

WHEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD MEANS MONARCHY

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, I tell you emphatically, unless a person is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God’” (Jn 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 retain this terminology only 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). Like Simeon, he was waiting for the one who would comfort Israel (Lk 2:25).

Leon Morris (The Gospel according to John p. 218) does not see any difference between ‘seeing’ (Jn 3:3) and ‘entering’ the Kingdom of God. The BAG Greek Lexicon suggests that ‘see’ here means experience, experiencing Messiah’s reign in action, whereas entering it is sharing in it. Morris 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, and not just assume something.

One day, when translating John’s Gospel into an African language, I wondered about the meaning of Jn 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 that 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 man rather than over him. 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 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 to rule the earth. There are many passages where the context makes it clear that those entering the Kingdom of God are 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 can expect to be princes in the Kingdom of God. They will be 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 a little lower than the angels, 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 him (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 a little lower than the angels, Jesus, who is crowned with glory and honor. Heb 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. Jesus is our great high priest and our king, and he has made us into a royal priesthood. 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).

In Revelation 1, 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 Rev 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 (the church), 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 form a royal house 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 Exod 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 consummated, when the Israel of God, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is made a kingdom of priests to serve God (Rev 1:6). This kingship is not of a spiritual or figurative kind. It culminates in the universal sway hinted at by Balaam (Num 24:17-19), by Moses in his last words (Deut 33:29), and still more distinctly by Daniel (Dan 7:27). Kingship is given to the saints, as the ultimate end of their calling from God. As a priest is a mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth.

Jesus promised overcomers that they would rule the nations with firm authority. He said he would give the person who conquers and continues to do what he commanded to the end authority over the nations. He 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! 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 and say that we are ruling now. The Messiah is seated at the right hand of God in heaven, but no verse of Scripture says that the Messiah is presently ruling over the earth, and consequently, no verse 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 the world, 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 raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realm (Eph 2:6). But that doesn't mean believers are already reigning. 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. 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, many verses clearly express that we will reign with the Messiah in the future.

Ruling the future world

Over 500 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. It is a kingdom that will one day be handed back to the Father, when all enemies, including death, have been defeated. When the Messiah has done away with every ruler and every authority and power, he will transfer the kingdom to God the Father, but he must rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25). 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 (Rev 3:26-27). Because the saints are united to the Messiah, they will be involved in all his activities.

Only Rev 21:1 speaks of a renewed heaven and earth. The following verses 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 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, the Father having sovereignty over all, and the Son having sovereignty over the world. His resurrected servants will worship him and see his face. 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, whereas angels are not.

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 the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). The unregenerate will not see or experience the Kingdom of God, let alone enter it (the monarchy). John frequently speaks of life and eternal life, and in some places, entrance into that life is equivalent to entering the 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 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 the 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 monarchy. 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 monarchy (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. The truth is, 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 others. Peter said it was from others. Then Jesus said that the children were 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 in Eph 2:19, Paul said that believing Gentiles were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. 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 also mentioned citizenship in Phil 3:19-20. Some people in their fellowship had set their minds on worldly things.

But ‘our citizenship’, says Paul, 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. 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 of Heaven (Mt 18:3). Messiah’s kingdom is our hope of glory. It is great to experience forgiveness of sins and to have the 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 from 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 are more or less synonymous with life in 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, 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 all would 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 that time (1 Cor 15:50-53). When the last trumpet sounds, the dead are raised imperishable, and Jesus begins his reign on earth. This is clearly shown when the seventh (and last) angel blows his trumpet in Rev 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 the 1 Corinthians 15 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. The perishable, mortal man cannot inherit the imperishable, or the image of Christ, or the immortal life in the holy city.

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 monarchy and the subjects of the kingdom. There are two groups of people in Messiah's kingdom. 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 monarchy 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 rapture. 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 Cor 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 and unbelievers from the nations who survive the Great Tribulation and wars at the time of Jesus' return (Zech 14:16). They 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 writing to fellow believers spoke of believers being granted entry into Messiah's future reign. He tells them to be eager to make their calling and election certain. That way they'll be generously granted entry into the Messiah's eternal kingdom (kingship) (2 Pet 1:10-11). It's an eternal kingdom because even when the 1000 years are over, the kingship will continue 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. 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 Kingdom of God, which is the Messiah's future reign on earth. We possess eternal life already, 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, 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. 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 in this world in supernatural, immortal, spiritual bodies, and then 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

see 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 Rev 19:6b-8, just before 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 Hos 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, and 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 occur 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 from 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, are God’s children (Lk 20:35-36). They have the fullness of life in the family of God, and marriage is not appropriate anymore. 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 our future is Dan 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 the earthly reign of the Messiah. People are spoken of as entering and acquiring the kingdom, which in this context means entering the monarchy or acquiring the kingship. That is what Jesus confers on his followers (Lk 22:29). In these verses, I have translated the Kingdom of God/heaven as the Messiah's monarchy, which consists of all the people who will rule with him. For example, the meaning of Rev 1:6, which says that Jesus has made us a kingdom, is that Jesus has made us to be a monarchy. Entering the kingdom is entering the ruling class. Being given the kingdom is being given the kingship or right to rule, being appointed to government.

Mt 5:3 How blessed are those who are destitute in spirit, because the ~~Kingdom of Heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy belongs to them* (or better, *consists of them*).

Mt 5:10 How blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, because the ~~Kingdom of Heaven~~ *Messiah's monarchy belongs to them* (or *consists of them*).

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 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 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 8:11-12a Many will come from east and west and will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in ~~the kingdom from heaven~~

Messiah's monarchy. But the unfaithful heirs of that ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* will be thrown into the darkness outside.

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 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 for 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 the Messiah's kingdom. When Jesus told his disciples 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 the group that he was forming to support 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 will get 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 (or consists of) 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 10:23, 25 How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the ~~Kingdom of God~~ *Messiah's monarchy*! 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*.

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 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*.

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).

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

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.

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a ~~kingdom~~ *monarchy* that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful.

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