

THE KINGDOM

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Preface

The Bible has a lot to say about the kingdom of God. It tells what the kingdom of God is, who its King is, who its citizens are, and what its future will be. I hope that the answers to these questions will become clear as one reads the pages that follow.

I began compiling notes on the kingdom early in the 1980's when my wife and I lived in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Gary and Winnie Worley, our son-in-law and daughter, had encouraged me to write about the kingdom.

I thought, at first, to write only about the establishment of the kingdom, but afterwards I realized that the book would have to be about the reign of the King, too. So the book falls into two sections: (1) The establishment of the kingdom, and (2) the reign of the King. The subject of the kingdom is so large, however, that each chapter of the book is hardly more than an outline of what could be written.

The argument of this book is carried forward on the shoulders of the many passages of Scripture that are quoted for all to see. I attempted to cite Scripture references for as many of my comments as possible.

The scripture references are taken from The New King James Version of the Bible, published by the Thomas Nelson Publishers of Nashville, Tennessee, and quotations are made from it with their permission.

I want to thank James Andrews of Publishing Designs, Inc. in Huntsville, Alabama, for his kind and expert help in getting these notes ready for printing and also for helping me sharpen the questions at the end of each chapter. If any mistakes are left in the book, they are mine and not his.

I am thankful to God for His kingdom and am grateful to be in it. I wish I were a better citizen of it. I pray that this book will be an encouragement to those that read it.

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Lubbock, Texas
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1.

GOD IS KING

God had plans for the people on earth from the very beginning (1 Peter 1:20). In order to start developing these plans, God needed a man whom He could trust. Eventually, God found such a man. His name was Abraham. Abraham was unusual in that he believed in God and obeyed Him. God made a covenant with Abraham and with his descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). He agreed to be their God if they would be His people (Leviticus 26:12), and God promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17).

God also promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's family (Genesis 12:2-3).

Abraham's family lived in the land of Canaan for three generations. One of Abraham's grandsons, a man named Jacob (or "Israel"), had twelve sons. The twelve sons of Jacob became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. While Jacob was yet alive, he and his descendants went down to Egypt. When they went to Egypt, they were not yet a nation. They were only a single (but large) family. In Egypt, however, they multiplied so as to become a nation.

While the children of Israel were in Egypt, it was impossible for them to have a king of their own, for Pharaoh was their king. The children of Israel were Pharaoh's subjects. Eventually they became Pharaoh's slaves.

MOSES

God used a man named Moses to bring mighty plagues on the land of Egypt and to lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

Although Moses was a great leader, he did not aspire to being the king of Israel. He had enough problems just being God's representative and spokesman. Moses also did not try to appoint any person as king. He clearly understood that God was their King.

It was revealed to Moses that the time would come when the children of Israel would not be able to resist the temptation to have a king. Moses knew that the people would demand a king and that God would grant their request. Moses cautioned them, however, not to make a foreigner king over them but to take one of their own people, one whom the Lord would choose (Deuteronomy 17:15). Moses said that the king should not multiply horses nor cause the people to return

to Egypt (Deuteronomy 17:16). The king should also not take many wives for himself or heap up silver and gold (Deuteronomy 17:17).

IN THE LAND OF CANAAN

After the children of Israel came back into the land of Canaan, God was still their King. For two hundred years they had no king but were led by judges, whom the Lord chose.

The first man to whom the people offered the throne was a man named Gideon, who was one of the judges.

God had raised up Gideon in order to free the children of Israel from the Midianites, who oppressed them. The Midianites were Bedouins from the East that had come into the land of Canaan in great hordes. They were as numerous as grasshoppers, and they ate up all of the food. The children of Israel were so fearful of the Midianites that they hid in caves of the mountains. They cried out to God for help.

In response God sent them Gideon, who raised an army of 32,000 fighting men. God told Gideon that he had too many soldiers. God said,

“The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’”

Judges 7:2

So Gideon said to the army,

“Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once...”

Judges 7:3

The number of those that went home was 22,000, leaving Gideon with 10,000 fighting men. But God said,

“The people are still too many.”

Judges 7:4

So Gideon led his army down to water to get a drink. Everyone that lapped water out of his hand was chosen. The others, who knelt to drink, were sent home. This left Gideon with only 300 men.

With 300 men Gideon surrounded the camp of the Midianites by night. Each man had a torch and a trumpet in his hand. The torch was held under a pitcher. At a signal, the men broke their pitchers, blew their trumpets, and shouted,

“The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!”

Judges 7:20

This brought such fear to the hearts of the Midianites that they fled in disarray. As they fled, they began fighting among themselves. Gideon won a great victory, but it was God who directed him.

Following the battle, the children of Israel came to Gideon and requested that he become their king. They said to Gideon,

“Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”

Judges 8:22

Since this was not God’s idea but the idea of the people, Gideon refused to become their king. He said,

“I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.”

Judges 8:23

Gideon knew that God was their King and that they would be blessed as long as they submitted to Him. Yet there was a growing desire in the hearts of the people for an earthly king. They wanted to be like the other nations round about them. They wanted someone to fight their battles for them.

ABIMELECH’S ABORTIVE REIGN

One of Gideon’s sons, a man named Abimelech, was not as noble as his father. Abimelech went to his mother’s people, who lived at the city of Shechem and asked them if he could become their king.

The people of Shechem were worshippers of the idol Baal-Berith and did not understand that God was sovereign. They agreed for Abimelech to become their king, but Abimelech’s reign was not very significant. He began to reign without the approval of God. His kingdom was limited to a few cities in the center of the land of Canaan, and it lasted only about three years.

THE GROWING DESIRE FOR A KING

The last of the judges was a man named Samuel. He was devoted to God and judged the people well; but after he grew old, his sons did not follow in his ways. So the people said to Samuel,

“Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make for us a king to judge us like all the nations.”

1 Samuel 8:5

Samuel was very unhappy about their request. So he prayed to God about it, and God said to Samuel,

“Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not rein over them.”

1 Samuel 8:7

God told Samuel to warn the people what it would be like having a king. Samuel told them that the king would conscript some of their sons to serve in his army. Others of their sons would work in the king’s fields or make weapons for him. Their daughters would be forced to serve in his kitchens. Their fields, vineyards, and olive groves would be taken over by the king, and a tenth of their harvest would go to feed the king’s officers and servants. The king would take away their servants, their work animals and tenth of their sheep. The people would become the king’s servants (1 Samuel 8:11-17).

Yet, in spite of this warning, the people persisted in their desire for a king and said,

“No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

1 Samuel 8:19-20

The people thought that their weakness in the face of their enemies was due to their not having a king, but this was not the case at all. The cause of their weakness lay elsewhere. One can read in the book of Judges the real cause for their weakness. When things went well for them, they forgot about God and began to serve idols.

In order to correct the people and to bring them back to Himself, God allowed their enemies to afflict them. In their affliction, the people cried out to God; and He repeatedly sent them a savior, who was called a “judge.” The judge would free the people from their oppressors, and the people would be faithful to God for a while, but would soon fall again into idolatry. This happened over and over again.

In spite of the fact that the people were mistaken in thinking that a king would be able to protect them, God was willing for them to have a king. It was not God’s idea, however. It meant that they were rejecting His rule, but He was willing to go along with their idea and to use it in a way that was beyond their conception.

THE FIRST KING

The first king whom God chose to reign over the children of Israel was a young man named Saul. Saul was strong and handsome. He was taller by a head than the rest of the people of Israel. He possessed all of the physical attributes of a leader.

To indicate that Saul should be king, Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it over Saul’s head, kissed him and said to him,

“Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?”

1 Samuel 10:1

One result of the anointing of Saul was that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him so that he prophesied like one of the prophets (1 Samuel 10:6). This showed that God was willing to inspire and guide the kings of Israel in a very special way.

Yet, for all of his physical qualifications, Saul had an inner flaw. His flaw came to light on the very day of his presentation to the people as king. While the people were looking for him, Saul was hiding among the baggage.

Samuel made a very somber speech to the people about having a king. Samuel said,

“But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, ‘No, but set a king over us!’”

1 Samuel 10:19

Shortly after Samuel presented Saul to the people of Israel, the Ammonites attacked from the east. The Israelites appealed to Saul for help, and Saul gathered a large army and successfully warded off the Ammonites. This convinced the people that Saul was the man they had needed.

SAUL WAS MADE KING

The people gathered at Gilgal to make Saul king, and Samuel made another somber speech to the people, in which he reminded them of how the Lord had saved them from their enemies. He also reprimanded them for having asked for a king while God was their King (1 Samuel 12:12).

Finally, the people realized that they had done wrong and they said to Samuel,

“Pray for your servants to the Lord your God that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.”

