

# THE SAINTS OF THE MOST HIGH or THE SAINTS OF THE HIGH PLACES

## **The saints will rule with the Messiah**

A unique OT teaching about the coming Messianic kingdom is that the resurrected saints will rule with the Messiah. Only one Old Testament passage specifically refers to this reign, probably because it concerns the Church, not Israel. Keil's comment on Dan 7:18 agrees with my thesis that the saints constitute the royal family in the Kingdom of God, he says: "The saints of the Most High' are neither the Jews, who are accustomed to call themselves 'saints' (especially in the Psalms and Daniel), in contrast with the heathen, nor the converted Israel of the Millennium, but, as we argue from Exod 19:6, Deut 7:6, the true members of the covenant nation, the New Testament Israel of God, i.e. the congregation of the new covenant, consisting of Israel and the faithful of all nations; for the kingdom which God gives to the Son of Man will, according to Dan 7:14, comprehend those that are redeemed from among all nations of the earth. The idea of the everlasting duration of their kingdom is, by the words 'forever and ever,' raised to the superlative degree."

**Dan 7:18** But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever - yes, forever and ever.

**Dan 7:26-27** But the court will sit, and his (the Antichrist's) power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.

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

In the book of Daniel, both Hebrew (1:1 – 2:3, 8:1-12:13) and a dialect called Aramaic (2:4 – 7:28) are used. Daniel uses *Illaya* in Aramaic as a title for God, translated as 'the Most High,' or *Elaha Illaya* 'the Most High God.' Unlike Hebrew, the word for God (*Elaha*) in Aramaic is singular, so both God and highest are singular. The plural of *Illaya* is *Elyonin*.

In Daniel 7:18, 22, 25, 27, there are people called *qaddishei Elyonin*, usually translated as 'saints/holy people of the Most High,' both words being plural in form. However, as *Elyonin* is plural, meaning 'highest ones or places,' it should not be interpreted as a title of God. The Hebrew form of 'the Most High God' in Psalm 57:3 has the plural *Elohim* for God and the singular *Elyon* for Most High.

Daniel 7:22 is especially problematic: "Until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom." The Ancient of Days and the Most High are the same

person. It is not natural to call God by two different names in the Subject and Object of the same sentence.

So, *qaddishei ʿlyonin* is better translated as ‘saints of the most high places’ as in Darby, originally a French translation.

Who does the third-person singular pronoun ‘*his* kingdom, obey *him*,’ (Dan 7:27) refer to? The previous noun phrase is “the holy *people* of the Most High,” the word ‘people’ in Aramaic being a singular masculine construct. The past ten verses have concerned the saints, the Messiah has not been mentioned since verse 14. GNB and CEV translate: “*Their* kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey *them*.” This is confirmed several times in Revelation. “You have made them to, be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the Earth (Rev 5:10). Most translations say the saints will reign *on* Earth, but the Greek preposition can mean either *over/on and over* is more natural after the verb to reign. The saints will live in the New Jerusalem from where they will reign *over* the Earth. They will see God’s face and worship him (Rev 22:5).

The New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God and the dwelling place of God will then be with them (Rev 21:2-3). This is very significant. Throughout the OT, God has always been depicted as dwelling in heaven among spiritual beings, but now he will dwell among humans. The Messiah’s glory will be seen above the temple in Jerusalem, where he will be worshipped by all the nations on Earth. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the New Jerusalem, and he will reign through his saints who will dwell with him there (Rev 22:3). Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord filling the millennial temple in Jerusalem and he heard the Lord saying he would dwell there among his people, the Israelites, forever (Ezek 43:1-7). So, the Messiah will dwell among mortal Israelites in the temple in Jerusalem, and he will dwell among the immortal Church in New Jerusalem in the sky above. New Jerusalem above and earthly Jerusalem below are united in overlapping realms, the heavenly and the earthy.

The saints receive the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan 7:18). Judgment is given to them (Dan 7:22) and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven is under their control (Daniel 7:27). Half of the teaching that Jesus gave concerning the Kingdom of God relates to God’s people, the righteous or the elect because it is they who constitute the monarchy in the Messianic kingdom. As Jesus told Nicodemus, only those who are born again of the Holy Spirit can enter that monarchy. The meek inherit it, and there

are different status levels in it. Jesus spoke about people being the least or the greatest in the Kingdom of God.

The interesting phrase ‘saints of the Most High’ occurs four times (Dan 7:18, 22, 25, 27) and is better translated as ‘saints of the high places.’ Literally, in Aramaic, the language of Daniel 2:4–7:28, the expression means ‘holy ones of high places.’ The Hebrew word *קדושים* means holy or sacred. The first occurrence is in Exodus 19:6: “And you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a *holy* nation.” As an adjective, it means “holy, sacred, or belonging to God.” As a noun, it means “holy or sacred ones” and is usually translated as ‘saints’ and sometimes ‘angels.’

