jesus said that nobody knows. However, by comparing the teachings of this future time from the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24, Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2, and John's visions in the book of Revelation, the Bible does give us plenty of clues to date these events in relation to Jesus' coming. For example, the Great Tribulation is a seven-year period that precedes Jesus' coming and the millennium is a thousand-year period that follows it. Unbelievers will be surprised by Jesus coming, but believers shouldn't be. They are not left in the dark that his coming should surprise them (1 Thess 5:4). They will certainly have a better idea of the *year* of his return as the time draws closer.

The events that will be considered in this chapter are:

1. Preliminary Signs
2. The rise of the Final World Empire
3. The Rise of Antichrist
4. Daniel's Seventy Weeks
5. The Time of Jacob's Trouble
6. The Day of the Lord
7. The Messiah's Descent to the Mount of Olives
8. The Great Earthquake
9. The Battle of Armageddon
10. The Conversion of Israel
11. The Messiah's Earthly Reign

1. *Preliminary Signs*

When Jesus was asked by his disciples about the signs of his return in Matthew 24, the answer he gave was in three stages. First, he told them not to let anyone deceive them. Many will come claiming to be the Messiah and leading many astray; a warning about false religions. Secondly, he warned them about wars and rumors of wars. But he told them not to be alarmed. There would be wars between nations, famines, and earthquakes in various places, but these would only be the beginning of the birth pains, not the end. Only when these things happen on a global scale, should we consider them to signal the end of the age.

Then Jesus spoke about persecution, apostasy and evangelism. Persecution of Christians and apostasy in the church have been around since its beginning, but there would be an increase in the very last days, especially under the reign of a global leader called the Antichrist. Jesus told his disciples that they would be made to suffer and be killed and be hated by all the nations because of him. People will betray and hate one another. False prophets will appear and deceive many. Lawlessness will increase and the love of many will grow cold. Only those who endure to the end will be saved and enjoy eternal life in his messianic kingdom. The good news about the *kingdom* will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt 24:9-14).

The world-wide preaching of the gospel is a definite sign that the end is near, but how can it be measured? The world has 195 nations and there are now Christians and churches in every one of them. God's word is freely available like never before in written and audio form, including the internet, MP3 players, phone applications and the Jesus film. At the same time, there are many unreached groups among Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus in Asia who do not have a Christian friend or acquaintance.

The final stage of Jesus' response to his disciples concerns the signs of his return to earth and the end of the age. They bring us to the final seven-year period before his return. He spoke of the "abomination that causes desolation" spoken about by the prophet Daniel (Dan 9:27) standing in the holy place, and the reader is cautioned to understand this. Daniel was talking about the destiny of the Jewish people and of their holy city, Jerusalem, and of its sanctuary. An abominable idol was to be set up in the temple.

Jesus said there would be a time of *great suffering, greater than what has happened since the beginning of the world and that will not ever happen again*. If God didn't shorten those days, no one would survive. That sounds like nuclear warfare. For the sake of the elect, God's chosen, those days will be limited. Then, just as lightning flashes from the east to west, the Messiah will return (Mt 24:15-28). The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was a time of terrible suffering for the Jews, but it was only a precursor of later events that would happen when he returns and sends his angels to gather his elect from all over the earth.

The time of great suffering is called the Great Tribulation. It will be the greatest time of suffering that mankind has ever known, and a very difficult time for Israel. It will be characterized by warfare, no doubt nuclear, and the persecution of God's people. It is also a time of God's judgment on the world. Antichrist will rule during the final three-and-a-half-year period and the false prophet will have an image of the Antichrist erected in the holy place, which refers to a third rebuilt temple built in Jerusalem. Daniel certainly spoke of it in that way. There has been no Jewish temple in Jerusalem since the Romans destroyed the second temple in 70 AD, but Jewish groups are preparing for it, including furniture and clothing for the priests.

2. *The Rise of the Final World Empire*

The last world empire is symbolically called "Babylon". It was the first world empire that Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar saw in their dreams, and it was the Babylonians, who in 586 BC, conquered Israel and destroyed the first temple built by Solomon. The final "Babylon" will be a coalition of many countries. Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a great statue represented four empires, generally interpreted as being Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman. The fourth kingdom is described as being as strong as iron; it would shatter and crush everything. The feet and toes of the statue were part clay and part iron, representing a final, unstable coalition of nations. Another weakness will be multiculturalism; people will have different allegiances and this world-wide empire just won't hold together. It is at this time that the Messiah will intervene and set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. This is the messianic kingdom that Jesus referred to as the kingdom from God. When the Messiah returns, he will shatter and crush the world-wide coalition, and establish his kingdom which will stand forever (Dan 2:40-43).

In Daniel's vision, the legs of iron (Dan 2:40) represent the fourth empire, Rome, but Daniel goes on to talk in detail about the feet and toes (Dan 2:41-43), which represent the same empire, but at a later time and in a different form. This is the coalition of nations, described as being an unstable mixture of iron and clay. Countries that surround the Mediterranean may be the base of this future

empire as they were in the past. It is during the time of this last unstable empire, that God will destroy human kingdoms and set up his own kingdom that will never be destroyed; the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed, his own messianic kingdom.

Later, Daniel had a vision of four beasts that represent the same four empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The fourth beast is described as an awe-inspiring, terrifying, and viciously strong animal! It had large, iron teeth, and it devoured and crushed things and trampled under its feet whatever remained. Different from all the previous animals, it had ten horns and would devour *the entire earth*, trampling it down and crushing it (Dan 7:7, 23). This may be political globalization, or a transnational state apparatus.

An angel interpreted the meaning of the dream for him. The four great animals were four kings, or founders of kingdoms, who would rise to power from the earth, but eventually the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan 7:17-18). The four kingdoms, represented by wild animals, are renegade kingdoms established by men who are oblivious to God and his plan. God allows their establishment, but eventually he will establish his own kingdom on earth, putting an end to the corrupt empires that don't acknowledge him. The fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire, represented by the legs of iron, but the feet and toes represent an extension of that kingdom in the last days that will be defeated at the return of Jesus the Messiah. The ten horns represent ten kings or leaders of the most powerful nations. On observing the economic, social and political integration that is happening in our world today, the possibility of a single world empire is great, if not inevitable. It is driven by ever-developing technology in communications and transport, and by multiculturalism; more than half the population growth in western countries is now due to migration. The European Union currently has twenty eight states and there are ongoing negotiations with a dozen others.

3. *The Rise of Antichrist*

The prophet Daniel gives us the most information about the Antichrist, although the name Antichrist only occurs in 1 & 2 Jn. Jesus does not name him, Daniel calls him a "little horn" (7:8), and

“a despicable person” (11:21), Paul calls him the “man of sin” (2 Thess 2:3) and “the lawless one” (2 Thess 2:9), while in Revelation, John simply calls him “the animal” or “the beast”. In 1 John, John talks about many antichrists and doesn’t seem to have the end-time Antichrist in mind. Sometimes the word “animal” or “beast” describes the kingdom, sometimes it refers to the dictator, whose number is 666. Daniel describes his appearance and demise. In his vision, he was thinking about the ten horns (leaders) the beast had, when another horn, a little one, grew up among them. Three of the first horns fell before it. It had eyes like a man (shrewd, crafty) and a mouth that boasted with audacious claims. He kept observing it until the animal was killed and its body destroyed and given over to fire (Dan 7:8, 11 cf. Rev 19:21). This fourth animal (empire) was different from the others, extremely awe-inspiring, with iron teeth and bronze claws. It devoured and crushed its victims and trampled them under its feet. The Antichrist, who will be greater in appearance than his fellows, will wage war against the saints and prevail against them until God comes and passes judgment in their favor, and the time comes for them to possess the messianic kingdom.

The Antichrist will seek to alter God’s times and laws, which may include the calendar, sacred holidays, and Judeo-Christian morality. Nevertheless, the heavenly court will convene, and his authority will be destroyed forever. Then the kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints. Messiah’s kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve him and obey him (Dan 7:19-22, 24-27).