1 Samuel 12:19

To underscore that the people had done wrong in asking for an earthly king, Samuel asked God to send thunder and rain that day. The people were greatly afraid when the storm came; and Samuel said to them,

“Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.”

1 Samuel 12:20

So Samuel promised the people that even though they had displeased God, God would not forsake them, for He had chosen them to be His people (1 Samuel 12:22).

SAUL REJECTED BY GOD

All during the days of King Saul, the Philistines, who lived to the west of the children of Israel, along the Mediterranean coast, afflicted them. Saul's son, Jonathan, attacked and overran a garrison of the Philistines. In retaliation, the Philistines gathered many chariots, horsemen and foot soldiers.

King Saul gathered his little army at Gilgal, where he remained for seven days, waiting for Samuel to arrive. Saul was waiting for Samuel to come and offer a sacrifice to God. Saul did not dare go into battle without seeking God's blessing.

While Samuel was delayed in arriving, Saul grew anxious. Although Saul was not authorized to offer sacrifices, since he was of the tribe of Benjamin rather than of Levi, Saul offered both a burnt offering and a peace offering.

When Samuel arrived, Samuel said to Saul,

“What have you done?”

1 Samuel 13:11

Saul began to make excuses for his actions. He said,

“When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.”

1 Samuel 13:11-12

Had Saul trusted in God, as he should have done, he would have waited for Samuel to arrive and would not have acted so rashly. This makes one wonder how much Saul really understood God. Samuel said to Saul,

“You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandments of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

1 Samuel 13:13-14

SAUL’S CONTINUING LACK OF GOOD JUDGMENT

Saul’s son Jonathan soon initiated another attack against the Philistines. Jonathan was so successful in the attack that the whole Philistine army was thrown into confusion. God sent panic among the Philistines and they began fighting among themselves.

When Saul and his warriors saw what Jonathan had done, they also attacked the Philistines. As they were on the verge of a great victory Saul again demonstrated his stupidity. He issued the following command:

“Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.”

1 Samuel 14:24

Due to this command, the complete victory for which Saul had hoped was not possible since his troops were exhausted because of their lack of nourishment. This was such a blunder on Saul’s part that even his son Jonathan said,

“My father has troubled the land.”

1 Samuel 14:29

SAUL’S DISOBEDIENCE INCREASED

Some time later, the prophet Samuel came to King Saul and told him to go and attack the Amalekites, who lived to the south, saying,

“Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them.”

1 Samuel 15:3

In compliance with God’s command, Saul got his army ready and marched southward. He fought against the Amalekites and conquered them, but he did not destroy all of them as God had said. He spared Agag, the king, and the best of Agag’s sheep and cattle.

As a consequence, God said to Samuel,

“I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.”

1 Samuel 15:11

Samuel was so grieved to hear what God said that he wept all night long. He arose the next morning and went to meet Saul just as Saul was returning from the south. When Saul saw Samuel, Saul said to him,

“Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”

1 Samuel 15:13

Samuel responded to Saul,

“What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

1 Samuel 15:14

Saul tried to excuse himself and to place the blame on the people. He said to Samuel,

“They [the people] have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

1 Samuel 15:15

Samuel said to Saul,

“Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord?”

1 Samuel 15:19

Saul replied to Samuel,

“But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord...”

1 Samuel 15:20

So Samuel asked Saul,

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord?”

1 Samuel 15:22

In addition, Samuel said to Saul:

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

1 Samuel 15:22-23

Samuel again stated that God had rejected Saul as king and said to Saul,

“Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.”

1 Samuel 15:23

This was bitter for Saul to hear; and as a result of his having been rejected by God, Saul became a sad and despondent king.

So, the experiment of having an earthly king over the house of Israel was not turning out very well. Saul had proven himself to be unworthy and God had rejected him.

God did not, however, reject the idea of the kingdom. Although the kingdom of Israel was not God's idea, He accepted it and built it into His plan for the future. What God did was to select a better man than Saul.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the government of the children of Israel would have been like if they had not chosen to have an earthly king?
2. What were some of Saul's personal characteristics that made him an obvious choice for king?
3. What were some of Saul's main weaknesses? Do some people today show the same weaknesses that Saul manifested? How do their weaknesses manifest themselves?
4. Did Saul have a false concept of God and of how to worship Him? What was it that Saul did not understand?
5. Do you think God was too harsh in dealing with Saul? Please explain your answer.
6. Does God sometimes allow us to have our own way, even though it may not be for the best? Why does He do that? What do you think?
7. Can God take our bad decisions and make something that is good come from them? Explain or illustrate your answer.
8. Do people today rely too much on the government to solve their problems and not enough on God? Please give some specific examples.

2.

DAVID BECAME KING

Since God could not rely upon King Saul to obey His commands, He chose someone to replace Saul as king of Israel.

It happened in this way: God sent Samuel to a place in Judah called Bethlehem. There, Samuel visited the family of a man named Jesse. Samuel arranged for Jesse's eight sons to pass before him. When the first son came by, he son was such a fine specimen of young manhood that Samuel thought surely he was the one, whom the Lord would choose; but the Lord said to Samuel,

“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”

1 Samuel 16:7

Then the second son came by, but Samuel said,

“Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”

1 Samuel 16:8

Seven of Jesse's sons passed before Samuel and none of them was chosen. Then Samuel said to Jesse,

“The Lord has not chosen these... Are all the young men here?”

1 Samuel 16:10-11

Jesse replied to Samuel,

“There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.”

1 Samuel 16:11

So David, who was a handsome young man with ruddy complexion and bright eyes, came before Samuel. Although David was hardly more than a boy the Lord said,

“Arise; anoint him; for this is the one!”

1 Samuel 16:12

Samuel took the horn, in which he carried the oil, and poured oil over David’s head; and the Spirit of the Lord left King Saul and came and rested upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:13).

DAVID’S BRAVERY

One of David’s outstanding qualities was his bravery, which was due to his trust in God. This was a character trait that Saul, tragically, did not have. Even as a young man, David had showed his bravery by defending his father’s sheep against a lion and a bear, killing them both.

Before David was full-grown, war broke out between Israel and the Philistines; and David’s brothers were called to serve in Saul’s army. So Jesse sent David to take food to his brothers.

When David brought food to his brothers, he began to ask questions about the giant, Goliath, who was standing in opposition to the children of Israel. The soldiers informed David that if anyone were to kill Goliath he would be given a rich reward and would be permitted to marry the king’s daughter.

Saul heard that there was a young man in the camp, who was talking bravely and asking questions about Goliath; so Saul sent for David to see if he would try to kill Goliath. When David came to Saul, David said to Saul,

“The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

1 Samuel 17:37

So Saul said to David,

“Go, and the Lord be with you!”

1 Samuel 17:37

Saul put his own armor on David, but it was so large that David could hardly walk in it. So David took the armor off and chose five smooth stones from a brook. With his slingshot in hand he approached Goliath. The giant Philistine made fun of him, but David replied,

“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.”

1 Samuel 17:45

David continued speaking to Goliath, saying,

“This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you, and take your head from you... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”

1 Samuel 17:46

As Goliath advanced, David began to run toward him. David put his hand into the pouch and took out a stone. He placed the stone in his sling, slung the stone, and hit Goliath in the forehead. This knocked the giant down. Then David took Goliath’s own sword and slew him with it. It was one of the greatest single-handed victories of all time!

Following this triumph, David became Saul’s shield bearer and married one of King Saul’s daughters. David also became a close friend to Jonathan, Saul’s son. The women of Israel began to sing a song about David, which went like this:

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”

1 Samuel 18:7

The song greatly annoyed King Saul. Saul became so jealous that he tried to take David’s life. Twice he threw his javelin at David but missed. So David fled from Saul and became a fugitive. People that were discontented with Saul gathered to David.

DAVID’S RESPECT FOR GOD’S “ANOINTED ONE”

When Saul was out hunting for David, Saul came to a cave in which David was hiding. One of David’s men said to David,

“This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’”

1 Samuel 24:4

But David replied,

“The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.”

1 Samuel 24:6

David secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Even this caused David’s conscience to hurt him (1 Samuel 24:5).

At a later date, while still fleeing from Saul, David slipped into Saul’s camp at night, along with Abishai, one of David’s men. They found Saul’s guards asleep. Abishai wanted to take Saul’s life, but David would not permit it. To Abishai David said,

“Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?”

1 Samuel 26:9

This shows that David respected the sanctity of God’s anointed king.

DAVID’S INNER LIFE

David’s psalms provide a window into his heart. He elevated God in his thinking. David wrote the following lines:

“O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!”

