

# WHEN ‘KINGDOM OF GOD’ MEANS MESSIAH

*“If I drive out demons by the power of God, then the Kingdom of God (i.e. the Messiah) has come to you” (Lk 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, the 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 saying was, for security reasons, a coded way of saying that the Messiah himself was near. Below are the verses where the expression ‘Kingdom of God’ 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.

1. **Mt 3:2** Repent, for the ~~kingdom of heaven~~ **Messiah** has come near.

**Mt 4:17** From that time on, Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the ~~kingdom of heaven~~ **Messiah** has come near.”

**Mk 1:14-15** After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come near. Repent and believe the good news.”

One thing is clear. The kingdom did not appear at that time and has not appeared since. Despite what some theologians say, the kingdom has never been inaugurated. Some say the kingdom came near to people in the person of Jesus. No, Jesus was near, but not his kingdom.

Metonymy is a better solution that can be applied not only to this verse, but all the verses where the word ‘kingdom’ points to the Messiah. Jesus began his ministry in Judea and preached to Jews who were praying for the prophesied Messiah to come. He was that Messiah but he could not travel around proclaiming the fact openly; he spoke in parables and used cryptic expressions like ‘Kingdom of God’ and ‘Son of Man’. Using metonymy, he was proclaiming to the Jews that the Messiah was near, right there among them. At the same time, he did not want unbelievers to understand, so he spoke about himself with ambiguity. ‘The Kingdom of God’ could be understood as either the Messiah or the Messianic reign, while his healings, exorcisms, and teachings were evidence of his authority.

2. **Mt 4:23** Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news ~~of the kingdom~~ **about the Messiah**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

**Mt 9:35** Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news ~~of the kingdom~~ **about the Messiah**, and healing every disease and sickness.

**Lk 4:43-44** But he said, “I must proclaim the good news ~~of the Kingdom of God~~ **about the Messiah** to the other towns also because that is why I was sent.” And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

**Lk 8:1** After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news ~~of the Kingdom of God~~ **about the Messiah**.

**Lk 9:11** He welcomed them (the crowds) and spoke to them about the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** and healed those who needed healing.

Jesus’ healings and miracles got the attention of people. As Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” News that the Messiah had arrived was wonderful news for the oppressed Jews who were hoping for the vindication of Israel and a reign of peace, righteousness, and

prosperity. The gospel that Jesus announced was the gospel of the Kingdom of God: the good news that the promised Messiah had arrived. There could be no kingdom without him. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 in the synagogue at Nazareth and applied it to himself: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” Jesus wasn’t telling them that the kingdom had arrived. It was evident to everyone that it had not. His Jewish audience could never believe the Kingdom of God had arrived while being ruled by the Romans.

3. **Mt 10:7** As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The ~~kingdom of heaven~~ **Messiah** has come near.

The message Jesus’ disciples were instructed to proclaim was the same message that he was proclaiming: The Messiah had come near. The verb can indicate the nearness of location or time, but as the kingdom has still not appeared 2000 years later, the sense must have been locational, pointing to Jesus who was nearby.

4. **Mt 11:12** From the days of John the Baptist until now, the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ **Messiah** has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been ~~raiding it~~ **attacking him**.

Scholars have found this verse difficult to translate and interpret. It is difficult to comprehend how the Messianic kingship could be subjected to violence and raided. But certainly, Jesus was subjected to violence and attacked by the Jewish leaders (Jn 6:15). Compare Luke 16:16 below (No. 33.)

5. **Mt 12:28** But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come upon you.

**Lk 11:20** But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come upon you.

This was Jesus’ response to skeptics in the crowd who accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. He tells them, albeit in cryptic language, that he was the Messiah who had come to

them. A kingdom or kingship cannot come upon people, but Jesus did. He was not talking about the church coming to them. Only metonymy makes sense of his statement.

6. **Mt 16:28** Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming ~~in his kingdom~~ **as king**.

This passage is a riddle for most readers. The disciples died and where is the kingdom they would see coming? In the previous verse, Jesus spoke about the Messiah coming with his angels in the glory of his Father. What he is promising here is not that they would see the Messianic reign before they died, but a manifestation of his royal power as the glorified Messiah.

**Mk 9:1** And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come with power”

**Lk 9:27** Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah as king**.

You cannot see a kingdom coming. What the disciples would see is the Messiah coming in his majestic glory, as Matthew makes clear. Matthew speaks of the Son of Man coming, whereas Mark and Luke speak of the Kingdom of God coming, which supports my thesis that Jesus used the Kingdom of God phrase as a metonym for himself as the Messiah. Peter confirmed that Jesus’ promise was fulfilled at the transfiguration, an event that occurred one week later. He said that they (Peter, James, and John) were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ majesty when he received honor and glory from God who said, “This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.” They heard the voice that came from heaven when they were with him on the sacred mountain (2 Pet 1:16-18).

7. **Mt 19:12** For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others – and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the ~~kingdom of heaven~~ **Messiah**. The one who can accept this should accept it.

When a Christian chooses to live a celibate life, he does it for Jesus' sake rather than for the kingdom. "The unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord" (1 Cor 7:32).

8. **Mk 15:43** Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah**, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

**Lk 23:50-51** Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah**.

These words are spoken by the Gospel writers, not Jesus, yet they express the same metonymy which was no doubt common among the Jews. Many faithful Jews, like Joseph of Arimathea, were waiting for the Messiah to come and rule as king.

9. **Lk 9:2** And he sent them out to proclaim the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** and to heal the sick.

**Lk 9:60** And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah**."

Jesus told his disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of God, and Luke says that they were evangelizing and healing people everywhere (9:6). They were announcing the good news that the Messiah was around, and their healings were evidence of his healing power (Isa 35:5-6, Lk 7:22).

