

**Le règne
messianique
à venir**



débloquer les secrets

Dr Ross McCallum Jones

A propos du livre

C'est en traduisant la Bible en Boo, une langue de la République du Bénin en Afrique de l'Ouest, que le Dr Jones s'est d'abord interrogé sur le sens de l'expression 'royaume de Dieu'. Il semblait impossible de trouver une expression en Boo qui transmettrait le sens correct dans ses divers contextes. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie d'entrer dans le royaume de Dieu ou d'hériter le royaume de Dieu? Pourquoi Jésus a-t-il dit que le royaume de Dieu est proche ou au milieu des hommes? Comment pouvons-nous nous attendre à ce que la prière 'Que ton règne vienne' soit exaucée?

Jésus a dit que nous devrions nous préoccuper avant tout du royaume de Dieu. Pourtant, en interrogeant chrétiens et pasteurs, locaux et internationaux, j'ai constaté que peu de gens sont capables d'expliquer le sens et la pertinence du royaume de Dieu. Ceux qui pensent savoir quelque chose interprètent généralement le royaume selon leur vision du millénium, ce qui entraîne des interprétations très différentes des événements de la fin des temps.

Certains interprètent le royaume comme la souveraineté de Dieu sur l'univers, d'autres comme 'le règne de Dieu dans nos cœurs', 'le salut présent du Christ et ses bienfaits', ou 'la nouvelle vie en Christ'. Beaucoup ont tendance à penser au ciel comme notre destination, et le royaume devient une doctrine obscure, plutôt que la vérité glorieuse selon laquelle Dieu a fait des saints un royaume de prêtres qui régneront avec le Messie sur la terre.

Ce nouveau regard sur la théologie du royaume de Dieu clarifie beaucoup d'énigmes concernant le royaume et présente une nouvelle compréhension de Jésus et de son ministère en tant que Messie. Le livre explique clairement ce que Jésus a voulu dire par cette expression unique et cryptique, et cela a un bon sens dans tous les contextes. Le royaume est vraiment une perle de grand prix à attendre avec impatience alors que le retour du Messie se rapproche de plus en plus.

A propos de l'auteur

Le Dr Ross McCallum Jones a servi Dieu en tant que linguiste et traducteur de la Bible en Afrique occidentale pendant cinq décennies, évangélisant, implantant des églises et traduisant les Écritures en six langues. Sa profonde compréhension des Écritures s'y est développée sur le terrain de la mission. Travaillant dans des huttes aux murs de boue et au toit d'herbe avec des consultants en langues autochtones, il passa ses journées à fouiller dans les commentaires et les lexiques en hébreu et en grec pour trouver le moyen le plus approprié de traduire les concepts et les termes clés et de produire des traductions précises, claires et naturelles.

Après une éducation chrétienne nominale dans un foyer respectant les valeurs judéo-chrétiennes, il se convertit de façon dramatique à l'âge de 22 ans lorsqu'il céda sa vie au Seigneur. Fait disciple par des évangélistes, il a rejoint une église évangélique avec un accent particulier sur les missions et

l'évangélisation. Appelé à servir, il vend sa voiture et fréquente l'Institut Biblique de Melbourne, où il étudie l'hébreu et le grec. Il a ensuite obtenu un doctorat en linguistique à l'Université Monash de Melbourne, en Australie. En Allemagne, l'éditeur linguistique universitaire Lincom Europa a publié sa thèse intitulée *The Boko/Busa Language Cluster* et sept dictionnaires qu'il a compilés, chacun contenant un résumé de leurs grammaires. Après avoir travaillé comme linguiste exégète sur le terrain de la mission pendant de nombreuses années, il a pu aborder le sujet du royaume de Dieu sous un angle différent de celui des érudits qui étudient et enseignent dans des collèges théologiques.

Dr Ross McCallum Jones

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Dévouement

Ce livre est dédié à Jésus le Messie, qui reviendra bientôt régner sur la terre. Il est venu pour enseigner et nous montrer comment vivre et servir Dieu de manière acceptable. Puis il mourut gracieusement à notre place, afin que nos péchés soient pardonnés. Il a dit à ses disciples de chercher d'abord le royaume de Dieu et sa justice et toutes les autres choses leur seraient ajoutées. Je le remercie de m'avoir sauvé à l'âge de 22 ans. Je peux témoigner que j'ai découvert la paix, la joie et le courage que le Saint-Esprit produit en nous et que toutes les autres choses, toutes les nécessités de la vie, et plus, sont tombées. sur mes genoux: une bonne épouse, quatre fils, douze petits-enfants, un ministère de cinquante ans en Afrique de l'Ouest faisant la traduction de la Bible et l'implantation d'églises, une bonne santé, de la nourriture, un abri et une abondance d'amis. J'ai découvert la justice fournie par Dieu et j'ai l'assurance que je suis un enfant de Dieu et que je vais hériter du royaume à venir du Messie. Je suis impatient de voir la résurrection et partager la gloire du Messie et régner sur la terre.

Loué soit Dieu! Je vous remercie, Seigneur Jésus!

Les abréviations

AT

Genèse	Gen
Exode	Ex
Nombres	Nom
Deutéronome	Deut
2 Samuel	2Sam
1 Chroniques	1Ch
2 Chroniques	2Chr
Néhémie	Néh.
Psaumes	Ps
Isaïe	Isa
Jérémie	Jér
Ezekiel	Ezk
Daniel	Dan
Michée	Mich
Habakuk	Hab
Sophonie	Soph
Aggée	Ag

NT

Matthew	Mat
Romains	Rom
1 Corinthiens	1Cor
2 Corinthiens	2Cor
Galates	Gal
Ephésiens	Eph
Philippiens	Phil
Colossiens	Col.
1 Thessaloniens	1Th
2 Thessaloniens	2Th
1 Timothée	1Tim
2 Timothée	2Tim
Hébreux	Héb
Apocalypse	Apoc

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Après une éducation chrétienne symbolique dans un foyer respectant les valeurs judéo-chrétiennes, il se convertit de façon dramatique à l'âge de 22 ans lorsqu'il céda sa vie au Seigneur. Discipliné par des évangélistes, il rejoint une église évangélique avec un accent particulier sur les missions et l'évangélisation. Appelé à servir, il vend sa voiture et fréquente le Melbourne Bible Institute, où il étudie l'hébreu et le grec. Il a ensuite obtenu un doctorat en linguistique de l'Université Monash de Melbourne, en Australie. En Allemagne, l'éditeur linguistique universitaire Lincom Europa a publié sa thèse intitulée «Le groupe de langues Boko / Busa» et sept dictionnaires qu'il a compilés, chacun contenant un résumé de leurs grammaires. Après avoir travaillé comme linguiste exégète sur le terrain de la mission pendant de nombreuses années, il a pu aborder le sujet du royaume de Dieu sous un angle différent de celui des érudits qui étudient et enseignent dans des collèges théologiques.

Contexte

C'est en traduisant la Bible en Boko, une langue de la République du Bénin en Afrique de l'Ouest, que le Dr Jones s'est d'abord interrogé sur le sens de l'expression «royaume de Dieu». Il semblait impossible de trouver une expression dans Boko qui transmettrait le sens correct dans ses divers contextes. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie d'entrer dans le royaume de Dieu ou d'hériter du royaume de Dieu? Pourquoi Jésus a-t-il dit que le royaume de Dieu est proche ou entre les hommes? Comment pouvons-nous nous attendre à ce que la prière 'Votre royaume venu' soit élaborée?

Jésus a dit que nous devrions nous préoccuper avant tout du royaume de Dieu. Pourtant, en interrogeant chrétiens et pasteurs, locaux et internationaux, j'ai constaté que peu de gens sont capables d'expliquer le sens et la pertinence du royaume de Dieu. Ceux qui savent quelque chose interprètent généralement le royaume selon leur vision du millénaire, ce qui entraîne des interprétations très différentes des événements de la fin des temps.

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Ce nouveau regard sur la théologie du royaume de Dieu clarifie beaucoup de devinettes concernant le royaume et présente une nouvelle compréhension de Jésus et de son ministère en tant que Messie. Le livre explique clairement ce que Jésus a voulu dire par cette phrase unique et cryptique, et cela a du sens dans tous les contextes. Le royaume est vraiment une perle de grand prix à attendre avec impatience alors que le retour du Messie se rapproche de plus en plus.

Introduction

Ce livre se situe ou tombe sur les quatre thèses présentées ci-dessous. Si ces interprétations sont correctes, ce livre révolutionnera votre compréhension de Jésus et des évangiles. Cela vous éclairera sur le mystère de la raison pour laquelle Jean-Baptiste et Jésus ont prêché «l'évangile du royaume», pourquoi Jésus a parlé en paraboles et pourquoi il a utilisé des expressions cryptiques telles que «le royaume de Dieu», «le royaume de le ciel 'et' le Fils de l'homme ' . Plus important encore, cela vous aidera à interpréter correctement la fin des temps, y compris une vision scripturaire de l'enlèvement et du millénaire. Mais surtout, cela vous aidera à apprécier la merveilleuse position des croyants dans notre union avec Christ, qui aboutit à notre héritage de héritiers avec le Messie dans son futur règne terrestre.

Avant de passer en revue les quatre thèses que je présenterai sur le Royaume de Dieu, laissez-moi vous avertir de certaines idées fausses répandues sur le royaume de Dieu. Le royaume de Dieu est un concept pré-église et c'était le sujet principal de Jésus dans sa

prédication. Ne va pas à l'apôtre Paul pour comprendre; il n'en parle pas beaucoup. Le royaume de Dieu n'est pas «un pouvoir intérieur qui pénètre dans l'âme humaine et s'en empare» (Adolf von Harnack). Aucune Écriture n'enseigne cela. Le royaume de Dieu ne doit pas être identifié avec l'église en tant que père de l'église du cinquième siècle, Augustin. Le royaume de Dieu ne consiste pas à transformer le monde par une perméation lente et progressive, comme chacun peut le voir aujourd'hui. Le royaume de Dieu a son origine dans les cieux mais ne doit pas être assimilé à des cieux. Le royaume de Dieu n'est pas un territoire géographique comme le Royaume-Uni, ni la population appartenant à un tel territoire.

Première thèse:

Le royaume de Dieu, tel que prêché par Jésus, ne concerne pas principalement la souveraineté de Dieu, ce n'est pas le royaume de Dieu; c'est un royaume terrestre établi par Dieu. C'est le royaume du Messie.

Le terme «royaume de Dieu», tel qu'utilisé par Jésus, ne désigne pas le règne éternel de Dieu sur l'univers. Il y a un sens dans lequel tout appartient à Dieu, de sorte que le sens ne peut pas être totalement exclu, mais le sens que Jésus a donné à l'expression ne sera jamais compris, si le royaume de Dieu est considéré comme le royaume de Dieu. C'est plutôt le royaume qui vient de Dieu par opposition aux royaumes établis par les dirigeants humains. C'est un royaume terrestre avec un roi humain, Jésus le Messie. Jésus a toujours utilisé

cette expression pour désigner son royaume messianique, ou par métonymie, pour se désigner lui-même comme le Messie. Cela implique que le royaume de Dieu ne peut être assimilé à rien de ce qui existait avant l'arrivée du Messie. Le terme «royaume de Dieu» n'apparaît pas dans l'Ancien Testament, cependant, la plupart des prophètes ont prophétisé à son sujet. Cela ne devrait pas non plus être assimilé au ciel ni à l'église. Le royaume de Dieu concerne le Messie et le royaume qu'il établira ici sur terre immédiatement après son retour. Toutes les prophéties de l'Ancien Testament relatives au Messie et à son règne de Jérusalem seront littéralement accomplies, comme les prophéties d'origine étaient destinées à être comprises.

Les mots hébreu et grec pour royaume sont complexes et ont plusieurs significations, à la fois concrètes (territoire) et abstraites (royauté, règle, pouvoir royal). Couplés à des prédicats tels que «arrive», «est proche» ou «est parmi», l'expression désigne le roi lui-même, en qui appartient le royaume du royaume. En d'autres termes, «le royaume de Dieu est proche» signifie simplement que le Messie est proche. Cette vérité est souvent reconnue, mais encore plus souvent ignorée.

Deuxième thèse:

Les évangiles présentent Jésus d'abord et avant tout comme le Messie juif qui reviendra un jour pour régner sur toute la terre.

Pour les Juifs du temps de Jésus, le Messie était un espoir extrêmement important, même s'il était une figure énigmatique, tantôt humaine, tantôt divine; parfois un serviteur, parfois un roi.

Mais ce qui ne faisait aucun doute, c'était que lorsqu'il viendrait, il régnerait visiblement sur la terre, du trône de David à Jérusalem. Les Juifs attendaient un royaume pacifique et prospère, que Dieu établirait par son "Fils", le Messie. «Fils» signifiait «régent», un homme qui régnerait sur la terre pour le compte de Dieu. Il ressusciterait les morts, rénoverait la terre et régnerait pour toujours sur toutes les nations du monde. Telle était l'opinion commune du royaume de Dieu parmi les Juifs lorsqu'ils parlaient de ces choses avec Jésus.

Le mot «Christ» est une translittération du mot grec pour Messie, ριστός, mais la véritable signification échappe aux lecteurs modernes. Son utilisation actuelle ressemble plus à un nom personnel qu'au titre d'un roi juif qui vaincrait un jour tous les ennemis d'Israël et introduirait une ère de paix universelle sur la terre. Les évangiles sont pleins de désignations messianiques: Fils de Dieu, Fils de l'homme, Fils de David, roi des Juifs et même Seigneur, mais lorsque nous prions "que ton règne vienne", cela ne signifie pas que beaucoup de gens que nous prions pour le retour et le règne du Messie. Le royaume de Dieu ne peut pas venir; c'est éternel; il est toujours sur le trône. C'est le règne du Messie dans lequel nous espérons et prions. Ce royaume messianique est éternel, car à la fin de son règne sur terre, Jésus remettra le royaume au Père, après avoir supprimé tous les chefs, autorités et pouvoirs (1Cor. 15: 24-25).

Troisième thèse:

La signification première de «royaume» dans son usage biblique est abstraite, ce qui signifie «royauté» ou «règne» ou «gouvernement». Concrètement, cela peut signifier un domaine géographique, ou le Messie lui-même, ou la monarchie. Cela concerne seulement le salut, ou une nouvelle vie en Christ, dans l'église ou au paradis.

Les références bibliques à l'entrée et à l'héritage du royaume de Dieu doivent être interprétées correctement avec ces significations à l'esprit. Par exemple, Jésus a dit que les pauvres en esprit sont bénis, car le royaume des cieux leur appartient! (Mt 5: 3). De quelle manière leur appartient-il? Comment pouvez-vous posséder un royaume? Ce n'est pas en entrant dans le domaine géographique d'un royaume en tant que sujet, en étant sauvé, ou en trouvant une nouvelle vie en Christ. Vous le possédez en tant que dirigeant du gouvernement. Les Ecritures ne disent jamais que les gens entrent dans le royaume en tant que sujets ou citoyens, mais quelque chose de bien plus glorieux; ils entrent en tant que fils de Dieu et cohéritiers avec le Messie. A cause de leur union avec le Messie, les saints régneront avec lui sur la terre. Ils vont s'asseoir à la table royale avec Abraham, Isaac et Jacob. C'est l'enseignement passionnant de Jésus concernant le royaume de Dieu.

Quatrième thèse:

Le royaume de Dieu a un aspect secret qui n'a pas été révélé aux prophètes. Ce secret est que l'église, la communauté que Jésus le Messie appelle de tous les peuples, tribus, nations et langues, régnera avec le Messie dans le royaume de Dieu.

Il y a des prophéties de l'Ancien Testament concernant les Gentils, mais le mystère de l'église n'était connu qu'après sa révélation aux apôtres. Paul, dans Éphésiens, parle du plan secret de Dieu concernant le Messie, à savoir que les païens comme les juifs qui croient en l'évangile du royaume partageront à parts égales les richesses héritées des enfants de Dieu. Le but de Dieu est d'utiliser l'église pour montrer sa sagesse dans sa riche variété à tous les dirigeants et autorités invisibles des lieux célestes. C'est son plan éternel qu'il a réalisé à travers Jésus le Messie. Ne pensez pas à l'église comme un bâtiment, une congrégation ou une dénomination; Pensez à l'église comme la communauté totale du peuple de Dieu, ceux qui, dans les Écritures, sont appelés les élus, les justes, les saints ou simplement les serviteurs de Dieu.

Apocalypse 7: 9 nous parle d'une foule immense, trop nombreuse pour compter, de toutes nations, tribus, peuples et langues. Ces personnes ont lavé leurs robes et les ont blanchies dans le sang de l'Agneau. Dieu, selon son grand amour, sa miséricorde et sa grâce, est en train de sauver des gens de toutes les nations et de toutes les cultures. Ils sont les vrais croyants de tous les temps et de tous les lieux. Ils sont sauvés par la foi dans le Messie et lui sont unis. Ils reçoivent le don de la vie éternelle et régneront avec le Messie tout au long de son règne sur la terre et jusqu'à l'éternité. En tant que co-héritiers du Christ, ces saints internationaux constituent le gouvernement du royaume de Dieu!

Interprétation

Il est important d'interpréter correctement la Bible, tout d'abord en la considérant comme le mot infaillible de Dieu. Lors de la lecture ou de la lecture de la Bible, le texte ne doit pas être mis en doute. Les spécialistes du texte ont examiné des milliers de manuscrits anciens et nous ont fourni le meilleur texte autorisé possible. De plus, Dieu nous a dit que toutes les Écritures sont inspirées de Dieu (2Tim. 3:16), et Jésus a dit que le ciel et la terre vont disparaître, mais que ses paroles ne passeront jamais.

Dans la mesure du possible, la parole de Dieu devrait être prise à la lettre et non spiritualisée ou allégorisée. Ce n'est pas toujours possible; le genre est important. Les paraboles et les métaphores ne doivent pas être prises à la lettre. On ne peut pas non plus prendre à la lettre les visions d'un prophète, mais lorsque vous interprétez le symbolisme et les métaphores, vous vous retrouvez avec un message que vous pouvez prendre à la lettre. Des passages tels que Gen. 1-11, les prophéties messianiques de l'Ancien Testament et Apocalypse 20 communiquent un sens clair lorsqu'ils sont interprétés littéralement, sens qui est en accord avec les Écritures apparentées. Mais il y a beaucoup de mots dans la littérature apocalyptique comme le livre de l'Apocalypse qui ont une signification symbolique et doivent être interprétés. Et les visions de John ressemblent à des rêves qui reflètent la réalité, mais ne sont pas perçues comme nous le percevons normalement. Elles doivent donc être interprétées avec prudence, ce qui ne signifie pas nécessairement qu'elles doivent être «spiritualisées». Le déploiement des paroles de Dieu s'illumine et permet aux simples de comprendre (Psaume 119: 130).

Le royaume de Dieu est un terme clé qui apparaît 162 fois dans le Nouveau Testament. Il doit être traduit avec le plus grand soin pour ne pas causer de malentendu au lieu d'illumination. Grâce à mon expérience de linguiste et de traductrice biblique au cours de ces cinq dernières décennies, je suis parvenu à comprendre ce terme qui a du sens dans tous les contextes et qui est véritablement un trésor caché dans un domaine. Cependant, il s'agit d'un concept radicalement différent de celui de votre fidèle pratiquant d'église ou de pasteur. L'un des problèmes est que Jésus, prêchant dans un environnement hostile, ne pouvait pas parler clairement en public du fait qu'il était un roi et qu'il dirigerait le monde un jour. Nous ne pouvons pas changer la façon dont Jésus en a parlé, mais je pense qu'il y a un bon argument, qui sera expliqué plus tard, pour interpréter «royaume de Dieu» comme «royaume de Dieu» et «royaume des cieux» comme «royaume». du paradis'.

Cette citation de Henry Alford, dans son plaidoyer classique en faveur d'une lecture prémillénaire de la Rév. 20, illustre bien ce que je veux dire:

«Je suis de plus en plus conscient du décalage qui existe entre ce que les premiers chrétiens pensaient de la vie après la mort... et ce que beaucoup de chrétiens ordinaires semblent croire à ce sujet aujourd'hui.... et j'en suis venu à la conclusion que ce que nous faisons et disons à ce sujet est de plus en plus en contradiction avec tout ce qui peut être justifié par la tradition.... Ma crainte est que nous ayons simplement sombré dans la confusion et le désordre en rassemblant des fragments de traditions, d'idées et de pratiques dans

l'espoir qu'elles auront un sens. Ils ne le font pas. Il peut arriver qu'un fudge typiquement anglican soit agréable et capricieux, mais ce n'est pas le cas. Il est temps de parler et de penser clairement et d'agir avec détermination. "

La traduction ISV CHANGE

Ce livre contient de nombreuses citations des Écritures et de nombreuses références aux Écritures. S'il n'y a pas de guillemets, cela signifie que j'ai paraphrasé le passage. Pour les devis directs, j'ai choisi d'utiliser une nouvelle traduction appelée International Standard Version (ISV). Cela évite le langage archaïque et évite d'être excessivement littéral ou idiomatique. Des critiques indépendants l'ont décrite comme la traduction la plus lisible et la plus précise. J'apprécie particulièrement l'accent mis sur Jésus en tant que Messie. Le nom «Christ» n'apparaît pas du tout dans la traduction. Le mot grec Χριστός. est toujours traduit par «le Messie», plutôt que de se translittérer par «Christ».

Ce livre est écrit avec le désir que vous compreniez bien la Bible, je ne cherche donc aucune excuse pour les nombreuses références bibliques. Je vous encouragerais à ressembler aux Béréens, qui examinaient les Écritures tous les jours pour voir si ce que Paul leur avait dit était vrai (Actes 17:11).

Comprendre le fond

La révélation de Dieu dans les Écritures est progressive. Les prophètes ont vu des fragments du Messie et du royaume, mais ils ne pouvaient pas tout mettre ensemble. Parfois, il guérissait, parfois il souffrait. Parfois, il était un serviteur, parfois, il était un roi. Mais le temps est venu pour les justes de bien comprendre. Jésus a dit à ses disciples que la connaissance des secrets du royaume des cieux leur avait été transmise, mais pas à d'autres (Mt 13:11).

La plupart des gens ne comprenaient pas Jésus quand il allait de village en village, proclamant le royaume de Dieu, parlant en paraboles et utilisant des expressions telles que «royaume de Dieu», «royaume des cieux» et «Fils de l'homme». La plupart des gens aujourd'hui sont également ignorants, qu'il s'agisse d'incroyants, de pratiquants, de pasteurs ou même de théologiens. Mais nous, croyants, avons le droit de connaître les secrets du royaume des cieux. J'espère que dans les pages suivantes, vous trouverez une manière acceptable d'interpréter le royaume de Dieu. Aucune de ces idées n'est entièrement nouvelle, mais chaque scribe formé au royaume des cieux est semblable au maître de la maison qui apporte à la fois des objets nouveaux et anciens de son coffre au trésor (Mt 13:52).

À qui est ce royaume?

Le premier secret que nous devons comprendre est le sens de l'expression «royaume de Dieu». Nous devons nous excuser si nous

pensons aux passages de l'Ancien Testament qui décrivent la souveraineté de Dieu, comme ceci:

«A toi, Éternel, appartiennent la grandeur et le courage, et la splendeur, l'endurance et la majesté, car tout ce qui est au ciel et sur la terre est à toi. À toi appartient le royaume, SEIGNEUR, et tu es élevé comme un chef suprême. La richesse et l'honneur procèdent de vous et vous les dirigez tous. Vous contrôlez le pouvoir - vous contrôlez qui est fait grand et comment chacun devient fort »(1Chron. 29: 11-12).

Je crois comprendre que l'expression du royaume de Dieu, telle qu'elle est utilisée par Jésus, ne fait jamais référence à la loi souveraine de Dieu sur le ciel et la terre, telle que nous l'avons ici dans les Chroniques. L'expression «royaume de Dieu» n'est pas utilisée dans l'Ancien Testament et n'est jamais utilisée dans le Nouveau Testament avec cette signification. Jésus a parlé du royaume proche ou à venir, ce qui n'est pas une terminologie appropriée pour la souveraineté éternelle de Dieu. Jésus a parlé de personnes entrant dans le royaume et en héritant, ce qui, encore une fois, n'est pas une terminologie appropriée pour faire référence à la souveraineté éternelle de Dieu. Peu de gens comprennent le sens donné à cette expression par Jésus. Les évangiles commencent tous en mettant l'accent sur le fait que Jésus était le Messie, et Jésus a toujours utilisé l'expression du royaume de Dieu pour se désigner soit comme le Messie, soit comme son futur royaume terrestre.

"Christ" est une translittération du mot grec Χριστός, qui équivaut au mot hébreu pour "l'oint". Ce n'est pas un nom de famille, cela signifie

généralement «le Messie», le sauveur et le roi promis par les Juifs, mais la véritable signification de la parole s'est perdue et Jésus-Christ sonne comme un nom. L'Annexe 2 explique la signification du nom Messie.

Jésus a besoin de secret

Jésus a dit qu'il parlait en paraboles parce qu'il ne voulait pas que tout le monde comprenne de quoi il parlait. Il l'a lui-même expliqué. Il voulait que ses disciples comprennent, mais il y avait d'autres personnes dans la foule qu'il ne voulait pas comprendre.

Il est né le Messie, le roi des Juifs, mais il ne pouvait pas publier ce fait dans son enseignement. Les Juifs étaient dominés par Rome qui ne tolérerait pas un roi rival. Parmi les dirigeants juifs, il y avait des rois et des dirigeants qui ne voulaient pas tolérer un roi rival. Le roi Hérode donna l'ordre de tuer tous les garçons âgés de moins de deux ans à Bethléem et dans les environs dans le but de tuer cette menace perçue, mais Jésus s'était déjà enfui en Égypte. Ainsi, quand Jésus a commencé à prêcher, il a communiqué avec ses disciples au sujet de son identité, mais il n'a pas été aussi explicite à ce sujet en public.

Il a trois façons de contourner ce problème. L'une consistait à utiliser une expression cryptique comme «le royaume de Dieu». La seconde consistait à utiliser une autre expression cryptique, «Fils de l'homme», qu'il utilisait à la troisième personne, afin que les gens ne sachent pas s'il parlait de lui-même ou non. Et troisièmement, il a parlé en paraboles. La plupart des paraboles concernent le royaume

de Dieu ou le royaume des cieux, ce que favorise Matthieu et qui est généralement considéré comme synonyme du royaume de Dieu.

La révélation que le royaume de Dieu est le règne du Messie ne devrait pas être aussi surprenante, car quand on pense à l'alternative; que le royaume de Dieu se réfère au règne de Dieu, vous rencontrez des problèmes insolubles. Comment pouvez-vous entrer ou hériter de la souveraineté de Dieu sur l'univers? Il y a beaucoup de références au royaume de Dieu à venir, et si vous croyez en un Dieu tout puissant, souverain et éternel, vous devez immédiatement réaliser que parler de son royaume ou de son règne à venir est un oxymore. Le royaume de Dieu est quelque chose de plus petit que cela; cela ne concerne que le gouvernement de ce monde.

Jésus nous a appris à prier: «ton règne vienne; que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel ». Pourquoi prions-nous vraiment? Pensez-vous à l'église, aux missions chrétiennes ou à Dieu qui règne dans nos cœurs? Ou priez-vous pour que Jésus revienne et que son règne messianique commence ici sur terre? Le royaume de Dieu est le royaume du Messie dont l'avènement était le désir suprême des Juifs pieux. Le Père règne en éternité; ce n'est pas son royaume qui vient. La prière est adressée au Père, mais le royaume pour lequel nous prions n'est pas le sien, c'est le royaume qu'il a promis (1Chroniques 17: 11-14, Dan. 2:44).

Quel genre de royaume est-ce?

Le Nouveau Testament ne donne pas beaucoup de détails sur le règne terrestre du Messie et, à moins que vous ne soyez un prémillénariste, vous pourriez trouver le concept de règne terrestre plutôt roman. Comment le Messie ressuscité et glorifié régnera-t-il sur une terre imparfaite? Et comment les justes, qui seront ressuscités à son retour, régneront-ils avec lui dans leurs corps ressuscités?

La plupart des enseignements sur le royaume de Dieu ont été donnés par Jésus dans sa prédication aux Juifs, qui étaient au courant des prophéties faites par leurs prophètes. Ils n'espéraient pas aller au paradis; cela n'a jamais été une promesse biblique. Ils étaient comme Job, qui a dit qu'il savait que son Rédempteur a vécu et qu'il se tiendra à la fin sur la terre (Job 19:25).

Le Messie est un roi et sauveur juif, mais son royaume terrestre n'est pas réservé aux Juifs; les païens en feront également partie. Si on ne vous a pas appris à vous attendre à un royaume terrestre, vous constaterez peut-être que le concept est stigmatisé. Comment les personnes ressuscitées peuvent-elles se mêler aux mortels ordinaires? Beaucoup d'entre nous ont grandi avec les valeurs platoniciennes et augustinienne. Nous sentons instinctivement que le spirituel est supérieur au physique, que le ciel est plus désirable que la terre. Mais la philosophie hébraïque soutient que la création de Dieu est bonne. Dieu a créé une terre parfaite et il a marché avec Adam dans le jardin d'Eden. Jean nous dit que le trône de Dieu et de l'Agneau descendra sur terre et que Dieu vivra une fois de plus avec les humains dans la Nouvelle Jérusalem (Ap 21: 3).

L'appendice 4 des prophéties messianiques de l'Ancien Testament décrit le royaume du Messie comme un royaume terrestre, le Messie régnant depuis le mont Sion. Jésus s'assiéra sur le trône de David et régnera sur le monde avec justice, justice et paix. Les croyants seront ressuscités et transformés à sa venue et régneront avec lui.

Robert Mounce (Le livre de l'Apocalypse, p. 359) dit que certains commentateurs suggèrent que le millénaire pour l'apôtre Jean n'est pas l'âge messianique prédit par les prophètes de l'Ancien Testament, mais une récompense spéciale pour les martyrs qui ont payé avec leur vies. Il conclut en disant que John a enseigné un millénaire littéral, mais que sa signification essentielle peut être réalisée autrement que par un accomplissement temporel. Il existe d'autres voix qui nient l'existence d'un millénaire terrestre et, si cela est vrai, ma conviction que le royaume de Dieu est le royaume du Messie, tel que décrit dans les prophéties de l'Ancien Testament, est erronée. Mais, aussi étrange que puissent paraître certains événements futurs, nous devons respecter les Ecritures. Certaines des prophéties de l'Ancien Testament se terminent par les paroles solennelles: «Moi, le Seigneur, j'ai parlé!». Qu'en est-il des paroles de l'ange Gabriel à Marie concernant son enfant Jésus? Gabriel a déclaré qu'il serait grand et s'appellerait le Fils du Très-Haut, et que le Seigneur Dieu lui donnerait le trône de son ancêtre David. Il régnerait pour toujours sur la maison de Jacob et son royaume ne finirait jamais (Luc 1: 32-33).

La proclamation du royaume par Jésus

Il existe une réponse satisfaisante à toutes ces énigmes, mais cela pourrait nécessiter un changement de la vision du monde, en particulier de la vision de Jésus et de ce qu'il est venu accomplir. Le royaume est mentionné plus de cinquante fois dans Matthieu et principalement de la bouche de Jésus.

«À partir de ce moment-là, Jésus a commencé à annoncer:“ Repentez-vous, car le royaume du ciel est proche ”(Mt. 4:17).

«Puis il parcourut la Galilée, enseignant dans leurs synagogues, proclamant l'évangile du royaume et guérissant toutes les maladies et toutes les maladies parmi le peuple» (Mt 4:23).

«En cours de route, faites cette annonce:« Le royaume du ciel est proche! »(Mt 10: 7).

Les païens ont tendance à se concentrer sur la partie païenne de l'évangile et sur le côté spirituel du salut. Dieu a tant aimé le monde qu'il a donné son fils unique (Jean 3:16). Ils disent que Dieu n'aime pas seulement Israël, il aime toutes les nations. En fait, il aime tellement les nations que certains disent que son amour pour Israël est une histoire. Le christianisme est tout au sujet de l'évangile prêché dans le monde entier, des églises établies et des gens sauvés, mais n'oublions pas nos racines. Prends Isa. 9: 6-7 par exemple, ce qui nous rappelle au moment de Noël.

«Pour nous un enfant est né, pour nous, un fils a été donné; et le gouvernement sera sur son épaule, et son nom s'appelle Conseiller merveilleux, Dieu puissant, Père éternel, Prince de la paix. De la

croissance de son gouvernement et de la paix, il n'y aura pas de fin. Il régnera sur son royaume, assis sur le trône de David, pour l'établir et le défendre avec justice et justice à partir de ce moment et à jamais. "

Nous aimons embrasser de merveilleuses prophéties messianiques comme celle-ci et les appliquer à Jésus lorsque nous le visualisons. Mais, qu'en est-il de son gouvernement et de son règne du trône de David? Nous avons en quelque sorte mis cela de côté ou le spiritualiser. Mais, en fait, nous avons ici une prophétie du royaume de Dieu, le royaume sur lequel Jésus a prêché. Jésus est actuellement assis à la droite du Père qui est aux cieux, mais tant qu'il n'est pas ici, physiquement assis sur le trône de David, nous ne pouvons prétendre que le royaume de Dieu est venu ou que Jésus est le roi de la terre. Certes, il est assis à la droite du Père sur son trône, mais on ne nous dit nulle part dans la Bible que Jésus règne ou régnera sur la terre depuis le trône du Père au ciel. En tant que Fils de l'homme et Fils de Dieu, ce n'est pas son rôle. Il ne devient roi des rois et seigneur des seigneurs qu'à son retour, lorsqu'il vainquera ses ennemis à Armageddon (Apoc. 17:24, 19:16) et régnera sur la terre.

À la fin du repas du Seigneur, Jésus dit à ses disciples qu'il leur conférerait un royaume, tout comme son père lui avait attribué un royaume, afin qu'ils puissent manger et boire à sa table dans son royaume et s'asseoir sur le trône pour gouverner les douze tribus d'Israël (Luc 22: 28-30). Le royaume dont Jésus parlait est le royaume messianique. C'est un royaume terrestre (Ap.5: 10), et le roi n'est autre que Jésus lui-même.

Les saints gouverneront le monde

Comme point culminant de cette introduction au royaume de Dieu, considérons la merveilleuse vision du prophète Daniel. Dans sa vision, il a vu quelqu'un comme le Fils de l'homme venir accompagné de nuages célestes. Il s'est approché de l'Ancien des Jours (Dieu) et a été présenté devant lui. Dominion lui fut conféré avec la gloire et un royaume, de sorte que tous les peuples, toutes les nations et toutes les langues devaient le servir. Son royaume serait un empire éternel qui ne serait jamais détruit (Dan. 7: 13-14). Jésus a annoncé à ses disciples que tout lui avait été remis par son Père (Mt 11:27) et que toute autorité dans les cieux et la terre lui avait été donnée (Mt 28:18). Bien que rédigé il y a plus de 2500 ans, Daniel parlait de choses pertinentes à la fin de cet âge. Il a parlé de l'Antichrist et de la période de la Grande Tribulation qui se déroulera immédiatement avant la seconde venue de Jésus. C'est à partir de ce passage que Jésus prit le titre de «Fils de l'homme» et l'utilisa pour se désigner lui-même. L'importance de ce titre est examinée au chapitre annexe 3.

Et enfin, pour vous donner un peu plus envie de fumer, écoutez ce qu'un ange a dit à Daniel lorsqu'il lui a demandé quelle était la signification de la vision. L'ange a dit que le royaume, l'autorité et la magnificence de toutes les nations de la terre seraient donnés aux saints du Très-Haut. Le royaume du Messie durera éternellement et

toutes les autorités le serviront et lui obéiront (Dan. 7:27). Quand avez-vous entendu un sermon prêcher pour la dernière fois sur ce passage? Êtes-vous compté parmi ces saints? Votre nom est-il écrit dans le livre de vie de l'Agneau? Est-ce votre destin d'hériter du royaume de Dieu et de régner avec Christ sur cette terre? Si tel est le cas, il serait bon de connaître les détails.

1

Royaume

signifie

Royauté

“Quelque temps après, Jésus se rendit dans les villes et les villages pour y proclamer et annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle du royaume de Dieu.” (*Luc 8:1*).

The meaning of the phrase ‘kingdom of God’

‘The kingdom of God’, or ‘kingdom of heaven’, is mentioned 58 times in Matthew’s Gospel alone. It was Jesus’ main message; everywhere he travelled he proclaimed the kingdom of God. Even the apostle Paul, at the end of the book of Acts, was talking about the kingdom of God. Jesus said we should seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It must be an important topic. So, why do so few people understand the kingdom of God? Take a minute to think about it. How would you explain it to someone? Who is the king in the kingdom of God? Is the kingdom present, past or future? Is it on earth or in heaven? What is our role in it as Christians? What does it mean to enter the kingdom of God? How can you inherit it? How can a kingdom come? Don’t we often pray ‘thy kingdom come’? What are we praying for? Over the past 100 years there have been an estimated 10,000 papers and books written on the kingdom of God, and they give a variety of answers to these questions. I hope this chapter will clarify things for you.

It is my belief that all the messianic prophecies from the Old Testament, and all the kingdom of God passages in the New Testament, refer always and only to the Messiah and his coming reign on this earth; never to God’s sovereignty. It is certainly not about God reigning from heaven.

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream

In Dan. 2, Daniel explains the meaning of a dream that Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had. He dreamt of a statue that

represented four great empires, generally interpreted as Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. These were world empires, four powerful human kingdoms from antiquity.

In the dream, a rock is cut out, but not by human hands. It strikes the statue on the feet and smashes it to pieces and then the rock becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. The rock is a fifth kingdom, the kingdom of God. Daniel said that God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people (Dan. 2:44). That is the kingdom of God which we are studying. Note carefully that it is an earthly kingdom, not a heavenly one, and that it has nothing to do with God's universal reign. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that the great God was showing the king what would happen in the future. The dream is true, and its meaning certain (Dan. 2:45b).

The fulfilment of this prophecy will occur 'in the days of those kings' (the ten toes) at the end of this present age, when a rock (the Messiah) cut out from a mountain (Zion) comes and destroys them. When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, loud voices in heaven will proclaim that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

When John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, they were proclaiming the coming of the Messiah. But they couldn't be too explicit about it, because they were under the domination of the Roman Empire, so they spoke about the kingdom rather than the king. The clearest prophecy about Messiah's kingdom in the Old

Testament is from Dan. 7:13-14, and it is from there that John and Jesus took their terminology. While Daniel was observing the vision, he saw someone like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will never pass away, and his kingship will never be destroyed. Daniel asked the angel to interpret the vision and was told that the four beasts were four kings who would rise to power from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan. 7:17-18).

Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, a title for the Messiah, but one that was not obvious to the uninitiated. In the same way, the kingdom of God is an expression that means Messiah's kingdom. It was used by both John the Baptist and Jesus to refer to the messianic reign, but without being explicit as to who the king was, which was a necessary precaution in the political situation in which they lived. Jesus did not travel around broadcasting the fact that he was the Messiah. He spoke of the Son of Man, and then he didn't directly call himself the Son of Man, he spoke of the Son of Man in the third person.

The kingdom is given to the Messiah by God, so the most appropriate way of translating βασιλεία του θεού, is 'the kingdom from God', the title of this book. It is not an expression that speaks of God's rule in action, or of God's rule over the universe. This

kingdom is a kingship given by the Ancient of Days to ‘the Son of Man’, who is none other than Jesus the Messiah.

Daniel had a vision about four great animals or beasts that come from the earth and that are generally interpreted as being the same empires represented by the statue in chapter two, and the fierce fourth beast has similarities with the beast described in Revelation 13. Then comes the climax: The kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints. The Messiah’s kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve and obey him (Dan. 7:27).

The kingdom is not a territory

We are used to hearing about the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Bible, and in modern times, there are the UK and the kingdoms of Jordan, Saudi Arabia etc. In English we instinctively feel that kingdom means the king’s territory. Many commentaries and English translations add to the confusion.

In Hebrew and Greek, the primary meaning of the word ‘kingdom’ is the abstract meaning of kingship. It is the authority to reign as king, not a realm or territory. When translating the Bible for the Boko people of West Africa, we had no problem finding a word for kingdom in this abstract sense. It is a common word which means ‘a position of authority or rule’. Whether you are head of the household, chairman of the committee, chief of the village, or king over a region, the position you hold is your ‘kpala’. For a king, that

means his kingship or his reign, but not his land. When a new king sits on the throne, he inherits that kingship.

Many who preach about the kingdom of God today don't understand the expression. They talk about building, extending or benefiting the kingdom, expressions that are foreign to Scripture. Those verbs relate to the concrete idea of kingdom, rather than the abstract idea of kingship or reign. If 'kingdom' means kingship or rule, how can you build or benefit it? Looking at some modern Bible translations, we find 'the kingdom of God' translated as: 'God's present reign in the lives of his people', 'that dynamic new life in Christ,' or 'God's new society'. These paraphrases not only miss the point; they take us away from the subject under discussion. While 'putting faith in Jesus', 'living in heaven together with God', 'obtaining eternal life' and 'living God's new way' are Christian concepts, they really have no correlation with the concept underlying the word 'kingdom' or 'the kingdom of God'. Salvation and all that pertains to it is a blessing found in the kingdom of God, but the basic meaning of 'kingdom' is different to salvation and it should not be conceived of in that way. It just wasn't what Jesus was talking about!

Even in the epistles, where the growing community of Jesus the Messiah is in focus, the meaning of the expression 'kingdom of God' does not change. The apostles were disciples of Jesus, and they had undergone regular instruction on the kingdom of God.

After Jesus was resurrected, he ascended to heaven, where he sits on the throne with the Father. He is building his church (community) here on earth, and the powers of hell will not prevail

against it. At his return, he will give to the conquerors the right to share his earthly throne, just as he conquered and shares his Father's throne in heaven. He will invite the conquerors, saying: Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34).

The primary meaning of 'kingdom'

The word 'kingdom' as used in the Bible has a range of meanings which are often confused, and this is one reason why few people understand the true significance of the kingdom of God.

The Brown, Driver and Briggs Hebrew lexicon of the Old Testament gives several translations for the Hebrew word for 'kingdom' which is derived from the Hebrew triconsonantal root MLK 'king'. Depending on the context, they relate to

status: sovereignty, dominion, royal power

office: monarchy

action: reign, rule

area: realm, territory

The BAG Greek English Lexicon gives the meanings of βασιλεία 'kingdom' as:

1. kingship, royal power, royal rule, kingdom
2. kingdom (territory ruled over by a king)

3. the royal reign or kingdom of God

They define it as a chiefly eschatological concept, beginning to appear in the prophets, elaborated in apocalyptic passages and taught by Jesus.

Strong's Bible Dictionary definition of 'βασίλεια' is similar:

1. royal power, kingship, dominion, rule (not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom)
2. the royal power of Jesus as the triumphant Messiah
3. the royal power and dignity conferred on Christians in the Messiah's kingdom
4. a kingdom, the territory subject to the rule of a king
5. used in the New Testament to refer to the reign of the Messiah

Kingship, royal power and rule are what we should normally be thinking about when we see the word 'kingdom' in the New Testament, but, for each occurrence of the expression 'kingdom of God', we must decide whether the verse is referring to the office of kingship, the person of the king, or the government or monarchy of the king.

In this book we are primarily interested in the expression 'kingdom of God' and its synonymous expression 'kingdom of heaven'. However, there are also the following variations:

'his kingdom' (Mt. 13:41), referring to the Son of Man.

‘their Father’s kingdom’ (Mt. 13:43)

‘my Father’s kingdom’ (Mt. 26:29). The parallel passage in Mk. 14:25 has ‘kingdom of God’.

‘the coming kingdom of our ancestor David’ (Mk. 11:10)

‘the kingdom of the Son whom he loves’ (Col. 1:13)

‘his (the Lord’s) heavenly kingdom’ (2Tim. 4:18)

‘the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’ (2Pet. 1:11).

All these expressions describe the Messiah’s future earthly kingdom. None of them relate to God’s sovereignty, or to an imaginary kingdom in heaven, and none of them should be spiritualized and equated with the church.

