

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS STILL COMING

“May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

The whole idea of a kingdom *coming* is a collocational clash in many languages. As the basic meaning of kingdom is kingship, an abstract noun, it is not natural to talk about it coming. You can't have a kingdom without a king, so it is more meaningful to talk about the coming of the king rather than the coming of his kingdom. As long as Jesus is in heaven, the kingdom on earth cannot be said to have come or to be inaugurated.

The inference of the words “your kingdom come” in the Lord's prayer is that the kingdom is not yet here. It is a prayer for Jesus' return, when his messianic kingdom will be established, and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We can't pray for God's universal reign to come. God never stops reigning. This prayer only makes sense when we interpret it as referring to the Kingdom from God, the kingdom that he is establishing on earth with his Son Jesus as regent. Let us look at other Scriptures where the kingdom is spoken of as coming.

The foreshadowing of the kingdom

Although the expression ‘Kingdom of God’ does not occur in the Old Testament, ‘throne of the Lord’ occurs regarding the house of David. King David said that out of all his sons, God had selected his son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord, ruling over Israel (1 Chron 28:5). In the same vein the Queen of Sheba told King Solomon that the Lord had set him on his throne to be king for the Lord his God (2 Chron 9:8). The throne belonged to God, but as an earthly throne, it was appropriate for a man to be the king. It was the throne that God established here on earth for the kings of Israel to rule

on as his regents over his people. God spoke to David through the prophet Nathan about Solomon, saying that he, Solomon, would build a house for God's name and that God would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. He would be a father to him, and he would be his son (2 Sam 7:13-14). Although the words were spoken about Solomon, the ultimate fulfillment is in Jesus and the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed. As Isaiah prophesied: To us, a child is born, a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder (Isa 9:6). This is also reflected in Psalm 2:7-8, where the psalmist proclaims the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your possession'.

Jesus and the apostles taught that the focus of the Kingdom of God was not God's sovereign rule over the universe. Rather, it was a kingdom established by God in contrast to man-made kingdoms. The prophet Daniel spoke about someone like a Son of Man, who was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His kingdom will never be destroyed (Dan 2:44, 7:13-14).

The Kingdom of God has its roots in the kingdom of Israel, and in this kingdom, the king is always a Jew, a descendant of David. In the New Testament, the focus is not on God as king; he rules on earth through a man, his Son, whom he has appointed. Jesus didn't tell Pilate that his kingdom didn't belong to this world; he said that his kingdom was not from this world (Jn 18:36), and it didn't have its origin here. The Greek preposition ἐκ indicates source. His kingdom will be in this world, but his authority to rule it is from outside.

Salvation includes so many blessings including forgiveness of sins, a new compliant heart, eternal life, adoption as a child of God, union with the Messiah, and being a joint heir with the Messiah. All of this will culminate in our glorification: the resurrection of the body and inheriting the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. Some of these blessings are ours already, but our inheritance should not be regarded as 'realized eschatology'. We have blessings and the status we receive as believers in Jesus under the new covenant, but not the blessings that belong to Messiah's future kingdom.

‘Realized eschatology’ should at least mean that the reality has been experienced in some sense. Paul says that we have already been glorified (Rom 8:30). Some expositors think that the past tense expresses the absolute certainty of the event to come. Others refer it to as the eternal fulfillment of the decree in divine understanding. In either event, it is only by faith that we believe that believers are presently glorified or reigning. Visible glorification will start with our resurrection.

The kingdom draws near

After Jesus’ birth, the Magi asked where was the one who had been born king of the Jews (Mt 2:2). Emmanuel wasn’t far away. He was the Lord, the promised king, the son of David, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man mentioned in Dan 7. He was born *to be* king of the Jews one day, but to onlookers, he was just a baby boy lying in an animal feeding trough, born to poor parents, Joseph and Mary.

Jesus’ exaltation

After his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father on his throne in heaven. That is the figurative way it is expressed; it is a metaphor. It means that Jesus resumed his position as sovereign over the universe, together with the Father. There is no talk of a coronation. Jesus has always been king on the heavenly throne. He is always seated in glory, the glory the Father gave him before the creation of the world. In Jn 17:24, Jesus expresses a desire for his followers to see his glory and be with him where he *is*. As God the Son, this has eternally been his rightful place. We can get some appreciation of this by reading John’s vision of the heavenly throne in Revelation 4-5. But this is not the Kingdom of God. This is a vision of God’s sovereignty. The reign of Jesus the Messiah on earth is in the future.