Psalms 8:1

David did not esteem himself or any man to be above God. He was amazed at the kindness that God had shown to mankind. He wrote:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that

You are mindful of him? And the Son of man that you visit him?"

Psalm 8:3-4

One can imagine David being in the desert and looking up at the stars at night and thinking of God; for he wrote:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."

Psalm 19:1-2

David was a deeply religious man and loved God with all of his heart.

DAVID BECAME KING

Ever since Samuel anointed David, David knew that he would one day be king of the nation of Israel; yet he did nothing to hasten that day. He waited for God to make him king. So only after both Saul and Jonathan had died in fighting the Philistines did David become king.

Only two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, acknowledged David at first to be their king. David reigned over these two tribes for seven years in the city of Hebron. After seven years, however, the other ten tribes accepted David, too.

One of David's great military victories was the capture of the Jebusite castle on Mount Zion at Jerusalem. The Jebusites were confident that David could never take their stronghold; so they said to David,

"You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you."
2 Samuel 5:6

David's men, however, found a way into Jerusalem and conquered the city. David built a house for himself on Mt. Zion and Jerusalem became his capital.

During his reign, David fought the battles of the Lord, thereby greatly enlarging the borders of the kingdom. God blessed David in many ways. He gave him wives, children, prosperity, along with the good will of his people.

The peak of David's career came when he brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. He was so happy that he danced before the ark as it was being brought into the city.

DAVID DESIRED TO BUILD A TEMPLE FOR GOD

David delighted in everything pertaining to God. He wanted to build a house for God, a great temple. So David said to Nathan, the prophet,

“See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains.”

2 Samuel 7:2

The prophet Nathan replied to David,

“Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”

2 Samuel 7:3

Afterwards the word of the Lord came to Nathan and said to him,

“Go and tell My servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build a house for Me to dwell in?’

2 Samuel 7:5

David was not permitted to build a temple for God, because David was a man of war; but God allowed David to make all the preparations for the temple. David gathered gold, silver, wood, and stones. He also designed the temple and even wrote some of the songs, which were to be sung; yet the actual constructing of the temple was reserved for David’s son, Solomon.

God was pleased with David’s desire to build a house for Him, even though from God’s point of view it was not necessary. So we see once again, that God allowed the thinking of His human servant prevail, with the exception that God allowed David’s son to build the temple.

GOD PROMISED TO BUILD DAVID A HOUSE

While Nathan and David were speaking of building a house for God, God promised that He (God) would build a house (dynasty) for David. God said to David,

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

2 Samuel 7:12

What a great promise that was! Did it mean only that David's son would follow him on the throne of Israel? Or was more involved? Yes, indeed, there was much more involved; for God said to David,

“And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:16

That was indeed a great promise! For what king has ever expected that his dynasty would last forever? Furthermore, it was an unconditional promise, for God had already decided that He would do great things through David's royal lineage.

Understandably, David was overwhelmed with the greatness of this promise, and he said to God in prayer,

“Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?”

2 Samuel 7:18

David praised God for His great kindness, saying,

“Therefore You are great, O Lord God. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

2 Samuel 7:22

CONCERNING GOD'S PROMISES

This promise to David was not the first promise that God had made. God had promised to Eve, the mother of all living, that through her “Seed” the head of Satan would be bruised (Genesis 3:15). He promised to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, that through him and his family all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Now it became clear that it would be a king, who would bruise Satan's head and bless the nations. These promises would be fulfilled through the royal lineage of David.

DAVID'S SIN

It makes one sad to think that the life of such a fine man as David was marred by horrible sin.

After many years of battle, David remained behind in Jerusalem while his army went out to fight. From the roof of his house he looked over to the roof of his neighbor and saw his neighbor's wife washing herself. David was smitten with the woman's beauty and desired her. So he sent for her even though he knew that she belonged to another man.

When David learned that he had gotten the woman pregnant, he commanded that her husband be placed in a dangerous position in battle so that he would be killed. After the death of her husband, David added the woman, Bathsheba, to his harem. Their first child, however, did not live. David pledged to Bathsheba that their second son, Solomon, would succeed him on the throne of Israel.

David's sin was not hidden. Nathan the prophet came and confronted him with the sins of adultery and murder. To David's credit it can be said that he did not lie about his sins. He said to Nathan,

"I have sinned against the Lord."

2 Samuel 12:13

By rights, David should have paid with for his sins with his life; but God wrath is often mollified by an honest confession of sin and by repentance. God told Nathan to say to David,

"The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."

2 Samuel 12:13

David's repentance was genuine and he never committed such a sin again. He prayed to God,

"Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving kindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Psalms 51:1-2

Although God forgave David's sins, David's kingdom was never the same. Some of its glory was gone. David's enemies increased and he was forced to fight wars to the end of his life. Even some of his own children rebelled against him. However, God did not withdraw His Holy Spirit from David, as He had it from

Saul. God showed great kindness to David by allowing his son Solomon to succeed him on the throne.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Which of David's personal characteristics do you think appealed to God the most?
2. How did David's victory over Goliath show that there was a God in Israel?
3. Why did God did not cancel His promise to David after David sinned so grievously? What do you think?
4. Why do you think God would not let David, a "man of war," build His temple?
5. Does it disturb you that a son of David and Bathsheba sat upon the throne of Israel? If not, why not?
6. If God could use David in spite of his sins, do you think this means that God can use us, in spite of our wrong deeds, provided we repent and turn from them? If so, why?
7. God worked with the children of Israel to bring about His purposes. Do you suppose that He is working with people today? How can you tell?

3.

THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

Before David died he arranged for his son Solomon to sit on his throne. After Solomon became king, his reign started off in a very promising way.

Solomon prayed to God with these words:

“Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

1 Kings 3:9

God was pleased with Solomon’s prayer and God answered him, saying,

“Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, or have asked riches for yourself...behold, I have done according to your word; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart... and I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor...”

1 Kings 3:11-13

God kept all His promises to Solomon. God allowed Solomon to carry on trade with many countries and Solomon prospered greatly. He became famous both for his riches and his wisdom. During his reign the nation of Israel was at its peak of prosperity and glory. His kingdom was more opulent and extensive than was the kingdom of any of the kings that reigned in Jerusalem either before or after him.

God permitted Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem, which his father David had not been permitted to build.

In spite of his great wisdom, Solomon made some tragic mistakes. He assembled a large number of horses for his war chariots (which God had told the kings not to do, Deuteronomy 17:16). He also gathered gold and silver (which was forbidden, Deuteronomy 17:17). Worse of all, he took many wives, some of whom were from foreign nations.

When Solomon's foreign wives came to live at Jerusalem, they brought their pagan religions and their pagan gods with them. So when Solomon got old, his wives turned his heart from God. It is written concerning him:

“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David.”

1 Kings 11:4

TEN TRIBES TAKEN AWAY FROM THE HOUSE OF DAVID

Before Solomon died, God told Solomon that He was going to take the kingship from his descendants because Solomon's heart had turned from God. For David's sake, however, God did not take the kingdom away during Solomon's lifetime. Nor did He take the whole kingdom from David's descendants. He left the tribes of Benjamin and Judah to David's descendants.

Upon Solomon's death his son Rehoboam became king. The ten northern tribes came to Rehoboam and said to him,

“Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.”

1 Kings 12:4

Rehoboam replied to the northern tribes,

“Depart for three days, and then come back to me.”

1 Kings 12:5

So the people departed and Rehoboam took counsel with his older advisers, who said,

“If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.”

1 Kings 12:7

Instead of taking this advice, Rehoboam took the advice of his younger friends, who urged him to speak harshly to the people. Therefore, Rehoboam said to the people,

“My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!”

1 Kings 12:14

Upon hearing this, the ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam and chose a man named Jeroboam to be their king.

The nation was now split into two parts. There was “Israel” in the north and “Judah” in the south. Israel was by far the larger of the two, having ten tribes, while Judah had only two.

Rehoboam, the king of Judah, wanted to go to war to force the return of the ten tribes. But God told Rehoboam not to do it, for it was God who had taken the ten tribes away because of Solomon’s unfaithfulness in his old age.

JEROBOAM INTRODUCED IDOLATRY IN THE NORTH.

Jeroboam felt insecure as king of the Northern Kingdom. He feared that if his people went to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, they would restore their allegiance to the house of David. So in order to prevent his people from falling away from him, Jeroboam set up golden images of a calf at two places in his territory, one at Bethel in the south and the other at Dan in the north. Then Jeroboam said to his people,

“It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

1 King 12:28

Thus, Jeroboam introduced idolatry to the ten northern tribes. He even made idolatry the official religion of his realm. In doing so, he undid much of the good that God had accomplished among the people in over 800 years. This was very displeasing to God.

THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

The Northern Kingdom lasted for 209 years. Many of the northern kings did not reign very long. Half of them were assassinated. Some twenty different kings reigned over the Northern Kingdom, during which time only about half of that number reigned in Judah. It was a time of great trouble for Israel.

Things went better for Judah. Some of Judah's rulers were bad, but some were very good. David's house (dynasty) reigned continuously in Judah during the time that Israel had nine different dynasties.

AHAB

One of the worst of the northern kings was Ahab. He took Jezebel, a daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon as a wife. Jezebel was an avid worshipper of the pagan god Baal. So Ahab built an altar to Baal at Samaria, his capital. He also made a grove in which idolatry was practiced. He did more to provoke the anger of God than any of the kings before him. During Ahab's reign Elijah the prophet announced:

“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

1 Kings 17:1

Following this announcement, Elijah hid himself for three years. During that time the land suffered from the lack of rain.

When Elijah finally showed himself to King Ahab, Ahab said to him,

“Is that you, O troubler of Israel?”

1 Kings 18:17

Elijah replied to Ahab,

“I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals.”

1 Kings 18:18

Whereupon, Elijah instructed Ahab that he should assemble the people of the Northern Kingdom at Mt. Carmel. All the prophets of Baal should also be gathered there. When they were all present, Elijah said to them,

“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

1 Kings 18:21

The people answered not a word. So Elijah proposed a test. He suggested that two young bulls be slaughtered and laid on separate altars. He suggested further,

“Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.”
1 Kings 18:24

This appealed to the people and they answered,

“It is well spoken.”
1 Kings 18:24

The prophets of Baal took one of the bulls, dressed it, laid it on their altar and called upon Baal to send fire. They called all morning long. After a while, Elijah began to jeer at them by saying,

“Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”
1 Kings 18:27

The prophets of Baal called out all the more. They cut themselves with knives until the blood gushed out. They kept this up until late in the afternoon. Then Elijah said to all the people,

“Come near to me.”
1 Kings 18:30

All the people came near, and Elijah took twelve stones and built an altar. He dug a trench around the altar. Then he put wood on it. He cut the bull into pieces and laid the pieces on top of the wood and said to the people,

“Fill four water pots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.”
1 Kings 18:33

So the people poured the water on the sacrifice and on the wood, and then Elijah said to them,

“Do it a second time.”

1 Kings 18:34

They poured water the second time. And Elijah said to them,

“Do it a third time.”

1 Kings 18:34

By the third time, they had poured so much water that it ran down from the altar and filled the trench. Then Elijah prayed to God, saying,

“Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.”

1 Kings 18:36

At that point, fire fell from heaven and consumed not only the animal offering, but also the wood, the stones, and the dust. Fire even licked up the water in the trench!

When the people saw this, they fell on their faces and cried out,

“The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!”

1 Kings 18:39

Then Elijah commanded that the prophets of Baal be caught. The people caught them, took them to the brook Kishon and there put them to death.

In this way, the Lord cleansed the Northern Kingdom of the wicked prophets, but the love of idols still persisted in the hearts of many; for they trusted the idols to give them a good harvest. Some of the people may have enjoyed the lascivious rites connected with idol worship. So, in spite of the efforts of Elijah, the Northern Kingdom did not reform its ways. The people made no basic change and their leaders were no better than the people.

JEHU

The only northern king who is well spoken of in the Bible is Jehu. He wiped out the house of Ahab, as God told him to do. However, Jehu left the golden calves at Bethel and at Dan and did not destroy them. In spite of this, God granted to Jehu that his descendants would be on his throne until the fourth generation.

God finally got fed up with the Northern Kingdom and allowed the people to be taken into captivity. The Assyrians came and conquered them and led them away. The Assyrians took the people to Halah and Habor by the River Gozan, among the Medes. Then the Assyrians brought other people from distant places and settled them in the land of northern Israel.

WHY DID GOD ALLOW THE NORTHERN KINGDOM TO CEASE TO EXIST?

The covenant that God had made with His people was in part conditional. As long as they remained faithful to Him, He would remain faithful to them. If, however, they became unfaithful and broke the covenant, then God would be released from His part of the covenant. He would stand by them, only as long as they stood by Him.

The ten northern tribes lost their national identity because they lost their religious identity. As a result, they were scattered among the nations. Some of the individuals that were scattered may have continued to believe in Jehovah God; but they were, for the most part, assimilated by the people that lived in the places where they were taken.

The idea of there being a kingdom had not turned out well for the people of the Northern Kingdom. Northern Israel disappeared from history as a nation. They had failed in their attempt to keep the Kingdom that God had given them. They had failed, but God still had something in mind for the future.

THE FALL OF JUDAH

The Southern Kingdom (Judah) continued to exist for 136 years after the Northern Kingdom fell. Some of the kings of the south were as evil as were the kings of the north, but others of them were outstanding. In addition to David, the Southern Kingdom had the following good kings:

ASA

Asa abolished the cult of prostitution and rid the land of homosexuals (1 Kings 15:12). He even deposed his own mother for worshipping idols. He removed some of the “high places” where sacrifices were made.

JEOSAPHAT

Jehosaphat, a pious king, further purged the Kingdom of Judah of its idol worship. He fortified certain cities. He set up courts in which the people could receive justice and he arranged for priests to instruct the people in the Law.

JOASH

Joash became king at the age of seven. During his life he repaired the temple in Jerusalem and restored rightful worship in it.

Also Amaziah, Uzziah and Jothan were in part commendable kings.

HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was also an outstanding king. He reopened the temple, which had fallen into disuse and disrepair. He renewed the covenant that the people had with God. He celebrated the Passover. He destroyed many of the “high places.” He did away with the brass serpent, which Moses had made in the wilderness and which the people had been worshipping.

Hezekiah maintained his faith in God, even when his city was under attack from the armies of Sennacherib. Hezekiah paid attention to the words of Isaiah the prophet; and the Lord heeded Hezekiah’s prayer and added fifteen years to his life after he had become ill.

JOSIAH

Josiah reformed the worship at the temple in Jerusalem, which had been neglected during the reign of his father, Manasseh.

Josiah became king when he was eight years old. In the eighteenth year of his reign, the Book of the Law was found in the collection box at the entrance to the temple grounds in Jerusalem. On the basis of the Book of the Law, Josiah reinstated proper worship at the temple.

He also desecrated the high place at Bethel by burning bones on its altar. His reforms, however, were mostly formal and public. Many of his people still held to idol worship.

JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

When the Kingdom of Judah was in its final year, God sent Jeremiah the prophet to warn the people. His message was:

“Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.”
Jeremiah 6:16a

This message was not pleasing to the people of Jerusalem. They said,

“We will not walk in it.”

Jeremiah 6:16b

So God said through Jeremiah,

“Even the stork in the heavens Knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.”

Jeremiah 8:7

Finally, God gave up on the people of Judah, just as He had done with the people of North Israel. God instructed Jeremiah as follows:

“Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.”

Jeremiah 11:14

EZEKIEL

Regarding the kings in Judah, the prophet Ezekiel, who was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, said,

“Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord God: ‘Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same.’”

Ezekiel 21:25-26

Although Ezekiel addressed his prophecy to someone whom he called the “prince of Israel,” he was not speaking concerning the nation of north Israel, for north Israel no longer existed as a nation in Ezekiel’s day. Ezekiel was speaking of

Judah. He was saying that also the prince (king) of Judah would lose his royal crown.

As Ezekiel continued in this vein, he said,

“Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, Until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.”

Ezekiel 21:27

There would be no further king for the children of Israel until the rightful King appeared. Who is the rightful King? Of whom was Ezekiel speaking?

Why would God overthrow the king that reigned in Jerusalem? Did not God promise that there would be a descendant of David on the throne forever? Had God changed His mind? Did God not intend to keep His promise to David?

The promise that God made to the descendants of Jacob was both conditional and unconditional. God promised through Moses that if the people of Israel would be faithful to Him, they would always have a nation; but He warned that if they turned their backs on Him, He would take their nation away from them (Deuteronomy 28:63).

God's promise to David, however, was unconditional (2 Samuel 7:16). God indicated that He would carry out His plans to bless the nation and the world, through a descendant of David, no matter what. They could cooperate with God's plans, or they could oppose them; yet no matter what they did, they could not stop what God intended to do.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

Just as Jeremiah had foretold (Jeremiah 20:4), the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem; and King Nebuchadnezzar took the city in 587 B.C. He destroyed the temple that Solomon had built and the worship there ceased. He burned the king's palace and put King Zedekiah's sons to death before Zedekiah's eyes. Then, he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, the last of the earthly kings. King Zedekiah and many of the people were then taken into Babylonian captivity and the earthly kingdom ceased to exist.