The last world empire (the feet and toes) is an extension of the Roman empire (the legs), which consisted of southern Europe, northern Africa and parts of the Middle East. Antichrist will most probably arise from there, by defeating three confederates. As his name suggests, he will oppose God and Christians and Israel, and God will allow him to conquer them during the three and half years that precede the Messiah’s return.

The “the sacrilegious object that causes desecration” (NLT) spoken about by Jesus is generally believed to be a statue or image of the Antichrist. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus referred us to Daniel 9:26-27 to learn about this. There it says that the people of a coming ruler would destroy both the city and the sanctuary, a prophecy that was

fulfilled by the Roman emperor Titus, when he destroyed Jerusalem and its Jewish temple in 70 AD. Daniel said *the end* will come suddenly like a flood. War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He (the ruler) will make *a binding covenant with many for one week*, and for the second half of the week (three and a half years) he will suspend both sacrifice and grain offerings at the temple. He will set up an abomination that causes desolation at the temple until what God has decreed is poured out on him.

The text of Daniel 9:27 is not clear, but one theory has it that the covenant he makes with *many* will be an extensive peace treaty that allows Israel to build a third temple at Jerusalem. Then, after three and a half years, he puts an end to temple worship and sets himself up as God, placing a detestable idol of himself in the temple, the abomination that causes desolation (Dan 11:31, 12:11, 2 Thess 2:4, Rev 13:14-15).

Jesus warned the Jews that when they saw this object that causes desolation (Mt 24:15-16), they should flee to the mountains. He added that if those days hadn't been shortened, no one would survive, and that there would be desolation until Antichrist comes to his decreed end. His prophecy relates to the end of this age when the Messiah comes, as the following verses (Mt 24:23-28) indicate. Jesus was not interested in the temple that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. At that time most Christians had already fled from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Daniel 12:11 says that from the time the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination is set up, there will be 1290 days. Then he adds that those who wait and arrive at 1335 days are blessed. This time period, about three and a half years, is consistently used to refer to the second half of the Great Tribulation at the end of the age, at which time God still has an interest in Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. Nobody seems to know why an extra month or two is mentioned here, beyond the standard 1260 days or 42 months.

The Antichrist and his false prophet will be captured at the battle of Armageddon and thrown into hell, while his vast armies who will be recruited from all over the world will be slaughtered and left to be eaten by birds.

4. *Daniel's Seventy Weeks*

One day in about 536 BC the prophet Daniel was praying and confessing the sins of his people Israel, when the angel Gabriel appeared to him and gave him an important prophecy about the people of Israel and their holy city Jerusalem. Their future history was described as a 70-week period, each week apparently standing for seven years, instead of seven days, making 490 years in all. However, it is not continuous; there is a long break between the 69th and 70th weeks. At this time Daniel was in ancient Babylon along with the Jews who were in exile. There would be sixty nine weeks (483 years), starting from the date a decree was made to rebuild Jerusalem, and finishing with the coming of the Messiah. Without going into the complicated details, this period has been calculated as being from 457 BC to 27 AD, from the time that Artaxerxes made a decree concerning Ezra and his return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26) to the time when Jesus was baptized and began his ministry.

Gabriel told Daniel that 70 weeks (490 years) were decreed for Israel and Jerusalem, to finish transgression and to *bring in everlasting righteousness*. The long break after the 69th week can be explained by Jesus' words in Matthew 23:38. He told the Jews that their temple was left to them desolate and then he left it for the last time. This period would last until a new temple is built. Jeremiah had prophesied this event, when the Lord said he would forsake his house (whether the house of Israel or the temple) and abandon his inheritance and give the one he loves into the hands of her enemies (Jer 12:7). So Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and the Jews were scattered among the nations. As Jesus prophesied, they fell by the sword and were carried off as captives to all the nations, and Jerusalem has been trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk 21:24). Jesus said the trampling of Jerusalem is a judgment on the Jews, a time of punishment (Lk 21:22) in fulfillment of what had been written (Dan 9:24). The trampling was started when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. and will finish when the Antichrist surrounds Jerusalem and is defeated by the returning Messiah.

After Israel rejected their Messiah and had him killed, the risen Jesus told the apostles to go and make disciples of all nations. The

history of Israel as the people of God was put into abeyance while Jesus built his church community from all the nations. As Paul said in Romans 11, Israel is a branch broken off the olive tree that represents the people of God, and the Gentiles were grafted in, and when their full number is complete, Israel will again be grafted back onto the olive tree. We live in exciting times. Israel has returned to their land and many are the signs that indicate that our world is coming to its prophesied conclusion. In 2017 the United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Jesus said the generation that witnesses the events of Mt 24:14-15, 21, 29, 32 will also see his return (Mt 24:34).

5. *The Time of Jacob's Trouble*

The final seven years will see Israel take a prominent place on the world stage. Despite its small size, nuclear-powered Israel is numbered among the ten most powerful nations of the world. Daniel 9:27 suggests that the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years and allow their temple to be rebuilt, but in the middle of the week, he'll break the treaty, set himself up in the new temple, and demand worship from everyone in the world. That time will be more distressful than any the world has previously known. It will be a terrible time for Christians, and especially for Israel, but the Messiah will return to rescue them from it (Jer 30:7).

The Antichrist's activity during this time is described in Daniel 11:36-45. The Antichrist will do as he pleases. He'll exalt and magnify himself above every god, speaking amazing things against God. He'll succeed until the indignation is completed, because what has been determined must be carried out. He won't recognize any god, because he'll exalt himself above everything. *He'll spend lavishly on military power* to support his position and *act against any opposition* with the help of a foreign god, who may be Satan (Rev 13:2b). Near the end, Egypt will oppose him, and Russia will overrun him with tanks and armies and many ships (Dan 11:40). The Antichrist will invade countries, moving swiftly through them. He'll enter Israel and extend his power over other countries,

including Egypt, Libya and Sudan. Then, reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he'll march out in great anger, intending to destroy many. When he pitches his royal pavilions near Jerusalem, he'll come to his end with nobody to help (Dan 11:45).

6. *The Day of the Lord*

Joel calls the Day of the Lord a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness. He sees a great and powerful people spreading over the mountains. Never has there been anything like it, and there never will be again. Fire devours before them, and behind them a conflagration rages. Before they come, the land is like the garden in Eden; after they leave, there is only a barren wasteland, nothing escapes them. They look like horses and move very fast. They leap over the mountains and rumble like chariots. They are like the roar of wildfire that devours the chaff, like an army drawn up for battle (Joel 2:2-5).

This great army has similarities to a swarm of locusts, but it is a great army of tanks and modern weapons of warfare. Joel continues telling us about the Day of the Lord. The Lord will display warnings in the heavens, and on the earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be given over to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and terrifying day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. True at Pentecost, and also for the Jews in the last days. On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling (Joel 2:32).

In those very days and at that time, when the Lord restores prosperity to Judah and Jerusalem, he will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. He will set out his case against them there, on behalf of his people Israel, because they scattered them among the nations and apportioned his land among themselves (Joel 2:30 – 3:2).

This is Armageddon. Joel continues his description of the judgment of the nations, which terminates in the coming of the Lord and victory for his people. God will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. "Put in the sickle, because the harvest is ripe. Come and go down, because the winepress is full. The wine

vats are overflowing, because their evil is great! Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Judgment! For the Day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Judgment!” The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will roar from Zion and shout from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth will shake, but the Lord will be a refuge and strength for his people Israel. And they will know that he is the Lord their God, dwelling in Zion, his holy mountain. Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no foreigners will invade her again (Joel 3:9-17).

The Lord is calling all the nations to gather their armies and come to Israel for a time of judgment. After the sixth angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the great river Euphrates, the way will be prepared for the kings of the east (Gog) to cross that barrier and head for Israel. Then John saw unclean spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, a counterfeit trinity of evil. They went out and gathered the kings of the whole world for the war of the great day of God. They were gathered to the place called Armageddon (Rev 16:12-16).