One of the Hebrew titles for God is *El Elyon*, meaning ‘the Most High God’. In Psalm 78:56 a fuller form is used: *Elohim Elyon*, where the plural word for God is used, but the word for ‘Most High’ remains singular. In Daniel, the Aramaic equivalent of this title is *Illaya*, which occurs ten times, with or without a preceding word for God. Another related word, *Elyonim*, occurs four times, always following the word for saints. *Elyonim* is the plural for *Elyon*, but as noted above, the plural form in Hebrew is never used with God’s name, the Most High. Why do translators assume that *elyonim* means ‘Most High’ when the word follows the word for saints? Daniel 7:25 says: “He will speak a word against the Most High (*Illaya* = singular), and will wear out the saints of the Most High (*elyonim* = plural).” The natural meaning of the word is ‘high things’ or ‘high places.’ The eighteenth-century Bible expositor John Gill interpreted the phrase to mean: ‘saints of the high places or heavenly realms.’ He said these saints are those “who are born from above and are called with a high and heavenly calling, towards which they are pressing, reckoning themselves strangers here below.” Expositors William Kelly and John Nelson Darby also follow that interpretation and suggest that the expression, ‘the high places,’ gave rise to the expression ‘heavenly places’ in Ephesians. Paul says that Christians are blessed in Christ “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). Christ is seated at God’s right hand ‘in the heavenly places’ (Eph 1:20), and Christians have been saved, raised with Christ, and seated with him ‘in the heavenly places.’

As the angel explained the future to Daniel, he may not have understood what the saints of a higher realm meant, but he did

understand that the saints were inheriting a kingship, that they would possess it forever, and that this kingship would involve all kingdoms on Earth. He also heard that the saints would be decimated by the Antichrist before God judges in their favor. This necessitated a belief in the resurrection. The interpreting angel said: “At that time your people will be delivered, everyone whose name will be found in the Book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life ... and those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:1-3). John’s visions in Revelation show us that when the saints are resurrected, they will live with God in the New Jerusalem in the heavenly realms.

The ‘saints’ or ‘holy people’ in Daniel are set apart from the Jewish nation. Israel is called ‘your people’ or ‘my people’ nine times in chapters 9-12 - 9:15, 16, 19, 20, 24, 10:14, 11:14, 12:1 (x2). ‘Saints/holy people’ are referred to eight times, always in the context of being persecuted by the Antichrist at the end of the age. Daniel is the only OT prophet who saw the Church in prophecy. They will be oppressed for 3 ½ years as the Antichrist wages war against them until their power is finally broken. Then the Ancient of Days will pronounce judgment in favor of them, and they will possess the kingship (7:18, 22, 27).

The most high places to which the saints belong, or from which they come, can be equated with the heavenly realms that Paul refers to in Ephesians. God has blessed the saints in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3). God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (Eph 1:20) and has raised the saints with Christ and seated them with him in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6). God intends that, through the Church, his manifold wisdom should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Eph 3:10). The saints struggle is not against flesh and blood (human beings), but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). The saints have been exalted to the heavenly

realms and it is from there in the New Jerusalem that they will reign during the Millennium. They are the saints of most high places spoken about by Daniel.

‘Saints of the Most High’ is also a superfluous phrase. ‘Saints’ means ‘holy people,’ implying that they belong to God. That the saints in Daniel are followers of Jesus in the last days is clear from a comparison of Daniel and Revelation.

**Dan 7:21** As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them.

**Rev 13:7** It (the beast) was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them.

They are delivered into his hands for a period of 3 ½ years.

**Dan 7:25** The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times, and half a time.

**Rev 13:5** The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for 42 months.

**Dan 12:2-3** Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

**Rev 20:4** And I saw the souls of those who ... had not worshipped the beast or its image ... They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

**Dan 7:18** But the holy people of the high places will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever.

**Rev 3:21** To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

## **NT confirmation of Daniel’s prophecy concerning the rule of the saints**

In a vision, Daniel saw the Ancient of Days giving the Son of Man *dominion and glory and a kingdom* so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. And so, after his

ascension, Jesus told his disciples that *all authority in heaven and on Earth* had been given to him (Matt 28:18). His instructions to them at this time were not about the Church ruling with him, but that they should go and make disciples of all nations. He would come back one day to reign over the Earth, when all the ungodly nations, peoples, and languages would be obliged to serve him. It would be at that time that his faithful followers would reign with him on Earth.