In the New Testament, we are told many times that Jesus was exalted to that place of honor at the right hand of the Father. When Jesus was ascending to heaven, two angels stood beside the disciples and told them that this same Jesus, who had been taken up from them into

heaven, would come back in the same way they had seen him go up into heaven (Acts 1:10-11). In Ps 110:1-2 the Lord tells his regent, the Messiah, to sit at his right hand until he subdues his enemies and *extends his mighty scepter from Zion*. The Davidic king will rule amid his enemies, forcing them into submission.

Ps 110:1 is quoted four times in the New Testament (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk 20:42, Heb 1:13), and there are another eleven references to Jesus being seated at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19, Acts 2:33, 5:31, Rom 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Pet 3:22). From the throne in heaven he holds all things together (Col 1:17), but we are never told that he is ruling over the earth from there. The Father told the Son to sit at his right hand *until* he made his enemies a footstool for his feet. Jesus has been waiting since that time and he is still waiting (Heb 10:13). He will continue to wait until the Day of the Lord, when the Antichrist is defeated and the kingdom of the world becomes the Messiah's kingdom (Rev 11:15). That is when his enemies will be defeated. That is the great day of judgment, and once judgment starts, salvation ends, so the Lord is being patient. He desires everyone to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), not wanting any to perish (2 Pet 3:9).

Jesus spoke to the Sanhedrin about his coming exaltation, saying that they would see him seated at the right hand of the mighty God (Lk 22:69). After his resurrection and his ascension, the apostles preached boldly about Jesus to the crowds saying that he had been *exalted* to the right hand of God, so Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:33, 36). His earthly judges had rejected him as Lord and Messiah. His messiahship, which had been announced at his baptism when God said, 'You are my Son', was now confirmed by his resurrection. He was declared by the resurrection to be the powerful Son of God, the Messiah (Rom 1:4). The apostle Peter added his testimony before the Sanhedrin, saying that God had exalted Jesus to his right hand as Prince and Savior, that he might extend repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31).

The apostles had earlier asked Jesus when he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus didn't deny that he would do that, but he commanded them to go and be his witnesses in Jerusalem,

Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The fulfillment of this command was a requirement before the end would come and the new age inaugurated (Mt 24:14). The Lord is building his church community; he is calling out a people from every nation and culture, a people who will be united to him, and who will rule with him during his messianic reign.

The Holy Spirit takes a major role in everything. Whatever one member of the Trinity does, the other members are always involved. But we never read in Scripture about the Spirit sitting on the throne with the Father and the Son. Rather he is before the throne (Rev 1:4, 5:4). However, the Holy Spirit has a major role in empowering the apostles and other servants of Christ throughout the church age, whether evangelists, missionaries, or teachers, and in regenerating those who respond to the gospel with faith. In this way, people from every tribe, language, people, and nation are being brought into the kingdom, and they will reign over the earth. The Messiah is presently on the throne in heaven from where he pours out his Spirit into our hearts. In this way he enlightens and teaches his people, he empowers his people for service, and he guides them as the Good Shepherd. The Bible does not teach that the Messiah rules the church or individual Christians. I am not denying that Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth, that he is head of the church, or that he is Lord and God. The emphasis of the New Testament is not on Jesus presently ruling, but on his future rule when he comes as king. In his present ministry, he is rather our comforter, our friend, our brother, our helper, our mediator, and our savior. At the same time, we acknowledge him as our Lord and our God.

When Paul taught about Jesus' exaltation, he said that God had raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm, where he is above every ruler, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Eph 1:20-21). He saw Messiah's kingdom as a future event that follows his second coming and the resurrection of those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:24-25, 2 Tim 4:1). He must reign until he puts all enemies under his feet, including death. The writer of Hebrews also spoke of Jesus' exaltation in Heb 1:3-5, 8:1, 10:12-13, 12:2.