Ezek 38-39 describe an invasion of Israel in the last days by an international leader called Gog of the land of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and of Tubal. In the latter years they will be summoned to Israel that has been restored from violence. They will be gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which formerly had been a continuous waste, but which will be populated with people who have been brought back from the nations and living there securely. They’ll arise suddenly, like a tornado, coming like a windstorm and covering the land with all their soldiers (Ezek 38:8-9). This coalition of nations will come from the north: Syria, Turkey, Iran, and many former Soviet Union countries, which are mostly Turkic and Muslim. Revelation 19:11-21 describes Armageddon in a very symbolic way. The horses, eyes like blazing fire, crown, robe, fine linen, sword, iron rod, winepress, supper, beast, fiery lake of burning sulfur are all words and phrases that are used metaphorically. The Old Testament prophecies give more literal descriptions.

The apostle Peter describes the Day of the Lord as a time of worldwide destruction, and it is also the day of the Messiah’s return. The time will arrive unexpectedly, like a thief for unbelievers, but not to the faithful (1 Thess 5:4). The sky will be

set ablaze and pass away with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be laid bare. But it's not the end of the world. According to God's promise, his people are waiting for a renewed heaven and earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:10, 12b-13).

This is in harmony with Jesus' prophecy, when immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. The Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) will mourn, when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they'll gather his elect from all countries, from one end of the earth to another (Mt 24:29-31). The Day of the Lord is not the end of the world. Jesus said that if God had not cut short those days, no one would survive. For the sake of the elect, the days will be shortened (Mt 24:22) and people will survive. It will be a time of massive destruction and the words Peter uses are indicative of nuclear warfare. How could a first century writer be expected to describe the phenomena of our atomic age? Much of the destruction described in Revelation is caused by man. One purpose of God's wrath is to destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:18).

When thinking about the final days and months before the Lord's coming, we should not forget the emphasis the Scripture puts on the destruction by fire. After the sounding of the first four trumpets one third of the earth will be burned by fire; trees, grass, seas and rivers are all affected. At that time the sun, moon and stars will be blotted out by the smoke.

Noah's earth was destroyed by a global flood, and afterward it was regenerated. The present earth is reserved for fire, when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed (2 Pet 3:8), but it will also be regenerated by the Messiah. Much of this destructive fire may be caused by the nuclear warfare.

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord will come with fire, and his chariot will be like a whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury and flames of fire. For with fire and sword *the Lord will judge all humanity*, and those slain will be *many* (Isa 66:15-16). This is an enormous

slaughter; one third of mankind will be killed (Rev 9:15). At that time the cities of the nations will collapse (Rev 16:19). This is *the* day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Pet 3:7).

Peter tells his readers to look forward to and hasten the coming day of God, because it is the day that the Messiah will come and set up his worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness. There will be new heavens and a new earth in keeping with his promise through Isaiah, an earth that will be restored by the Messiah.

The following prophecies all speak of great destruction at the end of the age, related to the battle of Armageddon. Some of them describe a restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, others the return of the Messiah (Isa 13:9-13, 34:1-4, 8, Joel 2:1-11, 30-32, 3:1-2, 12-16, Zeph 1:14 – 2:3, Hag 2:6-7, Mt 24:29-30, Lk 21:25-27, 2 Pet 3:10-13, Rev 6:12-17, 9:13-16, 16:12-21).

Many of these passages describe the destruction and judgment as the Day of the Lord. Some of them refer to the nations and their armies who are fighting against the Lord. And the climax comes when the Lord descends to fight against them. Many passages talk about earthquakes and cosmic disturbances: the darkening of sun and moon, stars falling from the sky, or being dissolved, the sky being shaken or rolled up, or disappearing. This judgment on the nations at the Lord's return should not be confused with the last judgment, when the wicked will be judged as individuals for what they have done, and the earth and the heavens will flee from his presence, and no place will be found for them.

Paul describes the judgment on evildoers at the Lord's return (2 Thess 1:5-10), where he is writing to encourage the persecuted Thessalonian believers. He says it is right that God pays back those who are afflicting them. The believers will get relief when the Messiah comes from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire to take revenge on those who don't know God and refuse to obey the gospel, including their persecutors. When the Lord descends with blazing fire, it is a judgment day scenario, it is Armageddon, when he comes to defeat his enemies who have surrounded Jerusalem and who have been mercilessly persecuting his people. The leaders of the rebellion, the Antichrist and the false prophet are immediately cast into hell to suffer eternal destruction. It is also a day of judgment in favor of the righteous, who will be resurrected and raptured to be with the Lord. And it

is a judgment in favor of Israel who will be converted at this time and shown to be God's chosen people.

Revelation 20 tells of a thousand-year period that follows the Messiah's return, in which Satan will be bound, so that he cannot influence those living on the earth while the Messiah reigns with the resurrected saints. After the millennial rule, Satan will be defeated once and for all, the earth and heaven will pass away, and the wicked will be resurrected and judged according to what they have done. As their names are not in the Lamb's book of life, they will be thrown into the lake of fire, a metaphor for hell (Rev 20:15). That is the last judgment, which should not be confused with the judgment of the nations on the day of the Lord.

7. *The Messiah's Descent to the Mount of Olives*

At the end of the Great Tribulation, when the nations have surrounded and captured most of Jerusalem, the Lord will come down from heaven to fight against them (Rev 19:11-16). The Messiah will descend physically from heaven in the same way that he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11), and to the same place from where he ascended, near Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4, Lk 24:50-51). The prophet Job prophesied, saying, he knew his Redeemer was alive, and *in the end, he would stand on the earth* (Job 19:25). When Jesus' feet touch the earth as he comes in judgment, the greatest earthquake ever will shake Israel and the whole earth as described in Ezekiel 38:19-20 and Revelation 16:17-21. The Mount of Olives will split in two with half of the mountain moving north and the other half moving south (Zech 14:4).

The kings of the earth and their armies will be gathered to make war against the Messiah (Rev 19:19), but the Messiah will defeat these kings and their armies by fire and the word of his mouth (Isa 11:4, Rev 19:21). Others will die by attacking each other in panic (Ezek 38:21, Hag 2:22, Zech 14:13) and by rotting flesh (Zech 14:12), maybe from chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. There will be massive slaughter, graphically portrayed in Revelation as blood flowing as high as a horse's bridle (14:20). The Antichrist and the false prophet will be killed and cast into hell (2 Thess 2:8, Rev 19:20).

The day that Jesus the Messiah returns to earth is a great and glorious visible event, when the Messiah comes on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory with his angels whom he will send out to gather the elect (Mt 16:27, 24:30-31, 1 Thess 3:13, Jude 14, Rev 19:11-14). The saints will meet the Lord in the air (Mt 24:31, 1 Cor 15:50-53, 1 Thess 4:15-17) and then descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:5). All the righteous dead will be resurrected, and the righteous who are alive will be transformed at this time, and the Lord will establish his millennial reign and reign as king over the whole earth.

Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 43:1-7) of the glory of the God of Israel returning to the temple is his depiction of the return of Christ, just as Malachi speaks of the Lord suddenly coming to his temple (Mal 3:1). Ezekiel was standing at the temple gate facing east, towards the Mount of Olives, and he saw the glory of God coming from the east. He heard a sound like the roar of rushing waters and the land was radiant with the Lord's glory. This visible glory entered the temple via the gate facing east and filled the temple. Compare this vision with the descent of the New Jerusalem that John saw (Rev 21:9-11).

8. *The Great Earthquake*

This massive earthquake is a major feature of the distress caused at the end of the Great Tribulation. Its affects are graphically recorded after the sixth seal is broken; the sun will become black, the full moon red, and the stars in the sky fall to earth. The sky will vanish like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island will move from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and all the slaves and free people will conceal themselves in caves and among the rocks in the mountains. They want the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and from the wrath of the Messiah. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to endure it? (Rev 6:12-17). Who can withstand the Lord's indignation (Nahum 1:6) or endure the day of his coming? (Mal 3:2)

Ezekiel talks about a massive earthquake occurring at the time when Gog invades the land of Israel. The Lord's zeal will ignite his

anger and there will be a massive earthquake throughout the land of Israel. He is going to shake the fish, the birds, the wild beasts, the creatures that crawl on the earth, and every single human being who lives on the surface of the earth. Mountains will collapse, cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground. The Lord will call for war against Gog on every mountain, and every weapon of war will be turned against their fellow soldier. He will judge them with disease and bloodshed. He'll shower Gog, his soldiers, and the vast army that accompanies him with a torrential flood, hailstones, fire and sulfur. He'll show his greatness and his holiness and make himself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that he is the Lord (Ezek 38:18-23).