Kingdom is a political word

It is hard to conceive of a word that is more political than ‘kingdom’. It is on a par with ‘government’ and ‘politics’. Separation of church and state may be desirable, but the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world fall into the same category. If ‘kingdom’ refers to the office of a king, then it must have political overtones. The Jews were expecting a kingdom that was Jewish, political and geographical with their own Jewish Messiah as king over a large area of the Middle East and ultimately over the entire world. When they heard the expression on the lips of John the Baptist or Jesus, that is what they would have envisaged. John and Jesus were Jewish prophets, preaching to a Jewish audience. Let us get out of our heads

the idea that they were talking about Christianity. There were no Christians or churches around when John and Jesus preached; the church began at Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts 2:1-13.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus. He told his disciples that they knew the Spirit, because he was living with them, but that one day he would be in them (Jn. 14:17). The Holy Spirit was with them while Jesus was around, but he was not in them until he was poured out at Pentecost. Paul defined a Christian as a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. He said, if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). That's what it means to be a born-again Christian. Jesus' disciples were followers of a Jewish prophet, and they had a growing conviction that he was the Messiah. Even when Jesus was gathering his team of disciples, Andrew went and found his brother Peter and told him they had found the Messiah (Jn. 1:41). This early conviction took a while to sink in as reality, and it wasn't until just before the transfiguration, when Peter, James and John saw Jesus in majestic glory, that Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was. Peter replied confidently that he was the Messiah (Mk. 8:29).

The many pronouncements by the Old Testament prophets of a messianic kingdom (see appendix 4) have never been fulfilled. They are promises of an earthly kingdom which John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed. Most of these prophecies were not fulfilled in Jesus' day, nor since then. Isaiah said that in the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple would be established as the highest

of mountains and would be raised above the hills, and all nations would stream to it, saying, Let's go up to the Temple of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and we'll walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. *He will judge between the nations and decide disputes for many peoples.* They'll beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nations won't raise swords against each other, they won't even learn warfare any more (Isa. 2:2-4).

And Isaiah prophesied again to Israel saying, a child would be born to them, a son would be given, and the government would be on his shoulders, and his name would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The growth of his government and peace will have no end. *He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David,* to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from that time onward and for evermore. (Isa. 9:6-7).

Obviously, these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. The Old Testament messianic prophecies and the kingdom of God that John and Jesus proclaimed are future events. Amillennialists say that this kingdom should not be interpreted literally, and postmillennialists think that it is either here already or somehow going to occur *before* the Messiah returns. Is there anything here to suggest that these prophecies should not be taken literally? Is it not a logical thing for God to bring a kingdom into existence before the end of the world, where justice and righteousness will reign, to show man how things could have been, without wars and dictatorships and the greed and

pride of world government leaders? One day Jesus will be King of kings and Lord of lords right here in this world. He is a king now in our estimation, but his enemies have not yet even started to be eliminated. He sits on the Father's throne in heaven ruling the universe, but he is not yet exerting his authority on earth, ruling it with a rod of iron.

Can these prophecies be spiritualized or allegorized in such a way that the prophesied earthly kingdom of the Messiah can be done away with? The nation of Israel is a key stakeholder here and the Middle Eastern geography has a significant role to play.

Some prophecies say unambiguously that the Lord himself will reign on earth, which led to the belief that the Messiah is in some sense divine. This may have been difficult for the Jews to understand, but since the incarnation, when Israel's God took on human flesh as the man Jesus, Christians can understand how the Lord God of Israel can reign as a man from Mount Zion. Isaiah said that on that day the moon will be embarrassed, and the sun ashamed; for *the Lord will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem*, and in the presence of its elders there will be glory (Isa. 24:23). He also expressed how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one who will bring news of peace and announce good news of salvation and tell the people of Jerusalem that *their God reigns*. Their watchmen will lift up their voices and sing for joy, because they will clearly see *the return of the Lord to Zion*. The ruins of Jerusalem will break forth into singing, for the Lord will comfort his people and redeem Jerusalem. The Lord will bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations,

and all the ends of the earth will see his salvation (Isa. 52:7-10). This refers to the second coming of Jesus, not the first.

Differentiating the two kingdoms

You will not have a clear understanding of the kingdom of God if in the back of your mind you interpret it as God's kingdom, or the church, or heaven. Those who have spiritualized the kingdom have taught that the kingdom of God is God's universal rule, in spite of the fact that Jesus is portrayed as king in the kingdom of God. In the Psalms, we read about God's sovereign rule over the universe: The kingdom belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations (Ps. 22:27-28), and, the Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Ps. 103:19). These passages refer to God's sovereignty over all things, but that is obviously not the kingdom of God announced by John the Baptist and by Jesus in the Gospels. It is true that in a genitive expression like 'kingdom of X', you would normally expect X to be the king, but when we are talking about God who is a trinity of persons and the source of all things, we cannot be so dogmatic.

The apostle John saw a vision of God on his throne in heaven. The Lord God Almighty is king. The elders worshiped God saying he was worthy to receive glory and honor and power (Rev. 4:11). Then the Lamb of God appears, standing in the middle of the throne, and all creation sings, ascribing praise, honor, glory and power to the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (Rev. 5:13). What the Father does the Son does and vice versa. Even a singular pronoun is used to refer to them both in some passages: The throne of God and of

the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will worship him (Rev. 22:3).

We cannot divide the Trinity. Whatever the Father does, the Son does, and vice versa. So, we can never talk about the Son to the complete exclusion of the Father. The kingdom of God, although it primarily belongs to the Son, will always have the nuance of belonging to the Father. But my point here is that the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus and John the Baptist focuses on the earthly kingdom of the Messiah. They are never talking about God's sovereign reign over creation. It can be thought of as God's kingdom in the sense that it was the Father who anointed and appointed the Son as king, a kingdom for which God is responsible. But to appreciate the real meaning of the kingdom of God, it should be conceived of as the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah.

Furthermore, it is widely accepted among biblical scholars that the word 'kingdom' in this phrase has as its primary meaning 'kingship', as evidenced in the dictionary definitions above. The basic focus is on the actual rule rather than on the realm or territory over which one rules. If the kingdom of God is God's sovereign rule, how can Jesus talk about the kingdom of God coming? God has always been sovereign ruler over his creation. And if the kingdom of God is God's kingship, how can we hope to possess or inherit it? Jesus said the poor are blessed, because the kingdom of God belongs to them (Lk. 6:20).

Only a few New Testament passages refer to the kingdom which God possesses, that is, his own sovereign reign over the universe, while

the New Testament expression 'the kingdom of God', and its synonym 'the kingdom of heaven', refer exclusively to a kingship *from* God or *from* heaven, a kingship God will establish among men on earth, a kingship of which the kingships of David and Solomon were a foreshadowing, a kingship which belongs to Jesus the Messiah.

Herman Ridderbos in 'The coming of the kingdom', 1962, says, "A twofold distinction should be made. In the first place, the Old Testament speaks of a general and a particular kind of kingship of the Lord. The former concerns the universal power and dominion of God over the universe and all the nations and is founded in the creation of heaven and earth. The latter denotes the special relation between the Lord and Israel."

Confusion arises when people do not differentiate between these two kingdoms of God. I think it is clearer for us to think in terms of a heavenly kingdom and an earthly kingdom. God's throne is in heaven. He rules from there and is sovereign over the universe. The Messiah's throne will be on earth, and he will reign from there over the whole earth. The Messiah is the man, Jesus, and his authority comes from God the Father. Jesus is the king, and his kingship will be clearly manifested when he returns. God is ultimately reigning through this kingdom too, reflecting the subtle ambiguity of the expression, but that is not the focus. Theological studies about the kingdom of God that Jesus preached sometimes confuse the issue by equating it with God's sovereignty as taught in the Old Testament. They are not the same thing. The end of the age prophecies in the

Old Testament are not about God's sovereignty; they are messianic and reveal many facts concerning the kingdom which Jesus will establish on his return to earth, and which are not repeated in the New Testament.

The fallacy of 'God's rule in our hearts'

The NIV study Bible (1984) gives a common definition of the kingdom of God in its commentary on Mt. 3:2, the first occurrence of the expression in the New Testament. I quote: "The kingdom of heaven/God in the preaching of Jesus as recounted in the Gospels is the reign of God that he brings about through Jesus Christ – i.e., the establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the overcoming of all the forces of evil, the removal from the world of all the consequences of sin – including death and all that diminishes life – and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace." That definition is vaguely scriptural, but the focus is all wrong. It is not the rule of God that Jesus brings about in the hearts and lives of his people; it is about the future rule of Christ over this world. There is no verse of Scripture that ties the kingdom of God to the idea of God ruling in our hearts and lives. And in saying that 'the kingdom of God is the *reign of God* that he brings about through Jesus Christ' does not bring out the true focus of the expression, and it does not help us to understand key kingdom of God concepts such as: Jesus Christ is the king; he will reign on earth; and the saints will inherit the kingdom.

The establishment of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people is not the focus. Overcoming all the forces of evil, and the removal

from the world of all the consequences of sin, and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace are future events related to the kingdom, but this is hardly a definition.

What was John Calvin's understanding of the kingdom of God? He says, "By proclaiming the kingdom of God, he (the Lord) was calling them to faith, for by the kingdom of God, which he taught was at hand, he meant the forgiveness of sins, salvation, life, and utterly everything that we obtain in Christ." (Book 3, chapter 3, section 19.) He makes it clear in his Institutes that his understanding of Christ's kingship is that it is spiritual. He did not make a break from Augustine's platonic thinking, and he has disassociated the expression from its Jewish messianic roots.

The expression 'the kingdom of God/heaven' is the kingdom *from* God/heaven that God will establish among men on earth. The kingdom is from God, and a man, Jesus Christ, the descendant of David, will be the king. It is a kingdom that we his followers can inherit, and we can't inherit God's universal reign.

Since his ascension to heaven, Jesus is often depicted as sitting at the right hand of God on his throne. He is there because he is God. Wherever the Father is, the Son of God is, and also the Spirit of God. But this is not the kingdom of God of which Jesus often spoke. We are never told that Jesus is ruling from heaven. After his return, Jesus will rule on earth, he will be the visible king. This is the kingdom of God, a kingdom that comes from God or heaven, 'the kingdom of the Son he loves.' Since the time that Jesus stepped into history, there is salvation in no other name under heaven, and when

Jesus returns as king, the kingdom which he will set up will be the only kingdom.

The nature of the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God has been variously described as universal, particular, political, spiritual, manifested and hidden. How do we make sense of these sometimes-contradictory statements? Jesus taught his disciples through the parables that the kingdom is worldwide as well as Jewish, and spiritual as well as political. In the present time the kingdom is only a prophecy, in the future it will be manifested at the King's return. Only in the coming age of the millennium can it be regarded as geographical, when the center of authority will be at Jerusalem.

The kingdom of God is Jewish in the sense that the king, the Messiah, is a Jew, his throne will be at Jerusalem, and the historical background and prophecies relating to it are to be found in the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament.

The kingdom is political, because the Messiah will be a king and will demand total allegiance. He will rule from east to west and will function as lawgiver and judge. The kingdom is spiritual in the sense that many of the parables of the kingdom of God involve the sowing of the seed, the word of God, at the present time. It is by hearing the word of God, believing it, and being born again by God's Spirit, that people of all nations are becoming children of God and entering the royal family as children of God. There is no kingdom before the Messiah returns, but believers are promised a place in his monarchy.

It is instructive to compare the kingdom of God and the Islamic state that classical Islam aspires to. Many Muslims are known to put Allah and the Muslim state first, before their non-Muslim country. Many Christians would also feel that their allegiance to God is primary. Christianity and Islam are both religions whose followers believe that God is supreme, their king. The significant difference is that many Muslims are trying to conquer the kingdoms of this world through 'jihad', whereas Christians believe that Jesus is the one who will usher in the kingdom when he returns.

Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. Jesus replied that his kingship didn't have its origin in this world, which is different to saying it didn't belong to this world. His kingship was from God. He said if his kingship had its origin in this world, his servants would fight to keep him from being handed over to the Jews. But *for now*, he said, as the situation stands, his kingship was not *from here*. "So, you are a king?" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth" (Jn. 18:36-37).

Jesus kingdom will be established on this earth, but it is not in the same league as earthly kingdoms which have armies for conquest and defense. His kingship is from God, who will at the appointed time replace the kingdoms of the world with his own.

The kingdom is hidden (Mt. 13:44) because it is not here yet, it is future. The church is very visible, but it is a religious institution, not a political one. The church's job is to make disciples of all nations, and it is the saints, the true believers, who will inherit the monarchy

in Messiah's kingdom. When Jesus returns, all will be manifested. Jesus and his people will then rule the world. His glorious throne will be visible at Jerusalem. It will become clear that the entire world is his domain. These are the concrete manifestations of his kingdom. But in this present age what do we have? There is no king, no throne, no monarchy and no dominion. Jesus is seated on the Father's throne, *waiting* (Heb. 10:13) for the day when the Father will make his enemies a footstool for his feet.

People want to compare the kingdom of God with the church. That is not easy, because 'kingdom' is an abstract word meaning 'kingship' or 'reign'. In its personal form, we need to think of the king himself, or his government, the monarchy. Kingdom never refers to the subjects of a realm, but the sons of the kingdom is a biblical expression that refers to the monarchy. Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth, meaning those people who submit to God. The saints, the true church, those born again of the Spirit of God from every time and place, will be the government in the coming kingdom. They are the 'sons of the kingdom', the princes or the monarchy, those who will rule with Christ. More about that below. Unfortunately, there are many in the worldwide church today who will not be part of the kingdom tomorrow. Jesus said that not everyone who says to him, 'Lord, Lord,' will get into the kingdom from heaven, but only the person who does the will of his Father in heaven (Mt. 7:21).

Many Scriptures tell us that the Messiah's kingdom belongs to this world. It is the throne of David. The Father told the Son to ask him,

and he would give him the nations as his heritage, the ends of the earth as his possession. He will break them with an iron rod and shatter them like pottery (Ps. 2:8). This doesn't sound like a spiritual kingdom!

The Jewish background to the kingdom

The kingdom of God is sometimes contrasted with the Law and the Prophets (Lk. 16:16). The latter expression speaks of God's covenant with Israel, whereas the kingdom of God speaks of God's new covenant with all nations, including believing Jews. What is a covenant? BAG defines the Greek word as meaning "a declaration of one person's will, not the result of an agreement between two parties, like a compact or a contract." So, a covenant is a decree, where God alone sets the conditions. In God's covenants he promises blessings which are dependent on the recipients' obedience. In my African languages it was hard to translate this concept, but we finally settled on a word that means concern or commitment. The new covenant is a *decree of divine commitment* toward Christians, ratified by the shed blood of Christ, and dependent on their continuing faith and obedience. However, God's gifts and calling never change (Rom. 11:29), so born-again Christians will remain secure in their faith. But their daily experience of God's blessings will vary according to their willingness to serve him.

The Jewish kingdoms of Judah and Israel foreshadowed Messiah's kingdom, but in Mt. 21:43 Jesus said the kingdom of God would be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will produce fruit for it. One kingdom parable likens the kingdom of God to a

king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (the Messiah). The initial list of guests (Israel) became disqualified, and after that, everyone was invited. Israel as a nation never really possessed the kingdom of God, they only had the promise of it. The mystery revealed to the apostle Paul is that, the Gentiles are now fellow heirs with believing Jews, members of the same body (of Christ), and partakers of what was promised by the Messiah Jesus through the gospel (Eph. 3:6).

Dining at the king's table was an important part of kingdom culture. The king did not rule alone, his ministers, who were often members of his family and friends, ruled with him and the royal table was symbolic of that. Jesus said he was telling the truth when he told his disciples that he wouldn't drink again of the fruit of the vine *until* that day when he drinks it anew in the kingdom of God (Mk. 14:25). There are other verses scattered throughout Scripture that refer to eating and drinking in the kingdom of God. It is encouraging to think of that possibility. Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (Mt. 22:2), and he said that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 8:11). Jesus promised his disciples that they would eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Lk. 22:30). The Jewish tradition was strong on there being a banquet in the kingdom of God (Isa. 25:6, Lk. 14:15). Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb is a benediction given in Rev. 19:9.

Jesus' ministry was primarily to the Jews of his day. He was born as their king and was their promised Messiah, but he did not come to reign immediately, God had a plan to include the Gentiles in the ruling hierarchy. Under domination by Rome, Jesus had to use suitably veiled language to talk about himself and his future kingdom. We should never lose sight of the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that the kingdom of God he spoke of so frequently was his future reign on earth. That is why he told us to pray that God's kingdom would come, and his will would be done on earth (Mt. 6:10).

A true understanding of the parables reveals how Jesus' gospel message would be preached in the world and would be embraced by those who believed in him. Through faith they would be saved and inherit the kingdom of God that the apostle John prefers to describe as eternal life. Salvation is all about sharing God's nature and becoming perfect, about being free from suffering and sadness, sickness and death, and about ruling with Christ over the earth.

The kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is earthly. Many theologians don't distinguish this reign from the Old Testament concept of God's sovereignty, and confusion results. God's kingship is an everlasting kingship that endures through all generations. That is not a kingship that you can talk about as 'coming', or that we can 'inherit'. God's sovereignty is not something that man can inherit. It is not something that God can give or confer on people. The kingdom of God spoken of by Jesus is obviously something else. Man was

created by God to rule the world. This was his original plan for them. (Gen. 1:26, 9:2, Ps. 8:6-8, 115:16).

Some commentators don't understand the abstract concept of 'kingdom' and interpret it as a domain or a people. Because of that error they can't give a good explanation of what it means to enter the kingdom or to inherit the kingdom, or for a kingdom to be spoken of as coming. They spend time in the Old Testament where the kingdom of God (Messiah's kingdom) doesn't exist, although it is foreshadowed in prophecy. They make much of Jesus' statement that 'the kingdom of God is within you' which is a mistranslation. Jesus was talking to unbelieving Pharisees. How could the kingdom of God be within them?

Believers are often spoken about as being citizens in the kingdom of God, which is not taught in the Bible. In fact, it ignores one of the greatest blessings of our salvation, our glorification as rulers in Christ's kingdom. The only reference in the new Testament to Christians being citizens is in Eph. 2:19 where Paul calls the Ephesian Christians fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God. Citizen is not the best translation here, because the context does not refer to a city or a country. 'Fellow citizens' in this context means that the Gentiles had become 'natives', or 'insiders', together with the Jewish saints, members of God's household, the very temple of God. The context does not imply that Christians are subjects or citizens in Messiah's kingdom. Royalty are never referred to as subjects.

The earthly kingdom of God predicted by Paul

Luke tells us in Acts 19:8 that at Ephesus, Paul went into a synagogue and held discussions for three months, persuading people about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). Then, when Paul finally arrived in Rome near the end of his ministry, he spoke to Jewish Romans, and his message still centered around the kingdom of God. He explained the kingdom of God to them, trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets (Acts 28:23). Then in verse 28 he told them that this message about God's salvation had been sent to the Gentiles. Then Luke says that he continued to preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

There are only ten references to the kingdom of God in Paul's epistles, so his general emphasis and vocabulary have moved away from the Messiah's future reign, as he has concentrated more on its present significance. He taught that God's kingdom doesn't consist of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy produced by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17), and that the kingdom of God isn't just talk but also power (1Cor. 4:20). Neither of these statements prove that the kingdom has been realized. They are timeless truths. Inheriting the kingdom was clearly a future event for him (1Cor. 6:9). When interpreting verses like this we need to ask what the precise meaning of 'kingdom' is in the context. As we have seen, 'kingdom' may refer to the reign, the kingship, the domain or the royal household. In Rom. 14, Paul is talking about weak and strong Christians and the danger of judging one another. What connection does that have with the kingdom of God? Just this. Messiah's future

rule will be characterized by righteousness, peace, joy and power, and Christians, who have been made righteous by faith in the Messiah, who have peace with God, and who experience the joy of the Spirit, are the ones who will constitute the government in Messiah's kingdom. So, they need to learn kingdom values here and now and not be fighting over irrelevant matters like what a person should eat or drink.

When Paul declares that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom (monarchy) of the Son he loves (Col. 1:13), he is talking about our status. We are already part of Messiah's kingdom, but as heirs with Christ, because we haven't come into possession of it yet. In a similar way, John taught that being born again guaranteed entry into the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). Our future glorification involves resurrection and being welcomed into Messiah's monarchy. That is our hope, not our present experience.

Paul's clearest messianic kingdom statement is in 1Cor. 15:24-25. After the Messiah has reigned over the earth and put every ruler, authority and power in submission to him, then comes the end (of the world), when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father. Seated on his Father's throne in heaven, Jesus is not presently doing away with these evil powers. He will do that here on earth when he rules from Zion (Ps. 2:6-12).

Paul argues that as we are God's children, we are his heirs, and co-heirs with Christ. That is our status, nothing is actually inherited until the time comes to inherit. The meek will inherit the earth (Mt.

5:5), but the time has not yet come. If we prove our faithfulness by sharing in his sufferings, we'll also share in his glory (Rom. 8:17). Paul said he endured everything for the elect's sake, so that they, too, may receive salvation through the Messiah Jesus, along with eternal glory. If they endure, they will reign with him (2Tim. 2:10, 12a). This salvation includes eternal glory that we will receive when we reign with the Messiah. In 1Thess. 2:12 Paul urges the believers to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls them into his kingdom and glory. 'His kingdom' is obviously the messianic reign, not God's universal reign, and the glory of participating in the messianic government and monarchy. The tense here is present (calls), or rather habitual; it is what God habitually does, he is calling people to enter his Son's monarchy and glory.

Paul places his charge Timothy in solemn eschatological perspective (ESV Study Bible). It is Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead. He will certainly return (his appearing) and his kingdom is the ultimate reality (2Tim. 4:1). This solemn warning is in harmony with the future events described in Rev. 19-20: the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the white throne judgment. In 2Tim. 4:18, Paul says the Lord will rescue him from every attack and take him safely to his heavenly kingdom. The kingdom is clearly future for Paul, but why a *heavenly* kingdom? The NIV commentary suggests heaven itself, because in verse six Paul says, 'the time of my departure has come.' But is heaven ever described in Scripture as a 'heavenly kingdom'? Paul mentioned Messiah's kingdom in verse one, and he referred to the Messiah's appearing in verse eight.

The BAG Greek Lexicon defines the adjective 'heavenly' as 'something that is there in heaven with God, *or* that belongs there by nature, *or* something that *comes from there*'. Just as the kingdom of God is better translated 'kingdom from God', so here, the heavenly kingdom is the kingdom that comes from heaven. That is what Paul was looking forward to, not an intermediary state in heaven about which we know nothing. Other things described as 'heavenly' because of their heavenly origins are:

The heavenly man - Jesus (1Cor. 15:48-49)

A heavenly calling - from God (Heb. 3:1)

The heavenly gift - the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4)

A better country, a heavenly one - the city God has prepared for them (Heb. 11:16).

The heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22) - that comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2).

The kingdom of God in Hebrews, James and Peter

There are another ten references to the kingdom of God in the books of Hebrews to Revelation, and it is instructive to see that all these authors interpret it as an earthly messianic kingdom. At least, many scholars think so.

Quoting Ps. 45:6, the writer of Hebrews interprets the king in Ps. 45 to be the Messiah, the Son of God. He calls him God and says his throne is forever and ever, and the scepter of his kingdom is a righteous scepter (Heb. 1:8).

In Heb. 12:28 he makes the important observation that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Receiving the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting it and ruling with the Messiah during his millennial reign.

James, the Lord's brother, said that God chose the poor in the world to become rich in faith, and to become heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him (James 2:5). With his godly Jewish background, he had a strong faith that we would be heirs of the messianic kingdom.

Peter tells the recipients of his letter that if they confirm their calling and election, they will be generously granted entry into the eternal kingdom of their Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah. Entry into the eternal kingdom is the logical outcome of entry into the monarchy, which occurs when one is born of water and Spirit (Jn. 3:5). This entrance into the earthly kingdom at Jesus' coming follows the resurrection (1Cor. 15:50). The saints will rise and meet the Lord in the air at his coming and thereafter they will be always with the Lord. According to my understanding our abode and throne will be in the New Jerusalem, from where we will rule over the world.

Summary teaching on the kingdom of God

1. The 'kingdom of God' in Jesus' teaching always refers to a future, earthly, messianic kingdom and not to God's sovereignty over the universe. Jesus used the title 'Son of Man' from the book of Daniel to speak of himself in the third person and avoid making it explicit that he was the Messiah. In the same way he used the expression

‘kingdom of God’ to speak of his coming kingdom and to avoid being regarded as a threat to Rome. He spoke more openly to his inner circle of disciples, but to the crowds he spoke in parables and he used these cryptic expressions. Cryptic here mean’s obscure, secret or enigmatic.

2. ‘Kingdom’ is not to be interpreted as a geographical domain. It should usually be understood as meaning ‘rule’ or ‘kingship’ or ‘government’. However, you can’t have a kingdom without a king, and sometimes the expression stands for the king himself (Mt. 3:2, 4:17, Lk. 11:20, 17:21). When the kingdom of God is spoken about as coming, the focus is on the king; an abstract concept like ‘rule’ or ‘kingship’ cannot come by itself.

3. The Greek genitive expression, of God, often expresses origin rather than possession (see the following chapter). This is a kingdom which has its origin in God and thus contrasts with the kingdoms of this world that have their origin in human politics. It is not to be confused with God’s sovereign rule over his creation; it is Messiah’s reign or government. The expression ‘kingdom of God’ never occurs in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it always refers to the messianic kingdom.

4. The kingdom of God is a rule on earth, not in heaven, and a man, the Messiah, is the visible king, not God the Father. He will rule from Jerusalem over a regathered people of Israel fulfilling the messianic prophecies made by the Old Testament prophets. The resurrected and raptured church will be united to him and will rule with him, fulfilling the promise of their glorification. The Messiah

will rejuvenate the earth and human society. The existence of this kingdom will vindicate both Israel as God's chosen nation, and the church as the people of God.

5. The kingdom of God as taught by Jesus is a future reign by the Messiah, a reign which will start when Jesus returns to earth in glory. Amillennialists teach that as Jesus is now on the throne in heaven at the right hand of the Father, the kingdom of God is already present. It cannot be denied that Jesus is on the throne, and that he rules over all, but this is his Father's throne in heaven. The Messiah created all things, and he holds all things together (Col. 1:17), so his rightful place is on God's throne, but this is not the 'kingdom of God' that Jesus proclaimed. The Messiah's future reign on earth has not yet begun. There are two thrones; the Father's throne in heaven and the Davidic throne on earth, and so there are two kingdoms. There are also two resurrections, one of the righteous to life (Lk. 14:14, Jn. 5:29, 1Cor. 15:23, 1Thess. 4:16, Rev. 20:5) and the other of the wicked to condemnation. They are separated by the 1000-year millennium. There is only one day of personal judgment, the great white throne judgment of Rev. 20:11-15, although the Day of the Lord which will occur immediately before the Messiah arrives, is also a great time of judgment on the nations who rise up against God. The righteous are not judged (Jn. 5:24, Rom. 8:1), but will be rewarded for their service (Mt. 16:27, 1Cor. 3:12-15, 2Cor. 5:10, Rev. 22:12).

6. I see no evidence for a theology of a realized kingdom of God. When Paul says in Col. 1:13 that the Father has rescued us from the

dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves, he is thinking about our position in Christ; *we are delivered* from the dominion of darkness, we are saved, our sins are forgiven, we have become children of God, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places, and we are *heirs of the kingdom*. This may be realized theology, but it is not realized eschatology. We are not yet reigning with Christ over his earthly kingdom. Paul does not write much about the kingdom of God; his focus is on evangelism and church-planting and pastoral affairs. But he believed that the kingdom of God was a future event (1Cor. 6:9, 15:50, 2Thess. 1:5), as did Luke (Lk. 22:18, Acts 14:22) and Peter (2Pet. 1:11). Paul said we must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God. We are not reigning yet, but Paul said, if we endure, we will reign with him (2Tim. 2:12). And Jesus promised to give the conqueror authority over the nations (Rev. 2:26). John saw the elders and the living creatures singing praises to the Lamb, saying that he had redeemed people and made them a kingdom and priests for God, and that they would reign over the earth (Rev. 5:10).

7. A kingdom does not exist on earth without a visible king. Only when Jesus returns will the kingdom from God be made manifest. According to Jesus' parables, the fulfilment of the Great Commission is resulting in a harvest of souls from every tribe and nation, and it is this multitude who will reign together with Christ on earth. The church age is sometimes referred to as the not-yet-fully inaugurated kingdom of God, but without Christ's physical presence on earth, the kingdom cannot in any way be described as inaugurated. As the

saints will reign with Christ over the earth, the kingdom won't be inaugurated until the full number of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25)

8. Entering the kingdom from God is not entering a geographical area as a citizen or subject; it is entering Messiah's government. Believers are called sons of God; they are sons of the kingdom, which means, princes. The many millions of God's people from every nation will make up one great royal family or monarchy. This is why the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her sons could sit on his right and left in the kingdom. The greatest in the kingdom (monarchy) is the one who humbles himself. Taxes are not paid by the king's sons, so Jesus told his disciples that they are exempt from the temple tax (Mt. 17:26), the inference being that the disciples belong to the royal household.

9. Inheriting the kingdom is winning a place in Messiah's government. The kingdom is given to believers, conferred on them. They are not subjects. And of course, they can't inherit God the Father's kingdom, the kingdom they are inheriting is here on earth.

10. The great chapter on the resurrection teaches us that the Messiah was resurrected first, and at his coming, those who belong to him will be resurrected. Then at the end, after he has ruled and destroyed every ruler and power, he will deliver the kingdom to God the Father (1Cor. 15:24-25). There we have it; the Messiah must reign on earth. It is the kingdom from God which John the Baptist and Jesus proclaimed, the kingdom described by John in Rev. 20 as a 1000-year reign. After this reign on earth during which Christ

subdues all opposition, he will surrender his Messianic kingship to his Father, so that God may be all in all.

11. In Rev. 19-20 John lists for us the events of Jesus' return and reign in chronological order.

19:11-14 Jesus will return with the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure (cf. 19:8). These are those who are chosen, called and faithful (cf. 17:14), the Christian dead who have just been resurrected.

19:15-16 The battle of Armageddon in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

19:17-18 A call to carrion birds to enjoy God's great supper; the slaughter of the nations who came to oppose God.

19:19-21 The Antichrist and the false prophet are captured and thrown into hell.

20:1-3 Satan is bound for 1000 years.

20:4-6 The resurrection of the martyrs to reign with their Messiah for 1000 years.

20:7-10 The release of Satan after the 1000 years, his final rebellion and doom.

20:11-15 The resurrection of the wicked, the white throne judgment, and the end of this present creation.

The central thesis of this book is that the kingdom of God is Messiah's future reign. Jesus will be king. Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the holy trinity, God himself. As such, he is

always sovereign, so we are told many times that he is seated at the right hand of God. But to the Jewish prophets he was a son of God; he was to be God's regent, his representative to reign on earth in God's place. The 'kingdom of God' phrase is deliberately ambiguous. If we think of Jesus as God, then it is the kingdom of God, but if we think of Jesus as a human Messiah, appointed by God, as the Jews understood him, then it is better understood as the kingdom from God. It does not have its origin in human politics like the great kingdoms of this world, it is a kingdom established by God.

**The Kingdom of God
is *Messiah's Kingdom***

“My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But for now, my kingdom is not from here” (Jn. 18:36).

βασιλεία του θεού

These three Greek words which are normally translated 'kingdom of God' could be translated differently, but in looking at 50 English Bible translations, I have not found one in which the translators have had the courage to come up with a more meaningful phrase. But it is not all the fault of the translations; I believe that Jesus deliberately used a cryptic expression, because he had enemies who would not appreciate what he wanted to communicate with his disciples. To know the truth about the kingdom we need study Jesus' words very carefully. He told his disciples they had been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom from heaven, but others hadn't, because to those who have some faith and understanding, more will be given, but those who don't have such knowledge won't understand anything (Mt. 13:11-12).

The Bible is the word of God and as such, it is not always easy to understand. It is a library of 66 books written by many authors over a period of 1500 years. It is God's revelation to mankind about himself and his plan for the world. When it comes to prophecy and a subject like the kingdom of God, it can become very complex. But the miraculous thing is that with all those authors and that long period of time, the Bible is wonderfully consistent; it doesn't contradict itself. All Scripture is inspired by God (2Tim. 3:16).

Some people call the kingdom of God a metaphor. A metaphor does not have a literal application, it is left to the imagination. and other Scriptures, to find the true meaning. Is the kingdom of God that Jesus taught so vague, or does it have a literal application? The

problem starts when people try to equate the kingdom with the church or heaven. If the kingdom exists *today*, it is surely imaginative, because there is no visible king, no earthly throne, no domain or realm. When you spiritualize the kingdom of God, you end up robbing Scripture of its meaning. Jesus taught us that he would usher in a literal kingdom when he returns in his Father's glory (Mt. 19:2, 25:31-32).

βασιλεία is the word translated 'kingdom'. The primary meaning is abstract, meaning sovereignty or kingship. The active meaning is reign or rule. It refers to the power, rule or authority of a royal person, usually a king. A secondary meaning is the territory ruled over by a king; his domain, as in the United Kingdom, which is a country, but that meaning is rare in the New Testament.

θεοῦ is the word for God in the genitive case, and in this expression, as in most contexts where it occurs, it refers to God. From the lips of Jesus, it refers to God the Father.

του is the definite article and it is also in the genitive case. It usually means 'of the', but there are many possibilities, including 'from the'. The full expression βασιλεία του θεοῦ does not refer to God's kingdom as expressed in Ps. 145, which speaks of God's majesty and sovereignty. The kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus, is a kingdom that is coming, that you and I can inherit. This can't be said of God's sovereignty. We cannot become God, and we cannot inherit his authority. The genitive case in Greek is quite complex; in different contexts, it has various shades of meaning. The general meaning of

the genitive is that there is an intimate connection between the two words that it connects, in this case 'kingdom' and 'God'. But what is that connection? One common use of the genitive is to express 'source' or 'origin'. In that case the meaning would be 'the kingdom from God'. Jesus is the king, the coming Messiah, so it would seem preferable to think about 'the kingdom from God' rather than the kingdom of God'. It is the Messiah's kingdom that is coming, and which, by virtue of our union with him, we will one day inherit.

It will clarify our thinking about the kingdom of God immensely, if we think of it as the kingdom that comes from God, rather than the kingdom that belongs to God. Having said that, it is also true that everything belongs to God, and sometimes that may be relevant. Some theologians distinguish the universal kingdom or reign of God from the particular kingdom or reign of God. Jesus' use of the expression is always in the particular sense. He is not referring to God's universal sovereignty. He is the Messiah, he is the obvious king in the kingdom of God, and the kingdom he is referring to is here on earth. So, I believe we are justified in translating 'the kingdom of God' as 'the kingdom that comes from God', or simply 'the kingdom from God'. The particular kingdom we are talking about is the kingdom of this world, which Jesus is coming to rule over.

‘Του Θεού’ often means ‘from God’

Koine (New Testament) Greek tended to replace the genitive of source with a prepositional phrase, particularly 'ἐκ' plus a genitival phrase. But the genitive form of one noun was an exception. Θεού

‘God’ was commonly used as a genitive of source, since one of the main attributes of God is that He is the source and origin of everything that exists. This means that many of the θεου phrases in the New Testament give a more accurate meaning when interpreted as ‘from God’. This variant of the genitive case is called the ablative, which indicates a movement away from something. In του θεού expressions the true genitive gives the meaning ‘of God’ (possession), while the ablative gives the meaning ‘from God’ (source). In the New Testament, many of the ‘of God’ expressions refer to God’s attributes: mercy, grace, love, greatness, glory, anger, wisdom, will; his mental processes and communication: word of God, thought, command, promise; or his people: children, sons, servants, heirs, church, flock, angels; or other things closely associated with him: his temple, house, mountain, throne, or his mouth, hand, or name. These are true genitives.

A look at other ‘of God’ expressions in the New Testament will quickly illustrate that they are ablative in meaning. John the Baptist directed people’s attention to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29) He was not looking at a lamb that belonged to God. He was looking at Jesus, the lamb that God had provided as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world, just as he provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac (Gen. 22:13-14).

Jesus told some Jewish leaders that they didn’t have the love of God in them (Jn. 5:42). This ‘love of God’ is not God’s love. Leon Morris (The Gospel of John p 332 fn. 120) says that “God is at once the

Author and the Object of this love”. Love is a gift of the Spirit. In Jn. 5:42, it means the love that God gives us, or our love for God, but not God’s love for us.

On another occasion Jesus said the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world (Jn. 6:33). This ‘bread of God’ isn’t God’s own bread, it is the bread provided by God, or the bread that comes from God, Jesus. He who comes down from heaven is the bread of life.

John said that some of the Jewish authorities believed in Jesus but did not confess it, because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (Jn. 12:43). This is also a ‘του θεου’ expression (praise of God), translated correctly by NIV as ablative: they loved human praise more than praise *from* God.

Rom. 10:3 says that the Jews were ignorant of the righteousness that comes *from* God (ISV) while they try to establish their own; they had not submitted to God’s means to attain righteousness. Compare the KJV translation, ‘God’s righteousness’. Paul is not talking about God’s own righteousness. It is the righteousness that God provides for us that they were ignorant of.

When Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11), it is not God’s personal armor we are to put on; it is the armor God has provided for us to stand up against the devil, the armor *from* God.

What about God’s peace, which goes far beyond anything we can imagine (Phil. 4:7)? Obviously, we are not talking about God’s

personal peace, but the peace that he gives us. It may be obvious when we think about it, but a more specific translation like ‘the peace that God gives’ would be more helpful. This reminds one of Nehemiah’s words (Neh. 8:10) to the people, when he said the joy of the Lord was their strength. It is joy from the Lord, the joy that he gives us, that gives us our strength, not his personal joy.

To hammer home this point that ‘του θεου’ expressions often have the ablative meaning of ‘from God’, let’s look at the expression ‘gospel of God’ in 1Thess. 2:8. Is that good news about God, or is it good news *from* God, as the Good News Bible translates it? I think you’ll agree with the latter.

These genitive constructions don’t teach us that God is possessor of the lamb, love, bread, armor etc., but rather that he is the source of these things. In the same way, the kingdom of God is the kingdom *from* God. It creates a problem when we interpret the kingdom of God as God’s own kingly rule, or his universal reign over all creation, because his rule is eternal. How can we talk about it coming? On the other hand, if we interpret the kingdom of God as meaning ‘the kingdom *from* God’, then we will have no such problem.

When the kingdom of God comes, it will fulfil numerous Old Testament prophecies in which the Messiah is the king. One cannot deny that God the Father is always king in a general sense, but that is not the point here.

Seeking his kingdom and his righteousness

Sometimes we need to ask ourselves whether the possessive pronoun 'his' is truly possessive, or whether it may relate to source and origin, especially when it relates to God. For example, in the statement 'The Lord has made his salvation known', it is not the Lord who is being saved, it is salvation that finds its source in him. Another example is, 'your kingdom come' (Mt. 6:10). This does not refer to the Father's own eternal kingdom, but the reign of his Son, whom he will install on Zion, his holy hill (Ps. 2). Jesus is asking us to pray for his return and his kingdom on earth. Only then will God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

During Jesus' Sermon on the Mount address, he told his disciples that they didn't need to worry about their lives and their basic needs. He had already told them that they couldn't serve both God and riches. Then he told them to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and everything else would be provided (Mt. 6:33). How does one seek the kingdom of God? What has the kingdom of God got to do with our economic security? The messianic kingdom was the Jewish hope, so Jesus' audience would have had a better idea of what Jesus was referring to. But what about the Gentiles, how are we to go about seeking the kingdom? Paul teaches about a mystery, the previously unknown fact that Gentile and Jewish Christians are now united in God's new family as equal heirs with one another and with the Messiah. We are all heirs of the kingdom that the Messiah will establish at his return, but to which he was already inviting people to be a part of. The Messiah and his kingdom are our hope, not some ethereal existence in heaven. Jesus said we

enter the kingdom when we are born again of God's Spirit as God's children. That is what we need to seek. Those who are heirs of the kingdom while they are in this world, and rulers of it in the future age, don't need to worry about earthly riches, their riches are stored up for them in heaven.

Jesus was drawing their attention away from worrying about clothes and food and drink, away from thoughts of present earthly riches. He wanted them to focus on future glory and present security. They should trust in God who cares for them today, and follow Jesus the Messiah, and all these basic needs will be provided.

Jesus wants us to know that if we believe in him, we will share in his kingdom. In Mt. 5:3, 10, 19-20 he mentioned the sort of people the kingdom belongs to, and those who will be great in the kingdom. The kingdom in these contexts is the *monarchy*. In a kingdom you have the ruling class and the *hoi polloi*, the masses. The focus here is not on giving God first place in your life, or on being concerned about the church, or missions and evangelism, or about God's will for the world, but on securing your place in the Messiah's monarchy. Once you know you are in the royal family, you will be confident that you will be looked after. Messiah is not yet reigning, but those who have been born from above can know now that they are co-heirs with Christ and will reign with him.

Jesus traveled around preaching the good news of the kingdom, which he mentions 50 times in Matthew's Gospel alone. He talked to his disciples about entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom. He was the Messiah, a king, and he had a kingdom! So,

his command to his Jewish disciples, and to us, is to discover the truths about the Messiah and his kingdom, to get on board and make it the center of our lives. This is another way of talking about salvation. Jesus is the king, he was born 'king of the Jews'. He was teaching and healing and saving people and performing miracles, but the most important outcome was that his disciples should understand that he was the Messiah. We need to understand that he alone is the one who makes us righteous in God's eyes, and that he gives those who believe in him the right to be called children of God. Seek and find the kingdom and gain all. This has nothing to do with helping God rule the universe.

A parallel passage to Mt. 6:33 is Lk. 12:31, and it is followed by the words that Jesus' little flock should not be afraid, because their Father was pleased to give them the kingdom (Lk. 12:32). When a person is born again, he enters the kingdom of God. He doesn't enter a geographical area, or a reign, he enters Messiah's monarchy or kingship, he becomes a co-heir with him! Jesus said we should seek that dignity. Those who have faith and are born again enter it. They enjoy the dignity of this wonderful status immediately, and when Jesus returns, they will inherit the government in Messiah's kingdom; they will actually reign with Christ over the world. When they enter the monarchy, royal authority is conferred on them. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that they had a glorious future waiting for them. The Father was pleased to give it to them. So, it was irrational for them to be worrying about earthly needs like clothes and food. Messiah's coming kingdom should be foremost in our

thinking. By God's grace, we are going to be royalty. We are God's children! If that is true, won't he take care of our present, basic necessities of life? Paul said that those whom God had predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:30). Jesus is calling out people from all over the world to join him in this greatly exalted position, the messianic monarchy; that is our glorification. The answer to all our needs is in finding the kingdom and the righteousness that come from God. The Messiah is coming back, and the greatest destiny man can experience is to be made righteous in God's eyes, to share in his divine character, and to enjoy eternal life in the messianic kingdom.

The righteousness from God

In Mt. 6:33, it is God who is the origin of the kingdom, and it is God who is the source of righteousness also. We are not being told to seek God's personal righteousness, or to live righteously (New Living Translation), but to seek the righteousness that God provides through faith in Christ. We are not being told to go around looking for God's kingdom, but rather to seek the King himself, because when people find Christ, they inherit both his kingdom and the righteousness that comes by faith. Our thesis is that 'the kingdom of God' as preached by Jesus, regularly means Messiah's kingship, and not God's sovereignty; so, the command to seek the kingdom of God must concern the Messiah. Jesus told people not to worry, but rather to trust God for their needs. The answer to all our needs is in finding the kingdom and the righteousness that come from God. Earthly

kingdoms result in oppression and poverty, but Messiah's kingdom is the domain where we will find peace with God, salvation, eternal life and a royal future. We will have all that we need. He will be our sufficiency. There will be no more pain, sickness, sorrow or death.

Martin Luther found his peace with God when he discovered this righteousness while reading Rom. 1:17. In the gospel, God's righteousness is revealed altogether from faith, as it is written: the righteous will live by faith. He realized that God's righteousness is not that which makes God righteous; it is the righteousness that God imputes to people because of their faith. He realized that our righteousness before God was not a result of good works; it is a gift from God. And so, Paul told the Ephesians that it was by grace they had been saved through faith. It didn't come from them; it was the gift of God; not the result of their deeds, so that no one could boast (Eph. 2:8-9). Seeking God's righteousness is seeking the righteousness that comes *from* God, as Paul emphasized when talking about Jewish beliefs. He said they were ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God and were trying to establish their own. They had not submitted to God's means of attaining righteousness (Rom. 10:3).