WAS ALL LOST?

Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet.” He had foreseen the tragedy that was coming and it was his lot to witness the downfall of his nation. He saw the people scattered. They had neither king nor kingdom. Was all lost? No, all

was not lost. In spite of his sorrow, Jeremiah spoke reassuringly to the people, saying,

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”

Jeremiah 23:5

The words of Jeremiah agree with what God had said through the prophet Amos:

“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle [house] of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old.”

Amos 9:11

Both North Israel and Judah had lost their nations, but the promise to David still stood. This meant that God had not finished carrying out His plans. Great things were still in store for the house of David.

THE PROPHET DANIEL

During the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity, there lived a prophet named Daniel, who was a high official in the city of Babylon and later in Susa. Also Daniel spoke with great assurance concerning the future. He said,

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

Daniel 2:44

God would yet set up an “eternal kingdom.” It would be His doing, not man’s doing. This kingdom would never be destroyed, and it would break in pieces and consume other kingdoms. It would stand forever.

THE RETURN FROM BABYLON

When the 70 years had passed, the first wave of the returnees came back to Jerusalem. Although they managed to build a temple, it was nothing compared to the original temple, which Solomon had built. They also rebuilt the wall around

Jerusalem, but God did not allow them to reestablish the kingdom in Jerusalem. This was a time for waiting, and they waited and looked into the future.

ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING A KING

During their time of waiting, Zechariah prophesied:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Zechariah 9:9

What a strange prophecy! How could it be that the future King would be a lowly person and not a man of war? That would be something new in the history of the world.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CLOSES

As the story of the Old Testament closes, the people were waiting and asking themselves: Would there be a new King? What would He be like? When would He appear?

As to the timing of the King's appearing, that would be for God to decide. Yet God gave some clues as to when He would come. God said that His kingdom would be set up during the days of the third empire that would follow upon the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 2:44). That is to say, it would come about during the Roman Empire.

In addition, God said that a powerful messenger would precede the appearing of the new King. Concerning this “messenger,” God said through the prophet Malachi,

“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.”

Malachi 3:1

This messenger would be like Elijah the prophet (Malachi 4:5). He would preach righteousness and would call the people to repentance. By his preaching he would reconcile the fathers to their children and the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:6). Thus, people would know that the Messiah was not far behind.

On this note the Old Testament ends, and the New Testament begins.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the people of Israel thought when they saw fire consuming the stones and licking up the water around Elijah's sacrifice?
2. Is it your understanding that God has a covenant with some people today? If so, what is it?
3. Does God stand by people today only as long as they stand by Him? Explain.
4. Does what happened to Judah and Israel have anything to say about our nation today? If so, what does it say?
5. Is God still carrying out His plan to bless all the world through Abraham? If so, in what way is He doing that?
6. Why do you suppose it is that Jeremiah is sometimes called the "weeping prophet"?
7. Can you identify who the prophet was that was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah? Give a reason for your identification.

4.

IS JESUS REALLY KING?

The announcement of the birth of John the Baptist is the earliest event that is recorded in the New Testament. It happened like this: There was a priest, named Zacharias, who was serving in the temple in Jerusalem when Gabriel, an angel, came to him and said,

“Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.”

Luke 1:13-15

The angel, continuing to speak about the work that John would do, said to Zacharias,

“And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him, in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Luke 1:16-17

Could it be that John was “the messenger” of whom the prophet Malachi had spoken 300 or so years earlier (Malachi 3:1)? Yes, the angel Gabriel gave a clue by quoting the words of the prophet Malachi and applying them to John. Gabriel said that John would be the one to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” (Malachi 4:6). With these words, Gabriel gave Zacharias notice that John would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

When Zacharias heard what Gabriel said, he could hardly believe his ears. Because of his slowness to believe, Zachariah’s ability to speak was taken from him. His speech was restored, however, after John was born. Then Zacharias said,

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David.”

Luke 1:68-69

Zacharias himself did not belong to the house of David. He belonged to the tribe of Levi. Therefore, it was not Zacharias’ son who was to be king over Israel but someone from David’s house, of the tribe of Judah.

GABRIEL FORETOLD THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The angel Gabriel also spoke to a young virgin, named Mary. He told her that she would bear a son. Gabriel said to her,

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.”

Luke 1:30-31

The angel Gabriel left no doubt as to the greatness of Mary’s son, for he said,

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.”

Luke 1:32

The angel Gabriel told Mary that her son would sit on the throne of David and that He would be called “the Son of the Highest,” that is, the Son of God. Gabriel also spoke to Mary concerning her sons’ reign, saying,

“And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:33

AN ANGEL ANNOUNCED THE BIRTH OF THE KING TO SHEPHERDS

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the town from which David had come. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered for the purpose of taxation.

At the time of Jesus' birth, shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem. In the night, an angel of the Lord appeared to them. A great light shone around about them. The angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11

It is clear that the angel was speaking about the long awaited King of the Jews, for he called him both “Christ” (the Anointed One) and “Lord” (Master). The angel was saying in effect that the baby, who had been born to Mary would be the King.

SIMEON LIVED TO SEE THE KING

When Jesus was only a baby, Joseph and Mary took him to the temple in Jerusalem where they met an old man named Simeon. God had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah (Christ) with his own eyes. So when Simeon saw baby Jesus, he took him into his arms and said to God,

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

Luke 2:29-32

WISE MEN CAME TO WORSHIP THE NEW KING

After Jesus was born, wise men came from the East seeking the young King. They asked the people of Jerusalem,

“Where is He who has been born, King of the Jews?”

Matthew 2:2

It is not surprising that men from the East knew that the Jews were expecting a divine King. Many people in many lands knew of the Jewish expectation. What is surprising is that these men knew that the King had already been born. They explained how they had come to know of His birth, saying,

“For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

Matthew 2:2

When King Herod got wind of this, he was troubled, as was all of Jerusalem. He assembled the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Scriptures said that the Messiah (Anointed One) should be born. The scholars knew the Holy Scriptures well and came up with the appropriate passage (Micah 5:2), which says,

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.”

Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6

Herod was an ungodly man, who had been placed in office by the Romans and not by the people. Being anxious to ward off any threat to his rule, Herod asked the wise men to bring him, following their visit to Bethlehem, information about the child. After the wise men had seen the child, however, God warned them not to return to Herod but to go home by another route.

When Herod realized that the wise men had not followed his instructions, he grew angry and sent servants to kill all the children at Bethlehem that were two years old or under. Herod hoped by so doing to get rid of a threat to his throne, but the young King was not there. He had been spirited away by his parents to Egypt, where they found refuge.

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARED THE WAY FOR THE KING

When John the Baptist was grown man, he began preparing the way for the Messiah (King). He did this by preaching to the people and by baptizing them. The heart of John’s message was this:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

Matthew 3:2

Many prophets before John had called the people to repent, but there was something new and compelling about John’s message. His message was that the kingdom of heaven was “at hand,” meaning it was about to come into existence. Although the kingdom was “at hand,” not everyone could be in it. Being a Jewish person did not qualify one to be in the kingdom.

Therefore, the people wanted to know what they should do. John told them:

“He, who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.”

Luke 3:11

This was new teaching. Although generosity was recommended in the Old Testament, it was made a condition for membership in the kingdom of Israel.

Also tax collectors came to John and wanted to know what they should do, and John told them,

“Collect no more than what is appointed for you.”

Luke 3:13

Soldiers came asking what they should do, and John said to them,

“Do no intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”

Luke 3:14

By preaching repentance, John was getting people ready for citizenship in the kingdom of Heaven. He taught them not only about repentance, but also about baptism for the forgiveness of their sins (Mark 1:4).

It was generally known that the Messiah would reign righteously (justly). But did the people in the Messiah’s kingdom have to be righteous too? If they did, it would be a most unusual kingdom. All of this was very new and very startling!

JOHN THE BAPTIST POINTED TO THE KING

Some people thought that John the Baptist was himself the Messiah, but John knew that he was not the Messiah (John 1:20). John pointed to someone else, saying,

“I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”

John 1:26-27

One day, John the Baptist saw Jesus walking towards him and said regarding Jesus,

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 1:29

How could John be sure he was pointing to the right man? Here is John’s explanation of how he knew that Jesus was the Messiah:

“I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

John 1:33

John continued speaking of Jesus. John made the identification of Jesus as the anointed King very plain. He said,

“And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

John 1:34

JESUS’ BAPTISM

While John the Baptist was uttering the above words, he was thinking, no doubt, of how Jesus had come to him earlier requesting baptism. John had at that time been reluctant to baptize Jesus and had said to Him,

“I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”

Matthew 3:14

Jesus replied,

“Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Matthew 3:15

As Jesus was coming up out of the water after John had baptized Him, John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Jesus. John also heard a voice from Heaven saying,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17

JESUS WAS TEMPTED BY SATAN

After John baptized Jesus, Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness in order to be tempted. In the wilderness, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. Then Satan came and tempted him.