Jesus' enthronement on Mount Zion

When Jesus was born, he was born king, because that was his dignity and his destiny, but up until now, he has not received his earthly messianic kingdom. The Messiah's kingdom is from God; it is not a worldly kingdom like the Roman Empire. When he returns, he will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:10). It is at that time that the Lord will install him as king over all the earth and enthrone him in Zion (Ps 2:6-8). The Lord in this context is the Father, and Jesus is the Son. The Father is a sovereign ruler over the universe. The Son is the Father's representative on earth. Vassal kings and regents were often spoken of as having a father-son relationship. A regent is someone appointed to administer a country because the monarch is a minor, incapacitated, or absent. Jesus is the Father's regent during the millennium because the world was created for mankind to rule (Gen 1:28).

God will become Jesus' Father in this respect when Jesus starts his reign (Ps 2:7). Psalm 2 has always been regarded as messianic, and it is evidence for the enthronement of Jesus on Mount Zion. The apostle Peter included Herod and Pilate among the kings that conspired against the Messiah (Acts 4:25-28), but the main fulfillment is in the future on the Day of the Lord.

This enthronement of the Messiah is what Daniel saw in his vision 530 years before the Messiah was born. Dominion was given to the Son of Man along with glory and a kingdom so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion would be an everlasting dominion that would never pass away, and his kingship would never be destroyed (Dan 7:14). The context of Daniel 7 is Daniel's vision of the fourth beast and the small horn that had eyes like those of a human being and a mouth that boasted with audacious claims (Dan 7:8). It has a close correlation with Revelation 13 where the beast (the Antichrist) and the false prophet are permitted to wage war against God's holy people for 42 months during the Great Tribulation and to conquer them before being slain by the rider on the white horse, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-21).

Jesus was not in the dark about his identity, nor his destiny, but there was one thing that he, as the human Messiah, was not to know and share; the date of his coming (Mk 13:32), which is also the time of the

restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-7). He hinted at his future in a parable, when he said that a prince went to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return (Lk 19:11-12). His time in that 'distant country' is now 1990 years! When the prince returns, he will reward his servants according to their faithfulness, and as for his enemies who didn't want him to be their king, they will be executed (Lk 19:27). This punishment will apply to all who reject his rule, but especially those armies who oppose him at the battle of Armageddon on the day of his return. They will be slaughtered in his presence.

The establishment of the Kingdom of God is the central theme of the final book of the New Testament. It is the unveiling of the future events that will occur at the end of this age, especially the last seven years, otherwise known as the Great Tribulation and the glorious return of the Messiah. He will come in the clouds, and every eye will see him, especially those who pierced him (the Jews), and all the tribes of the land (the Jews) will mourn because of him (Zech 14:10-12, Rev 1:7).

Two passages in Revelation signal the arrival of the kingdom. In Rev 11:15, after the seventh angel blows his trumpet, loud voices in heaven declare that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah. Then in Rev 19:11-16, John sees heaven standing open and a white horse whose rider is named Faithful and True. On his head are many royal crowns, and the armies of heaven follow him on white horses. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations which he rules with an iron rod. On his robe and thigh, he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

Satan currently rules the world

Even though the risen Jesus told his disciples that he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, he is not yet currently ruling this world as God's regent. It is not yet time for him to intervene. There is another power in charge down here, whom Paul calls Satan. He is the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2). Paul warned Christians that their struggle was not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of the domain of darkness, and evil spiritual forces in

the domain of the air (Eph 6:12). The apostle John adds that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). His influence is widespread.

From the heavenly throne, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and in heaven he intercedes with the Father for the saints. All powers in heaven are in submission to him (1 Pet 3:22). Jesus is superior to them all, but he is waiting for the day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet (Heb 10:13). God will subdue the enemies at the climax of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns. The major defeat will be at the battle of Armageddon when God destroys the Antichrist and his evil empire. It is only after that battle that the Messiah will begin his messianic rule, and he will reign until he puts all remaining enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25).

The first and second comings of Jesus

Before Jesus' birth, the kingdom was promised and predicted in many prophecies, for example, Ps 2:6-8, where God said he had set his king on Zion, his holy mountain, and he would give him the nations as his heritage, the ends of the earth as his possession. The Lord has appointed the dominion of the world to his Son. The oldest proclamation of this decree is found as early as 2 Sam 7:13-14, written over 3000 years ago, but this worldwide kingdom has never been established. There was a foreshadowing of it in the kingdom of Israel with David and Solomon, but that kingdom was cut down and it now remains for a shoot (the Messiah) to come up from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1).