Understanding 'kingdom' as 'kingship' or 'reign' throws light on whether the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated or not, as some people claim. Messiah's reign on earth is clearly future, but sharing in his kingship is a present reality. We are 'in the Messiah' and share his status. We are 'saved', and 'made whole'. We have been made right with God, we have found the righteousness that

comes from God, that which he imputes to those who trust in him. But we are not yet reigning. Rather, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken.

The two divine thrones

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached that God had raised Jesus to life, and that he had been exalted to the right hand of God. We can confidently say that Jesus is on that throne. However, that is simply a way of saying that the Son of God was back where he had been before, sharing God's throne and sovereignty, but now as a God-man. God's throne is not the same thing as the throne of David, or of the Messiah.

When Jesus returns, *God will give him the throne of his ancestor David*, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Lk. 1:32-33). The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath from which he will not turn back. He said he would place one of his own descendants *on his throne* (Ps. 132:11, Acts 2:30). Isaiah predicted that a child would be born to Israel who would *reign on David's throne and over his kingdom* establishing it and upholding it from that time on and forever (Isa. 9:7). Jeremiah said that the Lord would raise up to David a righteous Branch, *a King who would reign wisely* and do what is just and right in the land (Jer. 23:5). Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord's servant David would be king over Israel and they would all have one shepherd (Ezek. 37:24). Zechariah prophesied that through Jesus, God would save Israel from her enemies, so that they might serve him without fear. To this

day, that prophecy has not been fulfilled, and it won't be fulfilled until the Messiah comes.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he sat down on the right hand of his Father. He sat on the throne of God's universal sovereignty, because he is God the Son. At the end of the book of Revelation, we find this same throne of God and of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem that will come down to earth from heaven. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord coming from the east and entering the temple in Jerusalem and filling the temple. A voice from the temple told Ezekiel that this was the place of *his throne* and the place of the soles of his feet, where he would dwell in the midst of his people Israel forever (Ezek. 43:6-7). So, when the Messiah returns, he will rule the world from the temple in the earthly Jerusalem. Isaiah said the Lord would create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night, and over all the glory there would be a canopy (Isa. 4:5). The context suggests that this is the visible manifestation of the New Jerusalem that will come down from heaven. The earthly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem should be regarded as one, but they are in different dimensions.

God said his servant David (the Messiah) would be king over Israel (Ezek. 37:24). Everyone will come and worship the Lord at Jerusalem (Isa. 66:22-23, Jer. 3:17). The Father said he would make the nations his Son's inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession. The Messiah would rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery. This earthly kingdom is what Jesus

consistently referred to when he spoke of the kingdom of God. Don't confuse the two kingdoms, and you won't need to call the kingdom of God 'realized' or 'inaugurated' or consummated. Jesus has not yet begun his *messianic* reign.

The kingdom has not yet begun

Here are six reasons for believing that the kingdom of God is not yet present:

1. Jesus is now seated on God's throne, not the throne of David. Only when he is seated on David's throne here on earth can we say that Messiah's kingdom has arrived.
2. Verses that speak of the kingdom being near or having arrived are referring to Jesus' presence in the world, not to his kingdom. See section on metonymy below.
3. The petition, 'your kingdom come', is a prayer for Jesus to come, because only then will the kingdom be established, and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This petition is eschatological and it is in the aorist tense, which suggests that it is a single event, like the Messiah's arrival, not a whole series of events, like world evangelization.
4. Passages that speak of the ethics of the messianic reign or our status therein are timeless. The fact that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the monarchy of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13) implies only that the coming kingdom and our royal status in it are sure.

5. It is at his return and during the messianic reign that the Messiah's enemies will be subdued, not during the present age. The Father told him to sit down until the time comes (Ps. 110:1). So, he waits (Heb. 10:13). John describes our present situation as one where we know that we are from God, while the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1Jn. 5:19).

6. Nowhere in the New Testament is the claim made that Jesus is currently reigning. Many verses refer to his status and authority (as God), but not to him actually ruling. However, he is not inactive. He is on the Father's throne and he holds everything together by his powerful word (Heb. 1:3). He intercedes for us in his role as priest, and he is building his church through the proclamation of the gospel to all the nations. But the apocalypse is still future. One day the Messiah will be revealed to the world. Only then can we say that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah. Then he will rule forever and ever and it will be said that the kingdom from God has been established.

The gospel of the kingdom

When one has a true understanding of the kingdom of God, it brings new light to so much of the teaching of the New Testament. The gospel (good news) that Jesus preached was not the gospel that Paul preached. Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. It was about faith in Jesus and forgiveness of sins. But Jesus was preaching before the cross, and he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. The good news was that the king had arrived (Mk. 1:15).

The gospel, as originally preached by Jesus, had the connotation of good news from God, and in the minds of his Jewish audience, the ‘good news’ would have meant the coming of the Messiah to reign (Isa. 40:9-10) and salvation for Israel (Isa. 52:7). Jesus quoted Isa. 61:1 and applied it to himself, saying that, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, because the Lord had appointed him *to bring good news* to the poor, and then told them (Lk. 4:21) the Scripture was fulfilled as they heard it. The good news was that the Messiah had arrived. It was not yet time to speak about the cross which we usually associate with the gospel. The expression ‘gospel of the kingdom’ occurs seven times in the New Testament. It was the essence of Jesus’ message. He went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom* (Mt. 4:23). Speaking to the Pharisees one day he said the Law and the Prophets were until John, but since then, *the good news about the kingdom of God* was being proclaimed, and everyone entering it was under attack (Lk. 16:16 ISV).

Messiah’s kingdom was the good news Jesus preached; it was the gospel! During the week before the crucifixion, Jesus spoke about world evangelism in the distant future, and he continued to speak in terms of the gospel of the kingdom, saying, this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt. 24:14).

Moving into the book of Acts we find Philip in Samaria telling people about the Messiah (Acts 8:5). Crowds listened intently to him and they believed and were baptized, as Philip proclaimed the good

news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:12). He wasn't talking to them about the church or heaven, but about the Messiah, who would one day return to rule on earth together with the saints.

Benefits of the gospel

In the book of Romans, after his treatise on salvation and being made right with God, Paul speaks about the benefits of the gospel. He said there is now no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus (Rom. 8:1). As believers in Jesus, their sins are forgiven. Later in the chapter he says that as they are now children of God, they are also heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah. They will be glorified with him. Paul considers that the sufferings of the present are not worth comparing with the glory of the future. Even the creation is eagerly awaiting the unveiling of God's children (Rom. 8:17-19). The glory that we will share with the Messiah is firstly the resurrection, followed by the glory of reigning in his earthly kingdom. That is where God's children will be revealed to all creation in their resurrected bodies. In their immortal bodies, they will be easily recognized as God's adopted children. Creation won't be resurrected or glorified, but it will be set free from corrupting bondage in order to share the freedom of the glory of God's children (Rom. 8:21-23). As Luther said, the creature now serves, to its own harm, the wicked, but then, delivered from corruption, it will serve the children of God in glory. Only

resurrected beings can enter the eternal state, but we are sure to enjoy the wonder of all God's creation during the millennium.

Comparing 1Cor. 15:23 and Rev. 20:4-6 suggests that the resurrection of the righteous (called the first resurrection) occurs at Jesus' second coming, 1000 years before he hands the kingdom over to the Father (1Cor. 15:24). The millennium will be an era of reversal of the ravages of the curse on this world. The Messiah's throne will be at Jerusalem, and the whole earth will be his glorious kingdom. The messianic feast will symbolize the full enjoyment of blessing in the perfected kingdom, and during the 1000 years all enemies and remnants of the curse will be demolished; the last one being death (1Cor.15:26, Isa. 25:6-8).

The new heavens and new earth prophesied in Isa. 65:17-25 relate to the millennium and that is the only future world the prophets know about. Isaiah said that one who dies at a hundred years will be thought a mere youth (65:20), and people will build houses and live in them (65:21), and they won't toil in vain nor bear children doomed to misfortune (65:23). Rev. 21:1 is best interpreted as John's brief glimpse of the millennium, while 21:2 – 22:5 are a symbolic description of the bride of Christ, who is glorified at the second coming and rules with the Messiah during the millennium. Isaiah's vision of the millennium is described by Jesus as the 'renewed creation', a time when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and his disciples will rule with him. The apostles called it, the time when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), and the time of universal restitution (Acts 3:21), and Paul

called it the time for creation to be set free from corrupting bondage. When Jesus said the meek would inherit the earth (Mt. 5:5), he is obviously talking about the present earth, not another planet that his listeners knew nothing about. Similarly, the elders and living creatures are referring to the saints ruling over planet earth, when they said that the Lamb had made them a kingdom and priests for their God and that they would reign over the earth (Rev. 5:10).

Miracles and the kingdom from God

There are several passages which indicate that the purpose of miracles was to help people believe that Jesus was the Messiah. After Jesus healed the demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, the crowds were amazed and kept asking whether he might be the Son of David (Mt. 12:23). A similar healing resulted in people exclaiming that nothing like that had ever been seen in Israel (Mt. 9:33).

Jesus claimed that his exorcisms were proof of his messiahship. He said that as he drove out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God (the Messiah himself) had come to them (Mt. 12:28). It seems that Jesus used his healing ministry to encourage faith in himself as the Messiah as he went about Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every illness (Mt. 4:23).

The apostle John also emphasized this connection in his Gospel between Jesus' healing ministry and faith. He turned water into wine and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him (Jn.

2:11). When the people saw the signs that he did, they kept saying that this was the prophet who was to come into the world (Jn. 6:14), and that when the Messiah comes, he won't do more signs than this man has done (Jn. 7:31). When Lazarus fell ill, Jesus said that it wouldn't end in death, it was for God's glory, so that the Son of God might be glorified through it (Jn. 11.4). Then many Jews who had come with Mary and had observed what Jesus did believed in him (Jn. 11:45). Lazarus was the reason why so many Jews were defecting to believe in Jesus (Jn. 12:11). In a summary statement of Jesus' ministry, John said that Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that weren't recorded, but these were recorded *so that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Messiah*, the Son of God (Jn. 20:30-31).

Luke makes the same connection in the book of Acts. When Peter preached to Cornelius' friends, he said that God had sent the good news of peace through Jesus the Messiah. He had anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and because God was with him, he went around doing good and healing everyone who was oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:36-38).

Different nuances of the kingdom

The apostle Peter tells us about the destruction of the present world at the coming of the Messiah. He said, the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire and are being kept for the day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed (2Pet. 3:7). He is speaking about the Day of the Lord when a great earthquake will destroy the cities of the world, associated destruction of the world

by fire, and the destruction of the armies at Armageddon. When he says the heavens will disappear with a roar and the elements will be destroyed by fire, it sounds like the end of the world, but when we compare it with the opening of the sixth seal, we find similar language. There it says that the sky receded like a scroll rolling up (Rev. 6:14), but then in the next verse we find people hiding in caves, so it is not the annihilation of the planet. After talking about the destruction of the world by fire, Peter says that in accordance with his promise (Isa. 65:17), we wait for a renewed sky and earth, where righteousness is at home (2Pet. 3:13). It is the same world, but a righteous one.

In this future context, the renewed sky and earth is nothing else but the kingdom of God, Messiah's millennial rule after the second coming. This messianic kingdom is established by God, with the Messiah, Jesus, as the king. According to 1Cor. 15:24-25 and Rev. 20:4-5, the Messiah will reign on earth for 1000 years while he subdues his enemies, the wicked and the lawless, both human and demonic. The Messiah will transform the sky and earth, as prophesied by Isaiah. The former things won't be remembered or come to mind. He will transform Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy (Isa. 65:17-18).

Messiah's kingdom on earth will eventually terminate with the last judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). Death and everything that is evil will be thrown into hell. The earth and the heavens will flee from God's presence, and no place will be found for them. That definitely sounds like the passing away of the physical creation as prophesied

by Jesus, when he said that heaven and earth would pass away, but his words will never pass away (Lk. 21:33).

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

In some verses in the epistles the kingdom of God refers to the nature of the rule. The kingdom is not about food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The import of these verses is not that the kingdom of God is present. We should remember that Jesus regularly used this expression to refer to his future reign. The ethics and qualities of life in the kingdom we hope for are also the ethics we should aspire to in our Christian lives. Sanday and Hedlam in the International Critical Commentary on Romans say: "The phrase (kingdom of God) is used normally in St Paul of that messianic kingdom which is to be the reward and goal of the Christian life ... Hence it comes to mean the principles or ideas on which that kingdom is founded, and which are already exhibited in this world."

When the Kingdom of God means Messiah

“If I drive out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God (=Messiah) has come to you” (Lk. 11:20).

Metonymy

When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God in a present context, he was often talking about himself. This is a figure of speech called metonymy; the substitution of the name of an attribute for that of the thing meant. For example, crown for the monarch, turf for horse racing, the golden arches for McDonalds or the White House for US government. In this case the word 'kingdom' is a substitute for the king.

When John the Baptist and Jesus called Israel to repentance, the reason they gave was that the kingdom of God was near. As you can't have a kingdom without a king, what they were really saying was a coded way of saying that the Messiah himself was near. Below are some verses where the expression 'kingdom of God' is best interpreted as a substitute for the Messiah himself. Read these verses while interpreting 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God' as 'the Messiah' and you will find that it clarifies the meaning.

Mt. 3:2/4:17 Repent, because the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is near.

Mt. 10:7 As you go, make this announcement: The ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is near.

Mt. 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking ~~it~~ him.

Mt. 12:28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come to you.

Mt. 13:52 That is why every scribe who has ~~been trained for the kingdom from heaven~~ become a disciple of the Messiah is like the master of a household who brings both new and old things out of his treasure chest.

Through his instruction Jesus' followers had become his disciples and scholars of the Christian message.

Mt. 18:23 That is why the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah may be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

This parable teaches the need of forgiveness among God's people. We must all appear one day before the judgment seat of the Messiah. It is more to do with the Messiah than with his kingdom.

Mt. 19:12 Some men are celibate from birth, while some are celibate because they have been made that way by others. Still others are celibate because they have made themselves that way for the sake of the ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah.

Mt. 20:1 The ~~kingdom from heaven~~ Messiah is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

Mk. 9:1 Some people standing here will not experience death until they see the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah arrive with power.

Compare the parallel passage: 'before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (Mt. 16:28). The disciples saw a glimpse of the majestic Messiah at the transfiguration, which happened a week later.

Mk. 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, a highly respected member of the Council, who was waiting for the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Lk. 4:43 I have to proclaim the good news about the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah in other cities.

Lk. 9:2 Then he sent them to proclaim the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah and to heal the sick.

Lk. 9:27 Some people who are standing here won't experience death until they see the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah (in his glory).

Lk. 10:9 Heal the sick that are there, and tell them the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come near them.

Lk. 10:11 But realize this: the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come near.

Lk. 11:20 But if I drive out demons by the power of God, then the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah has come to you.

Lk. 17:20-21 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah would come. He answered them; the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is not coming with a visible display. People won't be saying, look, here ~~it~~ he is, or there ~~it~~ he is, because now the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is among you.

Lk. 18:29-30 There is no one who has left his home, wife, brothers, parents or children because of the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah who will not receive many times as much in this world, as well as eternal life in the age to come.

Lk. 19:11 Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because the people thought that the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah would appear immediately.

Lk. 21:31 When you see these things taking place, you will know that the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah is near.

Lk. 22:18 From now on I will never drink the product of the vine until the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah comes.

Lk. 23:50-51 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and righteous man - he had not voted for their plan and action - from the Jewish town of Arimathea; and he was waiting for the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah.

Acts 1:3 After he suffered, he showed himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during a period of 40 days and telling them about the ~~kingdom of God~~ Messiah.

He probably told them what Moses and the prophets said about himself and his reign, as he had done on the road to Emmaus.

The coming of the king(dom)

In most of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, the focus is on the promised Messiah. It is mainly Daniel that focuses on the kingdom, because Nebuchadnezzar's dream and his own visions were about the kingdoms of this world and the final world kingdom which would be given to the saints to rule (Dan. 7:27).

When John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness, he told people to repent, because the kingdom of God was near (Mt. 3:2). By metonymy, the word 'kingdom' represents the king. It was the king (the Messiah) who was near! Jesus said that if he drove out demons by the Spirit of God, that was evidence that the kingdom of God had come to them (Mt. 12:28). It was a veiled way of saying that he, the king appointed by God, had come to them. At the end of his ministry, when Jesus knew it was time for him to be condemned as the king of the Jews, he publicly declared before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, that he was indeed a king.

When we pray for God's kingdom to come (Mt. 6:10), we are really praying for the Messiah to come with a visible manifestation of the kingdom of God. Only when Jesus comes to reign on earth will God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. He will rule the whole world and bring in an era of justice and righteousness and peace that the world has never known. In praying that prayer, we are also praying for all that must necessarily happen before the Messiah returns, including the evangelization of the nations.

Postmillennialists believe something different. They think that Jesus will return after the millennium. For them, it is the gospel that will change the world and bring in an era of peace and righteousness. I believe that the gospel will be preached in all the world and millions of people will be gloriously saved and transformed, but history shows us ever so clearly that the gospel doesn't change the world. Governments by and large are godless and are characterized by pride and greed and corruption. The problem is that the whole world

lies under the power of the evil one (1Jn. 5:19). How can we have a millennium while Satan is so active? The book of Revelation teaches us that the world's history will culminate in the Great Tribulation and the rule of a satanically inspired Antichrist, resulting in God's judgment of the ungodly at the battle of Armageddon and the pouring out of his wrath on the ungodly world. It is out of the night and darkness of that time, that the Morning Star will arise to usher in a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

The Messiah was predicted long ago. He is the king appointed by God to rule the earth. When looking at passages that speak about the coming of the kingdom of God, the precise meaning becomes clear if we ask the question, 'Is this passage talking about the kingdom as embodied in the person of the Messiah (metonymy), or is it talking about the establishment of his kingdom at a future time?'

One day Jesus told some of his disciples they would not die until they saw the kingdom of God arrive with power (Mk. 9:1). They would see an open manifestation of his power as the glorified Messiah. If the kingdom of God phrase is taken literally, we are left wondering when this event in the lifetimes of his disciples. In the parallel passage in Luke, it simply says, they wouldn't die before they saw the kingdom of God (Lk. 9:27). Matthew makes it more explicit by saying, they wouldn't die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Mt. 16:28).

Peter was one of the disciples Jesus was talking to, and he later testified in his second epistle to being an eyewitness of Jesus' majesty. He said: "When we told you about the power and coming

of the Lord Jesus the Messiah, we did not follow any clever myths. Rather, *we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when these words from the Majestic Glory were spoken about him: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. I am pleased with him.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain” (2Pet. 1:16-18).

The following passage in the Gospels is unfortunately often separated from Jesus’ dramatic statement by a section heading and a chapter break. It describes the transfiguration, where Jesus appeared in supernatural majestic glory, talking with Moses and Elijah, and a voice from heaven saying, ‘This is my Son’, which to those disciples meant only one thing. Jesus was the messianic Son prophesied in 2Sam. 7:12-14, Ps. 2:7-8 and Dan. 7:13-14.

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. What they were really asking was when the Messiah would come. Jesus replied that the kingdom of God (the Messiah) was among them (Lk. 17:21). An earlier NIV translation had ‘within you’, with ‘among you’ given as an alternative translation. The Greek preposition means ‘in the midst’. This naturally means ‘within’, if you are talking about one item, but ‘among’ if you are talking about many. Nowhere else in the Bible is it suggested that the kingdom of God is inside people, or in their hearts. That doesn’t even make sense. Kingship isn’t something that you find inside a person. And here Jesus was conversing with unbelieving Pharisees, so he would not say that the kingdom of God was in *them*. But Jesus, the Messiah,

was right there among them, and Jesus answered them in this evasive way, not wanting to reveal to them his true identity.

Paul exhorted the Colossians to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts (Col. 3:15). He is talking about the 'peace' that Christ gives them, something quite different to saying that God rules in them, or in their hearts.

When Jesus told his disciples in Mt. 26:29 that he would never again drink the product of the vine until the day when he would drink it with them once again in his Father's kingdom, he was saying that he wouldn't drink it again until the messianic kingdom, which comes from the Father, is manifested. The parallel passage in Lk. 22:18 says 'until the kingdom of God comes'. In other words, when Jesus returns to earth as the Messiah. This feast is not in some imaginary kingdom in heaven, it will take place here on earth, when Jesus confers kingship on his followers, so that they might eat and drink with him at his table in his kingdom, and sit on thrones governing Israel (Lk. 22:30). This feast should not be spiritualized. Jesus said he would drink wine once again when his kingdom was consummated. Isaiah was the first to describe this feast, saying: On this mountain (Mt Zion Isa. 2:2-3) the Lord will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of well-aged wines – rich food full of marrow, and refined wines of the finest vintage (Isa. 25:6).

In a present context, the kingdom of God often refers to the King himself. As a kingdom is a subordinate adjunct of the king; the kingdom is present in his person, he is the embodiment of the

kingdom. That is the significance of metonymy. That is why Jesus could say: the kingdom of God is near, the kingdom of God is among you, or the kingdom of God has arrived.

The criminal on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom (Lk. 23:42). He had faith in Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah. This verse has been variously translated as, 'when you come to your throne' (New English Bible), 'when you come as King' (Good News Bible), or 'when you come to reign' (Moffatt). The basic meaning of kingdom is kingship or royal rule, so any of those translations is valid.

The kingdom of God, by extension, also refers to the royalty, or the wider ruling class, as will be explained in the following chapter. Christians entering the kingdom of God enter the royal rule, the monarchy, the government in Messiah's kingdom. The kingship is given to them, conferred upon them. As children of God, they inherit it. They share the government in the kingdom of God. That is why Jesus said that he would share his throne with those who conquer, just as he conquered and shared his Father's throne (Rev. 3:21).

John the Baptist proclaimed that the kingdom of God was near (Mt. 3:2). In its commentary, the NIV study Bible definition of the kingdom of God is typical of current ideas that result in misunderstanding of what the kingdom of God is about. It says: "The kingdom from heaven began when God himself entered human history as a man. Today Jesus the Messiah reigns in the hearts of

believers, but the kingdom from heaven will not be fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed.”

This is an amillennial statement and all three of these statements are open to challenge. The Messiah arrived when Jesus was born, but not his reign. There is no Bible verse that teaches that Jesus reigned while he was on earth, or that he reigns in the hearts of believers. The kingdom will be established when he returns. A vast army of evildoers will be judged and removed at his arrival at the battle of Armageddon, but others will be removed during his reign, and the final enemy, death, won't be removed until the very end of his 1000-year reign.

The mistaken view that the kingdom of God is God's reign in our hearts is lamentable. The only verse that comes close to supporting this view is Lk. 17:21 which says that 'the kingdom of God is within you' (NIV 1973). The footnote suggests 'among you' and most modern translations follow that interpretation. The New American Standard Version (NASB) has 'in your midst', the New Living Translation (NLT) 'is already among you', and the NIV (2011) was changed to, 'in your midst'. This is metonymy. It was Jesus who was in their midst, not the kingdom. In the next verse, following this discussion about the coming of the kingdom of God, he tells the disciples they will long to see to one of the days of the Son of Man (the Messiah), but they wouldn't see it (because he wouldn't return in their lifetimes).

Another verse that is often misinterpreted in this way says, let the peace of Christ to which you were called in one body rule in your

hearts (Col. 3:15). This is about human relationships, it is peace that is to rule in their hearts, not the kingdom of God. How can a person enter the kingdom of God, if that kingdom is within him? The major thesis of this book is that the kingdom of God is not to be spiritualized; it is Messiah's future reign on earth. Any teaching suggesting that the kingdom of God is God's rule in our hearts, or that the kingdom of God is a present reality in the church has no scriptural foundation. What is significant about the present is that God is secretly at work, through the preaching of his word, calling out a people for himself from all corners of the world, people who are entering and inheriting Messiah's monarchy right now, and who will one day rule with him.

Metonymy in the parables

Many of Jesus' parables are about the kingdom of God, and most of them relate to the Messiah's future kingdom. But in Mt. 13, the parables are teaching us about something that is going on now. The primary meaning of the Greek word for kingdom is the abstract word 'kingship', but we have already seen that by metonymy Jesus often used the expression 'kingdom of God' to refer to himself. These seven parables really teach us something about the Messiah and his kingship (Mk. 4:10-11), or the kingship of those who will rule with him, the monarchy.

The sower (Mt. 13:3-9, 18-23)

The seed is the message being preached by Jesus about the Messiah and his kingdom (13:19). The parable tells us different ways people

respond. Some people don't get enough information (the seed on the path) and Satan comes and removes what they hear before they can thoughtfully respond to it. Other people's thinking is too shallow (the seed that fell on rocky places), and they don't allow the message to go deep and change their lives. Others respond to the message positively, but due to worries and the love of money, they don't persevere (the seed that fell among thorns). But when the message about Jesus is accepted by those who have a noble and good heart, they are converted, they embrace the Messiah and his coming kingdom and become fruitful to varying degrees.

The wheat and the weeds (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43)

In this parable the Messiah is again sowing seed, but this time the seed he sows is not the message. The seed stands for the sons of the kingdom (13:38), who are the righteous, those who will constitute the monarchy in the coming kingdom.

It would not be so surprising to Jesus' Jewish audience to hear that the seeds he is sowing turn out to be people. See 'Sons of the Kingdom' section in chapter 5.

The field is the world, meaning that the kingdom of God is not only for the Jews as his hearers would have expected, but for all nations. His enemy, the devil, also sows seeds, the weeds, which stand for the sons of the evil one. He is also winning many souls to his side. The righteous and the wicked are mixed up in the world and they can't be separated until the harvest (judgment) at *the end of the age*. The harvest at the end of the age is not the last judgment, but the

time of judgment at the Messiah's coming, as described in Rev. 14:14-20. The weeds are destroyed at the battle of Armageddon, that great winepress of God's wrath, and from there cast into hell. The good seed inherit the monarchy. They are resurrected and receive the kingship.

It is reminiscent of the people Daniel spoke about, when he said that many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the earth will awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who manifest wisdom will shine like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:2-3). These are the saints who receive the kingdom, inheriting it forever and ever (Dan. 7:18).

The mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-32)

The mustard seed is very tiny, but it can grow into a tree big enough for birds to perch. By metonymy the kingdom of God here refers to the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. The monarchy started off as a very small group, Jesus' eleven disciples (Lk. 22:29). On the day of Pentecost there was a band of about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) who increased to 3,000, then 5000, and since that day the Lord has been adding people daily to the number being saved. One third of the world's population presently claim some adherence to the Christian religion, and the Lord knows those who are his; now a very large number from all nations.

The yeast (Mt. 13:33)

The yeast stands for the message about the Messiah and his coming kingdom that is being proclaimed throughout the world. It is a powerful and penetrating message. Wherever it is faithfully preached, there are results. The powerful influence of the gospel message is invisible, just like yeast, a fungal substance that causes fermentation. The unbelieving world pays little attention to this spiritual activity, but when the task is finished, it will have permeated the whole world, transforming people from every tribe, people, language and nation.

The hidden treasure and the pearl (Mt. 13:44-46)

What these seekers find is the Messiah himself and the status that results from receiving him (Jn. 1:12). They become children of God and will constitute the monarchy during Messiah's reign. This is truly the greatest treasure one could find. The kingdom from God is priceless, an eternal treasure that can't be compared with any other possession. Only faith enables people to surrender everything they have, but in doing so they will rule the world and possess everything.

The fishing net (Mt. 13:47-50)

The kingdom of God is like a net, because the preaching about the Messiah results in many souls being caught, but as in the parable of the sower, not all who hear the message become genuine believers. At Messiah's coming, the angels will gather the resurrected righteous, who will enter the kingdom as the monarchy, but the wicked will be thrown into hell. This is a warning to Christians to

make sure that they are genuine God-fearers, and not nominal Christians to whom the Lord will say, 'I never knew you'.

The parable of the two sons, the tenants and the wedding banquet all teach that the Jews, for the most part, would reject the gospel, and the monarchy which was originally meant to be theirs, would be given to other tenants, the believing Gentiles. Messiah's kingdom will be a future reign on earth, but the monarchy is developing in a secret, unseen way, until that day when God reveals who his children really are; millions of men and women and children from every nation, tribe, people and language.

The true church consists of born-again believers, who will be the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. The government will be on Messiah's shoulders, but he won't rule alone. In God's plan to glorify his saints, he has adopted them into his royal family, a royal priesthood who know him, and serve and worship him.

The growing seed (Mk. 4:26-29)

This is another parable about the kingdom of God, which is, by metonymy, about the monarchy. The growing seed teaches us about the mysterious way in which a believer is born again, matures, and is saved. The sower of the seed is the Messiah. The seed he sows are the sons of the kingdom, the monarchy of his future kingdom. When he scatters the seed on the ground, they sprout (they are born again), they produce stalks and heads of grain (they develop and become fruitful), and they are harvested by the Messiah at the resurrection of the righteous.

Other parables, like the great feast, illustrate how the Jewish nation rejected their opportunity to inherit Messiah's kingdom, and how the Gentiles become the monarchy in their place. The gospel of the kingdom, the good news that Messiah is coming to reign, will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt. 24:14). The significance of the church, as far as the kingdom of God is concerned, is that they are the people being called out from every tribe and nation to be heirs of Messiah's monarchy. All the Mt. 25 parables (bridesmaids, talents, sheep and goats) relate to the second coming. Some of the bridesmaids weren't ready and didn't make it into the monarchy. Those who received talents were rewarded according to their faithfulness in service, but one was excluded from the monarchy and cast into hell because of his lack of faith. The sheep and the goats were differentiated according to their attitude towards the Messiah's brethren (Christians), which points to their faith in Jesus, or their lack of it. Christians should do good to all people, but especially to those who belong to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

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 was a believer (Jn.

7:50, 19:39), who like Simeon, 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. If the kingdom of God is Messiah's future rule

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 which 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 originally 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 of ruling the earth. There are many passages where the context makes it clear that those entering the kingdom of God are actually 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 are happy to 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 world 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. 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 (2Tim. 2:12). This is in accord with John's 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 Rev. 1, drawing on an Old Testament designation of Israel found in Ex. 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 (1Pet. 2:9). Keil and Delitzsch, in their ICC Commentary on Ex. 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 fulfilment 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 literally 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 there is no verse of Scripture which says that the Messiah is presently ruling over the earth, and consequently, there is no verse that 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. In fact, 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 (1Cor 4:8). However, there are many verses that 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, both of Israel and all the nations. Israel would have interpreted the saints 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 (1Cor. 15:24-25). The saints in their capacity as the government in Messiah's kingdom will 'rule the world' (1Cor. 6:2), even angels (1Cor. 6:3), and they will rule over cities (Lk. 19:17). He who conquers will share Jesus' throne and be given authority over the

nations to rule them with an iron rod. Because the saints are united to the Messiah, they will be involved in all his activities.

Revelation 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, the church. In his great love for us, God has planned that the elect will continue to reign with him forever. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. His resurrected servants will worship him and see his face. His name will be on their foreheads (Rev. 22:3-5). 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. John frequently speaks of life and eternal life, and in some places entrance into that life is equivalent to entering Messiah's kingship. If entering the government of the Messiah seems to be a preposterous thought, it is only because we do not fully appreciate 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 (1Cor. 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 (2Pet. 1:4). The Messiah is in us as a guarantee of future glory (Col. 1:27).

Being 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 the kingdom from heaven (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 from others. Peter said it was from others. Then Jesus said that the children are 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 to 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 from heaven (Mt. 18:3). Messiah's kingdom is our hope of glory. It is great to experience forgiveness of sins and to have 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, 1Pet. 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. 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 (1Cor. 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 1Cor. 15 chapter on the resurrection, 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, the image of Christ and 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 Jesus' 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 1Cor. 15:50-56 are those who will possess the reign, not subjects. The subjects of the kingdom of God will include the 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) (2Pet. 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 (2Pet. 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 (1Jn. 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 prior to 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. He will swallow up the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations, 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, 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* (1Thess. 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 to 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 fulness of life in the family of God, and marriage is not appropriate any more. 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. There is a lot of teaching in the New Testament to support this. The following verses refer to the earthly reign of the Messiah, and people are spoken of as entering and acquiring it, 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 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*.

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 to 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 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 he 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.

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 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.

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

The Kingdom is our Inheritance

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now 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. 8:16-17).

Inheriting a kingdom

According to the BAG Greek Lexicon, the verb ‘inherit’ means especially, to participate in messianic salvation; also, to acquire, obtain or come into possession of something. The consistent teaching of the New Testament is that people can be heirs of Messiah’s monarchy, not just its blessings. This authority is given to believers; it is conferred upon them. Being an heir of the kingdom shouldn’t be regarded as a vague expression of experiencing the kingdom of God. It means that we will literally inherit Messiah’s monarchy. We are joint heirs with the Messiah, as per this chapter’s

text. The glory in which we will share is his reign on earth for a thousand years.

Salome, the mother of James and John had insight into this when she came to Jesus and asked that her sons might sit at his right and left in his kingdom. There is evidence that she was Jesus' aunt, the sister of Mary, which makes her request more understandable. If we compare the names of the women watching the crucifixion with Jesus' mother in Mt. 27:56, Mk. 15:40 and Jn. 19:25, we find that in each case there are three women apart from Jesus' mother. Mary Magdalene is mentioned every time. A third Mary is the mother of James and Joseph, who in John is called the wife of Clopas. The third woman is Salome, the mother of James and John, who is identified in John as the sister of Jesus' mother. Note also that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother into John's hands, and John describes himself five times as 'the disciple that Jesus loved'. All of that gives a high probability that Salome was the sister of Jesus' mother, the wife of Zebedee, the mother of Jesus' disciples James and John.

An heir usually receives an inheritance after a testator's death, but heirs in the context of being God's children receive something from him as a possession. The Messiah is heir of all things, and according to Heb. 2:8, so are believers. They are heirs of the kingdom of God and of the righteousness that comes by faith (Heb. 11:7).

Entering glory

The epistles often focus on the glory we will experience when the Messiah returns. All mankind has sinned and come short of the glory of God. We lost the glory that God created us for, but we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). Paul says we have been predestined for glory (Rom. 8:30).

This glory means nothing less than the glory of the messianic monarchy (1Thess. 2:12). The Messiah will give us the right to share his throne. When the Messiah returns, he will sit on his glorious throne, and he will tell the righteous to take their inheritance, the monarchy prepared for them since the creation of the world (Mt. 25:31, 34).

Our glorification is our adoption into God's royal family. The special kind of love that the Father has given us is that he has called us his children (1Jn. 3:1). As God's children, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

Our resurrection bodies will be raised in glory (1Cor. 15:43). When he appears, we also will appear with him in glory (Col. 3:4). At the rapture, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21). Our inheritance is a glorified state in which we will reign with the Messiah over the earth for 1000 years. The holy city, the New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven from God, is the bride, beautifully dressed for her husband, the Messiah. We will shine with the glory of God, our glory is compared to that of pure gold and precious stones (Rev. 21:2, 9-11).

The saints will inherit the kingdom

The saints are children of God, they are co-heirs with Christ, and they will share in his royal power and government. They will constitute the ruling class in the kingdom, the monarchy under Jesus. I completely disagree with George Eldon Ladd's statements (A theology of the New Testament, p.111) that 'the church is the community of the kingdom but never the Kingdom itself', and 'they are not the kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men'.

Whereas Jesus spoke mainly about entering the kingdom, Paul and James often speak of inheriting it. What they are inheriting is the Messiah's monarchy and it is always spoken of in a future context. We have not yet come into our inheritance. Following are my rewording of verses that speak of inheriting the kingdom. If you don't accept the word 'monarchy', you can use kingship.

Mt. 25:34 The Messiah will tell those on his right to come and inherit the monarchy prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

1Cor. 6:9-10 Wicked people will not inherit the Messiah's monarchy.

1Cor. 15:50 People with mortal flesh and blood bodies can't inherit Messiah's monarchy; those who have perishable bodies can't inherit what is imperishable.

Gal. 5:21 People who practice immoral behavior won't inherit Messiah's monarchy.

Eph. 5:5 No immoral or impure person, or anyone who is greedy (an idolater), has any inheritance in the monarchy of the Messiah and of God.

James 2:5 God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to become heirs of the monarchy that he promised to those who love him.

Sons of the kingdom

We have seen what it means to enter the kingdom, and we have already established that the kingdom is not a territory, but rather kingship or the monarchy. Kingship is the dignity or rank or position of a king. What is a believer's relationship to the kingship? A literal translation of Mt. 8:12 is 'but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness' (NASB). The sons of the kingdom are often mistakenly thought of as subjects or citizens, but according to the BAG lexicon, sons of the kingdom are participants in the monarchy. These 'sons of the kingdom' who will be cast out were the intended heirs, the Jewish nation, or more specifically the Jewish royal family, who were so intent on destroying Jesus and his followers. The NIV translates them as 'subjects', NRSV 'heirs', ISV 'unfaithful heirs', KJV 'children'.

Another verse that mentions 'sons of the kingdom' is Mt. 13:38 in the parable of the weeds. It says that the field is the world; and the good seed are the *sons of the kingdom*; and the tares are the sons of the evil one (NASB). KJV and NRSV translate 'children', NIV 'people', and ISV 'those who belong to the kingdom'. All these

translations are inadequate; they don't reveal the meaning that the 'sons of the kingdom' are in fact sons of the king, and they constitute the royal family. The parable finishes with words that emphasize the sonship, saying that the *righteous* will shine like the sun in *their Father's kingdom* (Mt. 13:43). My justification for this interpretation is that kingdom means kingship, and sons mean offspring. In Hebrew a similar expression to 'sons of the kingdom' is, 'seed (offspring) of the kingdom'. Here are some examples:

2Kings 11:1 As soon as Ahaziah's mother Athaliah learned that her son had died, she seized the throne and executed the entire *royal bloodline* (lit. seed of the kingdom).

Jer. 41:1 In the seventh month, Nethaniah's son Ishmael, the grandson of Elishama, a member of the *royal family* (lit. a seed of the kingdom) came.

Ezek. 17:13 Then he took one of the *royal descendants* (lit. a seed of the kingdom), made a covenant with him, and put him under an oath.

Dan. 1:3 The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring in some Israelis of *royal and noble descent* (lit. seed of the kingdom and of the nobles).

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the young Israelites of royal blood be trained to enter his service. Daniel and his three friends were among them. All versions are unanimous that the seed/offspring of the kingdom means the royal family, which supports my thesis that those who enter and inherit the kingdom of

God are entering the monarchy as royal family and not as subjects who are being ruled over.

Believers are born from above to be heirs of the kingdom. They are relatives of the king; they are princes no less! In the parable of the tenants the Jewish leaders forfeited their position, while those who believe in Jesus are consistently told that Messiah's monarchy is theirs, it is given to them, or conferred on them. They receive it and inherit it. To understand that the faithful are merely subjects or citizens of the kingdom does not do justice to the meaning of these verbs.

To enter the kingdom is not to enter a geographical area or the sphere of Jesus' reign; it is entering his rule and authority. It is becoming part of his royal family. This is made clear by the vocabulary used, which points to the exalted position we have in the kingdom.

Christians don't go around telling people, or even each other, that they are going to rule the world one day. Maybe that is because it is the meek who inherit the earth. But preachers don't talk about it either, and I believe the main reason is ignorance, and general confusion about what happens at Jesus' return. The main reason is that Jesus' expression, 'the kingdom of God', has not been understood. When understood, everything becomes clear. The following verses are my own paraphrases.

Mt. 5:10 Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are blessed because *they will share in Messiah's kingship*, or because *they constitute the Messiah's monarchy*.

Lk. 12:32 Don't be afraid, little flock, because *your Father is pleased to give you the kingship*.

Lk. 22:29-30 *I confer on you kingship*, just as my Father conferred kingship on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my monarchy and *sit down on thrones to govern* the twelve tribes of Israel.

1Thess. 2:12 We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to live in a manner worthy of God, *who calls you into his kingship and glory*.

Heb. 12:28 Since *we are receiving a kingship that cannot be shaken*, let us be thankful and worship God in reverence and fear in a way that pleases him.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the holy city and his servants will worship him, and *they will reign forever* and ever (Rev. 22:3-5)

People of all nations are heirs of the kingdom

There are not many verses which confirm that Gentiles will inherit the kingdom of God, because Jesus spoke mainly to Jews. But the following are sufficient to confirm that truth. (Mt. 8:11, 21:43, 2Pet. 1:11). People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the Messianic kingdom (Lk. 13:29). References to the kingdom in the book of Acts confirm that it was proclaimed to Gentile Christians (14:22, 28:31) and there are

further references in Paul's epistles: (Rom. 14:17, 1Cor. 4:20, 15:50, Gal. 5:21, Col. 4:11, 2Thess. 1:5). In this book the kingdom of God is interpreted as Messiah's reign, which will endure on earth for 1000 years, before the Messiah hands it over to God the Father (1Cor. 15:24).

Paul prays that the Colossian Christians might thank the Father, who enabled them *to share in the saints' inheritance* in the light. God rescued them from the power of darkness and brought them *into the kingship of his beloved Son* (Col. 1:12-13). The Father has enabled us, made us fit, qualified us, because we are his sons, and he desires that we rule with his Son Jesus. Peter blesses the Father, because in his great mercy he has granted us a new birth, resulting in an immortal hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah to *an inheritance kept in heaven for us* that can't be destroyed, corrupted or changed (1Pet. 1:3-4). He is talking about Messiah's kingdom, as evidenced by many other verses that talk about us being heirs of God. In the following verse Peter says that through faith we are being protected by God's power for a salvation that is *ready to be revealed at the end of this era*, when Jesus the Messiah, is revealed (1Pet. 1:5, 7). Jesus is king in the kingdom of God and the saints constitute his monarchical government. The apostle Paul said that by enduring, we will reign with him (2Tim. 2:12), and that the saints will rule the world and judge angels (1Cor. 6:2-3). The verb for 'rule' is often translated 'judge', but the BAG Greek Lexicon suggests that here it may have the broader sense of rule, when compared to Dan. 7:22. Kings run their own judiciary.

The kingdom of God is a pearl of great price and a hidden treasure because finding it is the greatest thing that could ever happen to a person. God has called us to his eternal glory in the Messiah (1Pet. 5:10). To him be power, rule and sovereignty forever.

Unfortunately, shallow Christian teaching has an emphasis on 'going to heaven', which is not the Bible's emphasis at all. In the Living Bible there are 12 verses in the book of Hebrews that suggest that heaven is our destination, whereas in the Greek, the word 'heaven' doesn't occur. Heaven is inserted to clarify the text according to current understanding. That is a problem with paraphrases of the Bible; they sometimes confirm to readers the false ideas they have. Our citizenship may be in heaven (Phil. 3:20), but heaven is not our hope. Biblical thought, in contrast to Greek dualism, always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.

The reward of the saints

The promised reward of the saints, salvation, as it is often called, begins with the resurrection from the dead. The righteous dead will be raised when Jesus returns at the last trumpet and the world's kingdom becomes the kingdom of God and of his Messiah. Those who are resurrected from mortal life to immortality will enter his monarchy and assist him in his reign over the earth.

The saints are not judged in a criminal court, but there are many verses which speak of the Messiah giving rewards to the righteous

for their faithful service (Lk. 18:29-30, 1Cor 3:8, 14, 4:5, 2Cor. 5:10, Rev. 22:12).

Jesus told the parable of the coins, because the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. It begins with a prince going to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return (Lk. 19:12). When he returned as king, he settled accounts with his servants and rewarded one by giving him charge over ten cities, and another over five cities. These are appropriate rewards for servants who would be ruling with the king, as members of his monarchy. When are these rewards received? They are not received during this life or at death, but when Jesus returns to earth. The Messiah will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and *then* he will repay everyone according to what he has done (Mt. 16:27, Rev. 22:12). The parable of the sheep and the goats has a similar scenario. After the Messiah comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he separates the righteous from the wicked and then he tells the righteous to come and inherit the kingship prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:31-34). That their kingship was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, clearly indicates that it will take place in this world, and not in heaven.

