

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THE 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” (Jn 18:36).

βασιλεία του θεού

These three Greek words which are normally translated as ‘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 dared to come up with a more meaningful phrase. But it is not all the fault of the translations; 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 66 books written by many authors over 1500 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 very complex. But the miraculous thing is that with all those authors and that long period, 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).

βασιλεία is the word translated as '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 Ps 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 that 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 Θεού’ often means ‘from God’

Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament, tended to replace the genitive of source with a prepositional phrase, particularly ‘εκ’ plus a genitival phrase. But the genitive form of one noun was an exception. Θεού ‘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 Θεού 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, and 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 will quickly illustrate 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). He was not looking at a lamb that belonged to God. He was looking at Jesus, the lamb that God had provided 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 is the Lamb that God provided.

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. In Jn 5:42, 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.

Romans 10:3 says that the Jews were ignorant of the righteousness that comes *from* God (ISV) and in trying to establish their own; they did not submit 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 me of Nehemiah's words to the people when he said the joy of the Lord was their strength (Neh 8:10). 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 θεού' expressions often have the ablative meaning of 'from God', let's look at the expression 'gospel of God' in 1 Thess 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 the 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 fulfill 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 God's kingdom 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 upon 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 Mt 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, missions, evangelism, or God's will for the world, but on securing your place in the Messiah's 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 reign with him.

Jesus traveled around preaching the good news of the kingdom, which he mentions 54 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 Mt 6:33 is Lk 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 monarchy or kingship and 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 and will reign with Christ over the world. When they enter the monarchy, royal 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, 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 monarchy, which is our glorification. The answer to all our needs is in finding the kingdom and the righteousness that comes from God. The Messiah is coming back, and the greatest destiny man 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 Mt 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 Rom 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 but 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 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 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 was 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, 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 among 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 they may be 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 makes them holy.

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 the 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. 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 Isa 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 Cor 15:23 and Rev 20:4-6 shows that the resurrection of the righteous, called the first resurrection, occurs at Jesus' second coming, 1000 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 1000 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 Isa 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). Rev 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 the them ruling over this earth.

Miracles and the Kingdom from God

Several passages 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 (the Messiah himself) 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 every 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 won'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).

Different nuances of the kingdom

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 sky and earth are nothing else but the Kingdom of God, 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 Cor 15:24-25 and Rev 20:4-5, the Messiah will reign on earth for 1000 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).

Messiah's kingdom on earth will eventually terminate with the last judgment (Rev 20:11-15). Death and everything evil will be thrown into hell. The earth and the heavens will flee from God's presence, and no place will be found for them. That 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).

Heb 12:26-28 says that at Sinai, God's voice shook the earth, and he has promised to shake it once more; this time the sky as well as the earth. This means the removal of everything that can be shaken, that is, the whole creation, so that only what cannot be shaken may remain. The righteous will inherit a kingdom that cannot be shaken. When the earth and the heavens flee from God's presence at the last judgment, only the New Jerusalem will remain. That is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom in a different space-time realm, where the throne of God and the Lamb are found, a place where there will no longer be any curse (Rev 22:3).

In some verses in the Epistles, the Kingdom of God refers to the nature of the rule. The kingdom is not about food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The import of these verses is not that the Kingdom of God is now present. We should remember that Jesus regularly used this expression to refer to his future reign. 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."