This same earthquake is described again when the seventh bowl is poured out. The sixth bowl resulted in the drying up of the Euphrates, preparing the way for the kings from the east and the kings of the whole world to gather for the war of the great day of God, the great battle of Armageddon. There will be lightning, thunder, and a powerful earthquake, more powerful than any since people have been on the earth. The great city, Jerusalem, will split into three parts, and *the cities of the nations will fall*. Every island will vanish, and the mountains will no longer be recognizable. Huge hailstones, each weighing about forty kilograms, will fall from the sky on people, and they will curse God, because the hail will be so catastrophic.

This great judgment on the Day of the Lord is also described by the prophet Isaiah. He says that every hand will go limp, and every man's courage will melt. They will be terrified; pain and anguish will seize them; they'll writhe like a woman in labor. They'll look aghast at one another; and their faces will be ablaze with fear. The Day of the Lord will come – cruel, with wrath and fierce anger – *to turn the entire inhabited earth into a desolation and to annihilate sinners within it*. The stars of the heavens and their constellations won't shine their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon won't shine its light. The Lord will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. He'll put an end to the pomposity of the arrogant and overthrow the insolence of tyrants. *He'll make people scarcer than pure gold*. He'll make the heavens tremble. *The earth will shake* from its place at the time of the Lord's wrath (Isa 13:7-13).

Jesus himself confirmed the interpretation of these prophecies. He said that immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) will mourn when they see the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt 24:29-30). As the redeemed are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful and worship God in reverence and awe (Heb 12:28).

9. *The Battle of Armageddon*

This great battle will be a gathering of armies representing the nations of the whole world who will go to fight against Jerusalem. They will be anti-Christian, anti-Israeli, anti-God forces gathering to fight against Jerusalem at the instigation of Satan (Rev 16:13-14). The kings of the earth will take their stand and the rulers will conspire together against the Lord and his Messiah, saying, "Let us tear off their shackles from us, and cast off their chains" (Ps 2:2-3). Great numbers from the east and north (Gog and his hordes) will come to fight in Israel at a battlefield symbolically called Armageddon. But godless mankind will be slaughtered.

Zechariah tells us that these armies will end up attacking one another. He emphasizes the siege made against Jerusalem and Judah by all the nations of the earth. The Lord will make Jerusalem an unstable cup to all the surrounding armies when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. Everyone who burdens themselves with it will be crushed. He'll strike every horse with panic and every rider with insanity. He'll keep his eyes on the house of Judah, but he'll blind every horse of the invading armies. He'll search out and destroy all of the nations who come against Jerusalem (Zech 12:2-4, 9). The horse is made ready for the day of battle (Prov 21:31), so the horse is a metaphor for warfare. In these prophecies about the last days, we need to think about tanks and other weapons of warfare.

Jerusalem will be captured, the houses ransacked, the women raped, and half of the city will go into exile, but the remaining people will not be cut off from the city (Zech 14:2). The Lord will

inflict all those who attack Jerusalem with a plague. He'll cause their flesh to rot away, even while they're standing on their feet. He'll cause their eyes to rot away in their sockets, and their tongues to rot away in their mouths. They'll be stricken with a terrible panic from the Lord, and they will all attack each other. It is a day of judgment by God on the nations, but the nuclear contamination and slaughter are brought about by humanity on themselves. The spoils of war, the wealth of the surrounding nations will be gathered up and no doubt used for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Zech 14:12-14).

10. *The Conversion of Israel*

The conversion of Israel in at the end of the Great Tribulation is prophesied by many of the Old and New Testament prophets. It follows the Messiah's return and his victory at Armageddon. Nobody who believes the Bible is the word of God can deny that God has a future for national Israel.

Zechariah said that the Lord will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplications, and they will look on him, the one whom they *pierced* (Jn 19:37, Rev 1:7). *Then they will mourn for him, as for an only son (Zech 12:10). At that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for those who live in Jerusalem, so they can be cleansed from sin and uncleanness. Two thirds of the people living in the land will die, but a third will survive. The Lord will put this third through the fire, refining them. They'll call on his name, and he'll answer them. He'll say these are his people, and they'll say the Lord is their God (Zech 13:1, 8-9).*

Ezekiel said that the Lord is going to display his glory among the nations, and they'll see the punishment that he inflicts on them. *Israel will learn that he is the Lord their God from that day forward. The Lord is going to restore the resources of Jacob and show mercy to the entire house of Israel. He'll be zealous for his own reputation and for his holiness. They'll forget their shame and all of their unfaithfulness by which they behaved so unfaithfully toward him. They'll live securely in their land with none to make them afraid. When he brings them back from the nations, he'll demonstrate his holiness through them right in front of the eyes of*

the world, and they'll learn that he is the Lord their God, who sent them into exile and gathered them back to their land. He won't leave any of them remaining in exile. He won't hide his presence from them again, when he pours out his Spirit on Israel (Ezek 39:21-22, 25-29)

Joel said that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling (Joel 2:32). The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. The earth and the sky will tremble, but *the Lord will be a refuge and stronghold for his people Israel*. Then they will know that he dwells in Zion, his holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy and never again will foreigners invade her (Joel 3:16-17).

Paul declared that God has not rejected his people whom he chose long ago (Rom 11:2). After speaking about their unbelief, Paul says that if their fall meant riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full participation mean! Stubbornness has come to part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith. Then, *all Israel will be saved*. The Deliver will come from Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom 11:25-26). The restoration of Israel to a state of favor with God to which he refers, and which is clearly intimated by the spirit of prophecy, will be a most striking event. The fact that Israel has been preserved as a distinct people is a sign that they will again be reinstated as God's holy nation. Their embrace of Jesus as the Messiah will be an incontestable proof of the truth of the Bible.

John The two witnesses of Revelation 11:1-13 are powerful Christians who preach in Jerusalem "where *their* Lord was crucified". They give testimony about their Lord during 1260 days of the Great Tribulation, which always refers to the last half of the seven-year period (Dan 7:25, 12:7, 11). John is told to go and measure the temple, indicating that a third temple has been built. The two witnesses are called two olive trees, an allusion to Zechariah 4 where the anointed ones are the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, who were responsible for building the second temple in 520-516 BC. The third temple will be built in the first half of the Great Tribulation after the Antichrist has made a peace accord with "many". But he will break the accord halfway through and set himself up as God in the temple. The witnesses

will be immune from harm until their witness is finished. When Antichrist kills them, the unbelievers will celebrate their death, but then, when they come back to life and ascend to heaven, there will be a *great earthquake*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem will be terrified and give glory to God. This anticipates their conversion. It contrasts with the unbelievers at this time, who refuse to repent and can only curse God because of the plagues (Rev 16:9, 11, 21).

11. *The Messiah's Earthly Reign*

When the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Lord returning to the temple in Jerusalem and of his glory filling the temple, he heard the Lord speaking from inside the temple. He told Ezekiel that that was the place of *his throne* and the place for the soles of his feet. That is where he would live among the Israelites forever (Ezek 43:7).

Jesus may not be visible to the Israelites and the nations of the world who come to worship him at Jerusalem. His glory will fill the temple and be visible above Jerusalem. His throne will be there in the temple, and he will rule from there as the promised descendant of David, the Messiah. But it is also possible that Jesus will make appearances to people, as he did for forty days after his resurrection and before the ascension. The Lord told Ezekiel that he would make a covenant of peace with Israel, an everlasting covenant, and that he would establish Israel and increase their numbers, and he would put *his sanctuary* among them forever. His dwelling place will be with them, and he'll be their God and they'll be his people. Then the nations will know that the Lord makes Israel holy, when his sanctuary is among them forever (Ezek 37:26-27).

Jeremiah makes a similar statement. The Lord said that in those days, when Israel has increased greatly in the land, men will no longer say, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord." It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time, they will call Jerusalem the "Throne of the Lord", and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord (Jer 3:16-17).