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan

Satan gained authority over humanity and the earth in the garden of Eden, when Eve chose to listen to him rather than God. However, his doom was immediately pronounced by God, when he said that the offspring of the woman would crush his head (Gen. 3:15). His

existence, and that of demons and evil spirits throughout the world is very real. We may have doubts about this in the Western world, but in many countries the existence of evil supernatural forces is not in doubt. It is clearly evidenced by the prevalence of demon possession and the effectiveness of black magic.

The Bible blames Satan for the origin of sin and suffering in the world. It was he who in the form of a snake tempted Adam and Eve. They disobeyed God and were driven out of the garden. In the book of Job, we see why Satan is called the 'accuser of the brethren'. In the Gospels, a large part of Jesus' ministry consisted of exorcisms and healing people who were afflicted by the devil. The apostle John said that we know that we are from God and that *the whole world lies under the control of the evil one* (1Jn. 5:19). The apostle Paul said we used to be dead because of our offenses and sins, that we once practiced as we lived according to the ways of this present world and according to *the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient* (Eph. 2:1-2).

If the devil has this enormous power and authority, how does that relate to the kingdom of God? When Jesus was tempted by the devil before he began his ministry, it was in regard to kingdom authority. The devil took him to a high place and showed him *all the kingdoms of the world* in an instant. He told Jesus he would give him all that authority, along with their glory, because it had been given to him, and he can give it to whoever he wants. If Jesus would worship him, all this would become his (Lk. 4:5-7). Jesus rejected the offer

because the Father had his own plan and way of giving Jesus the kingdom.

During the last week before the crucifixion, Jesus told the crowd that the world was about to be judged, and *the ruler of this world would be expelled* (Jn. 12:31).

Satan and his cohorts were judicially defeated at the cross, but they are obviously still very active in the world, trying to thwart God's purposes. That is something to remember when we, as God's children, are being tempted or persecuted, for our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil forces in the heavenly realm (Eph. 6:12). There is no evidence that the activities of these evil forces have changed since the crucifixion. Satan is still as active as he ever was, he is not yet bound.

A significant battle in this saga will occur in the final years of this present age, resulting in the manifestation of the Messiah's kingdom on earth, as described in Revelation 12. A war will break out in heaven. Michael and his angels will fight Satan, and Satan and his angels will fight back, but he won't prevail, and they'll lose their place in heaven. That ancient serpent, the deceiver of the whole world, will be hurled down to earth, along with his angels. The outcome of Satan's defeat is that salvation is accomplished, the kingdom of God is established, as the Messiah arrives with power and authority. Christians will conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They will embrace martyrdom and not cling to their lives, even in the face of death

(Rev. 12:7-11). The blood of the Lamb symbolizes Jesus' death on the cross where he ransomed people for God and established their right to reign. The believers will share in the conquest over Satan because of their confession of faith in the face of martyrdom.

G. Eldon Ladd (A Commentary on the Revelation of John p. 173) says that their very martyrdom was their victory over Satan. It proved that his accusations against them were empty. This spiritual victory over Satan is won in the terrible experience of martyrdom. Since God's children are human, Jesus also became human, so that by his death he might destroy the devil who has the power of death, and that he might free those who are held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

How did Jesus destroy the devil? He did so by being born as a man, living a sinless life, and then dying as an innocent victim, our substitute. The world is condemned because of what they did to Jesus, and their prince is condemned with him. With his crucifixion approaching, Jesus said the ruler of this world would be expelled, and the ruler of this world is judged (Jn. 16:11). The devil met his match in Jesus. When Jesus disarmed the rulers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross (Col. 2:15). But the victory didn't come all at once. He conquered death when he rose from the dead, but death will still be the last enemy to be eliminated.

The Messiah's death on the cross has far-reaching benefits. Through the Son, God reconciled all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). Jesus'

redemptive work on the cross has made possible a reconciliation between God and creation. Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay during the millennium while Jesus reigns. The redeemed are empowered by the Holy Spirit and have the ability to overcome sin and evil forces. On the mission field I personally witnessed that Christians were far less likely to be possessed by evil spirits or affected by black magic, as unbelievers were. Many Muslims sought refuge from these evil powers in the church community. The devil has been bound to some degree as far as the righteous are concerned, but he is still the prince of this world, and he will continue to do evil, and sow tares, and hinder Christian workers, and deceive the nations, until the Messiah comes. Then he will be put out of action for 1000 years.

With three and a half years to go before the end of the age (Rev. 12:12-14), Satan is expelled from heaven, and his last strategy is to empower the Antichrist, the dictator of a worldwide empire. He will give the Antichrist his power, his throne, and complete authority (Rev. 13:2b). This final world dictator, will be the most powerful and evil dictator that the world has known. The ensuing persecution of the saints will be the final suffering the church will endure before Christ's return, and it will be extensive. The Antichrist will be allowed to wage war against the saints and to conquer them (Dan. 7:21). He will have authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation (Rev. 13:7). There will be many martyrs from all over the world in the last days. We are called to suffer for Christ.

Our heritage - the order of events in Rev. 19-21

Nine times in the passage commencing with Rev. 19:11 and finishing with 21:2 John said, '*and I saw*'. What did he see?

19:11 A white horse! Its rider is named Faithful and True - the second coming.

19:17 An angel standing in the sun - an invitation to birds to feast on the carcasses of the defeated armies.

19:19 The beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army - Armageddon.

20:1 An angel descending from heaven, holding the key to the bottomless pit - the binding of Satan.

20:4 Thrones and those who sat on them were given authority to judge - the saints reigning with the Messiah for 1000 years.

20:11 A large, white throne with God sitting on it while the earth and sky fled from his presence – the last judgment and the disappearance of the present earth.

19:12 The dead, both unimportant and important - the judgment of the unbelieving dead according to their works.

21:1 A renewed sky and earth – a one verse description of the restored world in the millennium.

21:2 The holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband – a description of 6, the glorified church in her eternal home.

Jesus will return with power and glory and defeat his political enemies, who will at that time be at war against God's people, Israel, and believers from all nations. At Jesus' second coming the kingdom will be consummated, and his coming, at least, will be visible for all the world to see. After Antichrist is defeated and Satan is imprisoned, Jesus and the saints will rule over all nations as prophesied in Dan. 7:18, 12:3 and promised by Jesus (Mt. 5:5, 19:28, 24:47, 25:21). This is the inheritance God promised them as mentioned in Eph. 1:14, 18, and clearly stated in Rev. 20:4, 6 where the martyrs came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for 1000 years as priests of God and the Messiah.

The saints John saw in his vision are described as those who were beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus. They represent all of God's elect. They are the blessed, those who have part in the first resurrection. This is the resurrection of the righteous (Lk. 14:14), those who belong to the Messiah and are resurrected when he comes (1Cor. 15:23). All people from all ages who died in union with Christ will arise with their resurrection bodies at his coming, and they will reign over the earth for 1000 years as resurrected people. United to the Messiah, all that he is, they are, and all that he does, they do. They are heirs of the kingdom of God. See what kind of love the Father has given us. We are called God's children, and that is what we are! For this reason, the world doesn't recognize us, because it didn't recognize him either. We are already God's children, but what we will be like has not yet been revealed. We know that when the

Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is (1Jn. 3:1-2).

Reigning in the millennium

In Rev. 20:2-7, John speaks of a 1000-year period six times. This is the millennium, which means 1000 years, from the Latin words *mille* and *annus*. Some people don't want to take the 1000 years literally, and some suggest that it won't take place on earth, but we should remind ourselves that a year is the time occupied by the earth in one revolution around the sun. There are no years in heaven! When Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss (20:2) so that he cannot deceive the nations, it reminds one of Jesus' words: 'How can someone go into a strong man's house and carry off his possessions without first tying up the strong man?' (Mt. 12:29). Born-again Christians gain immunity from the evil one. John says they have overcome the evil one and evil spirits (1Jn. 2:12, 4:4), because the Holy Spirit who is in them is greater than the one who is in the world. Faith protects them and the evil one cannot harm them (1 Jn. 5:18). This victory over Satan and sin is due to the Holy Spirit, not to an inaugurated kingdom.

Satan being out of action, the Messiah will begin his 1000-year reign of justice and righteousness and peace without hindrance. Non-premillennialists who think that Satan is already bound must have many problems explaining Satan's current activities. Peter warns us that our opponent, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1Pet. 5:8).

Premillennialism is the most widely held view of how this world will end. In a 2011 poll conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals in US, 65% of evangelical leaders affirmed their belief in premillennialism, 13% in amillennialism, and 4% in postmillennialism. It is an article of faith for AOG ministers, and most Pentecostals and charismatics are premillennial. Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is primarily the reign of God spiritually in people's hearts. There is no scriptural support for that. Jesus is Lord and we willingly surrender to him, but that is not what Jesus taught about the kingdom. They see the kingdom as present in this age and visible in the church, wherever there are believers who commit themselves to Jesus as Lord. They think that the kingdom grows through the spread and influence of the gospel and that the preaching of the gospel will bring in lasting peace and righteousness. Many of them believe that most of the world will be converted by this means. Postmillennialism is sometimes described as optimistic amillennialism. Neither of them believes that Jesus is coming to rule over the earth. Postmillennialism tends to see the world and man as basically good, and that society can be converted, whereas the Scriptures teach that Satan is the god of this world, and that suffering and persecution are the norm for the Christian life and it is only going to get worse before the Day of God, when God intervenes to judge the wicked. We have been given the privilege for the Messiah's sake not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him (Phil. 1:29).

Premillennialists believe that immediately after Jesus' return, there will be a Messianic reign on this present earth as stated in Revelation 20. What will this reign be like? We are not given many details in the New Testament. How are the resurrected saints going to live in their resurrected bodies during this time? And who else will be around? The vast army that fights at the battle of Armageddon will be struck down and killed at the coming of the Lord (Rev. 19:21). But millions of people, maybe hundreds of millions, will survive the Great Tribulation, and they will continue to live on earth during the millennium. God said that on the Day of the Lord, he will make man scarcer than pure gold (Isa. 13:12), so we should think of the world's population as a small fraction of what it is today. After the greatest earthquake the world has ever known, every island will disappear, and the mountains won't be recognized (Rev. 6:14, 16:20).

The millennium is a new age, but not the end of the world. The world will increasingly become an ideal place as the Messiah restores it from its state of destruction. As a result of the upheaval during the Great Tribulation, there will be no more roads or bridges, and all the cities will be history. In John's vision of the renewed earth, there was no longer any sea. If we are meant to take that literally, it would mean a complete change of climate. Presumably the same mass of water would remain on earth in some form. But the word 'sea' has a figurative meaning in some contexts, referring to the turbulent, unruly nature of the nations, and that may be true here also (cf. Isa. 57:20, Dan. 7:2, Rev. 13:1). It will be a completely renovated earth, and the sky will be somehow be different too. But

Isaiah says people will build houses and live in them. They'll plant vineyards and eat their fruit (Isa. 65:21). At the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released, and he will again deceive the unregenerate nations, called Gog and Magog. He will round up a mighty army from all over the world and march again against God's holy city, Jerusalem and his people Israel. Rev. 20:9 simply states that fire will come from God out of heaven and burnt them up.

In Ezek. 38-39, there is an extended prophecy about Gog and Magog. God says he'll judge them with disease and bloodshed, he'll shower him, his soldiers, and the vast army that accompanies him with a torrential flood, hailstones, fire and sulfur (Ezek. 38:22). But what Ezekiel sees in these chapters is not a postmillennial battle; it is the battle of Armageddon. He sees a great horde of many nations coming from the north against a newly regathered Israel (38:8). He sees the great earthquake that will occur in Israel (38:19) before Jesus' return. Gog's armies will be carrion for birds (39:4), compare Rev. 19:17-21. He also speaks of the conversion of Israel as a nation (39:7, 22, 28-29). They will be burying the dead for seven months (39:12) and gathering their weapons for fuel for the next seven years (39:9). These details don't agree with the postmillennial destruction of Gog.

There are prophecies in Rom. 8:18-23 and in Isa. 65-66 that speak of the glorious millennium and complement what Jesus said, when he told his disciples that when the Messiah sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, they would also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The words of Rom. 8 apply to the millennial reign and should be read with that in mind. Our hope is in the return of the Messiah, in the resurrection of the righteous, and in the renewal of all things. The creation is waiting for the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Paul says that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation has become subject to futility. It is frustrated and not achieving its original purpose, but during the millennium, it will be set free from its corrupting bondage and it will share the glorious freedom of God's children who eagerly await release from the limitations of their present bodies (Rom. 8:18-23).

God has not revealed everything about the conditions on earth during the millennium, but it will be glorious. We know that the Messiah will be ruling from Jerusalem over Israel and all the nations of the earth, and that we will be reigning with him. We know that creation will be set free from the curse of Gen. 3, which means a return to its original state when God made all things very good. Few details are given about how the saints will rule with the Messiah, but Jesus' promise to the person who conquers and continues to do what he has commanded to the end is that he'll give him authority over the nations. He'll rule them with an iron scepter; shattering them like clay pots (Rev. 2:26-27). This indicates the removal of corrupt governments and the firm implementation of righteous rule. It was a regular feature of Jewish eschatology that the followers of the Messiah would share in his final rule. In Rabbinical teaching,

the Jerusalem that is above (Gal. 4:26) would be let down to earth during the messianic period. Abraham was looking forward to this city that had permanent foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10). Others were longing for a better country (11:16), one that was heavenly in origin.

Interpreting Revelation 21:1 – 22:5

I have come to the conclusion that the vision of the new heaven and the new earth and that of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-22:5), are not to be interpreted as following on chronologically after the millennium, the last judgment and the dissolution of the planet. These visions make more sense when interpreted as the renewed world under the Messiah's rule, and of his bride, the church, who will rule with him during the 1000 years. It was Isaiah who prophesied that there would be new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17-20), and his prophecy is very clearly a description of a renewed earth, during the Messiah's reign. There is no prophecy about a newly created planet in the Bible. Isaiah speaks of death occurring, and of the wolf and the lamb feeding together. There are only two verses in Rev. 21 that mention the earth. Verse one says that the first earth had passed away, and this is interpreted in verse 4 as the former things (old order of things NIV) having passed away. Alluding to Isa. 60:3, 5, 11, John says that the nations will walk in the holy city's light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory to it (Rev. 21:24). Yes, the unregenerate nations are still part of the new age, but they are not part of the New Jerusalem, they cannot

enter it. They are not part of the kingship, but they are there in the messianic kingdom.

Much of the description of the holy city is a symbolic description of the bride, the church, who in union with God, reigns with the Messiah during the millennium.

At the end of the messianic reign, all remaining evil will be destroyed, including evil spiritual forces, Satan and death itself. Unbelievers will be raised and judged and consigned to hell. Then the Messiah will hand over his kingdom to God the Father (1Cor. 15:24). God the Father is the ultimate ruler within the internal relationships of the Trinity.

Sam Storms, (Kingdom Come, an Amillennial Alternative, pp. 136-137), states some problems he sees with the premillennialist position. For example:

- the natural creation and physical death will continue beyond the time of Christ's coming
- the new heavens and the new earth will not be introduced until 1000 years subsequent to Christ's return
- unbelievers will still have the opportunity to come to saving faith in Christ during the millennium
- unbelievers will not be resurrected, judged, and cast into eternal punishment, until after the millennium.

He thinks these things are denied by other verses in the New Testament, because in his amillennial view, everything comes to an

end at the second coming. Suddenly, out of nowhere, death is defeated and swallowed up in victory, the eternal judgment occurs, creation is set free from its bondage to corruption, the new heavens and the new earth are introduced, and all opportunity to receive Christ as Savior terminates. That is a whole lot of things that must happen in one day! And add to that the battle of Armageddon, Jesus' dramatic return, the resurrection of the righteous, the rapture, the wedding feast of the Lamb ...

The Day of the Lord is mentioned many times in Scripture, and it is expressed in many ways: the day of God, the day of Christ, the great day, the last day, that day, the day. The general meaning is a decisive intervention of God in history; whether by judgment, blessing or redemption. The time is indeterminate.

The question of whether people will come to faith in Christ during the millennium is an interesting one. We live in the church age, the age of grace, where God is calling people from all nations to live with him throughout eternity. Before Pentecost God concentrated on the nation of Israel, but there was opportunity for other peoples to trust in the Lord. Even before Abraham there were people who called on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26). Not everything is revealed to us, but we do know that ultimately, salvation is through Christ alone.

There is no doubt that people will be saved during the millennium. The millennium will be the climax of this world's history and the gracious and patient Lord we know is not going to reign over this glorious period without the inhabitants of the earth having the

chance to be saved. To begin with, the whole nation of Israel will be saved at the Messiah's return, so that he will be reigning over a redeemed nation. The Messiah will rescue them from their enemies at his coming and he'll pour out his Spirit upon them at that time (Isa. 44:3, Ezek. 39:27-29, Joel 2:28-32, Rom. 11:26-27)

The initial population of the world during the millennium will consist of people who chose Antichrist over Christ during the Great Tribulation. They took his mark on their bodies and worshiped the Antichrist and his image. Whether converted or not, these people will have to submit to the Lord, because the Messiah and the saints will rule them with a rod of iron. The word of God will be central during the millennium. People will say, let's go up to the temple of the God of Jacob, that they may teach us his ways, and let's walk in his paths (Isa. 2:3). The earth will be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). At that time the Messiah will stand as a banner for the peoples and the nations will rally to him. His resting place will be glorious (Isa. 11:10). However, the fact that after Satan's release from his prison, he is able to deceive the nations and gather them for battle against God's people, suggests that many people remain unregenerate. Those who are regenerated will be resurrected and glorified at the last judgment.

“Then the king will say to those on his right, “Come, you who have been blessed by my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34).

Is heaven really our home?

It's unbelievable, but most Christians don't have an accurate idea about where they are going. They don't have clarity about their destination. There are some Bible translations that give the wrong impression, especially those that we call paraphrases. It is not good to be too literal when translating the Bible, but on the other end of the spectrum, we have the paraphrase versions, for example The Message or The Living Bible, in which the interpretation is overly influenced by modern culture. The result is like a film made about a former era, but it all looks very 21st century. There is really only one destination for the redeemed, and that is to be 'with the Lord'.

Where are we going?

Common Christian terminology would have it that when we die, we go to heaven, and that's it. When reading the Living Bible, I noticed several references to heaven which seemed unnatural (Heb. 10:34, 11:10, 14). On looking up the Greek I found no heaven mentioned, rather it spoke of a city or country that the faithful were looking forward to.

While Jesus was hanging on the cross, he told the criminal who expressed faith in him that he would be with him in paradise that very day (Lk. 23:43). Paradise is mentioned three times in the New Testament. In 2Cor. 12:2, 4 Paul said he was caught up to the third heaven, which in verse four he defined as paradise. In Rev. 2:7 Jesus made a promise to everyone who conquers that he would give him the right to eat from the tree of life that is in God's paradise.

When Christians die, they go to be with the Lord. In Phil. 1:23, Paul said he couldn't decide between two possibilities; to continue living and serve God here, or to depart and be with Christ which is far better. He also said that if the earthly tent we live in is torn down, we have a building in heaven that comes from God, an eternal house not built by human hands (2Cor. 5:1). Many interpret this as referring to the resurrection body that we will receive at Jesus' return. Others feel that, as the text says we already have this building from God, it refers not to the resurrection body, but to the home of the redeemed in heaven. Jesus said that his Father's house had many rooms and he was going to prepare a place for his disciples (Jn. 14:2). Paul said that as part of our salvation in Christ, we have been raised up with him and seated with him in heaven (Eph. 2:6). He also said that the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (Gal. 4:26). The book of Hebrews has a lot to say about this city. God has prepared a city for people of faith (11:16). Christians have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22), so they are looking for the city that is to come (13:14). Then in Revelation John sees this city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It is a glorious place, and John sees it coming down from heaven to earth.

So, we can conclude from these verses that the holy city is the eternal home that God has prepared for us. Our spirits enter it at death; we are not left wandering around naked in space. The resurrection body doesn't come until later, when Jesus returns.

The intermediary state - 'heaven'

The 'intermediate state' is not a biblical term, but it refers to the spiritual state of believers between death and the Messiah's return to earth. The bodies of dead Christians decay in the grave or are burnt up by cremation; they exist as human spirits or souls only. Paul says that we would prefer to absent from the body and home with the Lord (2Cor. 5:8). It is a temporary stopover; not the final state of bliss and glorification. The martyrs John saw in Rev. 6:9-11 were there as disembodied spirits or souls. They ask how long it will be before God judges the wicked who remain on the earth. They are looking forward to something there, but they are told to wait until the number of their brothers is complete. They are seen again in Rev. 20:4, where they are resurrected and reign with the Messiah for 1000 years. Their glorification is finally complete

Regarding heaven as the final destination of the righteous is unfortunate, because it doesn't give scope to the imagination like the millennium does. The Christian hope, according to Paul, is our adoption as sons; the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23), which will materialize at the coming of the Messiah. Our hope should always be in the resurrection, the wedding supper of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem coming down to earth, and a future on earth during the messianic reign.

Jesus said that as he was going away to prepare a place for us, he would *come back to get us*, so that we might be with him. But if Christians go to be with the Lord at death, why does Jesus need to come again to get us? It must be to do with the resurrection. Man is not complete without a body. And it must be to do with place. Man's

home is on earth. When Jesus returns, he will give us our resurrection bodies and God will make his home among men and dwell with us with them on earth as our God (Rev. 21:3).

Our earthly tent is temporary; the building from God is permanent. In the Father's house, a city, there are many places that Jesus has prepared for us. But what is it really? The jewels and pearls and streets of gold are symbolic, as are the tree of life and the river of life. They are symbolic of the glory and immortality we will enjoy, but our actual mode of existence at that time has not been revealed. No mind is able to conceive what God has prepared for those who love him.

The Great Tribulation – the final week

The first three and a half years of this horrendous 'week' are described by the first four seals, trumpets and bowls. One quarter of the world's population will be killed during this time of warfare, famine, and most probably, radioactive contamination. This is the time when the final world empire will conquer the world under a coalition of nations. It will devour the whole world, trampling it down and crushing it (Dan. 7:23). The smoke and nuclear contamination resulting from these wars will cause much devastation and suffering. The Antichrist will emerge as a powerful dictator after putting down three other world leaders. He will make a peace accord with many nations for seven years, but then in the middle of that time, he will break it.

In the second half of the seven-year tribulation, with the help of his public affairs officer, the false prophet, he will set himself up as God, the only person to be worshipped. Through a campaign of blasphemy, political injustice, social harassment, economic deprivation and murder, he will put an end to all organized religion, including Christianity and Judaism. He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship. He will sit down in the sanctuary of God and declare that he is God (2Thess. 2:4). But there will be political opposition. His empire is described as a mixture of iron and clay, a metaphor for instability. The 'king of the South' (possibly a Muslim coalition) will engage him and the 'king of the North' will storm out against him. The Antichrist will invade many countries including Israel, then reports from the east and the north (beyond the Euphrates) will alarm him. He will finally come to his end at Jerusalem at the coming of the Messiah. Together with the false prophet, he will be captured and consigned directly to hell. The fifth and sixth trumpets and bowls relate to this period. The locusts and horses that they describe are symbolic of modern warfare – bombs and missiles and tanks. The number of troops involved in the final battle of Armageddon is stated to be 200 million, and a further one third of mankind is killed.

The church during the Great Tribulation

Some people claim that the church is not mentioned on earth during the Great Tribulation, thus supporting their theory that the rapture of the saints occurs before the tribulation begins. It is very important for Christians to think about future events and to find out whether

we are going to experience the horrific years of the Great Tribulation or not. I believe one of the main reasons why God gave us the book of Revelation was to prepare the church for this time of persecution and martyrdom that will occur during those seven years. It was specifically written to show God's servants in the churches what must surely take place (Rev. 1:1). Whenever we see the word 'saints' (12 times), or 'servants of God' (10), or 'those who hold to the testimony of Jesus' (9), they refer to Christians. Many verses speak of Christians being persecuted and martyred throughout the Great Tribulation and their need of endurance (Rev. 1:9, 6:9-11, 7:2-3, 12:17, 13:7-10, 14:12, 16:6, 17:6, 18:20, 24, 20:4). The presence of Christians during this time is evidence that the resurrection of the righteous and the rapture of the living will not occur until the day of Jesus' return.

Daniel makes several clear statements about the defeat of the saints in the distant future (8:26). He was told that the Antichrist would speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Most High. They'll be given into his control for three and a half years (7:25), destroying mighty men and the holy people (8:24). However, when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things will conclude (12:7).

Paul seems to have this text in mind when he tells the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord will not come unless the rebellion takes place first and the man of sin (the Antichrist), who is destined for destruction, is revealed (2Thess. 2:3). The Antichrist will be an atheist who honors military might. He'll plunge the world into a war

so horrific that a third of the world's population will be slain (Rev. 9:18). The rebellion from the east and the north can be identified with the 200 million strong army released at the Euphrates (Rev. 9:13-16) and culminating in Armageddon at the Lord's return, when the Antichrist will come to his end. There will be continuous war during his reign, but when the Lord Jesus comes, he will be killed by a word from his mouth.

No mention is made of people becoming believers during the tribulation, but that doesn't mean it won't occur. With that in mind let us look at twenty passages that indicate that the church will pass through the Great Tribulation. Some of these verses refer to Christian martyrs whose souls are in heaven, but they are all evidence of the presence of the church on earth during the Great Tribulation.

Rev. 6:9 When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of *those who had been slain because of the word of God and the witness they had borne.*

The inference is that the martyrs had died following the opening of the first four seals.

6:11 Each of them was given a white robe. They were told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers was completed, who would be killed as they had been.

7:3 Don't harm the land, the sea, or the trees until we have marked *the servants of our God* with a seal on their foreheads.

The servants of God (1:1, 2:20, 6:11, 7:3, 10:7, 11:18, 19:2, 5, 22:3, 6) always refers to Christians.

The 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel are on earth and at first sight would appear to be literal Israel, but it is a symbolic number ($12^2 \times 1000$) indicating the totality of the church, the Israel of God (Gal. 3:29, 6:16). Those who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

7:9, 14 John saw a crowd so large that no one was able to count it! They were from every nation, tribe, people and language. They were standing in front of the throne and the Lamb. These are the people who are coming out of the great tribulation. *They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

This innumerable number of saints are from every nation. They are before God's throne in heaven, and appear to have died as Christian martyrs during the Great Tribulation.

8:3 An angel was given a large quantity of incense to offer on the gold altar before the throne, along with the prayers of all *the saints*.

These prayers are prayed by the suffering saints on earth (cf. 5:8) and the martyrs, asking how long it will be before God judges and takes revenge on those living on earth who shed their blood (6:10).

9:4 The locusts could harm only the people who *do not have the seal* of God on their foreheads.

That is the faithful, the 144,000 who were sealed in chapter 7.

11:8 Their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where *their Lord* was crucified.

The two witnesses are Messianic Christians – Jewish believers, of whom there were an estimated 350,000 adherents in the world in 2012 (Wikipedia).

11:13 One tenth of Jerusalem collapsed, 7,000 people were killed by the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and *gave glory to the God of heaven*.

Their response contrasts with that of the unrepentant unbelievers who curse God (16:9, 11, 21). Giving glory to God suggests repentance, but I think their actual conversion awaits the Messiah's arrival, when he pours out his Spirit on them (Zech. 12:10).

12:17 The dragon became angry with the woman (Israel) and went away to do battle against the rest of her children, the *ones who keep God's commandments and hold on to the testimony about Jesus*.

13:7 The Antichrist was allowed to wage war against *the saints* and to conquer them.

13:10 If anyone is to be taken captive, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with a sword, with a sword he will be killed. Here is a call for endurance and faithfulness on the part of *the saints*.

Compare Jer. 15:2. God's people get caught up in God's judgments. Antichrist was given power to make war against the saints, but the age will soon come to an end, when the saints will be resurrected.

So, they are encouraged to be faithful and endure, and not submit to Antichrist.

14:1 John saw the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! With him were 144,000 people *who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

Mount Zion is here equivalent to the New Jerusalem. The church sings a new song which nobody can learn except the 144,000 who have been redeemed from the earth. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

14:12-13 This is a call for the endurance of *the saints who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to their faithfulness in Jesus.* A voice from heaven said, how blessed are the dead who die *in the Lord* from now on!

This is another plea to the church to endure. The severity of the persecution under Antichrist has been described in chapter 13. The blessing is pronounced upon those who are about to suffer martyrdom. They should not fear, because they will be blessed for surrendering their lives to the Lord.

14:16 The one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was harvested.

This picture of a grain harvest is the closest we get in Revelation to a description of the resurrection and rapture of the church. Cf. Mt. 24:30-31. In Mk. 4:29 harvesting the grain with a sickle is a picture of the ingathering of the righteous.

15:2 John saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. Those who had conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name (the church) were standing on the sea of glass holding God's harps in their hands.

16:6 God gave those who worshiped Antichrist blood to drink because they spilled the blood of *saints and prophets*.

16:15 Jesus said he is coming like a thief. How blessed is the person who remains alert, and keeps his clothes on (spiritual diligence). He won't have to go naked and let others see his shame.

17:6 John saw that the woman Babylon was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of *the witnesses to Jesus*.

18:20 Be happy about her (Babylon) heaven, *saints*, apostles and prophets, for God has condemned her for you.

God has judged Babylon for the way she has treated the church.

18:24 The blood of the world's prophets, *saints*, and all who had been murdered was found in her.

The woman who is guilty of the murder of all the Christians is defined as the great city that rules over the kings of the earth. It applies primarily to Antichrist's capital city, but it involves all the great cities of Antichrist's empire that are bound together by politics, commerce and entertainment.

20:4 John saw the souls of *those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God*. They came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.

This is the first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, and presumably the resurrection of the entire church.

Two resurrections

The Nicene creed (revised version 381) says:

“He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. ... we look for the *resurrection of the dead*, and the life of the *world to come*. Amen”

When we harmonize the biblical teaching, we find that there are two resurrections, one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The righteous are resurrected at the beginning of the messianic reign, while the wicked are resurrected and judged at the end of it. Jesus said *those who are considered worthy* of a place in that age and in *the resurrection* neither marry nor are given in marriage. And since they share in the resurrection, they are God’s children (Lk. 20:35-36). ‘That age’ and references to ‘the coming age’ (Mt. 12:32, Mk. 10:30, Lk. 18:30, Eph. 1:21, 2:7) are interpreted by the BAG Greek Lexicon as the messianic age. References to the first resurrection are numerous, and in the following verses those resurrected are designated as the elect, the righteous, and those who are worthy (Mt. 24:30-31, Lk. 14:14, Jn. 5:29, 11:25, 1Cor. 15:22-23, 2Cor. 4:14, Phil. 3:20-21, 1Thess. 4:15-17, Rev. 20:4-6). Jesus was the first person to be resurrected. Lazarus was brought back to life, but strictly speaking, not resurrected, because he died again, and resurrected people are immortal. The holy people who came to life

when Jesus died (Mt. 27:52-53) also later died. They were not resurrected with immortal bodies.

The rapture

The living saints will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air at the second coming. It is not done secretly; it will be a very loud and a brilliant display of power and glory. There will be a loud roar like a waterfall (Ezek. 43:2, Rev. 1:15), and the sound of a loud trumpet (1Thess. 4:15). The angels will gather the elect from one end of the earth to another. It will happen very quickly; it is not a drawn-out affair. The dead in Christ will be raised and then the living saints will be changed (1Cor. 15:52).

Christians are not left in darkness, so that that the Day of the Lord will surprise them like a thief (1Thess. 5:4). They will be watching for the signs and will be ready for whatever eventuates. They should be confused about it. The coming of the Lord and their being gathering to him *will not happen unless the rebellion takes place first and the Antichrist is revealed* (2Thess. 2:1-3). He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship, and will set himself up in the Jewish temple (Mt. 24:15, 2Thess. 2:4) proclaiming himself to be God.

The second coming is not imminent, because the rebellion hasn't happened yet. Antichrist will appear on the scene at least seven years before Christ returns, and he'll set himself up in the temple three and half years before he returns. So, the church should be on the lookout for the rise of Antichrist and his worldwide empire. But

her *hope* is in the second coming of Christ and the resurrection and the millennial reign on earth.

There is no clear teaching about people being saved after the resurrection and rapture. Only one resurrection of the righteous is mentioned. In the parable of the virgins, the time came when the door was shut. Paul makes it clear that there is a certain date when the full number of Christians is complete, and that is when the Lord Jesus returns.

But as Israel are saved after the Lord's arrival, there must be a further resurrection of the righteous at the last judgment. Stubbornness has come to *part of Israel* until the *full number* of the Gentiles has come to faith, then *all Israel* will be saved as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion, he will turn godlessness away from Jacob' (Rom. 11:25-26). The door is closed to the kingdom at the Messiah's arrival. When the Spirit is poured out on all Israel, they will be saved, but too late to be included in the resurrection, and too late to be a part of the kingdom. Their role in the kingdom is a different one

1. Church age, the age of grace finishes
2. Jesus returns and the church is resurrected and raptured
3. Israel is saved and glorified on earth
4. The church rules the world with the Messiah

In the parable of the talents, Jesus taught that the kingship would be taken away from the Jews and given to a people producing its

fruits (Mt. 21:43). The Jews were still to be saved, but they would miss out on the kingship. They are saved when the Messiah, at his return, comes *to* Zion to save Israel from its enemies (Isa. 52:8-10). Then Paul says, he will come *from* Zion (Rom. 11:26) and banish ungodliness from Jacob. When Jesus pardons Israel for its sin of unbelief in him, he will renew his covenant with them, a prerequisite for them being renewed as God's people among the nations.

Christians won't suffer God's wrath

We are called to suffer for Christ (Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29), but not to suffer God's wrath. God's seal on the foreheads of believers (Rev. 7:3) doesn't guarantee protection from persecution or martyrdom, it is God's stamp of ownership guaranteeing their eternal security. Death will be transient because death has been conquered. Christians are not appointed to suffer wrath, but to experience salvation. Jesus will rescue them from the coming wrath, but the church will have to pass through the Great Tribulation. Jesus' prayer for his disciples is not that God would take them out of the world (as in a pretribulation rapture) but that he would protect them from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). There are thousands of Christian martyrs every year. They lose their lives for Christ, but they gain eternal life. They don't suffer God's wrath; there is no condemnation or punishment for those who are in Christ Jesus. The seal was put on God's servants so that they would not be affected by the calamities that followed the opening of the seals. Then, after the fifth trumpet the locusts were told not to harm those who had the seal of God

(Rev. 9:4). And after the first bowl was poured out, painful sores broke out *only* on people who had the mark of the beast (Rev. 16:2).

The millennium

The New Testament gives little detail about the Messiah's reign, but Revelation 20 repeats six times that it will last 1000 years and makes it clear that the righteous will reign with Christ during that time. 1000 years may be symbolic for a long time, but that doesn't mean it is not literal. Rev. 21:1-22:5 is often regarded as a description of the new heavens and the new earth, but on closer scrutiny, we find that only the first verse relates to the new earth. John saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. That is all that he says about the earth.

The rest of the passage is about the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven and is the abode of God and the redeemed. The holy city is a place, but it may not be in this place-time dimension. It is a very symbolic representation of the community of the redeemed. Consequently, there is little said about contact with the surrounding nations and the world, but there is enough to indicate that the New Jerusalem relates to the millennial era and corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem. It is a picture of the saint's glorification, beginning from the time of the resurrection, and the marriage feast of the Lamb which celebrates their union with him.

The new heavens and earth that John saw in Rev. 21:1 is a vision of the world during the millennium. It is the new heavens and earth that Isaiah saw (Isa. 65:17-25). It is the renewal of all things that Jesus spoke about, and the liberation of the creation from its bondage to decay that Paul spoke about (Rom. 8:21). The old order will pass away under Messiah's rule. The sea is often a metaphor for the tumult and rebellion of the nations, in which case 'no more sea' would reflect the peace and righteousness that the nations will experience under the Messiah's firm rule. Ps. 72:8 is messianic, and it says that the Messiah will rule *from sea to sea*.

The earth and heavens finally flee from God's presence at the white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11) when they have finally served their purpose. The unrighteous dead will be judged according to what they have done and then consigned to hell together with death and Hades. Only what is immortal will remain.

Rev. 21:2 – 22:5 describes John's vision of the New Jerusalem whose inhabitants are the immortal bride of Christ. This is our eternal home. This New Jerusalem can be identified with the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22), which is the abode of the departed saints after death and before resurrection.

The purpose of this vision is to portray in symbolic form the glorification of the saints in their relationship to the Messiah and to God during the messianic reign and on into eternity. It is the climax of the book and is fittingly left to the end, before concluding remarks are made by Jesus and John. The descent of the holy city (Rev. 21:2, 9-10) seems to be another way of describing the resurrection of the

righteous. Before the descent, the spirits of the righteous are in the holy city in heaven. After the descent, the resurrected saints are in the holy city which is on or close to the earth. After the saints are resurrected at the Messiah's return, there follows the wedding of the Lamb (19:6-7), after which believers will be eternally united to God.

The Old Testament prophecies give us many more details about the earthly messianic reign. The Messiah will rule from Mount Zion with the saints (Dan. 7:27), there will be houses, vineyards and gardens (Isa. 65:21-22), and the Messiah will rule over the unbelieving survivors of the nations (Zech. 14:16). He will rule them with justice and righteousness resulting in worldwide peace (Is 2:4). The earth will be gradually regenerated with an ideal climate free of drought or storm. The curse will be removed and nature will be at harmony with man, with no more thistles and thorns and no more danger from animals, reptiles or insects (Isa. 11:6-9). Man will live progressively longer on earth as disease is eradicated (Isa. 65:20).

At the Messiah's return to earth, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and the righteous living will be raptured. The elect will receive their new bodies and reign over the earth with the Messiah (Dan. 7:18, 22, Rev. 20). Although John saw only those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus, these martyrs represent all the righteous, who will come back to life in what is termed, 'the first resurrection', and that they will reign with the Messiah. That is the straightforward interpretation of Rev. 20. They will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the royal family.

The subjects of the kingdom will bring tribute to Jerusalem, but they won't enter it (Zech. 14:16-17).

The resurrection body is: spiritual, supernatural, imperishable, glorious, powerful, bearing the likeness of the man from heaven (1Cor. 15:42-44). There is not much more we can say about those resurrection bodies, except what Paul said in 1Cor. 15. But we shouldn't think of the resurrection body as being unsuitable for life on earth. Jesus appeared to people over a 40-day period in his resurrection body, before ascending to the Father's throne. They touched him, and he breathed and talked and ate with them. Jesus was recognizable by those who knew him, but at times he went unrecognized, and that may have been something that Jesus could control (Mt. 28:17, Lk. 24:15, 31, Jn. 20:15-16, 21:4, 7, 12). Gordon Fee in his commentary on 1Corinthians suggests that when the resurrected body is called 'spiritual' (1Cor. 15:44), it is not in the sense of 'immaterial', but of 'supernatural'.

The resurrected Jesus was supernatural in the sense that he could walk through walls, and disappear into a different realm. That may be what we can expect of our resurrection bodies, because we will be like him. We are only given a symbolic representation of our home, the New Jerusalem; our mode of existence has not been revealed. The description of our future home, the New Jerusalem, is symbolic, because it represents an existence in a different realm It is distinct from, but closely related to, the earthly Jerusalem. Paul spoke of them both in Gal. 4:25-26, the present city of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem that is above, who is our mother.

The messianic promises of the Old Testament are not situated on a newly created earth or in heaven, but on this present earth: (Ps. 2:6, 8, 110:2, Isa. 35:1-10, 49:8-23, 51:4-6, Dan. 7:14, Mic. 4:1-8, Zech. 8:2-8). See also the following:

Mt. 19:28 Jesus told his disciples that when he sits on his glorious throne in the *renewed creation*, they would sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 3:21 The Messiah must remain in heaven until *the time of universal restitution, which God promised long ago through his prophets*.

Rom. 8:19-21 The creation eagerly awaits the revelation of God's children, because it has been subjected to futility. One day it will *be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of God's children*.

2Pet. 3:12-13 We are *waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God*, when the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*.

Peter is not asking the faithful to look forward and hasten the end of the world. He uses the Greek word 'παρουσία' which he also used in 2Pet. 1:16, 3:4, where it refers to the coming of the Lord. The promise he refers to of a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells alludes to the prophecy Isaiah made (65:17ff) about a new order of things on earth under the Messiah. The former things will not be remembered or even come to mind. The glorious Jerusalem

described in Isa. 62 is also millennial. The prophets knew nothing of a new planet, only a renewed earth. Isaiah describes a glorious Jerusalem (Isa. 62:4) with a new name 'Hephzibah' (My Delight is in Her), as the Lord makes Jerusalem a song of praise throughout the earth (Isa. 62:7). Israel is there, and they are called 'the Holy People' and 'The redeemed of the Lord' (Isa. 62:11).

Eternal life is kingdom life

Life in the kingdom of God can be equated with eternal life, or simply life, as John refers to it. The eternal life for which we hope for and expect will initially be worked out on this earth in Messiah's kingdom.

Matthew records Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats where kingdom life is equated with eternal life. After the king says to those on his right, to come and *inherit the kingdom* (Mt. 25:34), he says, those people will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into *eternal life* (Mt. 24:46).

John's Gospel only mentions the kingdom of God twice, when Jesus talks with Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again. But John makes up for this by referring 17 times to 'eternal life' and 19 times to 'life'. What is eternal life if it is not life in the kingdom from God? Living as a king and co-heir with Jesus will be exciting and glorious, but eternal life is also defined as knowing the Father and the one he sent, Jesus the Messiah. Eternal life is knowing God, being united to God through Christ in a relationship akin to

marriage, and reigning with him on into eternity. Believers have already crossed over from death to life (Jn. 5:24).

The kingdom is also equated with life in Mk. 9:43-47. Jesus said that it is better to lose a hand or foot or eye than to be thrown into hell. Better to 'enter life' maimed, he said twice, but the third time he said, 'better to enter the kingdom of God', thus equating 'life' with 'the kingdom of God'. The kingdom is also contrasted with hell, which is literally Gehenna, Jerusalem's burning rubbish heap in the valley of Hinnon. It is interesting that the two eternal destinies, heaven and hell, are pictured as a new Jerusalem (Isa. 65:18-19) and Gehenna (Isa. 66:24, Mk. 9:47) on the outskirts. John maintains the picture in Rev. 22:15, saying that *outside* are dogs, sorcerers, immoral people, murderers, idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. The new Jerusalem of Isaiah is the Israelite capital of a regenerated earth; that of John is heavenly in origin and is the dwelling of God and the church.

After the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told his disciples that 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 (Mk. 10:25). By talking about 'life' rather than the kingdom, John concentrates his teaching on the spiritual life we already have, rather than focusing on the future. John's Gospel was written later than the Synoptic Gospels and he wrote predominantly to a Gentile audience. He mentions 'the Jews' 70 times, referring especially to the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time. Kingdom terminology was not so relevant to the Gentiles as it had

been for the Jews that Jesus ministered to. Even now, talking about 'eternal life' is more relevant to most people than talking about 'the kingdom of God'.

John's final book, Revelation, is all about the final showdown, the events that will happen before and after Jesus' return, leading into the earthly kingdom. The central verse is Rev. 11:15 where the world's kingdom becomes the kingdom of the Lord and of his Messiah, who then reigns forever and ever.

The time for Jesus' return is drawing nearer with the return of Israel to their historical land, and with globalization and world government on the increase. The scene is now set for the rise of Antichrist, the day of judgment at Armageddon, the salvation of Israel, and the subsequent millennium. As the end approaches, kingdom terminology will become more relevant and precious to God's people.

The New Jerusalem

I was going to entitle this section 'the eternal state', but New Jerusalem is the biblical term which expresses this idea. After the Messiah's reign, he will hand the kingdom over to God the Father. In doing so, the Son himself becomes subject to the Father so that the Father may be all in all. So, there is this change in authority after the Messiah's reign. Jesus will be the undisputed king over the earth during the millennium, the King of kings and Lord of lords, but when this earth disappears and all unbelievers are judged, the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city. The New

Jerusalem, our final destination, is what is described at the very end of the Bible.