Satan tempted Jesus by suggesting that He use His miraculous power to turn stones into bread, but Jesus refused to use His miraculous power for Himself.

Following this, Satan took Jesus to a high point of the temple and suggested that He cast himself down, presumably to show the Jews that He (Jesus) had come from above. That, however, would have forced God to intervene in Jesus' behalf in order to keep Jesus from hurting Himself. That would be to tempt God. So Jesus rejected it.

Satan also took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and Satan said to Jesus,

“All these things will I give You if you will fall down and worship me.”

Matthews 4:9

Satan offered to help Jesus get a kingdom, if Jesus would but fall down and worship him. Jesus refused. He knew that even if Satan were able deliver on his part of the bargain, Satan would afterwards want to keep his finger in things. Satan would want to make certain “suggestions” from time to time. Satan would bring disorder into God's government. So Jesus said to him,

“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

Matthew 4:10

The vision of a world worldwide kingdom, which Satan set before Jesus, was very tempting. Many people were dreaming of such a kingdom in those days and many are still dreaming of the same today; but Jesus turned away from it. He was dreaming of something different, something that is far better.

ANDREW FOUND THE MESSIAH

One of the first persons to become a disciple of Jesus was a man named Andrew. Andrew began to follow Jesus because he had heard John the Baptist say that Jesus was the “Lamb of God.”

After Andrew became acquainted with Jesus, he was so impressed with Him that he went off to find his brother, Simon. Upon finding Simon, Andrew said to him,

“We have found the Messiah.”

John 1:41

Andrew, by leading his brother Simon to Jesus, became a great benefactor of the kingdom of God. Simon (whom Jesus renamed “Peter”) became one of Jesus’ most trusted and fruitful disciples.

PHILIP AND NATHANIEL FOUND THE MESSIAH

Jesus saw a man named Philip and invited him to follow Him. Philip, in turn, went and found a man named Nathanael and said to him,

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

John 1:45

Nathanael, however, was skeptical. He asked Philip whether anything good could come out of Nazareth. In response, Philip told Nathanael to come and see for himself.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching Him, Jesus commented about Nathanael,

“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in who is no guile!”

John 1:47

This comment so startled Nathanael that he asked Jesus,

“How do You know me?”

John 1:48a

Jesus replied to him,

“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”

John 1:48

Nathanael obviously thought that only by a miracle could Jesus have seen him under the fig tree. Immediately Nathanael concluded that Jesus was truly the Messiah, as Philip has said. Nathanael said to Jesus,

“Rabbi! You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

John 1:49

It is interesting that Nathanael so quickly recognized Jesus’ identity and that he also knew that if Jesus were the “King of Israel,” He was also the “Son of God.” Nathanael had apparently learned from the Old Testament, prior to his meeting Jesus, that the Messiah would be a divine King. Nathanael’s knowledge about this tends to indicate that many people in that day may have been thinking about and discussing the nature of the Messianic King.

What is even more interesting is that Jesus did not deny what Nathanael said about Him. Rather, He tacitly accepted that He was, indeed, both “Son of God” and “King of Israel.”

JESUS TOLD A WOMAN THAT HE IS THE MESSIAH

Jesus was not opposed to people knowing that He was the Messiah, but He did not blatantly proclaim it. He much preferred for people find it out for themselves.

He did, however, occasionally reveal His identity, as He did to the woman at Jacob’s well in Samaria. In the course of their conversation, the woman made this statement:

“I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will tell us all things.”

John 4:25

In response to her statement, Jesus replied to her,

“I who speak to you am He.”

John 4:26

When the woman returned to her village, she said to the people,

“Come; see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”

John 4:29

Whereupon, the people came out from their village to see Jesus. Having seen Him, they prevailed upon Him to spend some time with them. After two days, the villagers said to the woman,

“Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

John 4:42

This statement shows great comprehension on the part of the people of Sychar. They clearly understood that the Messiah would be not the Messiah for Jews only, but for the entire world. They understood that the Messiah would come as the “Savior of the world.” Therefore, they correctly identified Jesus as both the “Christ” (Messiah) and the “Savior.”

JESUS PREPARED THE GALILEANS TO RECEIVE THE KINGDOM

When Herod Antipas put John the Baptist into prison, this seemed to be the signal for Jesus to begin His public ministry. He began His evangelistic work in Nazareth, His hometown. Since He was not well received in Nazareth, He shifted the center of His activities to Capernaum, a city on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

In Capernaum, Jesus preached in the synagogue and cured many people. While He at Capernaum Jesus began gathering His disciples. The men whom He gathered were not necessarily Bible scholars, but they were men who had many fine qualities.

The people of Capernaum asked Jesus to stay with them, but Jesus would not. He explained His reason for moving on, as follows:

“I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.”

Luke 4:43

On His preaching tours throughout Galilee, Jesus preached in synagogues and healed many people. Soon, great crowds of people began to follow Him wherever He went. There were so many people that the synagogues could no

longer hold the crowds. Before long, not even the cities could hold the crowds. So Jesus began to preach in open fields, by the lakeside and on hillsides.

JESUS FED FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE

After Jesus had taught a large crowd of people, His disciples suggested that He send the multitude away so they could go and find food in the villages; but Jesus told the disciples that they themselves should give the people food. The disciples, however, did not know where they could find food for so many. Jesus asked them how many loaves of bread they had. The disciples said they had five loaves of bread and two fish. So Jesus said to them,

“Bring them here to me.”

Matthew 14:18

When the multitude had been seated on the grass, Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish. Looking up to Heaven, He blessed the food and gave it to His disciples and they distributed it to the multitude. After all had eaten and were satisfied twelve baskets of the fragments were taken up, which had been left over. About 5,000 men were fed, not counting the women and the children.

MANY WANTED TO MAKE JESUS THEIR KING

This miraculous feeding of the 5,000 so impressed the people that some of them said,

“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”

John 6:14

The people who spoke these words, no doubt, knew that God had promised Moses that He would raise up a Prophet from among the people like Moses and that He would put His words into the mouth of that Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18).

Jesus fulfilled the prophecy given by Moses; but the 5,000 people that Jesus fed did not appear to understand the role of the Messiah. They saw in Jesus a golden opportunity to get rid of the Romans. They were likely thinking, “Here is a leader who can feed his own troops and God is obviously with him.”

Some of the people came to Jesus and tried to force Him to become their king (John 6:15); but, instead of being receptive to their plans, Jesus went away to the mountains to be alone.

Why did Jesus not welcome the opportunity to become their earthly king? Did He not wish to see His people freed from the Romans? Yes, presumably He did; but think a bit: If He had become the kind of a king that the people were proposing, what would have happened? They would have marched against the palace of Herod Antipas at Tiberius. After that, their goal would have been Jerusalem, to chase the Roman soldiers out. After freeing Jerusalem, what next? On to Egypt? Or north to Syria? Along that path would lie a sea of blood. Jesus wanted to have nothing to do with it. He had once said,

“For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”

Luke 9:56

Jesus’ kingdom was to be a kingdom of peace, a divine kingdom. God would set it up. It was to be God’s doing and not the work of humans. God would do it at a time that He saw fit, not at a time of human choosing.

SIMON PETER CONFESSED THAT JESUS IS KING

When Jesus’ popularity had become so great that the towns could no longer hold the crowds and after the people had tried to force Him to become a worldly ruler, Jesus began to limit His public activity. He still appeared in public, but He often withdrew to spend more time with His disciples.

On one occasion He left the Jewish territory altogether and went for a while to the region around the cities of Tyre and Sidon.

Upon His return to the general area of the Sea of Galilee, He came near the city of Caesarea Philippi. There, Jesus asked His disciples this question:

“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

Matthew 16:13

The disciples answered,

“Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

Matthew 16:14

Then Jesus put another question to His disciples:

“But who do you say that I am?”

Matthew 16:15

Simon Peter had grasped the truth that Jesus was both the Christ (Messiah) and the “Son of God.” Simon had actually grasped this earlier. We know this, for Simon Peter had already spoken of it (John 6:69). It was God who had revealed it to him (Matthew 16:17).

MARTHA CONFESSED THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST

Among Jesus’ many friends were Lazarus and Lazarus’ two sisters, Mary and Martha. When Lazarus became ill, Jesus was aware of it but did not rush to Lazarus’ bedside. Lazarus died and Jesus said to His disciples,

“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him.”