At the same time, Jesus will be present in the New Jerusalem as described in Revelation 21:2 – 22:5. The throne of God and of the

Messiah will be in the holy city, and his servants (the elect) will serve him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads.

Jesus, the Messiah, will rule over the world from his throne in Jerusalem, and the church will rule with him from their home in the New Jerusalem. Jesus told the apostles they would rule over and judge the twelve tribes of Israel, and by analogy, other Christians will rule over the areas with which they were familiar during their lifetimes.

George Eldon Ladd thought it was impossible to think of two peoples of God through whom God is carrying out two redemptive purposes (*The Gospel of the Kingdom* p. 118), but I don't think we can avoid it. Israel and the church are different communities and God made different covenants with them. The church includes Jews, and Israel included foreigners, but the two cannot be confused. The covenant promises to Israel include the promised land, Jerusalem, a future temple, the human ancestry of the Messiah who is a descendant of David, and future sovereignty over the nations, which they forfeited when the first century Jews rejected Jesus. They are all earthly promises. The covenant promises to the church include union with Christ, forgiveness of sins, redemption through his blood, a sharing in the divine nature, the resurrection of the body, sharing in Christ's rule over the earth, an eternal future in the New Jerusalem, and adoption as sons into God's family. Because we are sons, we are also heirs.

All Israel will be saved at Jesus' return, but not until after the first resurrection, so they will live on earth as survivors of the Great Tribulation. They will live in their promised land, Israel, during the millennium and serve the Messiah (Ezek 37:21-28). At the last judgment, they will be resurrected, and they will join the elect in the New Jerusalem. During the millennium, Israel and the church are both God's people, but Israel will live on the earth, while the resurrected church will live in the New Jerusalem. But eventually the two peoples will become one, as Israel are grafted back into the olive tree and inherit all the blessings that the church enjoys.

13

Chiliasm

How blessed and holy are those who participate in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them. They will be priests of God and the Messiah and will rule with him for a thousand years. – Revelation 20:6

Chiliasm or Millennialism

χίλια is the Greek word for a thousand, from which the word chiliasm is formed. Chiliasm is the belief that after his return, the Messiah will rule the world for one thousand years. Today we call this premillennialism.

There are six occurrences of the word χίλια in Revelation 20:2-7:

20:2 An angel will seize the Dragon, that old serpent, the devil, Satan, and bind him in chains for one thousand years.

20:3 Satan will be thrown into the Abyss, so that he can't deceive the nations until the thousand years are finished.

20:4 The souls of the martyrs will come to life and reign with the Messiah for one thousand years. The first resurrection.

20:5 The rest of the dead will not come back to life until the thousand years have ended.

20:6 The saints will be priests of God and of the Messiah and will reign with him one thousand years.

20:7 When the thousand years end, Satan will be let out of his prison.

There is much evidence in both Old and New Testaments for a messianic reign following the Messiah's return to earth, but the above verses are the only evidence that its duration will be one thousand years, a millennium. The period of forty years is used rather loosely for Israel's wandering in the wilderness and the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. The meaning of one thousand may not be strictly literal, but it is obviously meant to convey the meaning of a very long time, if not close to one thousand years. There is no reason to say it will be more or less, or a non-event. The statements made above are very clear.

Chiliasm in the Early Church

The apostolic history shows us that many of the church fathers leant toward this view. So for example Corinthes, who is thought

to have been a contemporary of the Apostle John. He believed that the Messiah would have an earthly reign lasting one thousand years with his seat in Jerusalem. Papias in the middle of the second century held the same view. Likewise, Justin Martyr (about 150 AD), who said that the majority of Christians of his time were looking forward to an earthly kingdom. But he added that there were also good Christians who had other opinions. Irenaeus (latter part of 2nd century) believed that after the destruction of the Roman Empire, the Messiah would return and would literally bind Satan with a rope.

From the Third Century to the Reformation

Chiliasm made little progress in the church during this time. The decline can largely be ascribed to the extension of Christianity to new countries and to the unbroken prosperity which the church then enjoyed. The Gnostic philosophy of this period and the Alexandrian school with its allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures were also a great detriment to the progress of chiliasm. By far the most important figure of this period was the great church father Augustine, whose far-reaching influence in this matter extended beyond the Reformation, as his views on this were in the main, accepted by the four great reformers of the sixteenth century. Augustine believed the Old Testament prophecies and Revelation 20 were to be interpreted spiritually, symbolical of the eternal glory which the church would receive in the other world.

At the time of the crusades, it was again thought that the coming of the Messiah was at hand, in consequence of which many Christian worshippers returned to Palestine. Whenever war or persecution was present, chiliasm again received a fresh impetus. In that way, it found acceptance by several sects in the middle ages, but from the time of Augustine up to the Reformation, chiliasm had little influence in the Christian church.

The view of the Reformed Church on this subject finds expression in the Confession Helvetica: "We reject the Jewish fancy that there shall be before the day of judgment a golden age in which the pious shall take over the control of the world after their enemies, the ungodly, have been subdued, because the evangelists Matthew and Luke, as seen in Matthew 24-25 and in Luke 18, and also in the

apostolic teachings as found in 2 Thessalonians 2 and in 2 Timothy 2, 4, give us quite a different representation” (*Article on Judgment*, translated from Dutch). So also, in the *Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis*, no mention is made of a glorious reign of peace and prosperity of the Messiah and the saints, or of two resurrections after the Messiah’s return. The last article of this confession explicitly states that the resurrection and last judgment will both take place at the time of the Messiah’s coming.

A quick glance at those chapters soon shows that their arguments are weak. It is an argument from silence. Just because something is not mentioned somewhere doesn’t mean it is not true, and especially if it is attested by other Scriptures. Paul taught that at the Messiah’s return the dead in Christ will rise from their graves (1 Thess 4:16). There is no evidence here of a general resurrection, only Christians are mentioned. And Paul said that each person will be resurrected in the proper order: first the Messiah, then those who belong to the Messiah when he comes (1 Cor 15:23). He doesn’t even mention the resurrection of the wicked. Perhaps he is concentrating on those who receive an immortal, supernatural body at resurrection. Which leaves us with the question as to whether the wicked will be resurrected bodily. Revelation 20:13 simply says that the sea and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. But in John 5:28-29 Jesus says that a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out, some to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of judgment. Rising from the grave sounds like a bodily resurrection.

The Resurrection of the Righteous

Paul says that the Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command and the dead in Christ will rise, but he says nothing about the wicked. He is only interested in the resurrection and rapture of the righteous.

Daniel 12:2 and John 5:29 don’t make a distinction in the timings of the resurrections of the righteous and the wicked, but because of progressive revelation, we must respect the apostle John’s words. The martyrs will come back to life and rule with the Messiah for one thousand years, but he explicitly says that the rest of the dead don’t come to life until the thousand years are over.

Revelation 20:4b-5 calls the resurrection of the martyrs “the first resurrection”, necessitating a second.

The saints of all ages will be resurrected at this time, not just those who were beheaded in the Great Tribulation. For the last two thousand years, the Messiah has been building his church community, and they will all reign with him. The martyrs are singled out for special mention as they are in focus, and they may even be the majority during the final years of this age. The four living creatures and the twenty four elders who surround God’s throne sing a new song, saying that the Messiah had purchased people from every tribe, language, people, and nation and made them to be a monarchy and priests for God, and that they would reign *over the earth* (Rev 5:9-10). In addition, *Daniel* 7:27 says that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations *of the earth* would be given to the saints of the Most High. And Paul says that if we die with the Messiah, we will also live with him, and if we endure, we will also reign with him (2 Tim 2:11-12a).

Mt 24 and parallel passages are concerned with signs leading up to the Lord’s return, not with events that follow. But Matthew does record Jesus’ teaching about his reign on earth. He said, when he comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him (Mt 25:31-32a). And again, he said that when he sits on his glorious throne in the new age, his disciples will also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). Both those passages make it clear that the Messiah’s reign and judgment will take place here on earth.