When John saw his vision of the last judgment, he made a clear statement about the created universe. He said the earth and the heavens fled from God's presence, and no place was found for them (Rev. 20:11). After the judgment, death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire, and anyone whose name was not found in the book of life was consigned to hell. That is the end of the world and the whole created universe.

Scholars such as R. H. Charles, Theodore Zahn and G. R. Beasley-Murray interpret the vision of the New Jerusalem as millennial rather than the eternal state, but this relationship between God and his people is eternal, starting with the resurrection, when the saints enter eternity, and continuing on forever.

Some verses speak of the nations, and these naturally apply only to the earthly Jerusalem. The relationship between the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem has not been revealed, but there is a close correspondence. The New Jerusalem will be our home, even though we are described as reigning over the earth during the millennium. Jesus will be with us in the New Jerusalem, but at the same time he will be seated on the Davidic throne in the earthly Jerusalem.

God becomes the focus in the New Jerusalem, rather than the Father or the Son, reflecting the eternal nature of the holy city, but Jesus is referred to seven times as 'the Lamb'. The holy city is called 'the

wife of the Lamb', and there is mention of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and the Lamb's book of life. Father and Son are linked together in three ways: The glory of God gives the city light and the Lamb is its lamp; the throne of God and the Lamb is mentioned twice; there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are there, but there is a temple in the earthly Jerusalem, where the unregenerate nations come to worship. The title Lamb occurs in Revelation 28 times. Although the Greek word is diminutive in form, it no longer had this meaning in the first century. It may rather designate the leading ram, who leads his flock to victory. He is the shepherd (7:16), who will 'shepherd' the nations with an iron rod. The Lamb of Revelation is the glorified Christ, enthroned with God, and victorious over all opposing forces, whether human or demonic.

The New Jerusalem and the millennium

1. The holy City symbolizes the union of the Messiah and his bride, the church; the union of God and his people. Once resurrected the church will live in that eternal community, whether during the millennium or after it. There is no temple there, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
2. The New Jerusalem is a city that will come down out of heaven from God to the renewed earth which the Old Testament prophets always regarded as a restoration.
3. Promises made to the conquerors in the seven letters include having the name of New Jerusalem written on them, sitting with the

Messiah on his earthly throne, and having authority over the nations.

4. The New Jerusalem is a place, but not a part of the creation. The holy city consists of its inhabitants; God, angels and the resurrected righteous. It descends from heaven and will be in close proximity to the earthly Jerusalem, hovering above it or being superimposed upon it. For John to see it in his vision, he was carried away in the Spirit to a great high mountain (Rev. 21:10-11).

5. The nations who survive the Great Tribulation will go to the earthly Jerusalem to worship the Lord year after year. They will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem, which will be visible to people on earth.

6. Alluding to Isa. 60:11, the gates will never be shut, day or night. The kings of the earth will bring their splendor to Jerusalem, but they cannot enter the New Jerusalem; it is only for the redeemed.

7. The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, the survivors of the Great Tribulation.

8. The blessed are in the holy city (22:14). They have the right to the tree of life, while the dogs and sorcerers and murderers etc. are outside, maybe alluding to Gehenna.

9. At the Messiah's return the Mount of Olives will split in two and Jerusalem will be raised up higher than the surrounding mountain (Mic. 4:1-2). Instruction will proceed from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem. The fountain that flows from the

temple (Joel 3:18, Ezek. 47:1-12, Zech. 14:8) and the throne (Rev. 22:1-2) may be symbolic of spiritual blessings (cf. 7:17, 21:6b, 22:17).

10. The last eight chapters of Ezekiel are a vision of a renewed temple, a division of land for the prince, the priesthood, the Levites and all the tribes of Israel. As Jesus promised his twelve apostles that they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel during the millennium, this may have to do with their future organization, or be symbolic of it.

The essence of eternal life, from Rev. 21-22

God is making everything new - No eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, the things that God has prepared for those who love him (1Cor. 2:9).

Relationships - The triune God will dwell eternally with his redeemed people. They are his people, sometimes called children, and he is their God. They will enter the heavenly realm and be see his face. There is no temple there, because God is present. They will serve him and reign with him.

Light and life - The river of the water of life is there to assuage every thirst. The tree of life is there to communicates life and to bear an abundance of fruit to give complete satisfaction. Leaves are symbolic of health and well-being. There is no night there, and no sun and moon are needed, because God is light.

Bliss - There is no curse there, or any effect of a curse. There is no death, the saints will be immortal. There is no suffering; no tears or

pain. There are no unbelievers or evildoers, and nothing impure, only those whose are enrolled in the Lamb's book of life.

Glory - The city shines with the glory of God. The precious stones, the gates of pearl, and the streets of gold, are all symbolic of the glory that awaits us. It is the glory of wealth, royalty, health, wholeness, purity, sufficiency and happiness.

Kingship - He who overcomes will inherit all this. The saints will reign forever (22:5), an obvious allusion to Dan. 7:18 where the saints inherit the kingdom forever.

The creation and new creation

What does the future hold? Scientists are rather pessimistic about the future of the universe and wonder what man can do to ensure our eventual survival. I doubt that they can do anything apart from taking care of the environment. The future has always been, and will always be, in God's hands. The choice for man is between heaven and hell. For those who choose to follow the Savior a glorious future has been promised. We live in a space-time dimension; this physical universe is all we know. But we read in the Bible about God, the Creator, who lives in another dimension called heaven. We can't see him, because we don't live in that dimension. But what of the future? We have the promise of a renewed sky and earth, and the New Jerusalem. How do these places relate to our present earth? What will living be like in those new domains? What can we say

about the continuity or discontinuity of the human person and the creation with its geology and flora and fauna?

The Messianic kingdom will be a continuation of this present earth. The present world and its infrastructure will be totally devastated by warfare and earthquake during the Great Tribulation, but mankind and the creation will survive. The Messiah's government will be a theocracy, not the rule of God alone, but the rule of the Messiah and his kingdom of priests. He will restore the world and stamp out all forms of evil. The present creation is in bondage to decay and degradation; everything dies and degenerates, the energy of the universe gradually moving towards disorder. Romans 8:21 says that the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. The curse will be lifted as the Messiah brings the earth back to an ideal condition. But what will this liberation lead to? The creation will not participate in the glory; only in the freedom from the bondage to decay. Godet, in his commentary on Romans (p. 315), says that this liberty expresses the unchecked development of the free expansion of all the powers of life, beauty, and perfection, wherewith this new nature will be endowed. There is no resurrection or immortality here; the individual in the animal or plant world is merely the temporary manifestation of the species.

The rebirth or regeneration of nature during the millennium should not be confused with the glorification of redeemed humanity. Glorification begins with resurrection, and it should be noted that only redeemed humanity is resurrected. Resurrection is a

transformation of the body resulting in immortality. It is the beginning of the process whereby redeemed humanity attain supernatural bodies, become heirs of Messiah's kingdom, are formally united to Christ, and become partakers of the divine nature (2Pet. 1:4). They will reign with God forever. Animals and the rest of the creation are not included. The creation is doomed to annihilation as the scientists predict, but it will happen in God's perfect timing. Before it is annihilated it will be perfectly restored over a period of 1000 years.

There are only two ultimate destinations for humanity; what is usually described as heaven and hell. There is also an intermediate state after death; for the believer that is called 'being present with Lord', for the unbeliever it is Hades. At the resurrection believers will rise to life in the New Jerusalem, and from there they will rule over the earth. After the millennium, believers will continue to reign with God forever, while unbelievers will be resurrected be judged.

There are many questions about the millennium. Who will live on earth during the millennium? Are people born and do people die during the millennium? Is there opportunity for salvation during the millennium? Are the glorified saints in their resurrected bodies mixed with mortals on earth during the millennium?

My position on these things has been clearly stated. The resurrected saints in their immortal bodies will be living in the New Jerusalem, not on earth, but they will be ruling over the earth. As the royal family, they are the kingdom. They will no longer have children and will never die. The subjects of the kingdom are the survivors of the

Great Tribulation, both Israel, who have been saved, and the nations, who are unbelievers. Israel will be the center of world government and the Messiah will rule the world firmly with a rod of iron, but there is no evidence that he will be visible. All nations will come to Jerusalem to bring gifts and pay homage to the king at his temple. The saints will have bodies like Jesus' resurrected body and they may appear on earth in their role as priests and rulers. We are not given details. The unbelievers will enjoy the ideal conditions on earth during those days, and presumably there will be those will be saved. The rebellion at the end of the 1000 years, when Satan is released from his prison, indicates that many will remain unregenerate. People will be buried when they die, and resurrected at the last judgment. Believers will then join the elect in the New Jerusalem, while unbelievers are consigned to hell.

The Jewish generation that survives the Great Tribulation will be converted after Jesus' return, but they will not be raptured at this time. The Messiah will pour out his Spirit on them and they will be cleansed from sin and impurity (Zech. 12:10, 13:1). They will enter the millennium as God's redeemed nation, Israel, and they will serve him as priests and Levites at the temple, enabling the nations to come and worship God in an acceptable manner. Believers who die will be resurrected at the last judgment and join the elect who are already in the New Jerusalem.

In the New Jerusalem there is no death; all the inhabitants are immortal. The holy city is the home of God, the Messiah, angels and the redeemed. The latter will enter this state when they are

resurrected at the Messiah's arrival, and they will live and reign with him forever. They will reign over the earth during the millennium from the New Jerusalem. The city will be in a different space-time dimension and the saints will commute between the city and the earth, just as Jesus did for 40 days after his resurrection. It will correspond to the earthly Jerusalem and will hover over it, so that the two, in a sense, become one. It is the holy city, because God is there. The ultimate Jewish king, the Messiah, and his throne are also there. Its gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel, and its foundation are named after Jesus' twelve apostles. The redeemed have their names written in the Lamb's book of life and constitute the royal family. During the millennium, the nations will see the light of Zion's glory (Isa. 60:3, Rev. 21:24) and they will bring their wealth to it, but it will be destined for the temple in the earthly Jerusalem, because nothing impure can enter the celestial city (Rev. 21:27). This city is a place where there is no more death or crying or pain. God said he is making everything new (Rev. 21:4-5), a space-time dimension that is not made of matter. However, during the millennium, the saints will appear to people in human form, as the risen Jesus did, and as angels have always done. What is said in Rev. 21:2 – 22:5 does not refer to the world during Messiah's reign. Apart from its connection with Jerusalem as the city of God, the holy city shows no continuity with planet earth. The earth is temporary, the holy city is eternal. Jesus said the sky and earth will pass away and Heb. 12:26-28 teaches the removal of created things that can be shaken, so that only what cannot be shaken may remain.

**The Kingdom of God
is not the Church**

“You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slaughtered. With your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe, language, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

The connection between kingdom and church

The word 'church' is usually used in the New Testament to refer to a local assembly of Christians, but it can also refer to the 'body of Christ', the totality of Christians, but only those who are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. Christ is the head of the church and with this meaning it is sometimes capitalized. The church is related to the kingdom of God, but the connection is not obvious. John Bright in 'The Kingdom of God' (p. 236) says, "There is no tendency in the New Testament to identify the visible church with the Kingdom of God," and "The church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, but the visible church is not that Kingdom".

Most Bible dictionaries and books about the Kingdom of God do not define the precise connection. There are many theories, but they are rather vague, and they are short on Scriptural backing. The common problem is that the authors begin with the premise that the kingdom of God is God's rule and they have no monarchy for the saints to enter. They know that Jesus is the King, and that there are verses that describe the kingdom as 'the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ', or 'the kingdom of Christ', or 'the kingdom of his beloved Son', and yet they persist with the belief that the kingdom of God is God's rule. They don't appreciate the fact that the kingdom of God, as Jesus used the term, typically refers to his future reign on earth; not God's sovereign reign. Acknowledging that fact helps us understand that while the church is a present reality, the kingdom of God is not, so direct connection between the two is less obvious. John Bright was correct when he said, the true church, meaning the

elect and not the organization, are the people of the Kingdom of Christ. I would go a step further and say that they are the royal household in the Messiah's kingdom. He also hinted at this on p. 220, when he said that those who heed the call have entered the kingdom, nay, *they are the kingdom*.

Heb. 3:6 states that the Messiah is a son in charge of God's household, and we are his household (family) if we persevere. Entrance into the kingdom comes through being born again or being born from above. Peter said that because of his great mercy God has granted us a new birth, resulting in an immortal hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead and to an inheritance kept in heaven for us that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed. Through faith we are being protected by God's power for a salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of this era (1Pet. 1:3-5).

That all happens when Jesus the Messiah is revealed (verse 7). The church community that Jesus said he would build, are sons of the kingdom, and one day, they will come to life, or be raptured, and they will reign with the Messiah. James said that in accordance with his will he made us his children by the word of truth, so that we might become the most important of his creatures (James 1:18).

The apostolic authority

One day Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. Simon Peter answered that he was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16). Then Jesus told him how blessed he was, because it was

God who had revealed that to him. He also told him that on the basis of that confession he would build his Messianic community, and the powers of hell wouldn't conquer it. *He would give Peter the keys of the kingdom from heaven*; Messianic community authority. Whatever he bound or forbad on earth would be forbidden in heaven, and whatever he loosed or permitted on earth would be permitted in heaven. In Mt. 18:18-19, Jesus gave the same promise to all the disciples, and then he added that if two of them agreed on earth about anything they requested, his Father in heaven would do it for them, because wherever two or three come together in his name, he is there among them. The keys of the kingdom given to Peter in chapter 16, and the same promises given to all the disciples in chapter 18, refer to their apostolic authority, especially as expressed in their writings and their preaching ministry. The books of the New Testament written by these men were 'God-breathed', their teaching and preaching was determined in heaven.

The royal household

Jesus is building his church, which is his community, God's household. The idea of building a community is found in Ruth 4:11 where reference is made to Jacob's wives Rachel and Leah, who built up the house of Israel. The community that Jesus is building constitutes his household, the royal family who will eventually reign with him in his kingdom

The church is the body of the Messiah, the totality of believers from every location and every age stretching from Pentecost to the day the Messiah returns in power and glory, when he will defeat his

enemies and establish his kingdom. How do people enter the monarchy? The keys (means of entry) were given to the apostles who were trained by Jesus to establish the early church. They did this by writing the books of the New Testament, preaching the gospel, and through prayer. The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Mt. 24:14). What a responsibility Christians have! The Pharisees had the keys once, but they shut the door of the kingdom from heaven in people's faces. They would not enter themselves, nor would they let those enter who were wanted to (Mt. 23:13). The preaching of the gospel to the lost is the church's number one mission in the world.

That is the connection between church and kingdom. We live in the church age, not the kingdom age. When the Messiah returns to set up his kingdom, his community (the true church) will be resurrected and raptured, and they will inherit the monarchy and reign with the Messiah as the royal household. Through faith we are saved and become part of the Messianic community, his community. By adoption we become children of God, and that makes us princes in his kingdom. We are sons of the kingdom, co-heirs with Christ.

Jewish and Gentile saints are united

We might well ask how Abraham gets entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus said that many will come from east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Abraham was a great man of faith and the first patriarch, but he and Isaac and Jacob and other people of faith from

the Old Testament were not part of the church which started at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out. Paul said that if anyone doesn't have the Spirit of the Messiah, he doesn't belong to him (Rom. 8:9). If born-again Christians are the royalty in Messiah's kingdom, and if they are going to take their place with Abraham at the feast in the kingdom of God (Mt. 8:11, Lk. 13:28-29), it means that the patriarchs, and all who are called saints or elect or righteous in the Old Testament, have become one body with the Christian saints. In fact, they are the original root, and we have been grafted into their tree (Rom. 11:24).

When the Messiah came, his followers were called Christians, and he brought about their eternal redemption through the cross. God planned something better for them in this dispensation of the gospel. Believers of all other times, whether they lived before or after the flood, or before or after the law of Moses, couldn't be perfected without them (Heb. 11:40). It is thanks to this dispensation of grace, which includes the Messiah's death for all nations on the cross, and his resurrection, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all believers, that past believers will be included at the resurrection. Many prophets and righteous people longed to see and hear about these things that the disciples were seeing and hearing from Jesus, but they didn't (Mt. 13:17). Thanks to the ministry of Jesus and the apostles we have a fuller understanding. At the resurrection of the righteous we will all be one people of God, in union with the Messiah.

Man was created to rule

It should not surprise us that we will be given the privilege of ruling with the Messiah. When God created man in his own image, he installed humanity as the earth's rulers saying, let them be masters over the fish, the birds, the livestock, everything that crawls on the earth, and over the earth itself (Gen. 1:26). This role is reiterated in Ps. 8:3-6 where the psalmist muses,

“When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you established,
what is man that you take notice of him,
or the son of man that you pay attention to him?

You made him a little less than divine,
but *you crowned him with glory and honor.*

*You gave him dominion over the works of your hands,
you put all things under his feet.”*

In the New Testament the glorious fulfilment of man's sovereignty over the earth is revealed. God did not put the coming world under the control of angels. He put everything under the dominion of humanity and *left nothing outside his control*. At the present time we don't yet see everything put under him. But we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor and with everything in subjection to him. God has made the pioneer of our salvation perfect through suffering *as part of his plan to glorify his many children* (Heb. 2:5-10). As Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor, so will redeemed mankind be

crowned in the life to come, regaining the original purpose for which God created them.

Teaching about the church is concerned with relationships within the church, between the church and God, and between the church and the world. It is also concerned with the ministry of Christians under their Lord. Teaching about the kingdom is concerned with the return of Jesus the Messiah to earth, his millennial reign over the earth together with his saints, and his political power over his enemies. The present age is the church age, because in it, God is calling out a people for himself, building his church. Believers are being united to the Messiah through his shed blood, they are justified and set apart as the holy children of God. The age to come (Mt. 12:32, Lk. 18:29-30, 20:34-36) or the coming age (Eph. 2:7, Heb. 6:5), is the resurrection age; the reconciled universe of the future. It is the kingdom age in which the Messiah will be manifested and will rule the nations with an iron scepter. The saints should eagerly await the kingdom age, because they will reign with the Messiah during the millennium, and then, with the Father and Son on into the future. The kingdom is the big picture of the Messiah's victory.

Some theologians say that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus, and we can envisage Jesus now, sitting on the throne in heaven in his majestic glory. But that is not the kingdom of God. Messiah's kingdom is an earthly kingdom and it cannot be inaugurated until the Messiah comes back to earth on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory and sits on his earthly

throne. Without Jesus' earthly presence, there is no messianic kingdom. God has anointed us and set his seal of ownership on us and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come, but the reality is not here yet.

Our future glory

Who are the subjects in the future kingdom of God? As a kingdom of priests, the monarchy will rule and judge others. When the believers rise to life in the first resurrection and reign with the Messiah on earth, they cannot reign and be subjects at the same time. The bulk of the armies that will gather around Jerusalem at Armageddon will be destroyed at the Messiah's coming, and then Satan will be bound for 1000 years so that he cannot deceive the nations that remain. It is the remaining unbelievers from all over the world, those who were left behind, who will be the subjects of the kingdom during the millennium (Ps. 22:27-28, 86:9, Isa. 66:23, Zech. 14:16). The Messiah will reign for a long time, renewing what was destroyed, restoring the world and its society to a God-fearing condition and liberating the earth from its bondage to decay. With Satan's evil influence negated, he will remove all opposing dominion, authority and power. Rom. 8:18-23 enlightens us on this glorious era. Paul said that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children, because it has temporarily lost its purpose. But it will be set free from its bondage to corruption, in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children who eagerly await the redemption of their bodies. The

deliverance of this world from frustration and bondage to decay resulting from the curses of Gen. 3 will take place during the millennium, after which the physical creation will be destroyed (Rev. 20:11).

The millennium is a time when Satan is banned from the earth, and peace is restored to God's creation. Wildlife will no longer be wild, disease will be eliminated, people will live longer, justice will be restored, all who are opposed to God will be eliminated, and every false religion and ideology will be banished. The Lord (the Messiah) will be king over all the earth at that time. There will be one Lord, and his name the only one (Zech. 14:9). Many peoples will go up to the temple of Jacob's God, that they might be taught his ways and walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3). The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters fill the sea (Hab. 2:14).

The government will be a benevolent theocracy; there will be no more evil dictatorships, corrupt communism, liberal democracy, or greedy capitalism. Daniel says the time will come for the saints to take possession of the kingdom (Dan. 7:22). Then the kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:27). This is the future reward for God's people, and their vindication. They will reign under the Messiah.

At the last judgment the remaining evils, Satan, death and Hades will be eliminated forever. The unbelievers, always stubborn in their

unbelief, will die in a final rebellion, they will be judged and cast into hell, pictured in Revelation as a lake of fire. In Rev. 22:15 the wicked are described as 'outside'. They are outside of the New Jerusalem, outside of salvation. After the 1000 years, Jesus, the Son of Man, the human Messiah, will hand over his kingship on planet earth to God the Father (1Cor. 15:24). But the New Jerusalem, in which are the throne of God and of the Lamb, will continue, and we his servants will worship him and rule with him forever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5).

The gospel

The gospel that is believed in is the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1). 'Son of God' is at least an honorary title for God's regent, the Messiah, at most, attributing deity, as several Old Testament prophecies seem to do (2Sam. 7:13-14, Ps. 2:7, Mic. 5:2). The gospel is qualified in various ways: It is the gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24); the good news that salvation depends on God's grace alone, his unmerited favor towards us human beings who are so undeserving.

It is the gospel of God (Mk. 1:14, Rom. 1:1), or better, the good news that has its origin in God, who promised it long ago through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures (Isa. 40:9-10, 52:7-9). It is the good news about his Son, Jesus the Messiah our Lord, a descendent of David, who was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4).

It is the glorious gospel of the Messiah, who is the image of God (2Cor. 4:4). Unfortunately, Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the illumination of his glory, the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of the Messiah.

It is the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13). Our salvation consists of so much: the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, regeneration, election, justification, being made righteous before God, union with the Messiah, being conformed to his image, being adopted into God's family. As for the future, it is a promise of resurrection, eternal life, and being made a kingdom and priests to reign with the Messiah on earth and throughout eternity. That is a glimpse of our salvation. Good news!

It is the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). This good news results in peace with God for individuals, and it will result in there being peace on earth during the millennium, and the regeneration of all creation.

It is the gospel of the kingdom (Mt. 4:23). Jesus preached that the kingdom of God (the Messiah) was near, and people must repent and believe this good news (Mk. 1:15). It is the news that the Messiah has finally arrived in the person of Jesus. All who believe in Jesus are heirs of his coming kingdom; they will reign with the Messiah. The kingdom is the goal of all history.

That is the crux of Jesus' message. The kingdom is the big story. The good news is that the world is finally going to turn out well with glory all around. Satan, sin, death, sickness, suffering, sorrow,

deception and corruption will all be banished. It is good news for all peoples.

The church and Israel

When we think about the future, the coming of the Messiah and what follows, one very important aspect that we need to consider, is where Israel fits in. Is Jesus coming back as the awaited Messiah to re-establish the Davidic kingdom over Israel according to the Jewish understanding of Old Testament prophecies? Or, has God finished with Israel? Is Jesus returning for his church, including believing Jews, to take us all to heaven? Or, is he setting up a kingdom on earth that will involve both Jews and Gentiles?

These are big questions for which Christians have different answers. Premillennialists believe Jesus will rule over an earthly kingdom after he returns, while others mostly believe he will not. And in the latter group are some church fathers and most of the Reformers, like Luther and Calvin. Throughout history there has tended to be an anti-Semitic sentiment which has been strong in some periods, resulting in prejudice which hasn't enabled theologians to think impartially.

Our authority is the Bible, and we don't need to go past Rom. 11 to know the truth. Rom. 9-11 is all about the nation of Israel, their election to be the people of God, and their relationship to the church. God chose to reveal himself to the world through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, the twelve tribes of Israel. Not all his descendants had faith, so not all are eligible for personal

salvation. Paul said a person was not a Jew because of his appearance, nor was circumcision something just external and physical. Being a Jew, and being circumcised, were matters of the heart, brought about by the Spirit, not by a written law (Rom. 2:28-29).

The nation of Israel is a chosen nation, but currently only a faithful remnant is saved, and as believers in Jesus, they are part of the church. The majority have turned their backs on the grace of God. People must be born again. Paul said, if a person doesn't have the Spirit of the Messiah, he doesn't belong to him (Rom. 8:9).

Israel and the church have the same purpose; they are both called a kingdom of priests, and they were both chosen to spread the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations. The culmination of their vocation is world government. Israel had the promise spoken by the prophets of ruling the world under the Messiah, and Christians also have the promise that they will rule with the Messiah. When Paul winds up his argument in Rom. 11, he teaches us that stubbornness has come to part of Israel *until* the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith, then *all Israel will be saved, as it is written*, the Deliverer will come from Zion and remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:25-26). The key point of this quotation from Isa. 59:20-21 is that Jacob, Israel as a nation, will be converted at Jesus' return. God will renew his covenant with them as he promised through the prophet Jeremiah. The new covenant that God will make with Israel after those days is that he'll put his law in their hearts. He'll be their God and they'll be his people (Jer. 31:33). Jesus

referred to this new covenant at the last supper when he said the cup represented the *new covenant* in his blood. It was initially promised to Israel and Judah, but in 2Cor. 3:6, Paul applied it to the church. In Hebrews, the writer lays stress on the fact that the new covenant with Israel has made obsolete the old covenant of the law. But the new covenant will be effective for Israel on the day when the Messiah comes and pours out the Holy Spirit on them. They will look to Jesus, the one whom they pierced, and at that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness (Zech. 12:10, 13:1). It is during the millennium that all Israel will know the Lord and not need to teach their neighbors to know him.

The unbelieving nation became enemies of the church as far as the gospel is concerned, but they are still loved by God because of election. God's call is irrevocable, unalterable. All Israel will be saved after the Messiah's return, even those who are not living in Israel. Rom. 11 has in focus the nation Israel, so there is no way that all Israel can be spiritualized and referred to the church.

The Messiah's salvation is for all, Gentiles as well as Jews, and they will all find salvation through faith in Jesus. The apostles and other early Jewish believers formed the basis of the early church. In recent decades, there have been many more Jews believing in Jesus and forming messianic churches, especially in the United States. The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations (including the Jews), and then the end will come. The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are two

Christian (probably messianic) preachers who will come in the spirit of Elijah and Moses to preach repentance to Israel in the last days.

God has already gathered and will continue gathering the scattered nation of Israel in these last days. They will be saved, and the Messiah will rule over them as his people during the millennium. But they won't be ruling with the Messiah as part of the New Jerusalem community; that privilege is only given to Jews who followed Jesus now.

The name 'Israel' occurs three times in Rev. 2:14, 7:4, 21:12, but none specify Israel in the last days. The book has about 500 allusions to the Old Testament, estimates ranging from 200 to 1000, and Jerusalem is mentioned three times, but only in reference to the New Jerusalem which has Israel's tribal names on its gates. The book of Revelation is of course written for Christians, and is addressed to seven churches. So, most of what we know about Israel in the last days is found in the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets.

The saints are from different backgrounds, but the holy people of God are not divided, whether in the church today or the kingdom tomorrow. The government of the world during the millennium will be upon the Messiah's shoulders, and his saints will be ruling with him. His royal household will consist of the saints from all ages up to the time of the Messiah's return.

The nations will all have their own social and political structures, their 'kings' (leaders) are often referred to in the prophecies. Israel will have its own structure as outlined by Ezekiel (Ezek. 44-45).

Their leader is called 'the prince'. We are not given details about the Messiah's administration of the kingdom, but it is possible that the redeemed will rule the world under the Messiah in the areas where they previously lived and served the Lord.

The salvation of all Israel prophesied by Paul after the full number of Gentiles comes in is alluded to in Revelation 11, when the two witnesses prophesy in Jerusalem. After the witnesses are murdered and brought back to life and taken to heaven, there is a great earthquake, and the terrified survivors of Jerusalem give glory to the God of heaven suggesting repentance (Rev. 11:13). The response of the unbelieving Gentiles during those days is quite different. They curse the name of God and refuse to repent and glorify him (Rev. 16:9).

The Jews who survive the Great Tribulation will continue as a redeemed nation on the renewed earth, but they will not be resurrected. As long as the renewed heavens and earth endure, so will Israel's descendants and their name endure (Isa. 66:22).

Jesus promised the apostles that they would rule over the twelve tribes of Israel in the new world, which makes it clear that the church and the nation Israel will both exist during the millennium. The resurrected apostles will be part of the bride of Christ ruling from the New Jerusalem. The newly converted nation of Israel will be enjoying life on the restored earth. They will be head of the nations, who will come year after year to worship the Lord at Jerusalem. The Lord will be king over the whole earth (Zech. 14:9).

When will Jesus return?

Jesus and his friends were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem and talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. His friends asked him when this would be, and what would be the sign of his coming and of the end of the age? (Mt. 24:3). Jesus told them about false prophets, wars and persecutions, and then he gave them the first real clue. He said the good news of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end would come (Mt. 24:14).

The Joshua Project, who promote world evangelization, give the following broad statistics in a 2017 report:

World population	7.47 billion
Followers of Christ	10%
Nominal Christian adherents	22%
Heard, no response	39%
Virtually no exposure	29%

Most of the unreached people groups are in Asia where 80% of Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus do not personally know a Christ follower. As for Bible translation, there are 670 Bibles and 1,450 New Testaments in the 7,100 languages of the world, covering 90% of the world's population. Many other languages have incomplete Bibles. Wycliffe Bible Translators plan to eliminate Bible poverty

throughout the world within the next decade! The Jesus film has been translated into 1600 languages which are understood by 97% of the world's population.

In Mt. 24:15 Jesus refers to the 'destructive desecration' standing in the holy place, which is generally interpreted as something idolatrous, probably an image of the Antichrist. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, and the nations will gather against it again before Jesus' return (Zech. 12:3, 14:2) during the Great Tribulation, which is also called the time of Jacob's Trouble. Jesus said that when armies are seen surrounding Jerusalem, we should understand that its devastation is near (Lk. 21:20). Jerusalem will be trampled on by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). There will be false prophets who will perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that is possible (Mt. 24:24). Immediately before Jesus' return the sun and moon will be darkened and stars will fall from the sky as graphically portrayed in Rev. 6:12-14. This may be a description of nuclear warfare. What is meant by stars falling from the sky? It may be a reference to Isa. 13:10, where in an Armageddon-type prophecy, it says the stars of the heavens will not give their light, or maybe Isaiah in his vision, saw lights falling from the sky, which were weapons of warfare.

Israel captured west Jerusalem in 1948 and east Jerusalem in 1967, but in 2018 the temple site remains in Muslim hands. In 2008 the Jerusalem Post reported that the Temple Institute had begun making garments and vessels to be used in the third temple when it is built. The United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2018.

Jesus hinted at what generation would see his return when he said that there would be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and on earth distress among the nations that are confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world, because the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Messiah coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Jesus said, *when these things begin to take place*, Christians should stand up and raise their heads in hope, because their *redemption (resurrection of their bodies), and the Messiah's kingdom are near* (Lk. 21:25-31).

At the start of the 20th century, there were only a few dozen independent sovereign states on the planet; today, there are nearly 200! Israel became a nation in 1948. Most of the world's countries were born during this time; 41 states gained sovereignty from UK and France between 1956 and 1966, and 18 from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia between 1990 and 1992. No wonder Jesus told us to look at the fig tree (Israel) and all the trees. As soon as they come into leaf, we are to know that summer, with its connotation of harvest and judgment, is near. The coming of the Messiah will be preceded by terribly destructive events: war, earthquake and the wrath of God.

According to the theses discussed in this book, the saints are the heirs of Messiah's kingdom. The saints include many Jews who were believers in Old Testament days, Jewish Christians in the early church, and messianic believers to this day. The nation of Israel who are converted at Jesus' return seem to be too late to be included in

the church. Their conversion apparently occurs after the rapture of the saints, so that they remain on earth as subjects of the messianic reign. Their inheritance is therefore somewhat different from that of the church. As believers, they will be grafted back into the olive tree, the patriarchs being the original olive root, representing God's elect people. Israel was broken off because of their unbelief and the Gentiles were grafted in because of their faith. Israel will be grafted back in again, because God's gifts and calling are irrevocable, beyond recall. But their resurrection will not occur until the final judgment. The Messiah will reign over all nations and Israel will be given top place, because Israel are his own people, and the Messiah will rule on David's throne from Jerusalem.

God made two covenants with mankind, the old covenant with Israel and the new covenant with the church. Individual Gentiles were integrated into Israel in the old dispensation, and individual Jews have always been part of the church. Their future is one. The old covenant Jews are included and the new covenant Jews will be included. Jesus said that many will come from east and west and will feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in his kingdom (Mt. 8:11). The church, which is comprised of believers from all nations, is hardly a parenthesis in God's plan, as some maintain. Rather, the church is God's primary redemptive purpose, God's way of extending the offer of his salvation to all nations.

Suffering and the kingdom

I don't want to finish this book without a message about suffering, because in my study of the book of Revelation, I see that the last

generation of Christians is going to pass through enormous suffering and there will be many martyrs. We will certainly be protected from the wrath of God that is poured out on the world in the last days, but I am not convinced by the arguments of a pretribulation rapture that will save us from the persecution that Antichrist and his dictatorship will bring. Peter said that it was time for judgment to begin with the family of God (1Pet. 4:17).

Our attitude to martyrdom should be positive. The times will be unbelievably evil, and death will be preferable to life, knowing that in a very short time the Messiah will arrive, and we will be resurrected, never to suffer or die again. If we are called upon to give our lives for the Lord, we will emulate our Savior who gave his life for us, and we should count that a great privilege. If we are children, we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah, provided *we suffer with him*, in order that we may also be glorified in him (Rom. 8:17). Following are the verses in Revelation that warn us about the *sufferings of the saints* during the Great Tribulation.

1:9 I'm John, your brother and *partner in the tribulation*, and the kingdom, and the patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

2:10 Don't be afraid of what you are going to *suffer*. The devil will throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. For ten days you will have tribulation. *Be faithful until death*, and I will give you the crown of life.

3:10 Because you have obeyed my command to *endure*, I will keep you through the hour of testing that is coming on the whole world to test those living on the earth.

6:9-11 I saw under the altar the souls of *those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne*. They cried out in a loud voice, ‘Holy and true Sovereign, how long will it be before you judge and take revenge on those living on the earth who shed our blood?’ They were told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers was completed, *who would be killed as they themselves had been*.

12:17 The dragon became angry with the woman and went off to *make war on the rest of her children, those who keep God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*.

13:7, 10 *The Antichrist was allowed to wage war on the saints and to conquer them*. He was also given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. *If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed*.

14:12-13 Here is a *call for the endurance of the saints*, who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to their faithfulness in Jesus. *How blessed are the dead, those who die in the Lord from now on!*

16:6 You gave them blood to drink because *they spilled the blood of saints and prophets*.

17:6 The woman was drunk *with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus*.

18:24 *In Babylon was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who were slain on earth.*

20:4 John saw *the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony of Jesus and for the word of God.* They didn't worship the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.

**The Kingdom of God
is Coming**

“May your kingdom come.

May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The whole idea of a kingdom *coming* is a collocational clash in many languages. When 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 whole significance 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. Only then, in his messianic kingdom, will God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We can't pray for God's universal reign to come. God never stop reigning. This prayer only makes sense when we interpret it as referring to the kingdom from God, the kingdom that he is establishing in the world 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 with reference to 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 (1Chron. 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 (2Chron. 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 would build a house for his name, and that he would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. He would be a father to him, and he would be his son (2Sam. 7:13-14). Although the words were spoken to Solomon, the ultimate fulfilment is in Jesus and in the kingdom of God that he proclaimed. As Isaiah prophesied: To us a child is born, to us 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 is one that would 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. 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), it didn't have its origin here. The Greek ἐκ means that it wasn't *from* this world, indicating 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 they should not be regarded as 'realized eschatology'. They are blessings and the status we receive as believers in Jesus under the new covenant, rather than 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 the eternal fulfilment 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 animals' 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 really 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. 14:3 & 17:24 Jesus speaks in the present 'where I am' but it refers to another place. 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 the throne 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. 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, 1Pet. 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 makes 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 all everyone to be saved (1Tim. 2:4), not wanting any to perish (2Pet. 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, that 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, in order to 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 was going to 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 fulfilment of this command was a necessary 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, 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, or 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. He is the coming 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 king, our Lord and our God.

Paul also taught about Jesus' exaltation. He said God 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 (1Cor 15:23-24, 2 Tim 4:1). He must reign until he destroys the remaining enemies including death. The writer of Hebrews also spoke of Jesus' exaltation in Heb. 1:3-5, 2:9, 10:12.

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. Messiah's kingdom is from God; it is not a worldly kingdom like the Roman empire. When he returns, he will rule over the entire world. 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, Jesus is the Son. The Father is sovereign ruler over the universe. The Son, the man Jesus, 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 since the creation of the world, it was given to mankind to rule over (Gen. 1:28).

The Lord will become Jesus' Father in this respect when Jesus starts his reign. That is why God said he had become his Father (Ps. 2:7). Ps. 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 fulfilment is future. Verse 6 says that God has set his regent on Zion, his holy mountain, and in verse 8.

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, his kingship would never be destroyed (Dan. 7:14). The context of Dan. 7 is during the time when Daniel was having a 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 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 1:7). He hinted at his future in a parable, saying 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 1989 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 visual realization of the kingdom of God is the central theme of the final book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation. It is the unveiling of the events which will occur at the end of this age, especially the last seven years, otherwise known as the Great Tribulation. This book is the revelation of Jesus the Messiah, which God gave him to show his servants the things that must happen soon (Rev. 1:1). 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).

There are two passages in Revelation that 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

Despite having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus is not 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 (1Jn. 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 (1Pet. 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 (1Cor. 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 2Sam. 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 king of the Jews by the Magi (Mt. 2:2). Even 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 obviously wanted his disciples from all ages to be hoping expectantly for his return. God is beyond time, he lives in eternity, and all things are open before him. As far as Jesus is concerned, 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). This was 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 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 Dan. 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 that are 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).

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 are 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).

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, 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 better, ‘namely, those who pierced him’. *Kai oitines* occurs again in Rev. 20:5, where it definitely 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 it says that the Jews will look on the Lord whom they pierced and mourn for him. Why would he 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’. It is the Jews at Jerusalem who 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, in repentance, not the unbelievers who will be cursing God because of the plagues (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21).

The phrase ‘all the tribes of the land will mourn’ occurs in Mt. 24:30 and refers to Israel’s mourning at the Messiah’s coming. It fulfills Zechariah’s prophecy that the land will mourn family by family (Zech. 12:10-12), when they look on him whom they pierced. After

defeating the enemies at the battle of Armageddon, the Lord will pour out the Spirit on Israel and they will be converted.

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 refers to 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 should 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 very clearly stated that Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss for 1000 years, so that he might not deceive the nations, after which he is released, and he immediately goes out to deceive the nations again. It is also clearly stated that the righteous are resurrected so that they reign with Christ for that same 1000 years, and then the rest of the dead come to life when the 1000 years are over. No

matter how hard amillennialists try to remove this age from the world's future history, they cannot convince us that Satan is presently bound, or that the first resurrection spoken of here is anything but the resurrection of the righteous dead.

1. The second coming (Rev. 19:11-21) The Messiah will descend from heaven, and with justice he will judge and make war. The armies of heaven will follow him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Verse 8 states that the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, so this army is the recently resurrected and raptured saints as they come marching in. The kings of the earth will wage war against the Lamb, 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).

2. The binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3) Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss. Compare Isa. 24:21-23, where it states that at the judgment of the earth, 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. Compare 2Pet. 2:4, Jude 6. These 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 (New Jerusalem); 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 which 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.

3. The resurrection of the righteous (Rev. 20:4) After the Lord's return and the incarceration of Satan, the resurrected saints begin their 1000-year reign on earth with the Messiah serving as priests of God and the Messiah. At the end of the 1000 years, the rest of the dead come to life and are judged. This vision overlaps the previous one, in that the resurrection of the righteous will occur before Jesus returns to Zion and defeats the Antichrist.

4. The millennium (Rev. 21:1) is seen by John and described in one verse only, when he saw new heavens and a new earth, for the first sky 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 saw in this verse is not a new creation, it is the renewed earth that the Messiah will rule over. God's original plan for his creation, that it would be ruled by humanity on his behalf (Gen. 1:26), will now be fulfilled by his Messiah and the redeemed. In the original promise of new heavens and a new earth made by Isaiah, the context clearly shows that it is a promise of a renewed earth. There is no promise or

description of a new planet! Peter says the heavens will be set on fire and disintegrate and the elements will burn up and melt (2Pet. 3:13). That just might be atomic warfare. Despite the destruction, Peter was looking forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

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 of crying are 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 'transform' (BAG). This is not a prophecy about a brand-new creation, but about a rebirth. After the destruction of the world during the Great Tribulation, the Messiah will restore it and establish justice and righteousness and eliminate the curse.

That the new heaven and the new earth refer to the millennium is supported by the following verses:

“When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne in the *renewed creation*” (Mt. 19:28). The Greek word indicates a rebirth or regeneration of the world.

“He (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). Most of the prophecies about restoration refer to Israel's restoration, but here it is a restoration of everything.

“For the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God’s children. ... The creation itself will also be *set free from corrupting bondage* in order to share the glorious freedom of God’s children” (Rom. 8:19, 21).

5. 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 is different to Armageddon and 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 thrown into lake of fire

20:2 Satan 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 lake of fire where 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, not by fire. And Israel is converted after

the defeat of Gog (Ezek. 39:7, 22). Gog and Magog may be symbolic names for armies who rebel against God.

6. 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 are ended. The following verses are the only ones which 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, 1Cor. 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, it is doubtful that they would be resurrected bodily, because they are condemned to hell. Resurrection is a reward and glorification for the righteous.

7. 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 the lake of fire (hell). The last judgment is mainly for the wicked, but will include Israel and anyone else 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. Whether other people will be saved during the millennium, we are not told.

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 states that there is now 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 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 and the righteous are invited to come and inherit the kingdom.

8. The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2 – 22:5) The brief vision of the transformed earth is followed by a detailed vision about the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is a city, the holy city, and her inhabitants are the bride of Christ. It is a symbolic description of her union with the Messiah and with God. The holy city is a symbolic representation of the saints in their glorified, eternal state, which begins at the resurrection and will be their home during the

millennium and on into eternity. New Jerusalem is both the abode of the redeemed and the capital city of the messianic kingdom. However, the descent of the New Jerusalem that John saw is a vision, not the reality. Like the vision in Revelation 19, where the Messiah descends to earth on a horse with his heavenly armies and a sword in his mouth to strike down the nations, it is only a symbolic representation of what will occur. Jesus will only descend once. The reality is reflected in Paul's prophecy in 1Thess. 4:16-17 and Zechariah's prophecy in Zech. 14:3-4.

The Lord will come to be glorified in his saints (2Thess. 1:10). The Messiah 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 and King. Their glorification is their resurrection and their union with Christ, as symbolized by the wedding supper of the Lamb. One result of the union is that they will become the monarchy in the messianic kingdom and will rule with him forever.

The nations will have their own kings (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 said, the saints will judge the world (1Cor. 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, this is an historical event. The nations, who are

the unredeemed subjects of the kingdom, will walk by its light (Rev. 21:24), and their kings will come to the brightness of her dawn. Light has a figurative sense, but here it is also literal. Isa. 60:1-3 tells us that the glory of the Lord will rise on Jerusalem and his glory will appear over her. 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). This glory is nothing but the glory of God and the Lamb, the glory of the New Jerusalem which will come down out of heaven from God and by which the nations will walk (Rev 21:10-11, 24). Isa. 2:2-4 describes how in the latter days (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. 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 will have their own leaders, who will bring their wealth to Jerusalem, but they will not be permitted to enter the holy city. That privilege is only for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

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 final 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 description of the New Jerusalem is symbolic, the details are not revealed. But the saints will reign with the Messiah (Rev. 3:21), and they will reign over the earth for 1000 years (5:10). The New Jerusalem is heavenly and will be intimately connected with the earthly Jerusalem, from where the Messiah will reign. As the capital city of his world-wide empire, it 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.

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride, will presumably take place in heaven, because she is described as being prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband, and coming down out of heaven from God. The holy city 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 his bride has made herself ready. The lucky bride is the church community that Jesus said he would build, people who are chosen by God from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Paul alluded to this marriage in Eph. 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, which is an illustration of the union between the Messiah and the church (Eph. 5:31-32).