John 11:15

When Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus’ body was, Martha came out to meet them. She chided Jesus, saying that if He (Jesus) had been there her brother would not have died. Jesus replied to Martha,

“Your brother will rise again.”

John 11:23

Whereupon Martha said she knew that her brother would rise in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus responded,

“I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

John 11:25-26

Martha had already grasped that Jesus was the Messiah. She also believed that He was the Son of God. She was right, for Jesus is the one whom God had anointed with His Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and had chosen to sit on the throne of David (Luke 1:32). He was also the one concerning whom the prophets had spoken (Romans 1:2-3). Yes, He was the Messiah; but would the people of Israel accept their rightful King?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why was it important for John the Baptist to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children,” and the “heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6)?
2. What do John’s instructions to tax collectors, to soldiers and to others tell about the nature of the kingdom?
3. Would there have been any point in John’s baptizing people if they had not repented? If not, why not?
4. Why did Jesus not blatantly proclaim himself to be King? What do you think?
5. Is there any difference between Satan’s offer to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the attempt of people to make Him king by force? If you see any difference, what difference do you see?
6. How do you explain that the “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) could also be called “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29)?

5.

JESUS REJECTED BY HIS PEOPLE

Jesus was different kind of a king from what many people were expecting. Some were expecting a king like David, who would fight the battles of the Lord. To many people, Jesus did not seem political enough. Instead of forming a government and gathering an army, He tried to change the way people lived. However, the only change that most people wanted was to get rid of the Romans. So Jesus did not fit their expectation. Although He is truly “the son of David” (Matthew 21:9, 15), He is a different kind of king.

WHAT KIND OF KING IS JESUS?

A careful reading of the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament reveal a larger picture of the Messiah than what many were expecting. Isaiah, for example, said of the Messiah,

“I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth.”

Isaiah 42:1-3

This portrays a peaceful Messiah, not a warrior. This passage alone should have awakened the people to what kind of a king the Messiah would be. But there are more passages of this one. Isaiah also wrote,

“The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”

Isaiah 11:2

This passage describes a religious King. Isaiah wrote yet still more:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6

Yes, the Messiah was to be a “Prince of Peace,” not a warrior like David. Jesus had far more important things to do than just driving out the Romans.

THERE WAS GREAT CONFUSION ABOUT WHO JESUS WAS

When Jesus was in Jerusalem for one of the feasts, He spoke openly at the temple and some of the people wondered why the authorities did nothing to restrain him. They said,

“But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ [Messiah]?”

John 7:26

Some people had decided that Jesus was not the Messiah. They said,

“...we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.”

John 7:27

The people who spoke like this did not know the Scriptures very well, for the Scriptures clearly tell where the Messiah would be born. They tell that He would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Matthew 2:5-6).

Although some people knew where the Messiah should be born, they were misinformed about where Jesus was born. They thought He was born in Galilee. So they argued,

“Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scriptures said that Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?”

John 7:41b-42

SOME BELIEVED ON JESUS

Others had no criticism of Jesus and defended Him. They knew that He demonstrated the signs of the Messiah. He healed people, performed miracles, cast out demons and taught the word of God. So they asked,

“When the Christ comes, will he do more signs than these which this Man has done?”

John 7:31

Some spoke out even more strongly, saying,

“This is the Christ [Messiah].”

John 7:41

THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ARREST JESUS

Although the people of Jerusalem were divided in their opinion of Jesus, the chief priests and the Pharisees were not divided. They wanted Him taken into custody and punished. So they sent officers to arrest Him, but the officers came back empty-handed. When the priests and Pharisees questioned the officers as to why they had not brought Jesus they said,

“No man ever spoke like this man.”

John 7:46

GROWING OPPOSITION TO JESUS

While many people were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, opposition to Him was growing. The leaders of the people were holding back from arresting Him for fear of the common people. They did, however, persecute those that believed on Him. They threatened to throw them out of the synagogue.

Jesus' enemies said to Him,

“How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

John 10:24

Jesus gave them an unequivocal answer. He said,

“I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.”

John 10:25

This answer, like everything else that Jesus did, plainly showed that He was the Messiah, yet not everyone could see it.

JESUS’ TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

The time finally came for Jesus to present Himself openly as the “King of the Jews.” The method He chose to present Himself as king was to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. This method was not regal from a human point of view; but it was in agreement with what Zechariah the prophet had written, namely,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Zechariah 9:9

Many of Jesus’ followers were with Him as He approached Jerusalem. They sensed the importance of what was happening and they cried out,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Matthew 21:9b

By calling Jesus the “Son of David,” His followers showed that they held Him to be the king who would sit on David’s throne. That is why some of them, in deference to Him, laid their outer garments on the path before Him. Others cut down branches from palm trees and laid them in His path.

The Pharisees who witnessed this scene were not in sympathy with the honor being shown to Jesus. They thought the crowd was out of control. So the Pharisees said to Jesus,

“Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.”

Luke 19:39

But Jesus replied to the Pharisees,

“I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.”

Luke 19:40

If no humans had comprehended what was happening and had not responded appropriately, God Himself would have graced the scene by causing the natural world to cry out. The time for celebration had come! The long awaited day had arrived! The King was approaching His city! The kingdom was being revived! Jerusalem was receiving her rightful ruler! But would the people understand? Would they desire such a king? Would they accept a kingdom in which true righteousness was the theme? Or, had their hatred for the Romans so blinded them that they could think only of revenge? The next few days would tell.

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

During Jesus’ final week, the leaders of the people came to Him and asked many questions. They were trying to trip Him up in order to find some fault with Him. After much discussion, Jesus asked the Pharisees,

“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”

Matthew 22:42

With this question, Jesus was asking the Pharisees whether they thought the Messiah would be a divine king or a temporal ruler. The Pharisees answered that the Messiah would be the “son of David.” This meant that they were looking for a king like David, a man who would be an opponent to their enemies.

Jesus then asked the Pharisees yet another question, one that showed that their expectations were untenable. He asked,

“How then does David in the Spirit call Him, ‘Lord’, saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’?”

Matthew 22:43-44

Jesus was referring to the 110th Psalm, in which David spoke of the Messiah that was to come. David calls the Messiah “Lord.” Jesus asked how it could be that King David could call the Messiah “Lord,” if the Messiah were only David’s son. The Pharisees could not answer this question.

This debate shows that Jesus (along with David) expected much more of the Messiah than many of Jesus’ contemporaries were expecting. His contemporaries

expected the Messiah to play a political role, but Jesus saw a much wider mission for the Messiah.

JESUS BEFORE THE JEWISH AUTHORITIES

After it became clear that Jesus was making an open claim to being the King (Messiah), the authorities in Jerusalem were not slow in taking action against Him. He had been in Jerusalem for less than a week when they took Him into custody.

Officers from the Sanhedrin arrested Jesus in the night, from Thursday to Friday of the Passover week. They took Jesus first to Annas, the power behind the throne in Jerusalem. Then they took Him to Caiaphas, who was the ruling High Priest that year. Although it was still early in the morning, Caiaphas was not alone, for he had assembled scribes, chief priests, elders, and all the council.

The council spent some time questioning people who might serve as witnesses against Jesus, but they did not have much success in finding any one that could bring damaging testimony against Him. Finally, two men were found who charged:

“This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”

Matthew 26:61

Jesus had, indeed, said something similar to that, but He was not referring to the temple in Jerusalem but to His own body (John 2:19-21). This was not a very serious charge, but it was all they had.

The high priest knew, however, that he needed a stronger charge, so he devised a plan whereby he might trap Jesus. He arose and asked Jesus,

“Do you answer nothing? What is it that these men testify against You?”

Matthew 26:62

Jesus did not answer. This angered the high priest and the high priest said, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

This was very clever. The high priest knew that Jesus laid claim to being the Messiah. He also knew that Jesus would not tell a lie, so if he could induce Jesus to go on record as claiming to be the Messiah this would be blasphemy in the eyes of those that were assembled; and blasphemy was a crime punishable by death.

Jesus responded by saying,

“It is as you said.”

Matthew 26:64

Some Bible readers are not sure whether Jesus said “yes” or “no,” but those who heard Him understood it to be a “yes” answer.

In order to leave no doubt, Jesus added,

“Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Matthew 62:64

This was all they needed. Jesus had confessed not only to being the Messiah but He also had said that they would see Him sitting at the right hand of God and returning to earth in glory. This was too much for the authorities. The high priest tore at his own clothing and said to the people,

“He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard his blasphemy!”

Matthew 26:65

When the high priest asked the assembly what it’s decision was, they decreed,

“He is deserving of death!”