With the birth of Jesus, we are told that the Messiah has arrived. Angels spoke to Zechariah, Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds about the baby Jesus, and they left them in no doubt that this was the birth of the Messiah. Devout Simeon and prophetess Anna also announced that he was the Messiah, and he was called the king of the Jews by the Magi (Mt 2:2). After his arrest, Jesus answered in the affirmative when asked by Pilate if he was a king (Mt 27:11). But the kingdom was not established at that time; the awaited Messiah was crucified.

In the visions that the apostle John saw, Jesus said three times that he would be coming soon! (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). This 'soon' seems like a

long time, but Jesus wanted his disciples from all ages to be hoping expectantly for his return. For Jesus, his second coming is the next great visitation.

When being judged by the Jewish Sanhedrin, the high priest stood up and put him under oath before the living God to tell them if he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus replied curtly: “You said it!” Then he added that they would see him seated at the right hand of God and ‘coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Mt 26:62-64), a clear reference to Dan 7:13-14 from where Jesus took the title Son of Man. But this prophecy is set in the last days, in the time of the Antichrist, and it is not until that time that Jesus will return. Jesus told Caiaphas that from that time on, he would be seated at the right hand of God (Lk 22:69). This is where Jesus is now, from the time of his ascension until the day he comes again.

When answering the disciples’ question about the sign of his coming and the end of the age, Jesus referred them to Daniel 7 again, saying that immediately after the Great Tribulation and the darkening of the sun and moon, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, his sign would appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) would mourn, when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt 24:29-30). Luke says that there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and distress on earth among the nations who will be confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint from fear and apprehension because of what is happening to the world (Lk 21:25-27). The cosmic disturbances, whatever the cause, will produce tsunamis.

Old Testament prophecies about the Day of the Lord portray graphically the situation at that time (Joel 2:2,10, 30-31). There will be a large and mighty army, and blood and fire and billows of smoke. It will be a day of darkness and gloom, clouds and blackness. The sun, moon, and stars will be blotted out, without a ray of brightness (Amos 5:20). The whole world will be consumed (Zeph 1:18). Then suddenly the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem (Joel 3:16). This may be the brilliance of the glory of God that will accompany Jesus. Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. The sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory (Ezek 43:2). The Messiah will return with

his saints to Jerusalem before roaring forth to defeat his enemies at Armageddon.

Everyone will see Jesus' return, and not on mobile phones or TV, because communications will be down with all the destruction of the Great Tribulation; the warfare, the earthquake, the cosmic changes, and the wrath of God being poured out on the earth.

The theme of the Book of Revelation is announced in the first chapter:

“Look, he is coming in the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen” (Rev 1:7)

The phrase ‘he is coming with the clouds’ is from the messianic prophecy in Dan 7:13-14, the same passage from where Jesus took the title ‘Son of Man’. He will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mk 8:38), to establish his eternal kingdom, and all nations will serve him. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, or possibly, ‘namely, those who pierced him’. *Kai oitines* occurs again in Rev 20:5, where it has explicative force: ‘the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony, *namely, those* who had not worshipped the beast’. John is alluding to Zech 12:10, where the Lord says, “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child.” Why would John say ‘*even* those who pierced him’ when it is something prophesied and to be expected? I think it makes more sense to translate ‘*namely those* who pierced him’. The Jews in Jerusalem will be the focus of Jesus’ return; they are the ones whom he is coming to save. It is the Jews who pierced him (Jn 19:37), and it is they who will mourn for him.

The phrase ‘all the tribes of the land will mourn’ (ISV) occurs in Mt 24:30 and refers to Israel’s mourning at the Messiah’s coming. This translation is superior because it fulfills the prophecy of Zech 12:10-12, where the Lord pours out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication, and they look on him whom they pierced, and the land mourns, each clan by itself. By contrast, the nations of the world curse God (Rev 16:9, 11, 21), rather than mourning in sorrow and repentance.