Let those who are spiritually dead bury their own. Christians are God's servants, and their primary responsibility is to bear witness to their Lord. The enquirer wanted to bury his father first, which probably meant that he did not feel free to follow Jesus while his father was still alive. Jesus knew that if he did not respond then and there, the opportunity would be gone.

10. **Lk 10:9, 11** Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come near you. ... Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** has come near."

Jesus sent his disciples ahead to places that he would come to so that they would warn people that the Messiah was around. Healing the sick was a Messianic activity that gave credence to their proclamation. It was the Messiah who was near, not his kingdom. For the Jews to accept that the Kingdom of God had arrived, they would first want to know who the new king was.

- 11. Lk 17:20-21** Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** is in your midst.”

An early NIV version had ‘the Kingdom of God is within you,’ which encouraged the misunderstanding that God’s kingdom can be in someone, or in their hearts. Unless the Kingdom of God is interpreted as a metonym for the Messiah, this verse does not make sense. He was saying that the Messiah was already among them. A kingdom cannot be in a person or among people. No scripture teaches that, especially in this context where Jesus is speaking to Pharisees. As he was there in their midst, his *coming* could no longer be observed. They should not be looking for signs of the Messiah’s coming such as will be seen at the second coming. Some like to interpret the Kingdom of God as God’s rule in a person’s life but no scripture teaches that. Misunderstanding verses like this have caused many Bible scholars to teach that the Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated. Jesus is coming back to reign, but his reign has not started. If so, where is his throne? Where is the righteousness and peace that will characterize his reign?

- 12. Lk 18:29-30** “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the ~~Kingdom of God~~ **Messiah** will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Parallel passages (Mt 19:29 and Mk 10:29) have ‘for my sake’ instead of ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of God,’ which supports the argument for metonymy. Jesus is the reason why people make such sacrifices to serve him. Faithful servants are rewarded here during this lifetime, and

they will be rewarded again in the age to come with eternal life when they rule the nations with the Messiah.

## **The coming of the king(dom)**

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 (the Messiah) 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 praying for the Messiah to come with and establish his kingdom, the Kingdom of 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, 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 (1 Jn 5:19). 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 being 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 messianic Son prophesied in 2 Sam 7:12-14, Ps 2:7-8 and 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 from saying that God rules in them, or in their hearts.

When Jesus told his disciples in Mt 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 Lk 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 Isa 24:23), the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of well-aged wines – rich food full of marrow, and refined wines of the finest vintage (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’ (Moffatt). The basic meaning of kingdom is kingship or royal rule, so any of those translations is 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 monarchy, and the government in 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 his reign did not begin during his life on earth. No Bible verse teaches that, 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 removed upon his arrival at the battle of Armageddon, but

other opponents will be removed during his reign, and the final enemy, death, won't be removed until the very end of his 1000-year 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 Lk 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, the 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 and inheriting 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 something 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 monarchy 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 the 'Sons of the Kingdom' section in the chapter entitled, The Kingdom of God and our Inheritance.

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*. This harvest at the end of the age is not the last judgment, but the time of judgment at the Messiah's coming, as described in Rev 14:14-20. The weeds are destroyed at the battle of Armageddon, that great winepress of God's wrath, and from there cast into hell. The good seed inherit the monarchy. 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 monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. The monarchy started 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 3,000, then 5000, and since that day the Lord has been adding people daily to the number being saved. One-third of the world's population presently claims some adherence to the Christian religion, and 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. The unbelieving world pays little attention to this spiritual activity, but when the task is finished, it will have permeated the whole world, transforming people from every tribe, people, language, and nation, all of whom become the monarchy in the 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 the 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 the gospel, 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 monarchy is developing in a secret, unseen way, until that day when God reveals who his children 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 monarchy. The growing seed teaches us about the mysterious way in which a believer is born again, matures, and is finally glorified. The sower of the seed is the Messiah. The seeds he sows are the sons of the kingdom, the monarchy 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 monarchy 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 heirs of Messiah's monarchy. All the Mt 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 monarchy. Those who received talents were rewarded according to their faithfulness in service, but one was excluded from the monarchy 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).

### **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. The sheep and the goats are of course symbolize the righteous and the wicked. The good shepherd, Jesus, is giving his reason for how he distinguishes between them and judges them. He is not talking about the great white throne judgment that will take place at the end of the world.

The bulk of the passage concerns the attitude people have toward 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 said, who is my mother, and who are my brothers? 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. This is a parable about the people living on earth at the end of the Great Tribulation when Christ returns. There will be the elect, the true followers of Jesus, and the remainder, who choose to align themselves with the Antichrist.

When the Messiah comes in his glory with all the angels, he will sit on *his* glorious throne, the throne of his ancestor David. As king, he judges, and this judgment begins at his return. It is premillennial, because the elect are invited to take their inheritance, *the millennial kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*. 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's people, Israel, 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' disciples may have thought about the prophet Joel. He 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. Why do *the nations* conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and his Messiah. The Lord rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, he has installed his King on Zion his holy hill (Ps 2:1-2,6). All people will be polarized in this way in the last days.

Jesus is teaching here that there are two destinies; eternal punishment and eternal life. There are two kinds of people, the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, those who have aligned themselves with Jesus, and those who haven't, instead, they chose the Antichrist. The basis of judgment is their attitude towards Jesus and his *brethren*. 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 Mt 13:43). The goats, who come to attack Jerusalem, have no concern for Jesus and his brethren, in fact, they are fighting against



them, persecuting and killing them. They have no love for Jesus' brethren. They are consigned to hell; their destiny is now sealed (cf. the weeds in Mt 13:40-42).

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