This is the meaning of the symbolism, where John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. God was now to dwell among men. They would be his people, and God himself will live among them. They will be united in mind and soul. They will be like God and will participate in his divine nature. The new Jerusalem is not depicted as a city of buildings, but a community of people united to God. The church is represented by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles, indicating that it consists of believers from Israel and all the nations.

Then there are the unredeemed nations and their kings, who are the subjects of the kingdom. The world's population that survived the Great Tribulation and their descendants will come to worship the Messiah at Jerusalem. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory to it. Jerusalem's gates will never be shut at the end of the day, because there will be no night there. This alludes to the glory of Zion prophesied in Isa. 60:3, 11, 19-20. Only the redeemed can enter the holy city, 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 nations will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

The land of Israel and their capital Jerusalem will be inhabited by the redeemed, but not resurrected, Israel. The Zion of the millennium is the work of God's hands, for the display of his splendor (Isa. 60:21).

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 home of the resurrected and redeemed, and indeed of God himself. Its existence seems to be in a different dimension, but visible above the earthly Jerusalem.

**The Arrival
of the Messiah**

“So, keep on watching, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this: if the owner of the house had known when during the night the thief would be coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. So, you too, must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you are not expecting him” (Mt. 24:42-44).

We cannot put a date to the Messiah's return by relating events to a timetable, because Jesus said that nobody knows the date. However, by comparing the teachings of this future time from the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' teaching in Mt. 24, Paul's teaching in 2Thess. 2, and John's visions in the book of Revelation, the Bible does give us plenty of clues to date them in relation to Jesus' coming. For example, the Great Tribulation is a seven-year period that precedes Jesus' coming and the Millennium is a 1000-year period that follows it.

The events that will be considered in this chapter are:

1. Preliminary Signs
2. The Rise of the Final World Empire
3. The Rise of Antichrist
4. Daniel's 70 Weeks
5. The Great Tribulation
6. The Day of the Lord
7. The Battle of Armageddon
8. The Messiah's Descent to the Mount of Olives
9. The Great Earthquake
10. The Conversion of Israel
11. The Messianic reign

1. Preliminary Signs

When Jesus was asked by his disciples about the signs of his return in Mt. 24, the answer he gave was in three stages. First, he told them not to let anyone deceive them. Many will come claiming to be the Messiah and leading many astray. This is a warning about false religions.

Secondly, he warned them about wars and rumors of wars. But he told them not to be alarmed. Nation would rise up against nation, and there would be famines and earthquakes in various places, but these are only the beginning of the birth pains, not the end of the world. Only when these things happen on a global scale, should we consider them to signal the end.

Then Jesus spoke about persecution, apostasy and evangelism. Persecution of Christians and apostasy in the church have been around since the very beginning of the church, but there will be an increase in the last days, especially under the reign of the Antichrist. Jesus told his disciples, they would be made to suffer and be killed and be hated by all the nations because of him. People will betray and hate one another. False prophets will appear and deceive many. Lawlessness will increase and the love of many will grow cold. Those who endure to the end will be saved, and the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come (Mt. 24:9-14).

The world-wide preaching of the gospel is a definite sign that the end is near, but how can it be measured? The world has 195 nations

and there are Christians and churches in every one of them. God's word is freely available like never before in written and audio form, including the internet and phone applications. At the same time, there are many unreached groups among Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus in Asia who do not have a Christian friend or acquaintance.

The final stage of Jesus response to his disciples concerns the signs of his coming and the end of the age. They bring us to the final seven-year period before his return. He spoke of the destructive desecration, mentioned by the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place. He said there would be a time of *great suffering, greater than what has happened since the beginning of the world and won't ever happen again*. If God doesn't shorten those days, no one would survive. That sounds like nuclear warfare. For the elect's sake, those days will be limited. Then, just as lightning flashes from the east to west, the Messiah will return to us (Mt. 24:15-28).

The time of great suffering is called the Great Tribulation. It will be a very difficult time for Israel, and also the greatest time of suffering that mankind has ever known. It will be characterized by warfare, probably nuclear, and the persecution of God's people. It is also a time of God's judgment on the world. The final three-and-a-half-year period will begin with the erection of a sacrilegious object in the Holy Place, which can only mean God's temple at Jerusalem. Daniel certainly spoke of it in that way. There has been no Jewish temple in Jerusalem since the Romans destroyed the second temple in 70 AD, but Jewish groups have made plans and even furniture and clothing for the priests.

2. The Rise of the Final World Empire

The last world empire, symbolically called 'Babylon', will be a coalition of many countries. King Nebuchadnezzar had a vision of a great statue representing four empires, generally interpreted as being Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman. The fourth kingdom was described as strong as iron, it would shatter and crush everything. The feet and toes of the statue were part clay and part iron, representing an unstable coalition. Multiculturalism will be another weakness; this world-wide empire just won't hold together. During the reign of these world leaders, God will step in and set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. When the Messiah comes, he will shatter and crush all of these leaders, and his kingdom will stand forever (Dan. 2:40-43).

In Daniel's vision, the fourth empire, the legs of iron (Dan. 2:40) represented Rome, but Daniel goes on to talk in detail about the feet and toes (Dan. 2:41-43), which represent the same empire, but at a later time and in a different form. This is the coalition of nations, described as being an unstable mixture of iron and clay. It is during the time of this last unstable empire, that God will destroy the kingdoms of man and set up his own kingdom that will never be destroyed. This is the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed, his own messianic kingdom.

Later, Daniel himself had a vision of four beasts that represent the same four empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The fourth beast is

described as an awe-inspiring, terrifying, and viciously strong animal! It had large, iron teeth. It devoured and crushed things and trampled under its feet whatever remained. Different from all the previous animals, it had ten horns and would devour *the entire earth*, trampling it down and crushing it (Dan. 7:7, 23).

An angel interpreted the meaning of the dream for him. The four great animals are four kings (founders of kingdoms) who will rise to power from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever (Dan. 7:17-18).

The four kingdoms, represented by wild animals, are renegade kingdoms established by man, opposed to God and his plan. God has allowed their establishment, but eventually he will establish his own kingdom on earth, putting an end to their rule. The fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire, represented by the legs of iron, but the feet and toes represent an extension of that kingdom in the last days that will be defeated at the second coming of Jesus the Messiah. The final form of this 'Roman' empire, symbolized by the feet and toes of iron and clay would appear to have a European base, as Rome did, but it will devour the entire earth, an empire that might be described as political globalization, or a transnational state apparatus. The ten horns represent ten kings or leaders of the most powerful countries. On observing the economic, social and political integration that is happening in our world today, the possibility of a single world empire is great, if not inevitable. This is driven by ever-developing technology in communications and transport and by multiculturalism – more than half the population growth in western

countries is due to migration. The European Union currently has 28 states and there are ongoing negotiations with a dozen others.

3. The Rise of Antichrist

The prophet Daniel gives us the most information about the Antichrist, though the name Antichrist is not used as a proper name in Scripture. Jesus does not name him, Daniel calls him a ‘little horn’ (7:8), and ‘a despicable person’ (11:21), Paul calls him the ‘man of sin’ (2Thess. 2:3) and ‘the lawless one’ (2Thess. 2:9), while John simply calls him ‘the animal’ or ‘the beast’. In 1 John, John talks about many antichrists and doesn’t seem to have the end-time Antichrist in mind. Sometimes the word ‘animal’ or ‘beast’ describes the kingdom, sometimes it refers to the dictator. His number is 666. Daniel describes his appearance and demise. He was thinking about the ten horns, when another horn, a little one, grew up among them. Three of the first horns fell before it. It had eyes like a man (shrewd, crafty) and a mouth that boasted with audacious claims. He kept observing until the animal was killed and its body destroyed and given over to fire (Dan. 7:8, 11). This fourth animal (empire) was different from the others, extremely awe-inspiring, with iron teeth and bronze claws. It devoured and crushed things, trampling under its feet whatever remained. The Antichrist, who was greater in appearance than his fellows, waged war against the saints and prevailed against them until God came and passed judgment in favor of the saints, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

The Antichrist will seek to alter God's times and laws, which may include the current calendar, sacred holidays, and Judeo-Christian morality. Nevertheless, the heavenly court will convene, and his authority will be destroyed forever. Then the kingdom, authority, and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints. The Messiah's kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve him and obey him (Dan. 7:19-22, 24-27).

The last world empire (the feet and toes) is an extension of the Roman empire (the legs), which consisted of southern Europe, northern Africa and parts of the Middle East. Antichrist will most probably arise from there, by defeating three confederates. As his name suggests, he will oppose God and the saints, and God will allow him to conquer them during the three and half years that precede the Messiah's arrival.

The 'destructive desecration' or 'the sacrilegious object that causes desecration' (NLT) spoken about by Jesus is generally believed to be a statue or image of the Antichrist. Jesus referred us to Dan. 9:26-27 to learn about this. There it says that the people of a coming ruler will destroy both the city and the sanctuary (the Roman emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its Jewish temple in 70 AD). The end will come suddenly like a flood. War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He (apparently the Antichrist) will make *a binding covenant with many for one week*, and for the second half of the week (three and a half years) he will suspend both the sacrifice and grain offerings at the temple. He will set up an

abomination that causes desolation on a wing of the temple until what God has decreed is poured out on him.

The covenant made with many may be an extensive peace treaty that will allow Israel to build a temple at Jerusalem. Then, after three and a half years, he will put an end to normal temple worship and set up a detestable idol of himself; the abomination that causes desolation (cf. Dan. 11:31, 12:11, 2Thess. 2:4, Rev. 13:14-15). Jesus told the Israelites to flee immediately to the mountains when they saw this object of desolation (Mt. 24:15-16). Jesus said, if those days hadn't been limited or shortened, no one would survive. This is world war III, which will continue for several years, with one center of attention being around Jerusalem.

4. Daniel's 70 Weeks

One day in about 536 BC while the prophet Daniel was praying and confessing the sins of his people Israel, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and gave him an important prophecy about the people of Israel and their holy city Jerusalem. Their future history was described as a 70-week period, each week apparently standing for seven years, making 490 years in all. However, it is not continuous; there is a long break between the 69th and 70th weeks. Daniel was in ancient Babylon along with the Jews who were in exile. There would be 69 weeks (483 years), starting from the date a decree was made to rebuild Jerusalem, and finishing with the coming of the Messiah. Without going into the complicated details, this period has been

calculated as being from 457 BC to 27 AD, from the time that Artaxerxes made a decree concerning Ezra and his return to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:11-26) to the time when Jesus was baptized and began his ministry.

Gabriel told Daniel that 70 weeks (490 years) were decreed for Israel and Jerusalem, to finish transgression and to bring in everlasting righteousness. The long break after the 69th week can be explained by Jesus' words in Mt. 23:38. He told the Jews that their temple would be left to them desolate. This began in 70 AD (Lk. 21:20) and would last until a new temple is built. Jeremiah had prophesied this event, when the Lord said he would forsake his house and abandon his inheritance and give the one he loves into the hands of her enemies (Jer. 12:7). So, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and the Jews have been scattered among the nations since. As Jesus prophesied, they fell by the sword and were carried off as captives to all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). Jesus said the trampling of Jerusalem is a judgment on the Jews, a time of punishment (Lk. 21:22) in fulfilment of what had been written (Dan. 9:24). The trampling was started when Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD. and will finish when the Antichrist surrounds Jerusalem and is defeated by the returning Messiah.

After Israel rejected their Messiah and had him killed, the risen Jesus told the apostles to go and make disciples of all nations. The history of Israel as the people of God was put into abeyance while Jesus

built his church. As Paul said in Rom. 11, Israel is like a branch broken off the olive tree that represents the people of God, and the Gentiles have been grafted in, and when their full number is complete, Israel will again be grafted back onto the olive tree. We live in exciting times. Israel has returned to their land and many are the signs that indicate that our world is coming to its prophesied conclusion. In 2017 the United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Jesus said the generation that witnesses the events of Mt. 24:14-15, 21, 29, 32 will also see his return (Mt. 24:34). Some scholars believe the seventieth week will begin when Israel is given permission by Antichrist to build the third temple (Dan. 9:27), but then in the middle of the 'week', he breaks the treaty

5. The time of Jacob's trouble

The final seven years will see Israel take a prominent place on the world stage. Despite its small size, Israel is already numbered among the ten most powerful nations of the world. Dan. 9:27 suggests that the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years and allow their temple to be rebuilt, but in the middle of the week he'll break the treaty, set himself up in the new temple and demand worship from everyone in the world. That time will be worse than any experienced before it. It will be a terrible time of trouble for Israel, but the Messiah will come to rescue them from it (Jer. 30:7).

The Antichrist's activity during this time is described in Dan. 11:36-45. The Antichrist will do as he pleases. He'll exalt and magnify

himself above every god, speaking amazing things against God. He'll succeed until the indignation is completed, because what has been determined must be carried out. He won't recognize any god, because he'll exalt himself above everything. *He'll spend lavishly on military power* to support his position and *act against any opposition* with the help of a foreign god, who may be Satan (Rev. 13:2b) Near the end, Egypt will oppose him, and Russia will overrun him with tanks and armies and many ships. The Antichrist will invade countries, moving swiftly through them. He'll enter Israel and extend his power over other countries, including Egypt, Libya and Sudan. Then, reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he'll march out in great anger, intending to destroy many, but when he pitches his royal pavilions near Jerusalem, he'll come to his end with nobody to help.

6. The Day of the Lord

The apostle Peter describes the Day of the Lord as a day of worldwide destruction; it is also the day of the Messiah's return. The Day of the Lord will come like a thief to unbelievers, but not to the faithful (1Thess. 5:4). The sky will be set ablaze and pass away with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be laid bare. But it's not the end of the world; according to his promise, we are waiting for a renewed sky and earth, where righteousness dwells (2Pet. 3:10, 12b-13).

This is in harmony with Jesus' prophecy, when immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. The Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land (Israel) will mourn, when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they'll gather his elect from all directions, from one end of the earth to another (Mt. 24:29-31). The Day of the Lord is not the end of the world, as shown by Jesus' words, when he said that if God had not cut short those days, no one would survive. For the sake of the elect, the days will be shortened (Mt. 24:22) and people will survive. It will be a time of massive destruction and the words Peter uses are indicative of nuclear warfare. How could a first century writer be expected to describe the phenomena of our atomic age? Much of the destruction described in Revelation is caused by man and one purpose of God's wrath is to destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev. 11:18).

When thinking about the final days and months before the Lord's coming, we should not forget the emphasis the Scripture puts on the destruction by fire. After the sounding of the first four trumpets one third of the earth will be burned by fire; trees, grass, seas and rivers are all affected. Then the sun, moon and stars will be blotted out by the smoke.

Noah's earth was destroyed by a global flood, and afterward it was regenerated. The present earth is reserved for fire, when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed (2Pet. 3:8), but it will also be

regenerated by the Messiah. Much of this destructive fire may be caused by the nuclear warfare.

Isaiah prophesied saying that the Lord will come with fire, and his chariot will be like a whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury and flames of fire. For with fire and sword *the Lord will judge all humanity*, and those slain will be *many* (Isa. 66:15-16). This is an enormous slaughter; one third of mankind will be killed (Rev. 9:15). At that time the cities of the nations will collapse and as Jesus said about towns that rejected his message, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for those towns (Mt. 10:15). This is the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2Pet.3:7).

Peter tells his readers to look forward to and hasten the coming day of God, because it is the day that the Messiah will come and set up his worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness; new heavens and a new earth in keeping with his promise through Isaiah, an earth that will be restored by the Messiah. The following prophecies all speak of great destruction at the end of the age, related to the battle of Armageddon. Some of them describe a restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 13:9-13, 34:1-4, 8, Joel 2:1-11, 30-32, 3:1-2, 12-16, Zeph. 1:14 – 2:3, Hag. 2:6, Mt. 24:29-30, Lk. 21:25-27, Heb. 12:26-27, 2Pet. 3:10-12, Rev. 6:12-17, 9:13-16, 16:12-21).

Many of these passages describe the destruction and judgment as the Day of the Lord. Some of them refer to the nations and their armies who are fighting against the Lord. And the climax comes when the Lord descends to fight against them. Many passages talk

about earthquakes and cosmic disturbances: the darkening of sun and moon, stars falling from the sky, or being dissolved, the sky being shaken or rolled up, or disappearing. This judgment on the nations at the Lord's return should not be confused with the last judgment, when the wicked will be judged for what they have done, and the earth and the heavens will flee from his presence, and no place will be found for them.

Paul describes the judgment on evildoers at the Lord's return in 2Thess. 1:5-10, where he is writing to encourage the persecuted Thessalonian believers. He says it is right that God pays back those who are afflicting them. The believers will get relief when the Messiah comes from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire to take revenge on those who don't know God and refuse to obey the gospel, including their persecutors. When the Lord descends with blazing fire, it is a judgment day scenario, it is Armageddon, when he comes to defeat his enemies who have surrounded Jerusalem and who have been seriously persecuting his people. The leaders of the rebellion, the Antichrist and the false prophet are immediately cast into hell to suffer eternal destruction. It is also a day of judgment in favor of the righteous, who will be resurrected and raptured to be with the Lord. And it is a judgment in favor of Israel who will be converted at this time and shown to be the people of God.

Revelation 20 tells of a thousand-year period after the second coming, in which Satan will be bound, so that he cannot influence those living on the earth, and Jesus the Messiah will reign on the

earth with the resurrected saints. After that, Satan will be defeated once and for all, the earth and heaven will pass away, and the wicked will be resurrected and judged according to what they have done. As their names are not in the Lamb's book of life, they will be thrown into the lake of fire, a metaphor for hell (Rev. 20:15). That is the last judgment.

7. The Battle of Armageddon

This will a great gathering of the armies of the nations of the whole world to go and fight against Jerusalem. They will be anti-Christian, anti-Israeli anti-God forces gathering to fight against Jerusalem at the instigation of Satan (Rev. 16:13-14). The kings of the earth will take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Messiah, saying, 'Let us tear off their shackles from us, and cast off their chains' (Ps. 2:2-3). Great numbers from the east and north (Gog and his hordes) will come to fight in Israel at a battlefield called Armageddon, but godless mankind will be slaughtered. The battle also appears to be against Antichrist.

Zechariah tells us that these armies will end up attacking one another. He emphasizes the siege made against Jerusalem and Judah by all the nations of the earth. The Lord will make Jerusalem an unstable cup to all the surrounding armies when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. Everyone who burdens themselves with it will be crushed. He'll strike every horse with panic and every rider with insanity. He'll keep his eyes on the house of Judah, but

he'll blind every horse of the invading armies. He'll search out and destroy all of the nations who come against Jerusalem (Zech. 12:2-4, 9).

However, the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, the women raped, and half of the city will go into exile, but the remaining people will not be cut off from the city (Zech. 14:2). The Lord will inflict all of the people who attack Jerusalem with a plague. He'll cause their flesh to rot away, even while they're standing on their feet. He'll cause their eyes to rot away in their sockets, and their tongues to rot away in their mouths. That sounds like nuclear contamination. They'll be stricken with a terrible panic from the Lord, and everyone will attack each other. Then the wealth of the surrounding nations will be gathered up: gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance (Zech. 14:12-14).

Joel 2 calls the Great Tribulation a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness. He sees a great and powerful people spreading over the mountains. There has never been anything like it, and never will be again. Fire devours before them, and behind them a conflagration rages. Before they come, the land is like the garden in Eden; after they leave, there is only a barren wasteland, nothing escapes them. They look like horses and move very fast. They leap over the mountains and rumble like chariots. They are like the roar of wild fire that devours the chaff, like an army drawn up for battle (Joel 2:2-5).

This great army has similarities to a swarm of locusts, but it is a great army of cavalry and tanks and modern weapons of warfare.

Joel continues telling us about the Day of the Lord. The Lord will display warnings in the heavens, and on the earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be given over to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and terrifying day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. True at Pentecost, and also for the Jews in the last days. In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling.

In those very days and at that time, when the Lord restores prosperity to Judah and Jerusalem, he will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. He will set out his case against them there, on behalf of his people Israel, because they scattered them among the nations and apportioned his land among themselves (Joel 2:30 – 3:2).

This is Armageddon. Joel continues his description of the judgment of the nations, which terminates in the coming of the Lord and victory for his people. God will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ‘Put in the sickle, because the harvest is ripe. Come and go down, because the winepress is full. The wine vats are overflowing, because their evil is great! Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Judgment! For the Day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Judgment!’

The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will roar from Zion, and shout from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth will shake, but the Lord will be the refuge of his people, and the strength of the people of Israel. And they will

know that he is the Lord their God, dwelling in Zion, his holy mountain. Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no foreigners will invade her again (Joel 3:9-17).

The Lord is calling all the nations to gather their armies and come to Israel for a time of judgment. After the sixth angel has poured out his bowl of wrath on the great river Euphrates, the way is prepared for the kings of the east (Gog) to cross that barrier and head for Israel. Then John saw unclean spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, a counterfeit trinity of evil. They went out and gathered the kings of the whole world for the war of the great day of God. They were gathered to the place called Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16).

Ezek. 38-39 describe an invasion of Israel in the last days by an international leader called Gog of the land of Magog, leader of the head of Meshech, and of Tubal. In the latter years they will be summoned to Israel that has been restored from violence. They will be gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which formerly had been a continuous waste, but which will be populated with people who have been brought back from the nations and living there securely. They'll arise suddenly, like a tornado, coming like a windstorm to cover the land with all their soldiers with them, along with many nations (Ezek. 38:8-9). This coalition of nations will come from the north: Syria, Turkey, Iran, and many former Soviet Union countries, which are mostly Turkic and Muslim.

8. The Messiah's Descent to the Mount of Olives

At the end of the Great Tribulation, when the nations have surrounded and captured most of Jerusalem, the Lord will come down from heaven to fight against them (Rev. 19:11-16). The Messiah will descend physically from heaven in the same way that he ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11), and to the same place from where he ascended near Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4, Lk. 24:50-51). The prophet Job prophesied, saying, he knew his Redeemer was alive, and *in the end, he would stand on the earth* (Job 19:25). When Jesus' feet touch the earth as he comes in judgment, the Mount of Olives will split in two with half the mountain moving north and the other half moving south (Zech. 14:4). At that time the greatest earthquake ever felt will shake Israel and the whole earth as described in Ezek. 38:19-20 and Rev. 16:17-21.

The kings of the earth and their armies will be gathered to make war against the Messiah (Rev. 19:19), but the Messiah will defeat these kings and their armies by fire (Isa. 66:15-16) and the word of his mouth (Isa. 11:4, Rev. 19:21). Others will die by attacking each other in panic (Ezek. 38:21, Hag. 2:22, Zech. 14:13), and by rotting flesh (Zech. 14:12), maybe from chemical or biological weapons. There will be massive slaughter, graphically portrayed in Revelation as blood flowing as high as horses' bridles (14:20). The Antichrist and the false prophet will be killed and cast into hell (2Thess. 2:8, Rev. 19:20).

The day that Jesus the Messiah returns to earth is a great and glorious visible event, when the Messiah comes on the clouds of the

sky with power and great glory with his angels whom the Lord will send out to gather the elect (Mt. 16:27, 24:30-31, 1Thess. 3:13, Jude 14, Rev. 19:11-14). The saints will meet the Lord in the air (Mt. 24:31, 1Cor. 15:50-53, 1Thess. 4:15-17) and then descend to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:5). All the righteous dead and living will be resurrected at this time and the Lord will be king over the whole earth and will establish his millennial reign.

Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 43:1-7) of the glory of the God of Israel returning from the east to the temple is fulfilled at this time. Ezekiel stood at the gate facing east, towards the Mount of Olives, and saw the glory of God coming from the east. He heard a sound like the roar of rushing waters and the land was radiant with his glory. Then the glory of the Lord entered the temple via the gate facing east, and his glory filled the temple. This vision should be compared with the descent of the New Jerusalem that John saw (Rev. 21:9-11).

9. The Great Earthquake

This massive *earthquake* is a major feature of the distress caused at the end of the Great Tribulation. Its affects are graphically recorded after the sixth seal is broken; the sun turned as black as sackcloth, the full moon turned as red as blood, the stars in the sky fell to the earth, the sky vanished like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and all the slaves and free people concealed themselves in caves and

among the rocks in the mountains. They told the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath had come, and who is able to endure it? (Rev. 6:12-17). Who can withstand the Lord's indignation (Nah. 1:6) or endure the day of his coming (Mal. 3:2)?

Ezekiel talks about a massive *earthquake* occurring at this time. On that day, when Gog invades the land of Israel, the Lord's zeal will ignite his anger and there will be a massive *earthquake* throughout the land of Israel. He is going to shake the fish, the birds, the wild beasts, the creatures that crawl on the earth, and every single human being who lives on the surface of the earth. Mountains will collapse, cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground. The Lord will call for war against Gog on every mountain, and every weapon of war will be turned against their fellow soldier. He will judge them with disease and bloodshed. He'll shower Gog, his soldiers, and the vast army that accompanies him with a torrential flood, hailstones, fire and sulfur. He'll show his greatness and his holiness and make himself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that he is the Lord (Ezek. 38:18-23).

This same *earthquake* is described again when the seventh bowl is poured out. The sixth bowl resulted in the drying up of the Euphrates, preparing the way for the kings from the east and the kings of the whole world to gather for the war of the great day of God, the great battle of Armageddon. There will be lightning, thunder, and a powerful *earthquake*, more powerful than any since

people have been on the earth. The great city, Jerusalem, will split into three parts, and *the cities of the nations will fall*. Every island will vanish, and the mountains will no longer be recognizable. Huge hailstones, each weighing about 40 kilograms, will fall from the sky on people, and they will curse God, because the hail will be so catastrophic.

This great judgment on the Day of the Lord is also described by the prophet Isaiah. Every hand will go limp, and every man's courage will melt. They will be terrified; pain and anguish will seize them; they'll writhe like a woman in labor. They'll look aghast at one another; and their faces will be ablaze with fear. The Day of the Lord will come – cruel, with wrath and fierce anger – *to turn the entire inhabited earth into a desolation and to annihilate sinners within it*. The stars of the heavens and their constellations won't shine their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon won't shine its light. The Lord will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. He'll put an end to the pomposity of the arrogant and overthrow the insolence of tyrants. *He'll make people scarcer than pure gold*. He'll make the heavens tremble. The *earth will shake* from its place at the wrath of the Lord, at the time of his burning anger (Isa. 13:7-13).

Jesus himself confirmed the interpretation of these prophecies. He said that immediately after the troubles of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the Messiah's sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land

will mourn when they see the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt. 24:29-30). Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God in reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28).

10. The Conversion of Israel

The conversion of Israel in the final days of the Great Tribulation is prophesied by many of the Old and New Testament prophets.

Zechariah

The Lord will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplications, and they will look on him, the one whom they *pierced* (Jn. 19:37, Rev. 1:7). *Then they will mourn for him, as for an only son* (Zech. 12:10). At that time, *a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for those who live in Jerusalem, so they can be cleansed from sin and uncleanness*. Two thirds of the people living in the land will die, but a third will survive. The Lord will put this third through the fire, refining them. *They'll call on his name, and he'll answer them*. He'll say these are his people, and *they'll say the Lord is their God* (Zech. 13:1, 8-9).

Ezekiel

The Lord is going to display his glory among the nations, and they'll see the punishment that he inflicts on them. *Israel will learn that he is the Lord their God from that day forward*. The Lord is going to restore the resources of Jacob and *show mercy to the entire house of*

Israel. He'll be zealous for his own reputation and for his holiness. They'll forget their shame and all of their unfaithfulness by which they behaved so unfaithfully toward him. They'll live securely in their land with none to make them afraid. *When he brings them back from the nations, he'll demonstrate his holiness through them right in front of the eyes of the world, and they'll learn that he is the Lord their God,* who sent them into exile and gathered them back to their land. He won't leave any of them remaining in exile. He won't hide his presence from them again, *when he pours out his Spirit on Israel* (Ezek. 39:21-22, 25-29)

Joel

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling (Joel 2:32).

Paul

God has not rejected his people whom he chose long ago (Rom. 11:2). After speaking about their unbelief, Paul says that if their fall meant riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full participation mean! Stubbornness has come to part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith. Then, *all Israel will be saved.* The Deliver will come from Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:25-26). The restoration of Israel to a state of favor with God to which he refers, and which is clearly intimated by the spirit of prophecy, will be a most striking event. The fact that Israel has been preserved as a distinct people is a sign that they will

again be reinstated as God's people. Their embrace of Jesus as the Messiah will be an incontestable proof of the truth of the Bible.

John

The two witnesses of Rev. 11:1-13 are powerful Christian preachers. They preach in Jerusalem 'where *their* Lord was crucified'. They will give testimony about their Lord during 1260 days of the Great Tribulation, which always means the last half of the seven-year period. John is told to go and measure the temple, indicating that the temple has been built. The two witnesses are called two olive trees, an allusion to Zech. 4 where the anointed ones are the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, who were responsible for building the second temple in 520-516 BC. The third temple will be built in the first half of the Great Tribulation after the Antichrist has made a peace accord with 'many'. But he will break the accord half way through and set himself up as God in the temple. The witnesses will be immune from harm until their witness is finished. When Antichrist kills them, the unbelievers will celebrate their death, but then, when they come back to life and ascend to heaven, there will be a *great earthquake*. The inhabitants of Jerusalem are terrified but give glory to God. This signals their conversion. It contrasts with the unbelievers at this time, who refuse to repent and can only curse God because of the plagues (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21).

11. The Messiah's earthly reign

When the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the Lord returning to the temple in Jerusalem and of his glory filling the temple, he heard the Lord speaking from inside the temple. He told Ezekiel that that was the place of *his throne* and the place for the soles of his feet. That is where he would live among the Israelites forever (Ezek. 43:7).

So, it would appear that Jesus will not be visible to the Israelites and the nations of the world who come to worship him at Jerusalem, but his glory will fill the temple and be visible above it. His throne will be there in the temple, meaning that he is ruling from there as the promised descendant of David, the Messiah. At the same time, Jesus will be present in the New Jerusalem as described in Rev. 21:2 – 22:5. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the holy city, and his servants (the elect) will serve him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. Compare Ezek. 37:26-27 where the Lord told Ezekiel that he would make a covenant of peace with Israel, an everlasting covenant, and he will establish Israel and increase their numbers, and he'll put *his sanctuary* among them forever. His dwelling place will be with them, and he'll be their God and they'll be his people. Then the nations will know that the Lord makes Israel holy, when his sanctuary is among them forever.

Jeremiah makes a similar statement. The Lord said that in those days, when Israel has increased greatly in the land, men will no longer say, 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time, they will call Jerusalem the

‘Throne of the Lord’, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord (Jer. 3:16-17).

Jesus, the Messiah, will rule over the world from his throne in Jerusalem, and the church will rule with him from their home in the New Jerusalem. The apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and by analogy, other Christians will rule over the areas with which they were familiar during their lifetimes.

George Eldon Ladd thought it was impossible to think of two peoples of God through whom God is carrying out two redemptive purposes (The Gospel of the Kingdom p. 118), but I don’t think we can avoid it. Israel and the Church are different communities and God made different covenants with them. The church includes Jews, and Israel included foreigners, but the two cannot be confused. The covenant promises to Israel include the promised land, Jerusalem, a future temple, the human ancestry of the Messiah who is a descendant of David, and future sovereignty over the nations, which they forfeited when the first century Jews rejected Jesus. They are all earthly promises. The covenant promises to the church include union with Christ, forgiveness of sins, redemption through his blood, a sharing in the divine nature, the resurrection of the body, sharing in Christ’s rule over the earth, an eternal future in the New Jerusalem, adoption as sons into God’s family, and because we are sons, we are also heirs.

All Israel will be saved at Jesus’ return, but not until after the first resurrection, so they will live on earth as survivors of the Great Tribulation. They will live in their promised land, Israel, during the millennium and serve the Messiah. At the last judgment, they will

be resurrected, and they will join the elect in the New Jerusalem (Ezek. 37:21-28). During the millennium, Israel and the church are both God's people, but Israel will be on earth, while the resurrected church will be in the New Jerusalem.

Appendices

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Appendix 1

Kingdom of God Time Chart

Preliminary signs (Mt. 24)

1. Wars, famines, earthquakes
2. Persecution, increase of evil, apostasy
3. False prophets and false religions
4. Gospel preached throughout the world

The Great Tribulation (Rev.6-19)

The first 3 ½ years

1. War in heaven, Satan and his demons are thrown down to earth (12:7-12)
2. Antichrist becomes world leader (6:2, 13:1-4)
3. Antichrist takes peace from the world, starts WW3 (6:3-4)
4. Worldwide famine results from warfare (6.5-6)
5. One quarter of humanity perishes as a result of war, famine and pestilence (6:7-8)
6. Living saints are sealed for eternal security (7:1-8)
Saints from all nations are seen in heaven (6:9-11, 7:9-17)
7. The environment is ruined as a result of WW3 (8:7-12)
One third of land and vegetation is burned up
One third of sea is polluted
One third of rivers and springs are polluted
Light is reduced by one third
8. The third temple is built in Jerusalem (2Thess. 2:4, Rev 11:2)

The last 3 ½ years

- 1.

Two powerful witnesses preach in Jerusalem for 42 months; inhabitants of Jerusalem repent at the end (11:3-13)

2.

he false prophet deceives the nations with miracles and enforces worship of Antichrist (13:11-14)

The false prophet sets up an image of Antichrist in the temple and requires everyone to receive his mark (13:15-17)

3. Empowered by Satan, the Antichrist slanders God, demands worship during 42 months (13:5-6), persecutes and kills Christians (12:13-17, 13:7-8) and conquers them. Victorious martyrs await Messiah's kingdom (14:1-5, 15:2-4)

4. Judgment is poured out on creation, painful sores afflict unbelievers, the sea is destroyed, fresh water is polluted, sun's heat is intensified (16:1-9)

5. Unbelievers are tortured for five months by a 'locust' army (9:1-11) and with darkness and pain (16:10-11)

6. A third of humanity is killed by worldwide armies converging on Jerusalem (9:13-19, 14:17-20, 16:12-16, 19:17-21)

7. A worldwide earthquake, the worst ever known, the cities collapse (6:12-17 16:17-21), the last world empire falls (17-18)

The Messiah returns

1.

he world is in darkness and desolated (16:11, 17-21)

2.

he nations of the world lay siege to Jerusalem (16:16, 19:19)

3.

he Messiah returns with power and great glory (1:7, 19:11-14)

4.

he resurrection and rapture of the saints (14:14-16)

5.

he slaughter of the world's armies at Armageddon (14:17-20, 19:15-21). The Antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into hell (19:20)

6.

he Lord descends to the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), enters through the eastern gate of the temple (Ezek. 43:4) and suddenly comes to his temple (Mal. 3:1)

7.

he descent of the New Jerusalem to rest above the temple (21:2-22:5). God and the saints live and reign from there.

8. From Zion, the Lord pours out on Israel a spirit of grace and the whole nation is converted (1:7, 11:13)

9. The Lord is king over all the earth (11:15-17, 20:4-6)

The millennium and the eternal state

1. The binding of Satan (20:1-3)
2. The Messiah's begins his reign (11:15-17)
3. The righteous rule with the Messiah for 1000 years (20:4-6)
4. The heavens and earth are renewed during the millennium (21:1)
5. Satan's release, final rebellion of the wicked against Israel and Jerusalem and their destruction (20:7-10)
6. The last judgment and the end of the physical universe (20:11-13, 15)
7. Death and Hades banished forever (20:14)
and the unbelievers cast into hell (20:15)
8. The saints live and rule with God forever.

Appendix 2

The Messiah

The meaning of Messiah

What does the word 'Messiah' mean? What is the significance of the title? When Christians read the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they usually read them from a Christian perspective which does not always give them an accurate picture of what is going on. It may come as a surprise to some people to know that there were no Christians or churches in the time of Jesus. You must wait for the book of the Acts of the Apostles for that. Jesus did say he would build his church, meaning his community, but that was to be done through the apostles and others in the future. Jesus is presented to us in the Gospels as the eagerly awaited Messiah of the Jewish religion. He is the fulfilment of the good news that was prophesied in the Old Testament. The background of the Gospels is very Jewish.

It is good to look for Jesus everywhere in the Bible, but there are dangers in reading the Old Testament and even the Gospels from a narrow Christian perspective. You can misinterpret what the writers were communicating. It can also result in spiritualizing and allegorizing passages according to preconceived ideas, instead of taking texts at face value. So, let us put on our messianic glasses and see what was really said about Jesus. That will help us understand why he talked so much about the kingdom of God and what it was he was really talking about.

Older versions of the Bible rarely mention the ‘Messiah’. The King James Version (KJV) mentions Messiah only twice, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) seven times. The earlier New International Version (NIV) version only mentioned Messiah twice, but the 2011 edition uses ‘Messiah’ 74 times. Recent translations tend to translate Messiah more frequently. The ISV translates Messiah 546 times, and never uses the word ‘Christ’. Their reason is ‘in order to emphasize the unique claim made by the New Testament writers, that the things about which they wrote pertained to Jesus as the claimed fulfilment of the hope of Israel’s Messiah.’

Jesus’ messianic consciousness

From the age of 12 years, maybe younger, Jesus was aware of his unique relationship with the Father, and at the very beginning of his ministry at about 30 years of age he was aware of his messiahship. Jesus quoted a messianic prophecy while preaching in the synagogue of his home town, Nazareth, he said:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me to tell the good news to the poor” (Lk. 4:18).

But if Jesus was the Messiah, the awaited Jewish king, how was he to teach people about his own identity and his mission without being arrested as a political activist? His strategy was to talk in parables and to use vocabulary that was cryptic.

In Mk. 8:27 Jesus asked his disciples who people thought he was. Most people seemed to think he was a reincarnation of one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked his disciples who *they* thought he was.

Peter answered: ‘You are the Messiah’ (Mk. 8:29). Then Jesus warned them not to tell anyone. Immediately after that he began to teach them that the Son of Man would have to suffer a great deal and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes. Then he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again (Mk. 8:31). This was not quite what they expected of their awaited Messiah and Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Their Messiah, according to the Jewish prophets, was a king!

The Messiah and his kingdom

The message of John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry was that people should repent, because *the kingdom from heaven was near!* (Mt. 3:2). The kingdom of God was also central to Jesus’ teaching from beginning to end. As soon as he was baptized, he started preaching that the kingdom of God was near (Mk. 1:15).

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke says that Jesus had shown himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to the apostles during a period of 40 days and *telling them about the kingdom of God* (Acts 1:3). At the end of the book of Acts we find Paul imprisoned in Rome where, he continued *to preach about the kingdom of God* and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah (Acts 28:31).

If we feel that this concept is not so relevant today, maybe it is because we have not understood Jesus properly. He came to his own people, Israel, but they didn’t receive him. So, he sent his disciples

to preach the gospel to all nations throughout the world saying that *this gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed* throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end would come (Mt. 24:14). The gospel is not only about the cross and forgiveness of sins, there is also the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born again, or born from above, he would not see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). Then he rephrased it saying that unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). Nicodemus expressed incredulity about the expression 'born again', but he didn't have a problem with the expression 'kingdom of God'. What can we assume about his understanding of seeing the kingdom of God, and entering the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not to be interpreted geographically as a location like the UK, but rather a 'reign'. To see the kingdom of God means to experience it. Cf. Acts 2:7 where it says that God would not let his Holy One *see* decay. It requires a spiritual transformation, a spiritual birth. Entering it is an interesting concept. What can it mean? There are various possibilities. We might think of the kingdom of God as the church, heaven, the eternal state of bliss, or paradise, and it is true that one needs to be born again to enter any of these. But Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man like Simeon who was devout and eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. A study of the use of the 'kingdom of God' expression, as is done in this book, soon reveals that it can only refer to the coming messianic reign.

The next question is, what does it mean to experience or enter this future kingdom? Remember kingdom means reign or kingship, not a territory. As a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus quite likely had the hope of participating in the government of Messiah's kingdom, if the Messiah arrived in his lifetime, rather than entering it as a subject or a citizen. That is the implication of entering a 'reign' or 'monarchy'.

Most references to the kingdom of God or the kingdom from heaven in the New Testament are in the Gospels and on the lips of John the Baptist and Jesus. Most scholars regard these terms as synonymous, but the 'kingdom of heaven', (translated 'kingdom from heaven' by ISV), emphasizes the heavenly origin and nature of the kingdom. It is only used by Matthew, and parallel passages in the other Gospels use 'kingdom of God'. Jesus doesn't have a kingdom in heaven; that is the Father's domain.

Why are the epistles relatively silent on the subject? Kingdom terminology has more to do with the Messiah and his future reign on earth than with the church. When people talk of building or extending the kingdom, they are not using biblical terminology. The Bible never talks about building the kingdom of God. However, Jesus did say he would build his church (Mt. 16:18), and in the next verse he told Peter he would give him the keys of the kingdom of God, so there is a connection. There is something going on right now, secretly, which is very vital for each one of us. During the past 2000 years God has been working out his plan for every people and nation. According to Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God, the

Sower is continually sowing the seed and reaping a harvest while the enemy is busy sowing weeds. The yeast is continually permeating the dough, and the mustard seed is becoming a large tree. People from every corner of the earth are discovering the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure. The treasure and the pearl of great price refer both to Jesus himself and the kingdom of God that believers in Jesus are going to inherit. The kingdom net is catching all kinds of fish; peoples of different tribes and cultures, and speakers of languages from every corner of the earth.

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God. He is our Savior, and he talked about the future of those who would be saved. He could have talked about paradise, eternal life (as John does in his Gospel) or heaven, but he chose to talk about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a phrase which contrasts with the kingdoms of this earth; corrupt kingdoms and empires with all their pride and oppression. It also contrasts with paradise. Paradise is equivalent to Abraham's bosom, that place of bliss and rest in the Lord's presence, but that is never referred to as the kingdom of God; the kingdom of God is to do with Messiah's reign on earth.

The kingdom of God is a 1000-year reign, when Jesus the Jewish Messiah will reign from his earthly throne until he has put all enemies under his feet, as taught in Mt. 19:28 and Rev. 20:4. We don't know all the details. What we do know is that at Jesus' return to this earth the dead saints will be resurrected, and the living saints will be changed, and they will all reign with Christ over this earth. This is the real beginning of eternal life, because after resurrection

we can never die again, mortality will have put on immortality. That is not to say that we don't possess eternal life already. The apostle John wrote his Gospel to believers, so that they might know that they had eternal life (1Jn. 5:13). We have the guarantee, but not the glorification. Real eternal life begins with resurrection, when man becomes immortal.

The Messiah in the Gospels

Matthew calls his Gospel a record of the life of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt.1:1). This emphasizes the fact that Jesus is the awaited Jewish Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός, Christ, is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Mashiach*, Messiah, who was everywhere believed to be the son of David, and a descendant of Abraham. The first verse of Ps. 110 is a command from the Lord to David's Lord (the Messiah), to sit at his right hand until he subdues his enemies. It is the Father who subdues the Messiah's enemies, culminating in the defeat of Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet at Armageddon. Only then will the Son sit on his throne in Zion and rule the world. While ruling, the Son will destroy every rule, authority and power, and then hand back the kingdom to God back to the Father (1Cor. 15:25-26). Ps. 110:1 is quoted four times in the New Testament (Mt. 22:44, Mk. 12:36, Lk. 20:42, Acts 2:34) and it is alluded to in the Pauline and Petrine epistles and in Hebrews. Jesus quoted it and then asks the Jewish scholars why David calls the Messiah his Lord, when he is his son (descendant)? They had no answer; they couldn't agree to his divinity. In his Pentecost address Peter quoted the verse and then

declared that all the people of Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made this Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:34-36). In adding the title 'Lord', Peter put Jesus on a par with God. The full title, the Lord Jesus Christ, was clearly an affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is both God and Messiah.

Mark begins his Gospel by saying that his book was the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. He immediately introduces Jesus as 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', both messianic titles.

Luke quotes the angel's words to Zechariah about the son who would be born to him, John the Baptist, saying that he will go before the Lord with the spirit and power of Elijah *to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord* (Lk. 1:17). This alludes to Mal. 3:1 and 4:5-6, which contain the words of the last messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels announced to shepherds that their Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born that night in the city of David (Lk. 2:11). So, the early emphasis in the Gospels is that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he preached, saying, the people should repent, because the kingdom of heaven was near (Mt. 3:2). When Jesus began his ministry, he went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Mt. 4:23). Whose kingdom is that? The Jews would have understood that this was none other than the kingdom of their awaited Messiah.