In a vision John saw a white cloud, and on the cloud sat someone who was like the Son of Man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp

sickle in his hand. He swung his sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped (Rev 14:14-16). This is a metaphor for the resurrection and rapture of the righteous. Then another angel swung his sickle and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:17-20). This is a metaphor for the bloody destruction of the multitudes in the valley of judgment (Joel 3:12-14), which will be executed at Jesus' coming (Rev 19:15). This harvest of the righteous and the wicked can be compared with John the Baptist's words in Mt 3:12, where Jesus is pictured with his winnowing fork in his hand, gathering his wheat into his barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Harmonizing Rev 19-20 with other Scriptures

In Rev 20:2-7, the messianic reign is described with much repetition as being millennial. 1000 years is repeated six times! It is stated clearly that Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss for 1000 years so that he might not deceive the nations anymore, *after* which he is released for a short time to go out to deceive the nations again. It is also stated clearly that the righteous dead come to life; they are resurrected to reign with Christ on earth for that same 1000 years, and the rest of the dead do not come to life until the 1000 years are over.

Those who remove the messianic age from the world's future history have to interpret this passage unnaturally.

1. They say that Satan is already bound, now, even though he is called the god of this world, and that our present struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
2. They say that Satan will be released before Christ comes again, whereas our passage clearly says that the devil will be released and finally caught *after* the thousand years are over and that he will be thrown into hell (20:10) where the beast and the false prophet are, they having been thrown into hell at Christ's return, before the 1000-year's reign began (19:20). The beast and the false prophet will be captured at the battle of Armageddon at Christ's coming, their armies will be killed with the sword (19:21) and left for the birds to eat, while the final army that Satan will gather for battle after the millennium will be

destroyed by fire that comes down from heaven (20:9). Granted that these battles both occur in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and both involve armies gathered from the nations, there are two battles 1000 years apart with different outcomes.

3. They say the first resurrection spoken of here is not a bodily resurrection of the righteous dead, but rather their regeneration, even though there are many verses scattered throughout the New Testament that speak of the resurrection of the righteous. In this passage, the resurrection occurs after their martyrdom at the hand of the beast, and those who participate in it are said to be blessed because the second death has no power over them. They have immortal resurrection bodies and will rule with Christ for 1000 years.
4. They say there will be no glorious kingdom on earth with the Messiah sitting on the throne of David as many of the prophets predicted, no restoration of the creation as Paul predicted (Rom 8:21), and no restored nation of Israel (Rom 11:26-29). They say that Christ is ruling now. Granted that he is seated at the right hand of the Father and rules the universe, but no verse says that Christ is now ruling the world, or that the saints are presently ruling the world.

There is no kingdom for the saints to inherit, even though we are told that they will reign on the earth (Rev 5:10). Jesus told the apostles they would sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28), and he told the churches (Rev 2:26-27) that he would give the overcomers authority over the nations and that they would rule them with a rod of iron. There is no scriptural teaching that the Christian church is the Kingdom of God, or that there is a kingdom in heaven which redeemed mankind will rule over, or that there will be another creation which the elect will rule over. This aspect of the saints' glorification is effectively negated.

The following is a natural interpretation of the teaching given in Rev 19-20.

1. The second coming (Rev 19:11-21)

A symbolic representation to be sure, but the Messiah will descend from heaven, and with justice, he will judge and make war. The armies of heaven will follow him as conquerors (riding on white horses) and righteous (dressed in fine linen, white and clean). As verse 8 states the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, this army consists of the recently resurrected and raptured saints as they come marching in. The kings of the earth have come to wage war against the Messiah, but he will conquer them because he is Lord of Lords and King of kings, *and those who are called, chosen, and faithful are with him* (Rev 17:14). The Antichrist and his false prophet are captured and are consigned directly into hell, while the complete army that dared to gather against the Lord and his Anointed one is killed in warfare and left for the birds to eat. This is the battle of Armageddon. This is judgment day for the nations of the world who rebel against God in their unbelief.

2. **The resurrection of the righteous** (Rev 20:4-6)

The first thing the returning Messiah does is to gather the resurrected and transformed saints to himself in the air (1 Thess 4:13-17). The resurrection and rapture of the saints, which precedes Jesus' descent to earth, is not seen by John. In this vision he sees some of them sitting on thrones. They had come to life and had begun to reign with the Messiah for the 1000 years, serving as priests of God and the Messiah. It is explicitly stated that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1000-year period was over.