John Calvin wrote in his Institutes that millennialism is a “fiction” that is “too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation”. The Anglican Church originally formalized a statement against millenarianism in the Anglican Articles. This is observed in the 41st of the Anglican Articles, drawn up by Thomas Cranmer (1553), describing the millennium as a “fable of Jewish dotage”, but it was omitted at a later time in the revision under Elizabeth (1563). John Calvin was a great theologian, but he didn’t say much about eschatology, it wasn’t his strength. In his commentary of the New Testament, he omitted the book of Revelation. In fact, all the major Protestant Reformers neglected the apocalyptic Scriptures, and they especially ignored the messianic reign. They embraced

the return of the Messiah, judgment day, and the existence of heaven and hell, but influenced by Augustine and Platonic thinking, they were too heavenly minded to see a bright future for this material world. Augustine's idea was that the kingdom of God consisted of eternal life with God in heaven. And unfortunately, this is what most people in the traditional churches still believe today. The belief has no substance to it, there are no details about how it would eventuate. It is not based on a sound interpretation of what Jesus taught when he spoke about the kingdom of God.

To say that millennialism is a fiction is not true. Revelation 20 speaks of the millennium six times, and twice it is stated that those who share in the first resurrection would reign with the Messiah for one thousand years. It is a formidable challenge to have great theologians like the Reformers and Augustine speaking against chiliasm. I hope that my arguments equating the kingdom of God with Messiah's reign will throw more light on the subject.

In Roman Catholic theology, the kingdom of God is identified with the Roman Catholic Church, an identification again due to Augustinian influence. The Reformers emphasized a spiritual and invisible side of the kingdom, a spiritual sovereignty that is exercised through the preaching of the word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. With the Enlightenment, the kingdom came to be increasingly understood as individualistic; grace and peace ruling in people's hearts. Then in liberal theology it developed in a moralistic direction, or in the forward march of social righteousness and communal development. How far from the truth things develop when the human thought becomes more important than the natural interpretation of God's word.

Amillennialism

General beliefs of people with an amillennial persuasion:

1. They reject the idea that Jesus will reign over the earth for a thousand-year period.
2. They hold that the kingdom of God equates with the church and the spread of the gospel.
3. They hold that the Messiah is presently reigning through the church.

4. They hold that Satan was bound from the ascension, or Pentecost, so that he is prevented from deceiving the nations!

5. They hold that the saints reign spiritually on earth (Augustine), or that they will reign with the Messiah in heaven.

6. They hold that the first resurrection (Rev 20:6) refers to either regeneration (Augustine) or ascension to heaven (Hoekema and Hendriksen).

It is not just the way different sides interpret the kingdom of God that is important; a correct interpretation should result in all the kingdom of God verses having a satisfactory consistent meaning. I believe that this can only occur when we look at them through the right-colored glasses. Rather than starting off with a certain philosophical or eschatological view like amillennialism, and then trying to interpret the New Testament accordingly, we need to start by recognizing that the Gospels were written as a record of the arrival of the prophesied Jewish Messiah, and that Jesus' use of the terms "Son of Man" and "kingdom of God" are to be interpreted as referring to the Messiah and his reign respectively.

It is sometimes claimed by amillennialists that when Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not *from* this world (Jn 18:36), he gave evidence that the kingdom of God was not an earthly kingdom. But most commentaries are agreed that the Greek text relates to the source and nature of the kingdom. The preposition "ἐκ" typically means "from". Jesus was not denying that his kingdom would be in the world, he was implying that his kingdom was from God and not from man.

It is also claimed that the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus and the apostles is unaccompanied by millennial ideas. Jesus didn't mention the millennium, but the following verses certainly refer to the messianic reign, especially in terms of first century Jewish thought: Mt 8:11, 19:28, 25:31-34, Lk 22:39-30. Apart from Jesus' own words, the Gospel writers have added more material (Mk 11:10, Lk 1:32-33). Revelation is all about the Messiah and his final victory over evil and his enemies. The climax is expressed in kingdom terms: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever" (Rev 11:15). BAG interprets it as: Our Lord has assumed the sovereignty of the world. In both Revelation 11:17, 19:6 we are

told that the Lord God Almighty has begun to reign. Revelation 11:15, 19:13-16 make it clear that it is the Messiah who has begun his reign on earth.

There are some amillennialists (Hoekema, Storms) who see the necessity of an earthly reign of Israel to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies, so that Messiah's reign might be disclosed in history (Storms, *Kingdom Come*, p. 348). Storms' alternative to the thousand-year millennium is that these promises will be fulfilled on a new earth, which inaugurates the eternal state! However, can it be called historical when it no longer happens on this current earth? When this present earth disappears (Rev 20:11), the Messiah will hand over his kingdom to the Father. We have no revelation of what happens after that.

Amillennialists claim that their teaching on the kingdom of God has no national limitations. It is true that Jesus and the apostles avoid talking about Israel and Jerusalem in this context, and there were political reasons for that, but Paul in Romans 11:25-26 endorses the prophecy that a Deliverer would come from Zion and banish ungodliness from Jacob, and that all Israel would be saved. He spends the whole of chapter 11 stressing the fact that God has a future for Israel. He said a partial hardening had come upon Israel, *until* the fullness of the Gentiles had come in.

Jesus left no doubt that he was the awaited Jewish Messiah. The Old Testament prophecies provide us with many details, and some of these are quoted in the New Testament. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he said that David was a prophet who knew that God had promised with *an unbreakable oath* that one of his own descendants would sit on his throne (Acts 2:30). Where else could that be but Jerusalem? And who else could that be but Jesus, the Messiah?

The most compelling evidence for a rebuilt temple in the last days is in Paul's words to the Thessalonians about the man of sin, the Antichrist. Paul said he will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship and seat himself in the sanctuary of God and declare that he is God (2 Thess 2:4). The Greek word *ναός* is the normal word for temple; more specifically the inner sanctuary. In his arrogance, the Antichrist will exalt himself above God. In the current political situation, building a new temple at Mount Moriah would be highly controversial,

however, a Jewish group has already made the plans and furnishings for a new temple. On comparing this verse with Matthew 24:15, it undoubtedly refers to a temple in Jerusalem.

As to the restrainer (2 Thess 2:7), God is the ultimate restrainer of lawlessness, but what means does he employ? That restraint has always existed and enabled human society to be law-abiding, because God's moral law was written on their hearts. But the secularization of society results in the Judeo-Christian ethical code being rejected. That is the rebellion (2 Thess 2:3) that is already taking place. Paul says the Day of the Lord and Jesus' return will not occur unless the rebellion comes first. Society will rebel against God. With globalization, that means a worldwide rejection of God, the church and Israel. The Bible will be banned. There will be apostasy in the church. The power of the state to maintain order will break down and a lawless man will get his chance to rule the world. This rejection of God's moral law is happening right now, it doesn't need the rapture to allow it to happen. The secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the restrainer will continue to restrain, until he is removed, and then the lawless one will be revealed (2 Thess 2:7-8a).

Most amillennialists claim that there is no expectation of the renewal of this world. But Jesus spoke about a time when the Messiah would sit on his glorious throne in the renewed creation. Jesus said there is no one who has given up all for the kingdom of God who will not receive many times as much *in this world*, as well as eternal life *in the age to come* (Lk 18:30). And Paul said that *the creation itself would also be set free from corrupting bondage in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children* (Rom 8:21). Peter also preached about the restoration of the world. The Messiah must remain in heaven until *the time of universal restitution*, which God announced long ago through the voice of his holy prophets (Acts 3:21).

Amillennialists hold that there is only one resurrection, even though there are at least six verses scattered throughout the New Testament that lead us to believe otherwise. In Matthew 24:31 it is *the elect* whom the angels gather from the four winds. On comparing this verse with others (1 Cor 15:52, 1 Thess 4:16-17), there can be no doubt that this gathering refers to the *resurrection of the righteous*. In Luke 14:14 Jesus tells his Pharisee host that

he would be repaid for his good deed in *the resurrection of the righteous*. In Luke 20:35, Jesus speaks of *those who are considered worthy* of taking part *in that age* and in the resurrection *from the dead*. This resurrection of the righteous immediately precedes the messianic age. Those who are resurrected are those who *belong to the Messiah* (1 Cor 15:23). It is *the dead in Christ* who will rise first (1 Thess 4:16), and it is *believers who are gathered together to him* (2 Thess 2:1). And finally, Revelation 20:4-5 says that the first resurrection precedes the resurrection of the rest of the dead by one thousand years!