Jesus began his ministry in his home town of Nazareth by quoting a messianic passage from Isa. 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me to tell the good news to the poor” (Lk. 4:18).

John began his Gospel by concentrating on Jesus’ deity, and very soon after, Andrew found his brother Peter and told him that they had found the Messiah (Jn. 1:41). Likewise, Philip went and found Nathanael and told him that they had found the man about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote (Jn. 1:45). When Nathanael met Jesus, he exclaimed: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (Jn. 1:49). And what was John’s declared purpose for writing his Gospel? He tells us near the end of his book that he had recorded the miracles, so that people might believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and so that through believing in him they might have life (Jn. 20:31).

Did you get the message? It is not only that we might believe in Jesus and have life, but that we might also believe that Jesus is the Messiah. That is the purpose of all the Gospels, and we should build our theology from there. Jesus is the Messiah, and he will come again to set up his kingdom here on earth as promised by the prophets in the Old Testament. Each Gospel makes it clear very early that the subject of their biographies is none other than the awaited Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός is mentioned over 50 times in the Gospels and over 500 times in the New Testament. To the Jews ὁ Χριστός was a title meaning ‘the Anointed One’, or ‘the Messiah’. The anointing was made by pouring oil on the head, and the person anointed was thereby consecrated for religious service as a prophet,

priest or king; in Jesus' case all three. But the Gentiles soon came to understand it as a personal name.

The teaching concerning our future reign with the Messiah in his kingdom should not be confused with that of our present status of being 'in Christ', who is now seated at the right hand of God. Paul said, God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realm in the Messiah Jesus (Eph. 2:6), and that if we have been raised with the Messiah, we should keep focusing on the things that are above, where the Messiah is seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). Our being raised with Christ and seated in the heavenly realms is our present spiritual position 'in Christ Jesus' but sitting with Christ on his earthly throne at the renewal of all things, and reigning with him there, is a different matter. That is our future glorification.

The Synoptic Gospels were written to give us a summary of Jesus' life and teaching, and to answer the question: "Who was this person?" The Gospel writers quote the Hebrew Bible extensively and identify Jesus as the Messiah, a mysterious person who is the subject of many prophecies; mysterious in the sense of his divine titles. He was generally regarded by the Jews of that era as a savior who would rescue Israel from their enemies and rule over them as their king with righteousness and justice. He would also have a profound influence over the nations of the world, the Gentiles.

Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah). The genealogy is evidence that he was a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and a descendant of

David, the most revered king of Israel, and one to whom God had made the following promise in 2Sam. 7:12-13:

“When your life is complete, and you go to join your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one who will come forth from your body, and I will fortify his kingdom. He will build a temple (house) dedicated to my Name, and I will make the throne of his kingdom last forever.”

Although the promise was fulfilled in part by his son Solomon who built the temple in Jerusalem, it is also regarded as a messianic prophecy. It is David's greater Son who would build his church and rule forever. Ps.89:27-29 says that God will establish David's line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure. The 'house' that the Messiah builds is the messianic community or church that Jesus said he would build, which ultimately becomes the royal household in the kingdom of God. God's household is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1Tim. 3:15). We are presently being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus the Messiah (1Pet. 2:5). As God's children, we are heirs of all things including the government of the world

In Mt. 2:1, astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem to look for the new-born king of the Jews. When the Jewish king Herod heard about it, he had all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and surrounds killed, fearing a rival. In Lk. 1:32-33, an angel appeared to Mary and told her she would bear a son and call him Jesus. The angel said that her son would rule over Israel forever.

In other words, he would be the Messiah! He would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High, and *God would give him the throne of his ancestor David*, and his kingdom will never end.

John the Baptist's father Zechariah also prophesied about Jesus emphasizing his Davidic ancestry. He said that God had raised up a mighty Savior for them *from the family of his servant David*, just as he had promised through his holy prophets (Lk. 1:68-70). So, Jesus is identified very clearly in these early chapters of Matthew and Luke as the Messiah, the awaited king in the line of David. He is also called 'the Lord,' and what other man apart from the Messiah could be called Lord?

The main question discussed in this book concerns Matthew's expression 'the kingdom of heaven', or 'kingdom of God' as it is expressed by other New Testament writers. My aim is to show that this expression does not refer to God the Father's kingdom which is universal and eternal and cannot logically be regarded as 'being at hand' or 'near'. Neither can it be inherited or entered. The phrase regularly refers to Messiah's kingdom, the kingdom from God, the kingdom established by God the Father, the kingdom of his beloved Son. In contrast to God's sovereignty over all, this kingdom is on earth and is ruled by a human king for a limited time. In fact, it will be ruled from Jerusalem and is to be identified with the kingdom promised to the 'Son of Man' and the saints in Dan. 7:13-14, 27 and in Rev. 20:4-6.

When Jesus performed his public ministry for three years while training his disciples, he had a challenging task. He was born

Messiah and Lord, but he couldn't declare that publicly. When his disciples realized the truth about his identity, he told them to tell nobody. He was the Messiah, the promised king of Israel, and his message was about his coming kingdom, but he could only communicate that in his teaching by using ambiguous language. He talked about himself in the third person as the Son of Man. And his coming kingdom he called the 'kingdom of God', which in Greek could mean God's kingdom, or the kingdom which has a divine origin, the kingdom from God.

With this understanding, let us look at what Jesus said when the Roman governor Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews (Jn. 18:33). Jesus initially avoided the question but eventually gave him a clearer answer. He said his kingdom did not belong to this world. If it did, his servants would have fought to keep him from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. Then Jesus said: "But *for now*, my kingdom is not from here." "So, you are a king?" Pilate said. Jesus answered: "You say that I am a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is committed to the truth listens to my voice" (Jn. 18:37). Jesus had his kingdom alright, but its origin was not from this world, just as he was not from this world; he is the man from heaven and his kingdom was from heaven, granted to him by God. But his kingdom is of this world, because he will reign over the earth. My point here is that Jesus was and is a king, but his kingdom is not from here, it is from God. The expression 'kingdom of God' refers to his reign on earth and never refers to the sovereignty of the Father. Jesus had to

talk in parables and use cryptic expressions, but we will get a clearer picture if each time we read about the kingdom of God, we interpret it as Messiah's coming kingdom.

Did people recognize Jesus to be the Messiah? They were divided, and there was doubt. The leaders initially didn't take Jesus seriously, but his miracles worried them. Even his disciples were confused. On the one hand, he was a miracle worker, a healer and undoubtedly a prophet. The demons, who often called Jesus 'Son of God', also encouraged the belief that he was the Messiah. But on the other hand, there was evidence against it. Jesus was a poor itinerant preacher, nobody's concept of the messianic king. Secondly, Jesus himself spoke of the Son of Man in the third person which suggested that the Messiah might be another person. And added to that he usually spoke of the kingdom of God (Messiah's kingdom, as something in the future. When he wanted to suggest to people that he was the Messiah, he said: "the kingdom of God is near", or "the kingdom of God is among you". On other occasions Jesus' speech made it clear that he was the Messiah. He told people they had to believe in him and give themselves wholeheartedly to him. He said, for example, that whoever acknowledged him before people, he would acknowledge before God (Mt. 10:32). That didn't have political implications.

The Messiah in Acts

The title 'Christ' meaning 'Messiah' occurs over 500 times in the book of Acts and the epistles. In addition, the kingdom of God is referred to about 28 times in the New Testament books following

the Gospels. Luke declares in the last verse of the book of Acts that Paul continued to preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah (Acts 28:31). Yet in Paul's 13 epistles he only refers to the kingdom 15 times, including related expressions, for example, 'the kingdom of the Son whom he loves. Only once (1Cor. 15:24), does he talk about Christ's reign on earth, but six times he refers to inheriting the kingdom of God. Otherwise, his main concern seems to be on the present condition of Christians and churches.

So, what do the references to the kingdom of God in Acts and the epistles relate to? Do they teach a future messianic kingdom, or do they somehow equate it with the church? Paul said that God has rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son whom he loves, through whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13). 'The kingdom of the Son whom he loves' is of course the kingdom of the Messiah, and this verse is often quoted to show that the kingdom of God has already begun, or been realized, and is a present reality. Yes, we are saved, our sins are forgiven, we have been adopted as God's children, we are members of the royal family, we are a kingdom of priests to serve our God. But we not yet reigning! We are justified, but not yet glorified. God has begun a good work in us, but it won't be perfected until the day Jesus Christ returns.

Being 'in Christ', we are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 2:6), but that status we have is for our own personal edification. The world cannot and does not recognize it. Christians have already entered

the monarchy, and we are waiting until Jesus comes to see how that will evolve. It is expressed in a past context because all our status blessings come to us when we are born from above. However, there is no reason to call this 'realized eschatology' as many do. 'Realized' means that something is present as reality. That is not true of the kingdom of God. In the spiritual realm, we have been delivered from the devil's power, we are new creatures in Christ, and we live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once a person is born again, he becomes a child of God and immediately shares in the life of God that belongs to the future. But Messiah's kingdom is not a spiritual experience. It has not yet arrived in the real world. The Messiah is not seated on his earthly throne. Paul speaks about the Messiah who is in us as our glorious hope (Col. 1:27). We have a relationship with God, we experience new life, we know that we are 'in the Messiah', but the glory is still to come. Jesus is on the throne in heaven, but he is also waiting for God to subdue his enemies (Heb. 10:13), culminating in Armageddon. His reign on earth has not begun, and nor has ours.

Luke said that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). What did he say to them? Was he talking about the church which hadn't yet begun? Or Messiah's kingdom, which as we now know, was still millennia away in the future? The two are connected, of course, because the true church consists of those who will inherit the kingdom. Jesus' conversation on the road to Emmaus may give us an idea of what he was talking about. He told them that the Messiah had to suffer these things before he entered into his glory.

Then, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, *he explained to them all the passages of Scripture about himself* (Lk. 24:26-27). And later he told his disciples that *everything written about him in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled* (Lk. 24:44).

There we have it from the mouth of Jesus himself. *All the Old Testament messianic prophecies must be fulfilled.* For example, Isa. 11:10 which Paul quotes in the book of Romans, saying that the Messiah *would rise up to rule the Gentiles*, and they would hope in him (Rom. 15:12). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would raise a banner for the nations and assemble the dispersed of Israel and gather the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:12).

Peter told a crowd at Jerusalem that the Messiah must remain in heaven until it was time for him, as Messiah, to restore everything to perfection. They should repent and turn to him to have their sins blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and so that he might send Jesus to them, whom he appointed long ago to be the Messiah. *Peter said that Jesus had to remain in heaven until the time for restoring all things*, which God had announced through his prophets (Acts 3:19-21).

Philip also preached the good news about the kingdom of God and about the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:12). In the Gospels, the teaching about the kingdom of God to a Jewish audience was one thing, while in Acts and the epistles the preaching of the gospel and salvation through the death of Jesus Christ was another. Perhaps in

Philip's preaching to the Samaritans we are seeing a blending of these messages.

Paul and Barnabas preached to Jews and Gentiles in Galatia and told them that they must endure many hardships before they enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). What does Paul mean here by entering the kingdom of God? Is it a synonym for 'being saved'? Is his message now a blending of Messiah's kingdom and the gospel message? Or is he focusing on the future? The kingdom of God always refers to Messiah's future government, sovereignty or reign. It is normal for Christians to experience suffering in this life before they are glorified in the next. F. F. Bruce's commentary on this verse is: 'No cross, no crown'.

The Messiah in Paul's Epistles

'Christ' has evolved into a personal name in the epistles, where Jesus is often referred to as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, and the Lord Jesus Christ. There are only scattered references to the kingdom in Paul's epistles and the emphasis has sometimes moved from Christ's future reign to Christ's present salvation and its benefits; the new life in Christ.

Paul declares that the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy produced by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17), and that the kingdom of God isn't just talk, but also power (1Cor. 4:20). However, neither of these statements prove that the kingdom has been realized; they teach timeless truths about the kingdom. That is what the kingdom of God is going to be like,

and that should be reflected in our present relationships. Paul usually refers to the kingdom as future. He said that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor. 6:9). His clearest messianic kingdom statement comes in his chapter on the resurrection:

“However, this will happen to each person in the proper order: first the Messiah, then those who belong to the Messiah when he comes. Then the end will come, when after he has done away with every ruler and every authority and power, the Messiah hands over the kingdom to God the Father. For he must rule until God puts all the Messiah’s enemies under his feet” (1Cor. 15:23-25).

He then makes the significant statement that mortal bodies (flesh and blood) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and then he adds that what decays cannot inherit what does not decay (1Cor. 15:50). Paul is here declaring the necessity of resurrection before entering the Messiah’s reign. The resurrection will take place at Jesus’ return and that is the moment when we will inherit the kingdom. This is in accordance with Rev. 20 which states that the resurrection of the righteous will occur before the millennial reign of Christ on earth begins. The rest of the dead don’t come to life until the thousand years are ended. This is additional unarguable evidence that the kingdom of God is not present now.

Paul calls his evangelistic team members, fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). Messiah’s reign is the goal, the climax towards which all Christian work is heading. Souls won for the Lord will enter their glory there and receive their rewards there. Paul

urges the Thessalonian Christians to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls them into his kingdom and glory (1Thess. 2:12). This verse does not mention the kingdom of God specifically, but ‘his kingdom’ is obviously the same thing, and as argued throughout this book, it does not refer to God’s universal reign, but Messiah’s earthly reign that originates from God. The tense here is present (calls), or rather habitual; it is what God habitually does, he calls people to enter his Son’s kingdom and glory. This is their ultimate destination.

In making a solemn charge to Timothy, Paul does so, based on future realities; the coming of Jesus to establish his messianic kingdom and to judge the living and the dead. He says,

“In the presence of God and the Messiah Jesus, who is going to judge those who are living and those who are dead, and in view of *his appearing and his kingdom*, I solemnly appeal to you” (2Tim. 4:1).

This verse refers to the future events described in Rev. 19-20, the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the white throne judgment. In the same chapter, Paul said that the Lord would rescue him from every evil attack and *would take him safely to his heavenly kingdom* (2Tim 4:18). What does he mean by ‘heavenly kingdom’? The NIV commentary suggests heaven itself, but Messiah’s reign is on earth, not heaven. The BAG (Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich) Greek lexicon states that the Greek word for ‘heavenly’ can mean something that is there, or that belongs there by nature, or that comes from there. Messiah’s kingdom has its source in God, so it is said to be ‘from heaven’. That is why Matthew often calls the kingdom of God ‘the kingdom from heaven’. It is also heavenly in

nature, because Paul's destination is the holy city which comes down out of heaven from God. This is the future home of the royal household after the resurrection (Rev. 21:2).

The Messiah in Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles

There are only four references to Messiah's kingdom in these epistles, but it is significant that these authors interpret it as a future earthly kingdom. Quoting Ps. 45:6, the writer of Hebrews says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of your kingdom is a righteous scepter" (Heb. 1:8). He interprets the king to be the Messiah, the Son of God, whose kingdom was always regarded as being on earth. Then he tells the Christians that since they are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful (Heb. 12:28). Receiving the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting it and ruling as co-heirs with the Messiah during his millennial reign.

James says that God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him (James 2:5). See also James 1:12 where he says that it is the man who has stood the test who will receive the crown of life; the victor's crown that endures for eternal life.

Peter says that Christians should confirm their calling and election, for in this way they will be generously granted entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah (2Pet. 1:11). Peter is probably alluding to Dan. 7, where it says that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth would be

given to the saints of the Most High. This kingdom *will endure forever*, and all authorities will serve the Messiah and obey.

The Messiah in Revelation

The Messiah is mentioned seven times in Revelation in ISV. The term kingdom of God does not occur at all. Nevertheless, the book is entitled ‘the revelation of Jesus the Messiah’ and he is referred to under many titles and names, including ‘Jesus’ fourteen times. The following four verses refer to Messiah’s kingdom:

Rev. 1:5b-6a Jesus, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, has made us a kingdom, priests for his God and Father. The New English Bible (NEB) translates ‘kingdom’ in a more meaningful fashion as a ‘royal house’. The primary meaning of ‘kingdom’ is ‘kingship’, but here it is not abstract; it refers to those who are reigning, the monarchy or royal household, those who are sometimes called the ‘sons of the kingdom’.

Rev. 5:10 The Lamb (the Messiah) has redeemed people to become a royal house (monarchy) and priests for our God, and they will reign over the earth. This repeats what was said in the previous reference with the additional information that the saints will reign over the earth. The kingdom of God (Messianic kingship) originates from heaven, but the reign is on earth. The Messiah, Jesus, will rule *over* the whole world together with his royal household, the saints, those redeemed by his blood. I prefer the translation *over the earth*, because there is no scriptural evidence that the Messiah or the saints

will be living *on* the earth. It seems that the redeemed in their resurrection bodies will rule over the earth from the New Jerusalem.

Rev. 11:15 The blowing of the seventh trumpet signals the climax of the book, when the world's kingdom becomes the kingdom of the Lord and of his regent, the Messiah, who will rule forever. This is a central verse and reflects the climax of the book. This kingdom belongs to planet earth and is most certainly an allusion to Dan. 2:44, 7:14. The world's kingdom is in the singular, because dominion and rule over the whole world passes to the Messiah. All earthly kingdoms have come to an end.

Rev. 12:10 A loud voice in heaven declares that the salvation, the power, the kingdom of God, and the authority of his Messiah have now arrived. This is the climax. There was war in heaven, and Satan, who had led the whole world astray, was hurled down to earth together with his demons. The time has arrived for God's kingdom to be manifested, and for the authority of his regent, the Messiah, to be enforced. The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book about the end of the present age, climaxing with the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, his victory over his enemies, and the beginning of his reign over the earth.

Jesus' titles in Revelation

We will now check the terminology used in Revelation to describe Jesus' person and his victory as Messiah.

Rev. 1:5 Jesus the Messiah, the witness, the faithful one, the firstborn from the dead, and *the ruler over the kings of the earth*.

1:8 The Alpha and the Omega, who is, who was, and who is coming, *the Almighty*.

1:17-18 *The first and the last* (cf. Isa. 44:6, 48:12), the living one.

2:18 The Son of God.

3:7 The one who is holy and true, who has the key of David.

The key to the house of David is mentioned in Isa. 22:22. Keys are symbols of authority and in this context keys to the kingdom of God, the Davidic throne. In Mt. 16:19 Jesus said he would give the keys of the kingdom to Peter.

3:14 The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation.

5:5 *The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*.

The Lion imagery originated from an early messianic prophecy in Gen. 49:9-10. Jacob blessed Judah saying he was a lion's cub. *The scepter would not depart from him*, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the one comes who owns them both, and *to him would belong the allegiance of nations*. 'Root of David' is better translated as 'Shoot or Scion of David'. A scion grows out of the root of a tree or plant, even when thought to be dead, and symbolically it refers to the Messiah who came from the royal line of David, son of Jesse, 1000 years after David, and 400+ years after the last Judean king. Another prophecy in Isa. 11:1-2 says that *a shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse*, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

5:12 The Lamb who was slain (cf. Isa. 53:7)

11:15 *His Messiah.*

Father and Son share the throne, but the pronoun remains singular because members of the Trinity are one. The Lord is sovereign over all, the Messiah is his regent on earth. Cf. Ps. 2:6 where the Lord installs his regent on Mount Zion.

14:14 *The Son of Man.*

The one 'like the Son of Man' is Jesus, an allusion to Dan. 7:13. This is the title that Jesus frequently used for himself in the Gospels.

17:14 *Lord of lords and King of kings.*

19:11 *Faithful and True.*

19:13 *The Word of God.*

19:16 *King of kings and Lord of lords.*

22:13 *The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

22:16 *The root (scion) and descendant of David, the bright morning star.*

This final name comes from a messianic prophecy given by Balaam son of Beor in Num. 24:17:

"I can see him, but not right now,

I observe him, but from a distance.

A star streams forth from Jacob;

a scepter arises from Israel.”

While the immediate reference is to king David, here in Revelation it relates to David’s greater son. F. F. Bruce, in “The Revelation to John” (p. 666), writes that “in the Qumran texts Num. 24:17 is a recurring testimonium of the messianic warrior of the end time.” The star was a familiar symbol in Jewish writings for the expected Davidic king. The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over, and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn. The Star of David, known in Hebrew as the Shield of David or Magen David, is a generally recognized symbol of modern Jewish identity and Judaism.

Summary of Jesus’ teaching about his messiahship

1. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, Peter declared that he was the Messiah, and Jesus told them to keep it to themselves.
2. Immediately after that, at Caesarea Philippi at the transfiguration, Peter, James and John saw Jesus in his messianic glory, but they told no one at that time what they had seen.
3. At his trial before the high priest, Jesus declared himself to be the Messiah.

4. When the Samaritan woman spoke of the Messiah, Jesus told her that he who was speaking to her was the Messiah (Jn. 4:26).

5. Jesus referred to God as his Father (Jn. 5:17), and himself as the Son (Jn. 5:19-23). ‘Son of God’ was a messianic title found in Ps. 2:7-8 where the Lord said: “You are my son, today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your possession, the ends of the earth as your possession.” The writer to the Hebrews quotes these verses and relates them to Jesus (Heb. 1:5).

6. He also said that the Father had given him authority to judge, because he was the Messiah (Jn. 5:27).

7. The ‘I AM’ pronouncements in John’s Gospel identify Jesus with the divine name Yahweh and the numerous verses which attribute deity to the Messiah in the Old Testament.

“I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6:35).

“I am the bread that came down from heaven” (Jn. 6:41).

“I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12, cf. Isa. 49:6).

“Unless you believe that I AM, you’ll die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24).

“Before Abraham was, I AM!” (Jn. 8:58). The Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

8. Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem was via the Mount of Olives, a significant messianic landmark. It was from the Mount of

Olives that Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:12), and it is to this same mountain that the Messiah will descend when he returns (Zech. 14:4). Jesus rode on a donkey to fulfil a messianic prophecy from Zech. 9:9, cf. Mt. 21:4-5. The crowds shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is *the coming kingdom of our father David*” (Mk. 11:9-10). The crowds recognized the significance of this messianic event, but the Pharisees rejected Jesus as their Messiah (Lk. 19:39). Jesus went to the temple where children shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Mt. 21:14). So, belief in him as the Messiah was growing.

9. Jesus questioned the Jews about why they accused him of blasphemy when he called himself the Son of God? (Jn. 10:36). In 2Sam. 7:12-14 God promised David that he would establish the throne of his descendant forever and that he would be his father and he would be God’s son. Based on this promise, Son of God became a messianic title.

10. The crowd told Jesus that they had learned from the Old Testament that the *Messiah* remains forever. So why was he saying that the *Son of Man* must be lifted up? (Jn. 12:34). Here the crowd equates the Messiah with Jesus’ expression ‘Son of Man’.

11. Jesus’ prayer to the Father in Jn. 17 leaves no doubt as to who Jesus believed himself to be. He called God ‘Father’ and referred to himself as ‘Son’. He said he had been granted authority over all people (Dan. 7:14, Ps. 2). The connection between Dan. 7:14 and Mt. 28:18-19 is significant. Daniel said, dominion, glory and a kingdom had been bestowed on the Messiah, so that all people,

nations, and languages would serve him. In Matthew, Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him, so, his disciples should go and disciple people in all nations.

This is the Great Commission, the church's marching orders. Jesus gives eternal life to all those whom the Father has given him. Inheriting eternal life is the Johannine equivalent of inheriting the kingdom of God. Having finished his work, Jesus is now returning to the glory he had with the Father before the world began. He said that those whom the Father gave him know for sure that he came from the Father and believe that he sent him. He states that all he has is the Father's and all the Father has is his. Complete unity. The believers have the word and Jesus asks for protection for them from the evil one. He doesn't mention his messiahship, or the kingdom of God explicitly, but rather prays for his disciples and those who will believe in him through their message. He prays for their unity and says he has given them the glory that the Father gave him. That glory is regal, and it is eternal. He has given them eternal life and their glory is in being co-heirs with Christ and ruling with him. Their ultimate glorification is expressed in Rev. 3:21, when the conquerors will share a place with Jesus on his throne, just as Jesus conquered and shared a place with the Father on his throne.

12. In Jn. 18:33 Pilate asked Jesus if he was king of the Jews. Jesus replied that his kingdom was not from this world. He didn't say that it didn't belong to this world. The Greek preposition ἐκ 'from, out of' indicates that his kingdom does not have its origin in this world,

not that it won't be manifested in this world. He admitted that he was a king, and that he was born for that reason.

13. John said his purpose for writing his book was so that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him they might have life (Jn. 20:31).

14. After the Last Supper, Jesus promised his disciples a share in his rule in his future kingdom. He conferred a kingdom on them, just as his Father had conferred one on him, so that they might eat and drink at his table in his kingdom and sit down on thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk. 22:29-30).

The evidence given in this chapter is more than sufficient to show that Jesus is the Messiah, and that he is the coming king promised by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus will come down to earth again, and this time he will reign as king over the earth and fulfil all those Old Testament promises that gave the Jews their hope and expectation.

Appendix 3

The Son of Man

The meaning of 'the Son of Man'

Jesus was the name given by Mary to her baby, meaning 'the Lord saves'. In the first chapter we saw that Jesus was also known as the Messiah, or the Greek form 'Christ', meaning 'the anointed one'. In this chapter we will look at another title that Jesus used for himself, the 'Son of Man'. This is a messianic title taken from Daniel 7, and it is used only by Jesus, except for Acts 7:56 where Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, which immediately reminded him of the Son of Man vision in Daniel, and so he called Jesus the Son of Man. Jesus used the title to speak of himself in the third person, enabling him to speak about the Messiah without explicitly claiming to be the Messiah himself. He used the 'kingdom of God' expression in the same evasive way. Unfortunately, the church at times has missed the significance of Jesus being the Jewish Messiah. 'Christ' has become a personal name, and the Messiah's future reign on earth gets interpreted in a vague, non-literal manner. He is no longer the eagerly awaited Jewish king. The terms 'Messiah', 'kingdom of God' and 'Son of Man' are pervasive throughout the Gospels and cannot be ignored. To do so is to miss the point of why the Gospels were written (Jn. 20:31). 'Son of Man' itself is a vague expression. What could 'Son of Man' refer to? It is Jesus' most common title for himself and used 81 times

in the Gospels. It is obvious from Mk. 8:38 that Jesus used the title to refer to himself, and he meant it as a messianic title.

“If anyone is ashamed of *me* and *my* words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the *Son of Man* will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father’s glory.”

And again in Mt. 16:13, 15

“When Jesus had come to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the *Son of Man* is? ... He asked them, “But who do you say *I* am?”

The Greek word for ‘man’ is ἄνθρωπος which means human being rather than a male. John Piper, in a paper called “Why is Jesus called "Son of Man"? makes the following observations: “Let me give a common understanding and then a more sophisticated historical understanding. The common understanding is that "Son of God" implies his deity—which it does—and that ‘Son of Man’ implies his humanity, which it does too. He was a son of man, that is, a human being. And he is the Son of God, in that he has always existed as the Eternally Begotten One who comes forth from the Father forever. He always has, and he always will. He is the Second Person of the Trinity with all the divine nature fully in him. The more sophisticated and important historical insight is that the term ‘Son of Man’ doesn't merely align him with humanity. It is taken from Dan. 7 to which chapter John alludes frequently. And in that chapter

the Son of Man is a very exalted figure. It was Jesus' favorite self-designation.”

Jesus didn't refer to himself often as Son of God, but rather, as Son of Man. He said things like, even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people (Mk. 10:45). He frequently called himself Son of Man. The reason he did so was because ‘son of man’ is an ordinary phrase that could be interpreted as ‘human being’ and would cause no offence. But those with ears to hear could hear Dan. 7, in which he was claiming a very exalted role in the history of redemption. And he meant to do it.

Jesus was very subtle in that he was always revealing his identity to those with eyes to see, but he wasn't revealing it so blatantly that everybody would come and make him king. He had to be very careful in disclosing his identity. He performed miracles and then told people not to tell anybody. And he would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in others. And only when he was on trial for his life, and the Jewish high priest asked him in Mt. 27:63 if he was the Messiah, the Son of God, did Jesus respond, saying: “You have said so. Nevertheless, I tell you, from now on you will see ‘the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power’ and ‘coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

He confessed his deity and messiahship before the Jewish Sanhedrin even though he knew he would be crucified for it.

Jesus is king in the kingdom of God, but in the Gospels, Jesus did not want to openly declare that he was a king, until he did so before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (Mt. 27:11). Rather he spoke about the Son of Man, a veiled way of talking about himself.

The Son of Man in Daniel 7

The messianic prophecy from which this title sprang is almost certainly Dan. 7:13-14:

“I continued to observe the night vision - and look! - someone *like the Son of Man* was coming, accompanied by heavenly clouds. He approached the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages are to serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion - it will never pass away - and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

This prophecy is about a world ruler whose kingdom, given to him by God, would last forever. By using the title ‘son of man’, Jesus was claiming to be this exalted person. The Greek expression is definite, he was *the* Son of Man, the son of man that people had heard about, the one spoken about by Daniel. This is a remarkable passage because it refers to a human being who is given great authority, a person whom people of every language would serve and worship, and it is implied that he will have an everlasting earthly kingdom.

The context of Dan. 7 is apocalyptic. Daniel describes four beasts which are interpreted as kingdoms, and especially the last beast, which by comparing Dan. 7:25 with Rev 13:5-7 can be identified as

the Antichrist and his kingdom. Then surprisingly, we are told that the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom forever (Dan. 7:18). The interpretation of the vision is found in Dan. 7:26-27:

“Nevertheless, the court will convene, and his (the fourth beast) authority will be removed, annulled, and destroyed forever. Then the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the people who are the saints of the Highest One. His kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve him and obey them.”

By designating himself as the Son of Man, Jesus identified himself as the coming Messiah who would rule the world with his saints. Compare that Daniel passage with what John saw in the book of Revelation. John saw thrones, and those who sat on them were given authority to judge. He saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life and reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

The Coming of the Son of Man in Matthew

Dan. 7:13 is not only about the Son of Man, it is about the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. The following seven verses from Matthew are all in the context of the Messiah coming down from heaven to rule on earth at the end of the age.

Mt. 13:41, 43 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from *his kingdom* everything that causes others to sin and

those who practice lawlessness. Then the righteous will shine like the sun (cf. Dan. 12:3) *in their Father's kingdom*. The harvest at the end of the age begins with the Great Tribulation, a time when a good percentage of the world's unbelieving population will be killed through warfare and God's judgments. Receiving the mark of the beast will distinguish the evildoers from the righteous, including nominal Christians. The righteous will be resurrected and glorified in their Father's kingdom. There are not two kingdoms; 'the Father's kingdom (the kingdom from heaven) is the messianic kingdom.

Mt. 16:27 The Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and he will repay everyone according to what he has done, whether good or evil. The righteous will be rewarded during his reign, according to how each one faithfully served the Lord during his life. The wicked will be punished at Armageddon and at the last judgment.

Mt. 19:28 When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne *in the renewed creation*, his Jewish followers will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel. Reigning with Jesus is a reward conferred on his disciples. The renewed creation is literally 'the rebirth', as the world will be almost destroyed during the Great Tribulation. In Acts 3:21 it is called 'the restoration of all things.' In Rev. 3:21 the promise is given to those who conquer. The conquerors will share in Jesus' throne (rule), just as he conquered and shared in his Father's throne.

Mt. 24:27 Just as lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus' coming will be clearly observed in the sky. Every eye will see him (Rev. 1:7).

Mt. 24:30-31 The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all 'the tribes of the land will mourn (ISV) (Zech. 12:12) when they see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' (Dan. 7:13), with power and great glory. He'll send out his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they'll gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another. These verses hardly need interpretation, but the bewildering interpretations in some commentaries makes a comment necessary. The expression 'Son of Man' taken from Dan. 7 confirms that this is a description of the second coming. Dan. 7:14 says that he will be given authority, glory and sovereign power. All people, nations and people of every language will worship him. The elect (cf. Mt. 24:22), are God's chosen ones; the righteous, the church. This accords well with what Paul said in 1Thess. 4:15-17:

"We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.... The dead who belong to the Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever."

This gathering of the elect by the angels from the four corners of the earth is Jesus' picturesque way of portraying the resurrection of the righteous and the simultaneous rapture of the living saints. Our destination is the New Jerusalem.

Mt. 26:64 Jesus told the Jewish high priest that from now on he would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven. In this last quote Jesus brings together messianic prophecies from Ps. 110:1 and Dan. 7:13-14. It is a claim to both deity and messiahship. The members of the Sanhedrin will see him in these roles on judgment day.

The parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt. 25:31-46)

The parable of the sheep and the goats is notoriously hard to interpret. For centuries, scholars have found it hard to harmonize with other scriptures. I here present a solution. The first clue is that Matthew 24 & 25 are concerned with the end of this age, the Messiah's return to earth, not with the end of the world. It is a judgment of the nations, rather than individuals, although it is individuals who are finally separated into the two groups. This passage is a parable, like the other two passages of this chapter; the parable of the ten virgins, and the parable of the talents. The sheep and the goats are symbolic; it is an allegory about the judgment of the righteous and the wicked, but Jesus is not talking about the great white throne judgment that will take place at the end of the world.

The bulk of the passage concerns the attitude people have toward Jesus, as illustrated by their attitude toward his *brethren*. The parable has nothing to do with caring for the poor, as it is often portrayed as doing. Jesus made it clear who his brethren were in Mt. 12:48-50, where he said, "Who is my mother and who are my

brothers.” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”. This is a parable about the two groups of people who will exist at the end of the Great Tribulation when Christ returns; the genuine followers of Jesus, many of whom will be martyrs, and the remainder who will choose to align themselves with the Antichrist.

When the Messiah comes in his glory with all the angels, he will sit on *his* glorious throne, the throne of his ancestor David. As king, he judges, and this judgment takes place at his return. It is premillennial, because the righteous (the elect) are invited to take their inheritance, *the millennial kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world*. Jesus will descend from heaven to earth as King, and his *glorious* throne will be both in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1, 3), which will be visible above the earthly Jerusalem, and in the earthly Jerusalem (Isa. 24:23, Jer. 3:17, Ezek. 43:7). The two major events that will occur at his return are the resurrection and rapture of the righteous, and the defeat of the nations who have gathered to fight against God’s people, Israel, at Jerusalem. This illustrates the separation that will take place; the righteous will be resurrected and will inherit the kingdom, while the wicked will be condemned and destroyed at the battle of Armageddon. Jesus’ disciples probably thought about Joel, who had prophesied that the Lord would *gather all nations* and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and judge them there (Joel 3:2, 12). This parable is about *these nations*. Why do *the nations* conspire and the peoples plot

in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Messiah. The Lord rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, “I have installed my King on Zion my holy hill” (Ps. 2:1-2,6). All peoples will be polarized in the last days.

Jesus is teaching here that there are two destinies; eternal punishment and eternal life. And there are two kinds of people, the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, those who have aligned themselves with Jesus, and those who haven't. Instead, they chose Antichrist. The basis of judgment is their attitude towards Jesus and his *brethren*. The righteous are saved because of their faith, resulting in an affinity with Jesus' people, which has a practical outcome (Mt. 10:41-42). They are invited to come and inherit the Messiah's kingdom (cf. the good seed in Mt. 13:43). The goats, who come to attack Jerusalem, have no concern for Jesus and his brethren, in fact, they are against them. They have no love for Jesus' brethren. They are consigned to hell; their destiny is now sealed (cf. the weeds in Mt. 13:40-42).

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

Son of Man verses

The title 'Son of Man' was used by Jesus to show himself to be the Messiah of Daniel's prophecy. It is a term that lays claim both to a divine pre-existence and a true humanity. In each context it either points to the Messiah's present lowliness or his future glory. In the vision that Daniel saw, God gives glory and the kingdom of the earth to him who appears before him in human form coming in the clouds of heaven, so that all people and nations might honor him.

In the following 'Son of Man' verses, 'he, the Messiah' is substituted for 'the Son of Man' and pronouns are added to show that Jesus was talking about himself. Those with discernment would have understood Jesus as referring to himself like that, while those who didn't believe that he was the Messiah might have thought that he was talking about someone else. Parallel verses are not repeated, and sometimes only the relevant sentence is given. I am not suggesting that Bible translations follow this format; Jesus expressed himself like this for a reason.

Mt. 8:20 Jesus said foxes have holes and birds have nests, but ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, has no place to rest.

Mt. 9:6 So that the scribes might know that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* had authority on earth to forgive sins, he told the paralyzed man to get up, pick up his stretcher, and go home.

Mt. 10:23 Jesus told his disciples that when they were persecuted in one town, they should flee to the next, because they will not have gone through the towns of Israel before ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* comes.

This verse implies that because of the persecution, described in 10:17-22, the towns of Israel would never be fully evangelized.

Mt. 11:19 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, came eating and drinking, and people said he was a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!

Mt. 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, is Lord of the Sabbath.

Mt. 12:32 Jesus said whoever speaks a word against ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the one to come.

Mt. 12:40 Jesus said, just as Jonah was in the stomach of the great fish for three days and three nights, so ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

Mt. 13:37 Jesus said the person who sowed good seed is ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*.

Mt. 13:41 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* would send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes others to sin and those who practice lawlessness.

Mt. 16:27-28 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to what he has done. He said some standing

there would not experience death before they see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, coming in his kingdom.

This refers naturally to the transfiguration which occurred six days later.

Mt. 17:9 Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about the vision until ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, had been raised from the dead.

Mt. 17:12 Jesus said Elijah had already come, yet people did not recognize him and treated him just as they pleased. In the same way, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to suffer at their hands.

Mt. 17:22 While they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus told them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going to be betrayed into human hands.

Mt. 19:28 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, his followers will sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Mt. 20:18 Jesus said they were going up to Jerusalem, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to the high priests and scribes, and they would condemn him to death.

Mt. 20:28 Jesus said that was the way it was with ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mt. 24:27 Just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* coming be.

Mt. 24:30 Then ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*'s sign will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land will mourn as they see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Mt. 24:37 Just as it was in Noah's time, so it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes.

Mt. 24:39 They were unaware of what was happening until the flood came and swept all of them away. That's how it will be when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, appears.

Mt. 24:44 So you, too, must be ready, because ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will come at an hour you are not expecting.

Mt. 25:31 Jesus said when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes in his glory and all the angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

Mt. 26:2 Jesus said the Passover would take place in two days, and ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would be handed over to be crucified.

Mt. 26:24 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was going away, just as it had been written about him. How terrible it will be for that man by whom ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, is betrayed!

Mt. 26:45 Jesus told them to keep on sleeping and resting. The time was near for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Mt. 26:64 Jesus told the high priest that from then on, he would see ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Mk. 8:31 Jesus began to teach them that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, would have to suffer a great deal and be rejected by the Jewish leaders. Then he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again.

Mk. 8:38 Jesus said if anyone is ashamed of him and his words in this adulterous and sinful generation, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory.

Mk. 9:9 On their way down the mountain, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, had risen from the dead.

Mk. 9:12 Jesus told them that Elijah was coming first and would restore all things. Then he asked them why ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must suffer and be treated shamefully.

Mk. 14:62 Jesus said, "I am" (ἐγώ εἶμι), and 'you will see ~~the Son of Man~~ *me, the Messiah*, seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.

Lk. 6:22 Jesus said his disciples were blessed whenever people hated, avoided, insulted, and slandered them because of ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*!

Lk. 11:30 Jesus said, just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will be a sign to his generation.

Lk. 12:8 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* will acknowledge before the angels everyone who acknowledges him before people.

Lk. 17:22 The time will come when the disciples will long to see ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* reign, but they won't see it.

Lk. 17:24 Just as lightning flashes and shines from one end of the sky to the other, so will ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* be at his coming.

Lk. 17:30 The day when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* is revealed will be like that (sudden destruction).

Lk. 18:8 Jesus asked whether when ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, comes, he will he find faith on earth.

Lk. 18:31 Jesus said that everything written by the prophets about ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, will be fulfilled.

Lk. 19:10 Jesus said ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, came to seek and to save the lost.

Lk. 21:36 Jesus told his disciples to be alert at all times, so that they might stand before ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Lk. 22:48 Jesus asked Judas if he was betraying ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, with a kiss.

Lk. 24:6-7 Jesus told his disciples that ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, must be handed over to be crucified, and rise on the third day.

Jn. 1:51 Jesus told his disciples they would see heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending on ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn. 3:13-14 Jesus said no one has gone up to heaven except him, the one who came down from heaven, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah* who is in heaven. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, be lifted up.

Jn. 5:27 Jesus said God gave him the authority to judge, because he is ~~the Son of Man~~ *the Messiah*.

Jn. 6:27 Jesus said his disciples should not work for food that perishes but for food that lasts for eternal life, which ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, will give them.

Jn. 6:53 Jesus said, unless his disciples eat ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah's* flesh and drink his blood, they won't experience eternal life.

Jn. 6:62 Jesus asked his disciples what their reaction would be, if they saw ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, ascending to heaven where he was before.

Jn. 8:28 Jesus said when they have lifted ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, up, then they will know that he is the I AM, and that he does nothing on his own authority.

Jn. 9:35 When Jesus heard they had thrown the beggar out, he found him and asked him if he believed in ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*.

Jn. 12:23 Jesus told them the hour had come for ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, to be glorified.

Jn. 13:31-32 Jesus said, ~~the Son of Man~~ *he, the Messiah*, was now glorified, and God had been glorified by him. If God had been glorified by him, God himself also would glorify ~~the Son of Man~~ *him, the Messiah*, and he would do it quickly.

Appendix 4

The Messianic Prophecies

The Jewish belief in the coming Messiah

This chapter is important, because one of the main issues involved in interpreting the future correctly is one's attitude to the nation of Israel and the way one interprets the Old Testament prophecies. Sam Storms in his 2013 book 'Kingdom Come' gives the amillennial alternative to a premillennial interpretation of eschatology, or the last things. He says these OT passages are largely symbolic and that the fulfillment is found 'in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the believing remnant, the church.' It is for this reason that Chapters 1 & 2 have concentrated on Jesus as the promised Messiah and the Son of Man. So, make up your own mind as you read these OT prophecies. Are they all somehow symbolic, referring to Jesus and the church? Or are they to be taken literally? They predict a regathering of Israel to their historic land and this miracle has been happening in our generation over the past 100 years. They also predict the coming of a Jewish Messiah as king of the entire world, and the subsequent establishment of a kingdom where the Messiah rules from Jerusalem? Jerusalem, the holy city that God has chosen as his own city, has been a constant source of contention between Jews and Muslims, and this disagreement will not go away. It is destined to be the focus of a rebellion of the nations against God, culminating in the battle of Armageddon. Jerusalem is the place

where Jesus died and was resurrected, the place from where he ascended and to where he will return, and the place from where he will rule the world with his saints. Our key text for this chapter says that *the Messiah will rule over David's kingdom, sitting on David's throne*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. That can mean nothing but the Messiah reigning over Jerusalem and Israel, and it is the zeal of the Lord of hosts that will accomplish it.

All these things were predicted by God's holy prophets, and the apostle Peter encourages us to take notice of them. He said we have the words of the prophets made more certain, and we'll do well to pay attention to them, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts (2Pet. 1:19). According to Jewish tradition, the messianic era will be one of global peace and harmony, an era free of strife and hardship, and one conducive to the propagation of the word of God. The following themes are common to these prophecies.

The return of Israel to their land

The battle of Armageddon

The coming and reign of the Messiah

The conversion of Israel

Messiah's reign from Jerusalem

Justice, righteousness, peace, and knowledge of the Lord

Messiah's kingdom will be international

Messiah's kingdom will be everlasting

The saints will reign with the Messiah

The main Old Testament prophecies are now presented in the order of these topics. However, some prophecies cover more than one topic. It should be noted that these prophecies have never been fulfilled, except for those that predict details of the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus, and those that predict the regathering of Israel, which has been happening before our very eyes. The selected verses relate to the kingdom of God; Messiah's kingdom, which can be further defined as God's rule on earth through his Son Jesus, as regent, and his co-heirs; the elect, the saints, the children of God. Many of these prophecies are guaranteed by the words, 'The Lord declares', 'The Lord has sworn', or 'The Lord will make it happen.' I have highlighted in italics words that I see as being especially significant. The following passages in this chapter are my own paraphrase of the ISV translation, in order to reduce words and phrases that are not relevant to our purpose or that seem to be redundant. Readers can check their veracity by comparing them with their favorite translation.