3. **The binding of Satan** (Rev 20:1-3)

After the defeat of the armies at the battle of Armageddon, Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss, otherwise known as the bottomless pit. Isaiah describes the judgment of the whole earth when the Lord will punish angelic powers in heaven, and the rulers of the earth on earth. They will be herded together into the Pit and shut up in prison, and *after many days* they will be punished (Isa 24:21-23). Compare 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6. The angelic powers are demons or evil spirits. Isaiah says the moon will be embarrassed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord will reign on Mount Zion, and in the presence of its elders there will

be glory. This prophecy is important because it informs us that all the evil powers in heaven and on earth will be imprisoned. The armies opposing the Lord at Armageddon will be defeated, whether spiritual or human, and these evil spirits and the souls of the human opponents are together thrown into the bottomless pit, to be punished after many days. Meanwhile, the Messiah will rule over the earth from his glorious throne on Mount Zion in the presence of the 'elders', who may be identified with the elders of Rev 4:4, representatives of the saints, who will rule with the Messiah from the New Jerusalem. It is the glory that emanates from the New Jerusalem, hovering over Mount Zion, that causes the moon to be confounded and the sun to be ashamed. They are outshone by the glory of the Lord.

4. **The millennium** (Rev 21:1)

The millennial world is seen by John and described in one verse only. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and the sea was gone. At the last judgment (20:11), the earth and sky fled from God's presence, and no place was found for them. What John sees in this verse is not a new creation, following the disappearance of the first one, it is the renewed earth that the Messiah rules over before the last judgment takes place. God's original plan for his creation, that it would be ruled by humanity on his behalf (Gen 1:26), will be fulfilled by his Messiah and the redeemed. In the original promise of new heavens and new earth (Isa 65:17ff.), the context clearly shows that it is a promise of a renewed earth, not a new one. There is no promise or description of a new planet in the Bible! Peter says the heavens will be set on fire and disintegrate and the elements will burn up and melt (2 Pet 3:10). That might be atomic warfare, but it is not a total destruction. Despite the graphic description, Peter was looking forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, *according to God's promise* made by Isaiah.

In Isaiah's prophecy, the Lord refashions a new earth. The former things are not remembered. He transforms Jerusalem into a delight and its people a joy. The sound of weeping and crying is no longer heard in it, nor an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years. People build houses and plant vineyards

(Isa 65:17-21). The word ‘create’ here is better translated as ‘transform’ (BAG). This is not a prophecy about a brand-new creation, but about a rebirth or regeneration of the world, as Jesus called it (Mt 19:28). Preaching in Jerusalem after Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to *restore everything*, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21). And Paul said that the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God’s children (at resurrection), when the creation itself will also be *set free from corrupting bondage* to share the glorious freedom of God’s children (Rom 8:19, 21).

After the near destruction of the world that will occur during the Great Tribulation, the Messiah will restore it, establish justice and righteousness, and eliminate the curse.

5. **The New Jerusalem** (Rev 21:2 – 22:5)

The brief vision of the transformed earth is followed by a detailed vision of the New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is a metaphor. It is described as a city with its walls, gates, foundations, and streets in other-worldly glory. It is described as a community; the inhabitants of the city are the bride of Christ. It is a symbolic description of her union with the Messiah and with God. The saints are in their glorified, eternal state, which begins at the resurrection of the righteous and this city will be their home during the millennium and on into eternity. The earthly Jerusalem is the capital city of both Israel and the messianic kingdom, while the New Jerusalem that John saw in a vision coming down from heaven is in another space/time realm, but closely identified with the earthly Jerusalem.

Jesus will only descend once, but his descent from heaven to Jerusalem is described differently in Paul’s prophecy (1 Thess 4:16-17, Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 43:1-5), and in Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech 14:3-4). The Messiah comes to be glorified in his saints (2 Thess 1:10). He will be glorified by his union with his redeemed, holy, and blameless people who will number in the hundreds of millions. The saints will be glorified in union with their Lord and Savior, who is now King of kings and Lord of lords. Their glorification is their resurrection, their union with Christ, as symbolized by the wedding supper of the Lamb,

and their status as the monarchy in the messianic kingdom, where they rule with Christ forever.