Amillennialists leave no room for the saints to judge and rule the world and angels. They ask how perfect saints in glorified, resurrected bodies can live together with unbelievers during the millennium. After Jesus' resurrection, he made appearances from another realm during a forty-day period before he ascended to heaven. We will be like him. The saints in their resurrected bodies will be able to travel in the same way between earth and the New Jerusalem.

The basic problem with the amillennial interpretation of the last things is its orientation. Amillennialists start with the belief that heaven must be our home and destination; a result of Platonic dualism thinking. They feel that the earth is evil or beyond redemption and not a worthy place for the Messiah or God the Father to live or for the saints to spend eternity. They ignore the fact that the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God and that the throne of God and the Lamb will be in that city. So when the Messiah comes, that's the end of planet earth for them; it must immediately be destroyed. However, when God created the earth, he put humanity in charge of it, and he himself walked in the garden in the cool of day. Despite being cursed because of sin, the Messiah has redeemed a faith community for himself and he will lift the curse and restore the world during the millennium. He is not ashamed to call us his brothers, and together we will rule the world. Man is body, soul and spirit; without his body he is not complete, and his natural habitat is planet earth.

Amillennialism's Achilles Heel

Here, I present nineteen New Testament passages, which from a normal, unbiased, natural reading, collectively teach that the Messiah and his saints, will reign over the earth. In rejecting a literal kingdom on earth, amillennialists have developed their own reign of the Messiah and his saints from heaven, even though there is not one verse of Scripture which supports the idea that Jesus is presently ruling or will ever rule the earth from heaven. There are many references to the Messiah's exaltation to the right hand of the Father and his ministry in heaven, but not once does it say that the Messiah rules the earth from that position. It is God the Father who rules the universe. God the Son, as the second person of the Trinity rules with him but is subject to him (1 Cor 15:28). Father and Son are equal in essence or being, but not in their roles. After the resurrection, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time *he waits* for his enemies to be made his footstool (Heb 10:13). Jesus, the Messiah, has been appointed by God the Father to rule the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:15-16). When the enemies are defeated at the battle of Armageddon, the Messiah will rule the earth with the saints.

Mt 5:5 How blessed are those who are humble, because it is they who will *inherit the earth*.

Mt 19:28 When the Messiah sits on his glorious throne *in the renewed creation*, his apostles will also sit on twelve thrones, *governing the twelve tribes of Israel*.

Mt 25:31-32a When the Messiah comes in his glory and all the angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All *the nations* will be assembled before him, and he will separate them, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Lk 1:32-33 Jesus will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him *the throne of his ancestor David*. *He will rule over the house of Jacob forever*, and his kingdom will never end.

Lk 17:19 The king told him, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of *ten cities*."

Lk 22:29-30 *I confer a kingdom on you*, just as my Father has conferred a kingdom on me, so that you may eat and

drink at my table *in my kingdom* and sit down on thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rom 8:17, 19 If we are children, *we are heirs*, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah, if we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. *The creation* is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children.

1 Cor. 6:2 The saints will rule *the world*.

1 Cor 15:25 The Messiah must rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet (cf. Isa 9:7).

2 Tim 2:12 If we endure, *we will reign with him*.

Heb 2:5, 8a For God did not put *the coming age/world* we are talking about under the control of angels ... *he put everything under man's feet*.

Rev 2:27 He who conquers will rule *the nations with an iron scepter*, shattering them like clay pots.

Rev 3:21 To the one who conquers *I will give a place to sit with me on my throne*, just as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Rev 4:4 Around the throne were twenty four other thrones, and on them sat twenty four elders wearing white robes and victor's crowns.

Rev 5:10 You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign *on the earth*.

Rev 11:15b The *kingdom of the world* will become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever.

Rev 12:5 The woman gave birth to a son, a boy, *who is to rule all the nations with an iron scepter*, but the child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne.

Rev 19:15 A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down *the nations*. *He will rule them with an iron rod* and tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Rev 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and *those who sat on them were given authority to judge*. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about

Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. *They came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.*

Finally a quote from Frederick Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1982 reprint, page 492, from his comments on Isaiah 65:25.

Anti-millenarians take refuge behind the enigmatical character of the Apocalypse, without acknowledging that what the Apocalypse predicts under the definite form of the millennium is the substance of all prophecy, and that no interpretation of prophecy on sound principles is any longer possible from the standpoint of an orthodox antichiliasm, inasmuch as the antichiliasts twist the word in the mouths of the prophets, and through their perversion of Scripture shake the foundations of all doctrines, every one of which rests upon the simple interpretation of the words of revelation.

Appendices

Interpreting Kingdom of God Verses

The Greek lexicons give various meanings for the “kingdom of God/heaven” expression depending on the context. Some of these meanings are regarded as archaic and so not well understood by modern readers.

A kingdom has many components. There is the king himself, those who reign with him (monarchy, government), and those he reigns over (subjects). There is the authority of the kingdom (kingship), which is the most common meaning, the activity of the kingdom (rule, reign), and the geographical area (domain).

To understand the meaning of each verse, one must decide what component of the kingdom of God is being referred to. I believe all 135 occurrences in the NT relate to the Messiah’s kingship.

20 refer to the Messiah himself

68 refer to the saints who will rule with him

47 refer to his future reign.

No verse relates to the subjects of the kingdom or to a geographical area or heaven. It is called the kingdom of God, because God is the source of it and all that pertains to it. *The kingdom is not about God’s sovereignty.* Based on this study, there are three vital components to the kingdom of God:

The Messiah who is God’s appointed regent.

The elect, whom God chose to rule with the Messiah.

The future messianic reign on earth

The Messiah

Jesus often used the expression “kingdom of God” to refer to himself as the Messiah in an oblique way, just as he used the “son of man” expression.

The Messiah had arrived, he was near, he was at hand. He had come upon them or near them, he was in the midst of them (Mt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 12:28, Mk 1:15, Lk 10:9, 11, 11:20, 17:20-21).

The Messiah was advancing forcibly (Mt 11:12 ISV).

The Messiah demands full surrender: giving up all and forgiving all (Mt 13:44, 45, 18:23, 19:12, Lk 9:62, 18:29).

Faithful Jews were waiting for the Messiah (Mk 15:43, Lk 23:51).

Some of the disciples saw the Messiah in his majestic glory (Mt 16:28, Mk 9:1, Lk 9:27, cf. 2 Pet 1:16-17).

The Monarchy

One aspect of a Christian's glorification is to rule with Christ in his monarchy after his return to earth. When "kingdom of God" is used in reference to believers or the righteous, or the saints, it teaches us something about their kingship. Half of all the "kingdom of God" verses refer to the kingship that Christians will exercise in the monarchy.

The monarchy *belongs* to the righteous (Mt 5:3, 10, 19:14, Mk 10:14, Lk 6:20, 12:32, 18:16, Col 1:13, Rev 1:6, 5:10).

There are different *status* levels within the monarchy (Mt 5:19, 11:11, 18:1, 4, Mt 20:21, Lk 7:28).

Believers are *entering* the monarchy now (Mt 5:20, 6:33, 7:21, 8:11, 16:19, 18:3, 19:23-24, 21:31, 23:13, Mk 9:47, 10:15, 23-25, 12:34, Lk 12:31, 16:16, 18:17, 24-25, Jn 3:3, 5).

Believers are given understanding about the monarchy, others are not (Mt 13:11, 19, 52, Mk 4:11, Lk 8:10).

The Jewish nation lost their place in the monarchy (Mt 8:12, 21:43, Lk 13:28).

The Messiah is calling people from *all nations* into the monarchy, but their identity is not visible (Mt 13:24, 33, 38, 43, 47, 22:2, Mk 4:26, 29, Lk 13:20, 29).

The monarchy has grown from a small number to a multitude (Mt 13:31, Mk 4:30, Lk 13:18).