The following verses confirm Daniel's prophecy that the saints will one day rule with the Messiah.

Mt 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the Earth.

Matt 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Matt 19:28 Jesus' followers will judge Israel

Matt 25:34 The righteous will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world

Luke 13:29 People will come from East and West and North and South and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God

Luke 19:17 Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.

Luke 22:29-30 I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rom 8:16-19 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if

indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we might share in his glory. ... For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

1 Cor 6:2 Do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world?

Col 1:12-13 Giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

2 Tim 2:12 If we endure, we will also reign with him.

Heb 12:28 Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful.

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.

2 Pet 1:11 You will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Rev 1:6 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father.

Rev 2:26-27 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations. That one will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery.

Rev 3:21 To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Rev 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth

Rev 20:4 I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God ... They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years



Rev 20:6b They will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years

John, in his vision, saw the saints rising from the dead and reigning with the Messiah on earth (Rev 5:10, 20:5-6) for a thousand years, presumably from their heavenly home in the New Jerusalem in the sky, where in their resurrected bodies, they will come and go like angels. The descent of the Holy City (Rev 20:2, 9-10) occurs in John's vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth. As this is the millennial Earth it is reasonable, if not necessary, to regard the descent of the New Jerusalem as contemporaneous with the Resurrection. The souls of the righteous are now in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22). The saints will meet the Lord in the air where, as resurrected beings, they will find their new home, the New Jerusalem. This heavenly city is called the bride of Christ, it is paradise.

This physical reign with Christ on planet Earth should not be confused with our spiritual exaltation. God has already raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realm. Being seated with Christ spiritually on God's throne is our present exalted status (Eph 1:20, 2:6) in anticipation of the overcomers sharing his throne and ruling with him on his glorious throne over the earth (Rev 3:21).

For how long will Jesus reign? Can his kingdom go on forever and ever, for eternity? Gabriel told Mary that Jesus would reign over Israel *forever* and that his kingdom would *have no end* (Lk 1:33). Daniel mentions many times that the Messiah's kingdom is everlasting and will never be destroyed. And those who are wise will shine like the stars forever and ever. Paul talks about the Son handing the kingdom (his kingship and reign) over to the Father (1 Cor 15:24). This will happen on judgment day, after the millennium, when we are told that earth and sky flee from God's presence leaving no trace. As that signals the end of the world, the Messiah's kingship will revert from Son to Father so that the Father might have full authority over everything. However, the Son and the saints will continue to rule with him, because they have been promised eternal life and eternal rule. The Son is united to the Father and the saints are united to the Son. Whatever

Almighty God does in the future, his Son and his redeemed children will be involved. There will be no more sin, death, night, crying, or pain. We will see God's face and understand him to some degree. We will love, serve, and worship him with all our hearts. That is about all we know about the eternal state.

Several scriptures indicate that the earth will perish, wear out like a garment, and pass away (Ps 102:25, cf. Heb 1:11–12). Jesus made the statement that heaven and earth will pass away, but his words will not pass away (Mt 24:35). The creation is not eternal. In Hebrews 12:27 we are told that we will receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The sky and earth will wear out like a garment, God will roll them up like a robe, and like a garment, they will be changed.

But, is this annihilation or transformation? Hebrews 12:26–27 prophesies the removal of things that can be shaken, so that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. It is a quote from Haggai who said that God will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. He will shake all nations, and as a result of these judgments, the nations will bring their treasures and fill the Messiah's temple with glory (Hag 2:6-9). Haggai is not talking about annihilation; his shaking of the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land has to do with the Great Tribulation and the complete transformation that will take place in the world when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and his Messiah. Isaiah also prophesied that the wealth of the nations would be brought to Jerusalem (Isa 60:5), and John confirms it in his vision (Rev 21:24–26).

There is no promise of a new planet or another physical creation in the Bible. What the OT prophets spoke about was a renewed creation during the millennium. The presence of the four living creatures around God's throne suggests that the animal kingdom will continue to exist during the millennium. The redeemed will continue their existence in the New Jerusalem, that symbolic other-worldly city where there is no need of sun or moon, and there is no night. They will reign forever (Rev 22:5). The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, because it appears out of another dimension, and our future existence will take place in that

sphere. Paul spoke about God's wisdom, by which he decreed a plan for us before time began and for our glory. He said nobody has seen or heard or imagined what it will be like (1 Cor 2:9), so theologians, philosophers, and scientists can be assured that the future will be bright for the redeemed, but the details have not yet been revealed. Even our mode of existence and that of the Messiah during the millennium is a mystery.