The nations on earth (survivors of the Great Tribulation) will have their own leaders. The role of the righteous who will rule over the earth with the Messiah is not specified, but in one parable, Jesus rewarded faithful servants by putting them in charge of five or ten cities (Lk 19:17). Paul clearly states that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2).

In his vision, John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2, 9-10). Although the city is symbolic in nature, its descent is a historical event, which is just another way of describing the return of Christ and his elect.

The description we are given in Rev 21:2-22:5 symbolizes our glorification, especially our union with Christ as suggested by the word 'bride'. In 19:7 and 21:9 we are called the bride of the Lamb. But in Rev 21:3 the emphasis is on God himself. He is going to live with us; we will be his people, and he will be our God. The throne of God will no longer be in heaven; the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and the city will come down out of heaven. This is our eternal state; united to God.

How could, maybe a billion people, live in a huge cube like that? How can the saints serve God and rule the world, if they are all concentrated in that one city? The answer is that the New Jerusalem is a metaphor and the details are not revealed. What we do know is that the saints will reign with the Messiah (Rev 3:21), and they will reign over the earth for 1000 years (5:10). Our abode will be intimately connected with the earthly Jerusalem, from where the Messiah will reign. The earthly Jerusalem, as the capital city of his worldwide empire, will be a glorious place and in need of the world's resources. All nations will go there to worship God and his anointed Messiah and to bring their glory and wealth to it.

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride, will take place in heaven. The holy city which comes down out of heaven symbolizes the union of the church with a personally present Christ in glory and government (Rev 19:7-9). The descent of Christ

will constitute the inauguration of the messianic kingdom (Isa 62:1-5, Zech 14:5c, 9) and the church will rest and feast and reign with her Lord.

The New Jerusalem is first mentioned in Rev 3:12, where Jesus promises the overcomers that they will be pillars in the temple of his God, and he will write on them the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from his God, and his new name. The focus here is on belonging to God and Jesus and being a member of the Messiah's community and kingdom.

In chapter 19 the elders and living creatures worship God and cry 'Hallelujah' because the Lord their God reigns. Then they rejoice and praise God, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the lucky bride is the church community that Jesus said he would build (Mt 16:18), people who are chosen by God from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Paul alluded to this marriage in Ephesians 5, where he said that husbands should love their wives just as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25). He goes on to speak of marriage as a union: a man leaving his parents and being united to his wife, an illustration of a profound mystery; the union between the Messiah and the church (Eph 5:31-32). God will dwell with his people, who will be united with him in mind and soul. They will be like him and will participate in his divine nature.

The messianic kingdom will be feudal in nature. The world's population that survived the Great Tribulation and their descendants will constitute the subjects of the kingdom. They are unredeemed but will walk by the light of the holy city (Rev 21:24), and their leaders will come to the brightness of her dawn. Light has a figurative sense, but here it is probably literal. The glory of the Lord will rise on Jerusalem and his glory will appear over her (Isa 60:1-3). The Redeemer will come to Zion in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of Israel's God (Isa 52:8-10). During the millennium, the nations of the world will flow to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the God of Jacob. They will learn his ways and walk in his paths (Isa 2:2-4). The Messiah will judge between the nations and settle their disputes. They'll beat their swords into

plowshares, and they won't learn war anymore. These unregenerate nations and their leaders will bring their wealth to Jerusalem, but they cannot of course enter the New Jerusalem. That privilege is only for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 21:27).

Jerusalem's gates aren't shut at the end of the day, because there is no night there (Isa 60:3, 11, 19-20). Only the redeemed can enter the New Jerusalem, so the nations and kings bring their wealth to the earthly Jerusalem which is bathed in the light of the New Jerusalem above it. The Zion of the millennium is the work of God's hands, for the display of his splendor (Isa 60:21). The nations will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

The land of Israel and its capital Jerusalem will be inhabited by the nation of Israel, who will be redeemed, but not resurrected. The people of Israel will be subjects in the kingdom, having forfeited their right to rule. Rabbinical teaching held that the Jerusalem above was the heavenly archetype (Gal 4:25-26) and that in the messianic period, it would be let down to earth. Hebrews also teaches that there is a heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). In Revelation the New Jerusalem is the holy city which comes down out of heaven from God (3:12, 21:2, 10). It corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem, but it is the eternal home of the resurrected and redeemed, and indeed of God himself. It is in a different dimension, but its light is visible above the earthly Jerusalem.