Believers inherit the monarchy (Mt 25:34, Col 1:12)

They enter the monarchy now but won't be glorified until after the resurrection (Mt 13:43, 26:29, 1 Cor 15:50, 1 Thess 2:12, 2 Pet 1:11).

The Messianic Reign

The remaining verses refer to the future earthly messianic reign which was the hope and expectation of godly Jews.

Jesus and others announce *the gospel of the kingdom* which is nothing but the coming reign of the Messiah (Mt 4:23, 9:35, 24:14, Lk 4:43, 8:1, 9:2, 11, 60, Acts 1:3, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31, Col 4:11).

The messianic reign is coming and *expected* in the future when the Messiah returns (Mt 6:10, Mk 11:10, Lk 11:2, 14:15, 19:11, 21:31, 23:42, Acts 1:6, 8:12, 2 Tim 4:1, 18)

The Messiah will reign forever (Lk 1:33, Heb 1:8, 12:28, 2 Pet 1:11, Rev 11:15).

The Messiah will celebrate the Passover banquet with the saints during his reign (Mk 14:25, Lk 22:16, 18, 29-30).

Tribulation will precede his reign (Acts 14:22, 2 Thess 1:5, Rev 1:9, 12:10).

The character of his reign. It is not from this world (Jn 18:36), it is characterized by righteousness, joy, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17), and by power and authority (1 Cor 4:20).

Messiah's reign will not be shared by the unrighteous (1 Cor 6:9-10, Gal 5:21, Eph 5:5).

When the Messiah has dealt with all his enemies, he will hand over his reign to the Father (1 Cor 15:24).

The Kingdom of God Time Chart

Preliminary Signs (Matthew 24:3-14)

The beginning of the birth pains before the dawn of the messianic age. The one who endures to the end will be saved.

1. Wars, famines, earthquakes
2. Persecution, martyrdom, apostasy
3. Increase of evil, lawlessness and wickedness
4. False prophets and false religions
5. Gospel of the kingdom preached throughout the world

The Great Tribulation (Rev 6-19)

The great tribulation is an expression used to describe the seven-year period before the Messiah appears. The origin of the seven years period is from Daniel 9:26b-27 where the ISV version says:

Its ending will come like a flood, and until the end there will be war, with desolations having been decreed. He (Antichrist) will make a binding covenant with many *for one week*, and for *half of the week* he will suspend both the sacrifice and grain offerings. Destructive people will cause desolation on the pinnacle until it is complete and what has been decreed is poured out on the desolator (Antichrist).

Jesus said that when people see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those in Judea should flee (Mt 24:15).

The fiercest persecution will be in the second half of the 'week', described as "time, and times, and half a time" (Rev 12:14 cf. Dan 7:25), "42 months" (11:2, 13:5), and "1260 days" (11:3, 12:6).

The First Three and a Half Years

1. There is war in heaven and Satan and his demons are thrown down to earth in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short (12:7-12)
2. The final world empire arises (6:2, 13:1-4)
3. Antichrist takes peace from the world, starts WW3 (6:3-4)
4. Worldwide famine results from the warfare (6.5-6)
5. One quarter of humanity perishes as a result of war, famine and pestilence (6:7-8)
6. Living saints are sealed for their eternal security (7:1-8)
Martyrs from all nations are seen in heaven (6:9-11, 7:9-17)
7. The environmental destruction that results from WW3 is announced by the first four trumpets (8:7-12)
One third of the land and trees are burnt and all the grass
One third of the sea is polluted, one third of the sea creatures die and one third of the ships are destroyed
One third of rivers and springs are polluted
Light is reduced by one third
8. The third temple is built in Jerusalem (2 Thess 2:4, Rev 11:2), then during the last forty-two months the nations will trample the holy city. Ezekiel and Malachi both prophesy that a temple will be there in Jerusalem when the Messiah returns (Ezek 43:4-7, Mal 3:1).

The Last Three and a Half Years

1. Two powerful witnesses preach in Jerusalem for forty-two months. In contrast to the wicked who can only curse God as a result of the plagues, the inhabitants of Jerusalem give glory to God (11:3-13), a precursor to their conversion.
2. The false prophet deceives the nations with miracles and enforces the worship of the Antichrist (13:11-14). He sets up an image of the Antichrist in the temple and requires everyone to receive his mark (13:15-17) without which no one can buy or sell anything.
3. Empowered by Satan, the Antichrist slanders God, demands worship for forty-two months (13:5-6), persecutes and kills Christians (12:13-17, 13:7-8) and conquers them. In heaven, victorious martyrs await Messiah's kingdom (14:1-5, 15:2-4).
4. Judgment is poured out on creation, painful sores afflict unbelievers, the sea is destroyed, fresh water is further polluted, and the sun's heat is intensified (16:1-9).
5. Unbelievers are tortured for five months by a "locust" army (9:1-11) and with darkness and pain (16:10-11).
6. One third of humanity is killed by worldwide armies that converge on Jerusalem (9:13-19, 14:17-20, 16:12-16, 19:17-21). cf. Zech 12:2-3, 14:2.
7. When the seventh bowl of God's wrath is poured out, there is a worldwide earthquake, the worst ever known to man, the cities of the nations collapse (6:12-17 16:18-21), and the last world empire falls (Ch. 17-18). cf. Mt 24:29. The sun and moon will be darkened, huge hailstones will fall from the sky, and islands and mountains will be obliterated. This is what Peter meant when he said that the heavens will disappear with a roaring sound, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be exposed (2 Peter 3:10).

The Messiah Returns (*Rev 19:1*)

1. The Messiah will return with power and great glory (1:7, 19:11-13). The spirits of the righteous dead will accompany him (19:14), cf. 1 Thess 4:14.
2. Then the bodies of the dead in Christ will rise and the living saints will be raptured (14:15-16), cf. 1 Thess 4:15-17. They will all meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever.
3. Then the Lord will descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4) with his saints (Zech 14:5b). He will enter through the eastern gate (Ezek 43:2, 4) and suddenly come to his temple (Mal 3:1).
4. The New Jerusalem, the bride of the Lamb living in a different time/space dimension, will come down from heaven to rest above the temple (21:2-10). God and the Lamb and the resurrected saints will live and reign from there. This is a different way of describing events 2 & 3.
5. The Lord will roar forth from Zion and the world's armies will be slaughtered at Armageddon (14:17-20, 19:15-21). The Antichrist and the false prophet are captured and thrown directly into hell (19:20). cf. Isa 52:7-10, Zech 12:9.
6. The Lord will pour out on the nation of Israel a spirit of grace and the whole nation will be converted (1:7, 11:13) cf. Zech 12:10-14, Rom 11:26-27.
7. The victorious king will reign over all the earth (11:15-17, 20:4-6 cf. Ps 22:27-28, Isa 24:23, Zech 14:9). He will also rule over his people Israel as their promised Messiah, a descendant of David (Jer 33:14-17).

The Millennium (*Rev* 20 – 22:5)

1. Satan will be bound and removed from the world (20:1-3).
2. The Messiah will begin his reign (11:15-17). Details are few, but several times we are told that he will rule the nations with a rod of iron.
3. The righteous will rule with the Messiah for one thousand years (20:4-6), cf. Daniel 7:18, 22, 27. The emphasis put on the saints' rule may indicate that most of the rule will be delegated to them. They will share his throne (3:21) and rule with a rod of iron (2:26-27).
4. The heavens and earth will be renewed (21:1), cf. Isa 65:17-25. The creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption and enjoy the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21).
5. After one thousand years, Satan will be released and he will lead the wicked in a final rebellion against Israel and Jerusalem. They will be supernaturally destroyed (20:7-10).
6. The last judgment will take place and the physical universe will be dissolved (20:11-13). The dead will be judged according to what is recorded in books. Death and Hades are banished forever (20:14) and unbelievers are cast into hell (20:15).
7. The Messiah, who had been appointed as God's regent to rule the earth (Ps 2:7, 110:1-2, Isa 9:6-7, Dan 7:13-14), will hand back his kingship and reign to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24).
8. The saints, whose names are recoded in the Lamb's book of life, will live and rule with God forever in "heaven", the space/time dimension symbolically known as the Holy City or the New Jerusalem (21:2 - 22:5).

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