The return of Israel to their land

The Jewish nation has been and will continue to be regathered from the four corners of the earth. Their fortunes have been restored; they are now one of the world's leading military powers. Jerusalem is destined to become the center of the world's stage at the battle of Armageddon, and after the Messiah's return, it will be the capital of his worldwide kingdom. Due to its immigrant nature, Israel is one of the most multicultural and multilingual societies in the world. The population of nearly nine million has migrated mainly from Europe, Africa and Asia.

The last question the disciples asked Jesus before his ascension was when he would *restore the kingdom* to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus implied that it was going to happen, but it wasn't for them to know the time that the Father had fixed by his own authority.

Isa. 11:11-12 At that time, the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people, from Assyria, Lower Egypt, Upper Egypt, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and *will assemble the dispersed of Israel; he will gather the scattered people of Judah from the corners of the earth.*

Isa. 14:1-2 The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel. *He will settle them in their own land*, and foreigners will join them, affiliating themselves with the house of Jacob. Many nations will take them and bring them to their land and their own place. Israel will put those nations to conscripted labor in the Lord's land. They'll take captive those who were their captors and will rule over those who oppressed them.

Jer. 30:3 The time will come when the Lord will restore the security of his people Israel and Judah. *He'll bring them back to the land that he gave to their ancestors, and they'll possess it.*

Ezek. 11:17 The Lord is going to gather you from among the nations, assembling you from the lands among which you have been dispersed. *He'll give you the land of Israel.*

Ezek. 37:21 *Watch me take the Israelis out of the nations where they've gone and return them from every direction. I'm going to bring them back into their own land.*

Hos. 3:4-5 Israel will dwell a long time without a king, without a prince, without sacrifice, without sacred pillars, and with neither ephod nor teraphim. *Afterward, they'll return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They'll come in awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the last days.*

Amos 9:11-12, 14-15 At that time the Lord will restore David's fallen tent, restoring its torn places. He'll restore its ruins, rebuilding it as it was long ago, so his people might inherit the remnant of Edom and all of the nations that bear his name. *He'll restore his people Israel; they'll rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them. They'll plant vineyards and drink the wine from them. They'll plant gardens and eat the fruit from them. The Lord will plant Israel in their own land that he gave them, never again to be removed.* (This passage is quoted in Acts 15:16-17.)

Armageddon and the Day of the Lord

When the Messiah returns, he will initially defeat the nations that surround Jerusalem at the battle of Armageddon, and then he'll rule over the survivors. This may be a shock to those who have prayed the prayer 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild'. The prophecies declare that all nations will gather to attack Jerusalem and will be judged there by God. Nations will attack each other, and many will be destroyed by a plague. At this time there will be a great earthquake, the most severe the world has known, and all the cities of the world will collapse. The Mount of Olives will split in two and water will flow from Jerusalem to the east and west. Jerusalem will be raised up, while the rest of the land will become a plain. The ferocity of God's wrath is shocking. There is great slaughter and retribution against rebellious mankind in the final moments before the Messiah returns to claim victory.

Ps. 2:1-2 Why are the nations in an uproar, and their people involved in a vain plot? *As the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his anointed one, they seek to throw off perceived shackles, and cast off their chains.*

Isa. 2:17-19 *Humanity's haughtiness will be humbled, male arrogance will be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. Their idols will utterly vanish. They will enter caverns in the rocks and holes in the ground to escape the terror of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty when he arises to terrify the earth.*

Isa. 13:9-13 *The Day of the Lord is coming – cruel, with wrath and fierce anger – to turn the entire inhabited earth into a desolation and to annihilate sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their*

constellations won't shine their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon won't shine its light. *The Lord will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity.* He'll put an end to the pomposity of the arrogant and overthrow the insolence of tyrants. He'll make mankind scarcer than pure gold. He'll make the heavens tremble. *The earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord.*

Isa. 24:19-23 *The earth is utterly shattered and split apart, and violently shaken.* The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard and sways like a hut. Its transgression lies so heavy upon it, that it falls, never to rise again. At that time, *the Lord will punish the armies of the exalted ones in the heavens, and the rulers of the earth on earth.* They'll be herded together into the Pit and shut up in prison, and after many days they'll be punished. Then the moon will be embarrassed and the sun ashamed, for *the Lord will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem; and in the presence of its elders there will be glory.*

Isa. 29:5-6, 8b The hordes of your enemies will become like fine dust, and the hordes of tyrants like flying chaff. Then *suddenly, in an instant, you will be visited by the Lord – with thunder, an earthquake, and great noise, with a windstorm, a tempest, and flames from a devouring fire. So will it be with the hordes of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion.*

Isa. 34:2-4, 8 *The Lord is angry against all the nations, and furious against all their armies.* He has doomed them to destruction and given them up to be slaughtered. Their slain will be thrown out; and as for their dead bodies – their stench will ascend; the mountains will be

soaked with their blood. The valleys will be split, all the stars in the heavens will fall down, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll. All their starry host will fade away like leaves withering on a vine. For *the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for Zion's cause.*

Joel 2:1-11 *Sound the ram's horn in Zion! Tremble, all of you inhabitants of the land, because the Day of the Lord is coming. A day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadows like the dawn spreading out to cover the mountains—a people strong and robust. Never has there been anything like it, neither will anything follow to compare with it. A fire blazes in their presence, and behind them a conflagration rages. Before they come, the land is like the garden of Eden; after they leave, there is only a barren wasteland. Nothing escapes them. As to their form, they're like horses, and how they can run! They leap like the rumbling of chariots echoing from mountain tops, like the roar of wild fire that devours the chaff, like an army firmly established in battle array. The people are terrified by their presence; every face grows pale. They run like elite soldiers, climbing ramparts like men trained for war. The land quivers in their presence; even the heavens shake. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will shout in the presence of his forces, because his encampment is very great; for powerful is he who carries out his message. Truly the Day of the Lord is great, and very terrifying. Who will be able to survive it?*

Joel 2:30 – 3:2, 12-16 I will display warnings in the heavens, and on the earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. *The sun will be*

*darkened, and the moon will redden, before the coming of the great and terrifying Day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling. At that time, when I restore prosperity to Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations, bringing them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. I will set out my case against them there, on behalf of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they scattered among the nations, apportioning my land among themselves. Let the nations be awakened and come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; because I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, because the harvest is ripe. Come and go down, because the winepress is full. The wine vats are overflowing, because their evil is great! Multitudes, multitudes, in the Valley of Judgment! For the day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Judgment! The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will stop shining. *The Lord will roar from Zion, and shout from Jerusalem.* The heavens and the earth will shake, but the Lord will be a refuge and strength for his people Israel.*

Zeph. 1:14-18 *The great day of the Lord approaches.* The sound of the Day of the Lord includes the bitter cry of the mighty soldier. That day will be filled with wrath, a day of trouble and tribulation, a day of desolation and devastation, a day of doom and gloom, a day of clouds and shadows, a day of trumpet and battle cry against fortified cities and watch towers. And the Lord will bring so much distress to people that they will walk around like the blind. *Because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood will be poured out like*

dust and their intestines will spill out like manure. Neither their silver nor their gold will deliver them in the Day of the Lord's wrath; *But the entire earth will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy, for he will bring the inhabitants of the earth to a sudden end.*

Zeph. 3:8-9 The Day will come when the Lord stands up as a prosecutor, for he's *determined to assemble the nations and to gather the kingdoms, in order to pour out his indignation upon them. All the earth will be consumed by the fire of his jealousy.* Then he will return his people to a pure language so that they all call upon the name of the Lord, serving him with a united will.

Hag. 2:6-7 Once more, in a little while, the Lord will make the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land to shake. *He'll shake all nations, and the One desired by all nations will come.*

Zech. 12:1-9 The Lord, who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundation of the earth, and who frames the spirit of man within himself, declares that he's *making Jerusalem an unstable cup toward all of its surrounding armies when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. He'll make Jerusalem a heavy weight, so that everyone who burdens themselves with it will be crushed, even though all of the nations of the earth gather against it.* The Lord will strike every horse with panic and every rider with insanity. He'll keep an eye on the house of Judah, but he'll blind every horse of the invading armies. He'll make the leaders of Judah like a torch setting fire to harvested grain. *They'll devour all the invading armies and Jerusalem will again be inhabited in its rightful place—as the real Jerusalem.* The Lord will deliver Judah first, so that neither the glory of the house of David

nor the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem overshadows Judah. The Lord will defend those who live in Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them will be like David. The entire house of David will be like God. *At that time, the Lord will search out and destroy all of the nations who have come against Jerusalem.*

Zech. 13:7-9 The Lord commands the sword to rise against his shepherd, against the mighty one who is related to him, to strike the shepherd, so that the sheep will be scattered. He added that *two thirds of the people living in the land would die, but a third would survive. The Lord will bring that surviving third through, testing them as if through fire, purifying them like silver, assaying them like gold. They will call on his name, and he will answer them and say, these are his people, and they will say, the Lord is their God.*

Zech. 14:1-15 A day is coming for the Lord, when Jerusalem's plunder will be divided in its midst. The Lord will *gather all the nations against Jerusalem, to lay siege against it. The city will be captured, the houses will be ransacked, the women raped, and half of the city will go into exile, but the remaining people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go out to battle against those nations, waging war as in a day of battle. His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem.* Then the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a very large valley, with half of the mountain moving toward the north and half toward the south. And then the Lord God will come, and all his holy ones will be accompanying him. At that time, flowing waters will run perennially from Jerusalem, half toward the Dead Sea and half to the

Mediterranean Sea. *The Lord will be king over all the earth at that time. There will be one Lord, and his name the only one.* The entire land will become like the Arabah plain from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem. It will be raised up and inhabited where it is. People will live there, there will be no more destruction, and Jerusalem will be safely inhabited. This will be the plague with which the Lord inflicts all of the people who have attacked Jerusalem: he will cause their flesh to rot away, even while they're standing on their feet. He will cause their eyes to rot away in their sockets, and their tongues to rot away in their mouths. At that time, they will be stricken with a terrible panic from the Lord. Everyone will attack each other. Judah, too, will fight at Jerusalem. Then the wealth of the surrounding nations will be gathered up: gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance.

The coming and reign of the Messiah

A ruling Messiah is promised, who will come to fight the nations attacking Jerusalem. The coming of the Lord, as depicted in Rev. 19:11-21 riding on a white horse, is very symbolic, but it does make it clear that at the end of this age the Lord Jesus will descend from heaven to Jerusalem during a time of warfare. He will empower the leaders of Judah and they will be victorious (Zech. 12:6). He will descend to earth and set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), which will split in two to form a great valley from east to west. The New Testament elaborates on this as we will see later.

Prepare the way of the Lord, cries a voice in the wilderness, make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isa. 40:3-5). The glory of the Lord will be revealed (1Peter 4:13) and all flesh will see it together (Rev. 1:7). The glory of the Lord will come from the east, and the sound of his coming will be like the sound of a waterfall, and the earth will shine with his glory (Ezek. 43:2). The glory of the Lord will enter the temple in Jerusalem from the gate facing east, and his glory will fill the temple (Ezek. 43:4-5). This is the Messiah, and he tells Ezekiel in his vision that this is the place of his throne and the place of the soles of his feet, where he will dwell among his people Israel forever (Ezek. 43:7). Zechariah says that the Lord will come and all his holy ones (Zech. 14:5b). The holy ones could be saints (Rev. 17:14, 1Thess. 3:13) or angels (Mt. 25:31, 2Thess. 1:7). The Messiah will come from heaven with his angels, but when he comes to take up residence in the temple at Jerusalem, it is more likely to be the saints, who after their resurrection will be with him always. The Lord told Ezekiel that his servant David would be king over Israel in the land that he gave Jacob (Ezek. 37:24). His sanctuary would be among them forever. In the absence of Scriptures declaring that the Messiah will be physically present on earth during the millennium, and in light of Scriptures which indicate that there will be a bright light above Jerusalem (Isa. 60:1-3), it may be more likely that the Messiah will rule the world with his saints from New Jerusalem with his sanctuary in earthly Jerusalem, where the nations will come to worship.

Num. 24:17 Balaam said, he could see him, but not right now. He observed him, but from a distance. *He saw a star streaming forth from Jacob; a scepter arising from Israel.*

Deut. 18:15 *Moses told Israel that the Lord would raise up a prophet like himself for them from among their relatives.* They must listen to him. Peter identified this prophet as Jesus the Messiah and said that heaven must receive him until the time for restoring all things about which the prophets spoke.

2Sam. 7:11b-16 The Lord promised David he would build a house for him. When his life was complete, *the Lord would raise up one of his offspring and fortify his kingdom.* He will build a house (royal household) dedicated to the Lord's name, and *the Lord will make the throne of his kingdom last forever.* He will be a father to him, and he will be to the Lord a son. *David's dynasty and his kingdom would remain forever, and his throne will be secure forever.* See also 1Chron. 17:1-14 and Ps. 89:3-4. This prophecy was partially fulfilled by David's son Solomon, but according to Lk. 1:32-33 it was also fulfilled by Jesus.

Ps. 2:4-9 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord scoffs at the rebellious nations. In his anger he rebukes them, and in his wrath, he terrifies them. He said he *has set his King on Zion, his holy mountain.* This is the decree of the Lord spoken to the Messiah: *"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. You will break them with an iron rod, you will shatter them like pottery."*

Ps. 110:1-2, 5-6 The Lord God told David's Lord (the Messiah) that he should sit at his right hand (in heaven) until he makes his enemies his footstool. *When the Lord God extends his mighty scepter from Zion, he will rule in the midst of your enemies.* The Lord God is at the Messiah's right hand on his earthly throne and he will utterly destroy kings in the time of his wrath. He will execute judgment against the nations, filling graves with corpses. He will utterly destroy leaders far and wide. The first verse is the Father's invitation to the Messiah to sit at his right hand on his throne in heaven at the ascension. In the rest of the Psalm, the Messiah is seated on his Davidic throne as the Father's regent. Cf. Rev. 3:21.

Isa. 9:6-7 is quoted at the beginning of the chapter.

Isa. 11:1-5 *A shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will bear fruit from his roots. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. He won't judge by what his eyes see, nor decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he will judge the needy, and decide with equity for earth's poor. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and the wicked will be killed with the breath of his lips. Righteousness will be the sash around his loins, and faithfulness the belt around his waist.*

Isa. 32:1-2 *A king (the Messiah) will reign in righteousness, and rulers (the saints) will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from*

the wind, and a hiding place from storms, like streams of water in the desert, in the shadow of a great rock in an exhausted land.

Jer. 33:14-17 The Lord will fulfill the good promise that he spoke concerning Israel and Judah. In those days he'll *cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he'll uphold justice and righteousness in the land.* Judah will be delivered, and Jerusalem will dwell in safety. And this is the name people will call it: 'The Lord is Our Righteousness'. For the Lord says that *David will never be without a man sitting on Israel's throne.*

Ezek. 34:23-24 Then *the Lord will install one shepherd for them - his servant David - and he will feed them and be there for them and will serve as their shepherd. The Lord will be their God, and his servant David will rule among them as Prince.*

The conversion of Israel

Paul's word in Romans is very relevant here. He told the Roman Christians that stubbornness had come to part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles comes to faith. In this way, all Israel would be saved, as Isaiah had written, saying, the Deliverer would come from Zion; he would remove ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:25-26). It can be ascertained from Revelation 11 that Israel, as a nation, will be ready for salvation at the Messiah's return. After the two witnesses ascend to heaven and an earthquake flattens one tenth of Jerusalem, the survivors give glory to God. God will pour out on them a spirit of grace and they will mourn for the one whom their ancestors had pierced (Zech. 12:10). The Israelis will be born again

of God's Spirit and be grafted back into that olive tree which is symbolic of the Spirit-filled people of God; it does not symbolize the kingdom.

Jer. 31:33-34 The Lord will make a covenant with Israel after those days, he'll put his law within them and will write it on their hearts. He'll be their God and they will be his people. No longer will a person teach his neighbor or his relative. Instead, they'll all know him, from the least to the greatest. The Lord will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.

Ezek. 36:24-27 The Lord is going to remove Israel from the nations, gather them from all of the countries, and bring them all back to their own land. He'll sprinkle clean water on them all, and they'll be cleansed from their impurity and from all of their idols. *The Lord is going to give them a new heart, and he's going to give them a new spirit within them.* He'll remove that rock-hard heart of theirs and replace it with one that's sensitive to him. He'll place his Spirit within them, empowering them to live according to his regulations and his just decrees.

Ezek. 37:23-28 Israel will never again defile themselves with their idols, with other loathsome things, or with any of their sins. The Lord will deliver them from all of the places where they have sinned *and then he'll cleanse them. They will be his people, and he will be their God. His servant David will be their king.* They will live according to his decrees, keeping his regulations and practicing them. *They will live in the land that the Lord gave to Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived along with their children and their grandchildren forever. The*

Messiah will be their everlasting leader. He'll make a secure covenant with them, one that will last forever. The Lord will establish them, make them increase in population, and *will place his sanctuary in their midst forever.* He will pitch his tent among them and will be their God. They will be his people, and the nations will learn that the Lord is the sanctifier of Israel *when he places his sanctuary in their midst forever.*

Ezek. 39:28-29 Israel will learn that the Lord is their God. He sent them into exile and then gathered them back to their land. He won't leave any of them remaining in exile. He'll no longer hide his presence from them when he pours out his Spirit on them.

Joel 2:28-32 It will come about at a later time that the Lord will pour out his Spirit on everyone. Their sons and their daughters will prophesy, their elderly people will dream dreams, and their young people will see visions. The Lord will pour out his Spirit upon men and women servants. He'll display warnings in the heavens, and on earth blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be given over to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and terrifying day of the Lord. And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered. In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, the survivors whom the Lord is calling.

Zech. 12:10 The Lord *will pour out on the house of David and on the residents of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of supplications, and they will look the Lord whom they pierced.* Then they will mourn for him,

as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him, as for a firstborn son.

Zech. 13:1 *At that time, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for those who live in Jerusalem, so they can be cleansed from sin and ceremonial impurity.*

These promises concerning the conversion of Israel have never been fulfilled. It will happen in these last days, now that they are once again living in the land of Israel, and the greater son of David will be there for them. Their salvation as a nation will be a separate act of grace to that of the church. Born-again members of the church have the promise of becoming heirs of the Messianic kingdom, but when all Israel is saved, their promises are earthly. The land promised to Abraham will be theirs, the Messiah's sanctuary will be in Jerusalem. The nations will come to worship the Lord in Israel and their kings will bring their wealth to Jerusalem.

The Messiah's reign from Jerusalem

The world will be ruled over by a human descendant of David, who is himself divine. He will rule from Jerusalem after the kingdoms of this world have been brought to a sudden and catastrophic end. The survivors of Israel and the nations will be the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom during the millennium on this present earth that he will renew. The saints who have been resurrected will inherit the kingdom and rule with the Messiah.

The Davidic monarchy is inextricably bound to Jerusalem and particularly to the hill called Mount Zion. Solomon built his palace

with a throne hall and a hall of justice, but there is no mention of such structures during the millennium; all emphasis is on the temple. It seems that the Messiah will rule over Israel and the nations from the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2).

There will be universal peace, justice and righteousness, and disputes will be settled peacefully. There will be universal knowledge of the Lord, with teaching coming from Jerusalem, and all nations will come to worship the Lord at his temple in Jerusalem. There will be a gradual restoration of the original conditions in the world, called a rebirth or renewal in Mt. 19:28, resulting in improved climate, productive land, taming of wild animals, less sickness, and longer lifespans. There will be an end of secularism, and no longer any distinction between holy and profane. At the end of the millennium all enemies and all curses will have been eliminated.

Jesus stresses that his throne will be glorious (Mt. 19:28 and 25:31). His throne will be in the New Jerusalem which will shine with the glory of God above earthly Jerusalem.

Ps. 2:6, 8 God the Father has set his Son (the Messiah) on Zion, his holy mountain. He tells him to ask, and he will give him the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession.

Ps. 110:2 The Father will extend the Messiah's mighty scepter from Zion, and he will rule in the midst of his enemies.

Ps. 132:13-14 The Lord has chosen Zion, desiring it as his dwelling place. It will be his resting place forever. He will live there, because that is his desire.

Issa. 2:2-4 In the last days, the mountain that is the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains and will be raised above the hills. All the nations will stream to it. Many groups of people will come, saying, Let's go up to the temple of Jacob's God, that we may be taught his ways, and let's walk in his paths. Instruction will proceed from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Isa. 4:5 The Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and *the shining of a flaming fire* by night.

Isa. 24:23 The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the *Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem* and there will be *glory* in the presence of its elders.

Isa. 52:7-10 *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one who brings news of peace, who announces good tidings and salvation and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'.* Zion's watchmen lift up their voices and sing joyfully together, because they will see with their own eyes the return of the Lord *to Zion*. The ruins of *Jerusalem* will *rejoice*, because the Lord has comforted his people and redeemed *Jerusalem*. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; *all the ends of the earth will see God's salvation*.

Isa. 60:19 The sun will no longer be Jerusalem's light by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will be *her everlasting light*, and her God will be *her glory*.

Isa. 62 is an impassioned plea for the vindication of Jerusalem. God has worked with the rebellious descendants of Abraham for 4,000 years and for the last 2,000 years Jerusalem has been in the hands of the Gentiles. It is inconceivable that the world could come to an end without God finally revealing to everyone that Israel is his chosen race and Jerusalem is his chosen city.

Isa. 62:1-7 For Zion's sake *I won't remain silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I won't stay quiet, until her vindication shines out like brightness, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations will see her vindication, and all the kings her glory;* and people will call her by a new name that the Lord will bestow. Jerusalem will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand. She'll no longer be called 'Deserted,' and her land will no longer be called 'Desolate'; people will call her 'Hephzibah' (my delight is in her), and her land 'Beulah' (married) - for the Lord will take delight in her, and her land will be married. Just as a young man marries a maiden, so her sons will marry her. Just as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so God will rejoice over her. I have posted watchmen on Jerusalem's walls. *May those who call on the Lord take no rest and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.*

Ezek. 37:27-28 My dwelling place will be with them. I'll be their God and they'll be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when *my sanctuary is among them forever*.

Mic. 4:6-8 The Lord will assemble the lame, and he'll gather those whom he scattered, and those whom he afflicted. He'll transform the lame into survivors and the scattered into a strong nation. *The Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.* And you, watchtower of the flock and stronghold of the daughter of Zion, it will happen even to you: *The former dominion will be restored, kingship will return to Jerusalem.*

Zech. 2:4-5, 10-13 Jerusalem will be an inhabited city without walls due to the number of people and livestock in it. And the Lord will be *an encircling rampart of fire, and the glory in her midst.* The Messiah will *come and live among them. Many nations will be joined to the Lord at that time and will be his people. The Messiah will live among Israel, and they'll know that God has sent him to them.*

Zech. 8:2-8 The Lord says he is *burning with jealousy about Zion. He'll return to Zion and live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called, 'The City of Truth' and the mountain of the Lord will be called, 'The Holy Mountain'.* There will yet be old men and old women sitting in the parks of *Jerusalem*, each of them holding canes in their hands due to their old age! The city parks will be filled with boys and girls. They will play in the city's open parks. It may seem impossible to the survivors, but it is not impossible for the Lord. After having saved his people from the east and the west, he'll bring them back to live in *Jerusalem*. They'll be his people and he'll be their faithful and righteous God. This prophecy was partly fulfilled after the Babylonian captivity, but Keil comments, "Jerusalem becomes a faithful city for the first time through the Messiah, and it is through

him that the temple mountain first really becomes the holy mountain” (p.312).

Zech. 14:16-17 *All of the survivors of the nations who came against Jerusalem will go there yearly to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to observe the Festival of Tents. If any of the peoples of the earth don't go to Jerusalem to worship the King, there will be no rain for them.*

Justice, righteousness, peace, and the knowledge of the Lord

Both Jew and Gentile will benefit from the ideal conditions under the reign of the Messiah. He will ensure that fairness and right prevail everywhere. Even wild animals will become peaceful as the curse is lifted from the world.

Isa. 11:6-9 The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf and the lion will graze together, and a little child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, and their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on viper's dens. *They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Isa. 51:4-5 The Lord tells Israel that *instruction will go out from him, and his justice will become a light for the nations. His arm will bring justice to the nations; the coastlands will hope in him and wait for his help.*

Jer. 33:15 In those days the Lord will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Messiah's kingdom is international

Jesus' expression 'the kingdom of God' is not geographical; it expresses the Messiah's sovereignty, his royal authority or kingship. But the messianic prophecies are clearly geographical. The rule is centered in Jerusalem and encompasses the whole world.

Ps. 2:8 The Father tells the Son he *will give him the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession.*

Ps. 22:27-28 *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations will bow in submission to the Lord.* For kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

Ps. 72:8, 11, 17b May he rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. May all kings bow down to him, and all nations serve him. *May his fame be eternal – as long as the sun – may his name endure, and may they be blessed through him and may all nations call him blessed.*

Ps. 86:9 *All the nations that you have established will come and worship you, my Lord, they will honor your name.*

Isa. 11:10 At that time, the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, *the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Isa. 60:3, 10a Nations will come to your light, and kings before your dawn. Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. The whole chapter describes the peace and prosperity of the future glorified Zion and its political domination of the nations.

Messiah's kingdom is eternal

2Sam. 7:16 *Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain forever in my presence - your throne will be secure forever.* This promise of an everlasting kingdom for the house of David became the focal point for many prophecies and influenced the development of the messianic hope in Israel.

Ps. 89:27-29 *I myself made him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.* I will show my gracious love toward him forever, since my covenant is securely established with him. *I will establish his dynasty forever, and his throne as long as heaven endures.*

Ps. 89:35-37 I have sworn by my holiness once for all: I will not lie to David. *His dynasty will last forever, and his throne will be like the sun before me.* It will be established forever like the moon, a faithful witness in the sky.

Ps. 110:4 The Lord took an oath and will never recant: You are a priest *forever*, after the manner of Melchizedek.

Dan. 2:44-45 During the reigns of those kings, *God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed*, nor its sovereignty left in the hands of another people. It will shatter and crush all of these kingdoms and it will stand forever.

Dan. 7:14 *To him dominion was bestowed, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all people, nations, and languages are to serve him. His dominion is an everlasting kingdom; it will never pass away. His kingdom will never be destroyed.*

Lk. 1:32-33 *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end.*

The saints will rule with the Messiah

A significant 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 Ex. 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 'for ever and ever', raised to the superlative degree."

Dan. 7:18 But *the saints of the Highest will receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever.*

Dan. 7:26-27 The court will convene, and the Antichrist's authority will be removed, annulled, and destroyed forever. Then *the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the earth will be given to the saints of the Most High.* His kingdom will endure forever, and all authorities will serve and obey him.

What impact did these Old Testament prophecies have on Jewish thinking at the time of Jesus? 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 was going to happen? 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 fulfilment 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' (Mt. 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."

Appendix 5

Chiliasm

Chiliasm or Millennialism

χίλια is the Greek word for 1000, from which the word chiliasm is formed. Chiliasm is the belief that after his return, the Messiah will rule the world for 1000 years. Today we call this premillennialism.

There are six occurrences of the word χίλια in Rev. 20:2-7:

20:2 An angel will seize the Dragon, that old serpent, the devil, Satan, and bind him in chains for 1000 years.

20:3 Satan will be thrown into the Abyss, so that he can't deceive the nations until the 1000 years are finished.

20:4 The souls of the martyrs will come to life and reign with the Messiah for 1000 years. The first resurrection.

20:5 The rest of the dead will not come back to life until the 1000 years have ended.

20:6 The saints will be priests of God and of the Messiah and will reign with him 1000 years.

20:7 When the 1000 years end, Satan will be let out of his prison.

There is much evidence in both Old and New Testaments for a Messianic reign following the Messiah's return to earth, but the above verses are the only evidence that its duration will be 1000 years, a millennium. The period of forty years is used rather loosely

for Israel's wandering in the wilderness and the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. The meaning of 1000 is often not strictly literal, but it is obviously meant to convey the meaning of a very long time, if not close to 1000 years. There is no reason to say it will be more or less.

Chiliasm in the early church

The apostolic history shows us that many of the church fathers leaned toward this view. So, for example Corinthes, who is thought to have been a contemporary of the Apostle John. He believed that the Messiah would have an earthly reign lasting 1000 years with his seat in Jerusalem. Papias in the middle of the second century held the same view. Likewise, Justin Martyr (about 150 AD), who said that the majority of Christians of his time were looking forward to an earthly kingdom. But he added that there were also good Christians who had other opinions. Irenaeus (latter part of 2nd century) believed that after the destruction of the Roman Empire, the Messiah would return and would literally bind Satan with a rope.

From the third century to the Reformation

Chiliasm made little progress in the church during this time. The decline can largely be ascribed to the extension of Christianity to new countries and to the unbroken prosperity which the church then enjoyed. The Gnostic philosophy of this period and the Alexandrian school with its allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures were also a great detriment to the progress of chiliasm. By far the most

important figure of this period was the great church father Augustine, whose far-reaching influence in this matter extended beyond the Reformation, as his views on this were in the main, accepted by the four great reformers of the sixteenth century. Augustine believed the Old Testament prophecies and Revelation 20 were to be interpreted spiritually, symbolical of the eternal glory which the church would receive in the other world.

At the time of the crusades, it was again thought that the coming of the Messiah was at hand, in consequence of which many Christian worshippers returned to Palestine. Whenever war or persecution was present, chiliasm again received a fresh impetus. In that way, it found acceptance by several sects in the middle ages, but from the time of Augustine up to the Reformation, chiliasm had little influence in the Christian church.

The view of the Reformed Church on this subject finds expression in the Confession Helvetica, — “We reject the Jewish fancy that there shall be before the day of judgment a golden age in which the pious shall take over the control of the world after their enemies, the ungodly, have been subdued, because the Evangelists Matthew and Luke, as seen in Mt. 24-25 and in Lk. 18, and also in the apostolic teachings as found in 2Thess. 2 and in 2Tim. 2, 4, give us quite a different representation,” (Article on Judgment, translated from Dutch). So also, in the ‘Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis’, no mention is made of a glorious reign of peace and prosperity of the Messiah and the believers and of a double resurrection after the coming of the Messiah. The last article of this confession explicitly

states that the resurrection and last judgment shall both take place at the time of the Messiah's coming.

A quick glance at these chapters will soon show that their arguments are weak. It is an argument from silence. Just because something is not mentioned somewhere doesn't mean it is not true, and especially if it is attested by other Scriptures. Paul taught that at the Messiah's return the dead in Christ will rise from their graves (1Thess. 4:16). There is no evidence here of a general resurrection, only Christians are mentioned. And Paul said that each person will be resurrected in the proper order: first the Messiah, then those who belong to the Messiah, when he comes (1Cor. 15:23). He doesn't even mention the resurrection of the wicked, perhaps he is concentrating on those who receive an immortal, supernatural body at resurrection. Which leaves us with the question as to whether the wicked will be resurrected bodily. Rev. 20:13 simply says that the sea and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. But in Jn. 5:28-29 Jesus says that a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out, some to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of judgment. Rising from the grave sounds like a bodily resurrection.

Two resurrections

Paul says that the Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command and the dead in Christ will rise, but he says nothing about the wicked. He is only interested in the resurrection and rapture of the righteous.

Dan. 12:2 and Jn. 5:29 don't make a distinction in the timings of the resurrections of the righteous and the wicked, but because of progressive revelation, we must respect the apostle John's words, that the martyrs will come back to life and rule with the Messiah for 1000 years, but the rest of the dead won't come to life until the 1000 years are over. Rev. 20:4b-5 calls the resurrection of the martyrs 'the first resurrection', so there must be a second.

The saints of all ages will be resurrected at this time, not just those who were beheaded in the Great Tribulation, because all will reign with the Messiah. The martyrs are singled out for special mention as they are in focus during the final years of this age. Rev. 5:9-10 says explicitly that the Messiah purchased people from every tribe, language, people, and nation and made them to be a monarchy and priests for God, and that they would reign *over the earth*. In addition, Dan. 7:27 says that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations *of the earth* would be given to the saints of the Most High. And Paul says that if we die with the Messiah, we'll also reign with him, and if we endure, we also reign with him (2Tim. 2:8a, 11-12a)

Mt. 24 and parallel passages are concerned with signs leading up to the Lord's return, not with events that follow. But Matthew does record Jesus' teaching about his reign on earth. Jesus said, when he comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he'll sit on his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him (Mt. 25: 31-32a). Again, he said, when he sits on his glorious throne in the new age, his disciples will also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). Both those

passages make it clear that the Messiah's reign and judgment will take place here on earth.

John Calvin wrote in his Institutes that millennialism is a 'fiction' that is 'too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation'. The Anglican Church originally formalized a statement against millenarianism in the Anglican Articles. This is observed in the 41st of the Anglican Articles, drawn up by Thomas Cranmer (1553), describing the millennium as a 'fable of Jewish dotage', but it was omitted at a later time in the revision under Elizabeth (1563). John Calvin was a great theologian, but he didn't say much about eschatology, it wasn't his strength. In his commentary of the New Testament he omitted the book of Revelation. In fact, all the major Protestant Reformers neglected the apocalyptic Scriptures, and they especially ignored the messianic reign. They embraced the return of the Messiah, judgment day, and the existence of heaven and hell, but influenced by Augustine and Platonic thinking, they were too heavenly minded to see a bright future for this material world. Augustine's idea was that the kingdom of God consisted of eternal life with God in heaven. And unfortunately, this is what most people in the traditional churches still believe today.

To say that millennialism is a fiction is not true. Revelation 20 speaks of the millennium six times, and twice it is stated that those who share in the first resurrection would reign with the Messiah for 1000 years. It is a formidable challenge to have great theologians like the Reformers and Augustine speaking against chiliasm. I hope

the arguments presented in this book equating the kingdom of God with Messiah's reign will throw more light on the subject.

In Roman Catholic theology, the kingdom of God is identified with the Roman Catholic Church, an identification again due to Augustine's influence. The Reformers emphasized the spiritual and invisible side of the kingdom, a spiritual sovereignty that is exercised through the preaching of the word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. With the Enlightenment the kingdom came to be increasingly understood as individualistic; grace and peace ruling in people's hearts. Then in liberal theology it developed in a moralistic direction, or in the forward march of social righteousness and communal development. How far from the truth things develop when the thoughts of man become more important than the natural interpretation of God's word.

Amillennialism

Following are the general beliefs of people with an amillennial persuasion:

1. They reject the idea that Jesus will reign over the earth for a 1000-year period.
2. They hold that the kingdom of God equates with the church and the spread of the gospel.
3. They hold that the Messiah is presently reigning through the church.

4. They hold that Satan was bound from the ascension, or Pentecost, so that he is prevented from deceiving the nations!

5. They hold that the saints reign spiritually on earth (Augustine) or that they will reign with the Messiah in heaven.

6. They hold that the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6) refers to either regeneration (Augustine) or ascension to heaven (Hoekema and Hendriksen).

It is not just the way different sides interpret the kingdom of God that is important, a correct interpretation should result in all the kingdom of God verses having a satisfactory consistent meaning. I believe that this can only occur when we look at them through the right colored glasses. Rather than starting off with a certain philosophical or eschatological view like amillennialism, and then trying to interpret the New Testament accordingly, we need to start by recognizing that the Gospels were written as a record of the arrival of the prophesied Jewish Messiah, and that Jesus' use of the terms 'Son of Man' and 'kingdom of God' are to be interpreted as referring to the Messiah and his reign respectively.

It is sometimes claimed by amillennialists that when Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not *from* this world (Jn. 18:36), he gave evidence that the kingdom of God was not an earthly kingdom. But most commentaries are agreed that the Greek text relates to the source and nature of the kingdom. The preposition 'ek' typically means 'from'. Jesus was not denying that his kingdom would be in

the world, he was saying that his kingdom was from God and not from man.

It is also claimed that the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus and the apostles is unaccompanied by millennial ideas. Jesus didn't mention the millennium, but the following verses certainly refer to the messianic reign, especially in terms of first century Jewish thought: Mt. 8:11, 19:28, 25:31-34, Lk. 22:39-30. Apart from Jesus' own words, the Gospel writers have added more material: Mk. 11:10, Lk. 1:32-33. The book of Revelation is all about the Messiah and his final victory over evil and his enemies. The climax is expressed in kingdom terms: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). BAG interprets it as: Our Lord has assumed the sovereignty of the world. In both Rev. 11:17 and Rev. 19:6 we are told that the Lord God Almighty has begun to reign. The verb is an inceptive aorist; it is the Messiah who has begun his reign on earth.

There are some amillennialists (Hoekema, Storms) who see the necessity of an earthly reign of Israel to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies, so that Messiah's reign might be disclosed in history (Storms p. 348). Storms' alternative to the 1000-year millennium is that these promises will be fulfilled on a new earth, which inaugurates the eternal state! However, can it be called historical when it no longer happens on this current earth? When this present earth disappears (Rev. 20:11), the Messiah will hand over his

kingdom to the Father. We have no revelation of what happens after that.

Amillennialists claim that their teaching on the kingdom of God has no national limitations. It is true that Jesus and the apostles avoid talking about Israel and Jerusalem in this context, and there were political reasons for that, but Paul in Rom. 11:25-26 endorses the prophecy that a Deliverer would come from Zion and banish ungodliness from Jacob, and that all Israel would be saved. He spends the whole of chapter 11 stressing the fact that God has a future for Israel. He said a partial hardening had come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in.

Jesus left no doubt that he was the awaited Jewish Messiah. The Old Testament prophecies provide us with many details, and some of these are quoted in the New Testament. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, he said that David was a prophet who knew that God had promised with an unbreakable oath that one of his own descendants would sit on his throne (Acts 2:30). Where else could that be but Jerusalem? And who else but Jesus, the Messiah?

The most compelling evidence for a rebuilt temple in the last days is in Paul's words to the Thessalonians about the man of sin, the Antichrist. Paul said he will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship and seat himself in the sanctuary of God and declare that he is God (2Thess. 2:4). The Greek word *ναός* is the normal word for temple, or more specifically the inner sanctuary. In his arrogance, the Antichrist will exalt himself above God. In the current political situation, building a new temple at

Mount Moriah would be highly controversial, however, a Jewish group has already made the plans and furnishings for a new temple. On comparing this verse with Mt. 24:15, it undoubtedly refers to a temple in Jerusalem.

As to the restrainer in 2Thess. 2:7, God is the ultimate restrainer of lawlessness, but what means does he employ? That restraint has always existed and enabled human society to be law-abiding, because God's moral law was written on their hearts. But the secularization of society will result in the Judeo-Christian ethical code being rejected. That is the rebellion (2Thess. 2:3). Paul says the Day of the Lord and Jesus' return will not occur unless the rebellion comes first. Society will rebel against God. With globalization, that will mean a worldwide rejection of God, the church and Israel. The Bible will be banned. There will be apostasy in the church. The power of the state to maintain order will break down and a lawless man will get his chance to rule the world. This rejection of God's moral law is happening right now, it doesn't need the rapture to allow it to happen. The secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the restrainer will continue to restrain, until he is removed, and then the lawless one will be revealed (2Thess. 2:7-8a).

Most amillennialists claim that there is no expectation of the renewal of this world. But Jesus spoke about a time when the Messiah would sit on his glorious throne in the renewed creation. Jesus said there is no one who has given up all for the kingdom of God who will not receive many times as much *in this world*, as well

as eternal life *in the age to come* (Lk. 18:30). And Paul said that *the creation itself would also be set free from corrupting bondage in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children* (Rom. 8:21). Peter also preached about the restoration of the world. The Messiah must remain in heaven until *the time of universal restitution*, which God announced long ago through the voice of his holy prophets (Acts 3:21).

Amillennialists hold that there is only one resurrection, even though there are at least six verses scattered throughout the New Testament that lead us to believe otherwise. In Mt. 24:31 it is *the elect* whom the angels gather from the four winds. On comparing this verse with 1Cor. 15:52 and 1Thess. 4:16-17, there can be no doubt that that gathering refers to the *resurrection of the righteous*. In Lk. 14:14 Jesus tells his Pharisee host that he would be repaid for his good deed in *the resurrection of the righteous*. In Lk. 20:35, Jesus speaks of *those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age* and in the resurrection *from* the dead. This resurrection of the righteous immediately precedes the messianic age. In 1Cor. 15:23, it is *those who belong to the Messiah* who are resurrected. In 1Thess. 4:16 it is *the dead in Christ* who will rise first, while 2Thess. 2:1 speaks of *our gathering together to him*. And finally, Rev. 20:4-5 says that the first resurrection precedes the resurrection of the rest of the dead by 1000 years!

Amillennialists leave no room for the saints to judge and rule the world and angels. They ask how perfect saints in glorified, resurrected bodies can live together with unbelievers during the

millennium. After Jesus' resurrection, he made appearances from another realm during a 40-day period before he ascended to heaven. We will be like him, so perhaps the saints in their resurrected bodies will be able to travel in the same way between earth and the New Jerusalem.

The basic problem with the amillennial interpretation of the last things is its orientation. Amillennialists start with the belief that heaven must be our home and destination; a result of Platonic dualism thinking. They feel that the earth is evil or beyond redemption and not a worthy place for the Messiah or God the Father to live or for the saints to spend eternity. So, when the Messiah comes, that's the end of planet earth for them; it must immediately be destroyed. However, when God created the earth, he put man in charge of it, and he himself walked in the garden in the cool of day. Despite being cursed because of sin, the Messiah will restore it during the millennium. He is not ashamed to call us his brothers, and together we will rule the world. Man is body, soul and spirit; without his body he is not complete, and his natural habitat is planet earth.

Amillennialism's Achilles heel

I will here present 19 New Testament passages, which from a normal, unbiased reading, collectively teach that the Messiah and his saints, will reign over the earth. In rejecting a literal kingdom on earth, amillennialists have developed their own reign of the Messiah and his saints from heaven, even though there is not one verse of Scripture which says Jesus is presently ruling or will ever rule the

earth from heaven. There are many references to the Messiah's exaltation to the right hand of the Father and his ministry in heaven, but not once does it say that the Messiah is ruling the earth from that position. It is the Father who rules the universe. Messiah's reign will be over the earth, and meanwhile he waits (Heb. 10:13).

Mt. 5:5 How blessed are those who are humble, because it is they who will *inherit the earth*.

Mt. 19:28 When the Messiah sits on his glorious throne *in the renewed creation*, his apostles will also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Mt. 25:31-32a When the Messiah comes in his glory and all the angels are with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All *the nations* will be assembled before him, and he will separate them, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Lk. 1:32-33 Jesus will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him *the throne of his ancestor David*. *He will rule over the house of Jacob forever*, and his kingdom will never end.

Lk. 17:19 The king told him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge of *ten cities*.

Lk. 22:29-30 I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred a kingdom on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table *in my kingdom* and sit down on thrones *to govern the twelve tribes of Israel*.

Rom. 8:17, 19 If we are children, we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah, if we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. *The creation* is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children.

1 Cor. 6:2 You know the saints will rule *the world*, don't you?

1Cor. 15:25 The Messiah must rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (Cf. Isa. 9:7).

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

Heb. 2:5, 8a For God did not put *the coming world* we are talking about under the control of angels ... *he put everything under man's feet*.

Rev. 2:27 He who conquers will rule *the nations* with an iron scepter, shattering them like clay pots.

Rev. 3:21 To the one who conquers *I will give a place to sit with me on my throne*, just as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Rev. 4:4 Around the throne were 24 other thrones, and on those thrones sat 24 elders wearing white robes and victor's crowns.

Rev. 5:10 You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign *on the earth*.

Rev. 11:15b, 17 *The kingdom of the world* has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will rule forever and ever. You have taken your great power and *have begun to rule*.

Rev. 12:5 The woman gave birth to a son, a boy, *who is to rule all the nations* with an iron scepter, but the child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne.

Rev. 19:15 A sharp sword comes out of his (the returning Messiah's) mouth to strike down *the nations*. *He will rule them* with an iron rod and tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and *those who sat on them were given authority to judge*. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. *They came back to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.*

Appendix 6

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