6. **Satan's doom** (Rev 20:7-10)

When the 1000 years are over, Satan is released from his prison and he again deceives the nations into rebelling against God and his people. They march from all over the earth to Jerusalem but are destroyed by *fire* from heaven. Satan and his evil forces are thrown into hell to be tormented forever. This spells the end of the forces of evil that have plagued mankind from the time when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden. This final judgment should not be confused with the battle of Armageddon, because it occurs 1000 years later. After Armageddon, the Antichrist and the false prophet were thrown

into hell (19:20), then at the end of the millennium, Satan is thrown into hell where the beast and the false prophet are (20:10).

19:20 Antichrist and his false prophet are thrown into hell

20:2 Satan is bound for 1000 years and thrown into the Pit

20:7 After 1000 years, Satan is released from the Pit

20:10 Satan is thrown into hell where the Antichrist is

This final rebellion of the nations is called Gog and Magog, the same term that Ezekiel uses when prophesying about the armies fighting at Armageddon. But those armies were fighting against an Israel who had recently returned to their land, and after their defeat, they were consumed by birds. At that time there will be a great earthquake in Israel which will cause everyone on earth to tremble. Mountains will be overturned, cliffs will crumble, and every wall will collapse. Gog's forces will turn on each other and God will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur on him and his troops and all the many nations with him.

Israel is converted *after* the defeat of Gog (Ezek 39:7, 22, 27-29). Gog and Magog are symbolic names for distant armies from the far north who rebel against God.

7. **The resurrection of the wicked** (Rev 20:5)

In contrast to the righteous who are resurrected before the millennium, the rest of the dead don't come to life until the 1000 years have ended. The following verses are the only ones that speak of a resurrection of the wicked as well as that of the righteous. (Dan 12:2, Jn 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Rev 20:5). The Greek word ἀνάστασις means a 'rising' or a 'standing up'. When referring to the Christian dead it always means bodily resurrection (Isa 26:19, Rom 8:11, 1 Cor 15:35, 42-44, 50-53). Daniel says the dead will 'awake'. John says that all will come out of their graves, some to (eternal) life, others to judgment and condemnation.

When the wicked come to life at the last judgment, they are also resurrected bodily, because Jesus warned people to be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and *body* in hell (Mt 10:28). He also said that it is better to enter the Kingdom of God with one hand, foot or eye than to be thrown into hell with two hands, feet or eyes (Mk 9:43-47).

However, the bodies of the resurrected wicked will not be the same as those of the resurrected righteous. Bodily resurrection is a reward for the righteous, a part of their *glorification*. The righteous look forward to the *redemption* of their bodies, the freeing of their bodies from earthly limitations (Lk 21:28, Rom 8:23). This may include the limitation of time and space, as Jesus experienced after his resurrection.

8. **The Last Judgment** (Rev 20:11-15)

The judge is not named, but ‘he who is seated on the throne’ is consistently God in Revelation. However, Jesus said that the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22).

The context is the very end of this world. John said that the earth and the heavens fled from his presence. When the judgment is over, death and Hades and anyone whose name was not found in the Book of Life, are thrown into hell. The last judgment is mainly for the wicked but will include Israel and others who are saved after the Messiah’s return. They will be resurrected at the last judgment and will join the rest of the elect in the New Jerusalem.

The church was resurrected at the first resurrection and there is no evidence that they will be judged here. Jesus said that they have already passed from death to life, and Paul boldly stated that there is no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus (Rom 8:1). The judgment seat of Christ is for all believers and can be compared to passing through a fire. The true value of all our attitudes and deeds will be made manifest and individuals will be rewarded accordingly. There is no punishment for sins; that is covered by the blood of Christ. Rewards may be withheld, and some will suffer loss; it is a divine assessment of each person’s worth. The wicked are judged according to works, according to what they have done.

The judgment of the ‘sheep’ and the ‘goats’ in Mt 25:31-33 where the righteous and the wicked are all judged at the same time is a parable, and as such, not all the details can be taken literally. The context is premillennial; Jesus is seated on his glorious throne in Zion and the righteous are invited to come and inherit the kingdom.