Matthew 26:66

JESUS BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE

Since the Jews were not allowed to put anyone to death without the permission of the Romans, they bound Jesus and took Him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The charge they brought against Jesus was that He tried to make Himself king. This could be a very serious charge in the eyes of the Romans, for they would consider it to be sedition. So Pilate, the Roman governor, asked Jesus,

“Are You the King of the Jews?”

John 18:33

Again, Jesus did not deny His kingship. He made what is called “the good confession” (1 Timothy 6:13). He said to Pilate,

“It is as you say.”

Matthew 27:11

Jesus affirmed that He was the King of the Jews even though it would cost Him His life. He explained to Pilate,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

John 18:36

IS JESUS A REAL KING?

Since Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world and that His servants would not fight, Pilate found it difficult to believe that Jesus was a real king. Pilate had never heard of such a king. He asked Jesus,

“Are you a King then?”

John 18:37

In response, Jesus replied,

“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”

John 18:37

To Pilate, who was a ‘man of the world’ and a skeptic, this was all very strange. So he asked,

“What is the truth?”

John 18:38

Pilate then added,

“I find no fault in him at all.”

John 18:38

PILATE SHOWED HIS WEAKNESS

Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, but he did not have the strength of character to stand up against the people. In order to placate them, he turned Jesus over to soldiers and they scourged Him. They platted a crown of thorns for Jesus' head. They also put a purple robe on Him and mocked Him, saying,

“Hail, King of the Jews!”

Matthew 27:29

The soldiers spat on Jesus and took a reed and struck Him on the head. After they had put Jesus' own clothing on Him again, Pilate brought Him out to the mob, where Pilate said to them,

“Behold your King!”

John 19:14

There was both irony and derision in Pilate's statement and it infuriated the mob. They shouted,

“Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!”

John 19:15

Pilate persisted in taunting them. He asked,

“Shall I crucify your King?”

John 19:15

The mob answered,

“We have no king but Caesar!”

John 19:15

With this they had made one of the most fateful statements of history. They rejected their King. They chose Caesar over Christ. They chose an oppressor over a Redeemer and therewith brought suffering over themselves for generations to come.

JESUS WAS TAKEN AWAY TO BE CRUCIFIED.

Over Jesus' cross an inscription was placed, which read, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

Some of the people objected to the wording of the inscription. They wanted it to read, "He said, 'I am the King of the Jews'" (John 19:21). But Pilate would not change the wording. He said, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22).

Thus the most tragic event in history was carried out. They put the "Prince of Life" to death. The sky turned dark while Jesus hung on the cross. God had sent His Son to reign over His chosen people, but they were not ready to accept God's rule over them.

WAS IT THE END OR THE BEGINNING?

There were many people who had felt the healing power of Jesus in their own bodies. Many of them knew the Old Testament Scriptures well enough to recognize that Jesus was the Christ. But what could they do? With Jesus in the tomb, their hopes for God's kingdom appeared to be at an end. Was this the end, or merely the beginning?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus come to earth as a man of peace instead of as a warrior? What do you think?
2. What was it about Jesus' manner of speaking that made it so difficult for the officers to arrest Him (John 7:45-46)?
3. Why do you think Jesus showed so little interest in freeing the Jews from Roman domination?
4. Why do you think the Jewish authorities wanted to put Jesus to death?
5. Why do you think Jesus would not permit His followers to defend Him with arms (Matthew 26:52)?
6. How do you think the subsequent history of the Jews has been affected by the fact that they rejected Jesus?

6.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD WAS ESTABLISHED

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus. One of them perceived that Jesus was not worthy of death. He knew that Jesus was going to die, yet he believed that Jesus would soon come into a kingdom, so he said to Jesus,

“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

Luke 23:42

This was a remarkable expression of faith. The man knew that Jesus was going to die, but he realized that Jesus’ death would be Jesus’ entrance into His kingdom. One can only wonder what lay in this criminal’s background that enabled him to have such insight. Jesus was so impressed with the man’s request that He said to him,

“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Luke 23:43

WHAT ONE OF THE CENTURIONS SAID

Among those that witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion was a Roman centurion, who was profoundly moved by what he saw. After Jesus had died, the centurion said,

“Certainly this was a righteous Man!”

Luke 23:47

The centurion also said,

“Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

Mark 15:39

JESUS’ BURIAL AND RESURRECTION

After Jesus' death, His body was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb, which belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus' body lay in the tomb over the Sabbath.

Early on the morning of the first day of the week, Jesus arose from the grave! He arose with great power! Gone were His physical limitations!

JESUS APPEARED TO TWO MEN ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Two of Jesus' disciples were walking to a village called Emmaus on the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. The two men were discussing the events that had taken place. They were not yet aware that Jesus had arisen from the dead.

As they walked along, Jesus joined them; but they did not recognize Him. Jesus asked them what they were talking about. One of them, a man named Cleopas, answered,

“Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?”

Luke 24:18

Jesus asked the two men,

“What things?”

Then they began to explain their disappointment over the death of Jesus, and they said,

“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel.”

Luke 24:21

Jesus was not pleased with what they said. In fact, He chastised them for their lack of faith. He said,

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!”

Luke 24:25

If they had understood what the prophets of the Old Testament had said, they would not have been dismayed at Jesus' death. Therefore Jesus asked them,

“Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

Luke 24:26

Yes, the Scriptures clearly show that the Christ should suffer and be put to death. Here are some of the things that the prophet Isaiah, for example, wrote concerning the Messiah:

“He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

Isaiah 53:3

Isaiah also wrote:

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him. And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53:5-6

Isaiah wrote further:

“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”

Isaiah 53:7

In addition, Isaiah wrote:

“For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken, and they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death.”

Isaiah 53:8-9

As Jesus walked along, He pointed out such passages as these. Finally, they reached the village to which they were going. The two men invited Jesus to stay with them. So He went into a house and sat down with them to eat.

When Jesus took the bread and blessed it, the eyes of the men were opened and they recognized Him. At that, Jesus vanished from their sight.

JESUS APPEARED TO THE APOSTELS

After Jesus had vanished, the two men got up immediately and walked back to Jerusalem to tell the good news. When they got there, they found that the apostles already knew of the resurrection, for the apostles said to them,

“The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!

Luke 24:34

Suddenly, while they were discussing among themselves, Jesus stood in their midst. They were very frightened because they thought it was a ghost. Jesus asked them,

“Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Luke 24:38-39

Jesus not only showed them His wounds but also asked them to give Him something to eat. They gave Him a piece of broiled fish and a bit of honeycomb, and He ate it.

Jesus then reminded them (Luke 24:44) that He had told them that He would be put to death and would rise again (Matthew 16:2; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). He also told them (Luke 24:44) that the Holy Scriptures foretold His resurrection (Psalm 16:9-11). Jesus said to the disciples:

“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Luke 24:46-47

With these words Jesus began to commission His disciples to go and tell people that forgiveness of sins is possible and that people should repent of their sins.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

A few days later, on a mountain in Galilee, Jesus further commissioned His apostles, by saying,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

From these words we understand that Jesus told His apostles to baptize people after they had taught them. They should baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The apostles also should instruct those whom they had taught and baptized to do everything which Jesus had commanded the apostles to do. Jesus promised to be with His disciples as long as they did these things.

JESUS' LAST APPEARANCE TO THE APOSTLES

At Jesus' last appearance to His Twelve Apostles, just before He ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:2-9), His apostles asked Him whether He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus ignored the obvious fact that they had not yet fully grasped what kind of kingdom He was to have. He only said to them,

“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Acts 1:7-8

Jesus also told His apostles not to depart from Jerusalem until they had been “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). As it turned out, the apostles had to wait only ten days before the Holy Spirit fell upon them. The Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost, which is a Jewish holy day. It was the first day of the week and the apostles were assembled as they always were on the first day of the week.

THE APOSTLES WERE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

It happened like this: Suddenly, there was a loud noise that sounded like a mighty wind (Acts 2:2). The whole house where they were sitting was filled with the noise. Tongues of fire came and sat on each of the apostles (Acts 2:3). The apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages, which they had not learned (Acts 2:4).

The sound was so loud that a crowd was attracted. The people that gathered heard the apostles speaking in many different languages. The people in the crowd were from different nations and they heard the apostles speaking in the languages of the places from which they had come (Acts 2:6-11).

This perplexed the hearers and they asked each other what this meant. Some, however, mocked and accused the apostles of being drunk with new wine.

THE KINGDOM HAD FINALLY BECOME A REALITY!

When the apostles saw that a crowd had gathered, they stood up and began to explain to the people what had happened. The apostle Peter said,

“For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day, but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

Acts 2:15-16

Peter continued quoting Joel to show that Joel had prophesied that the Holy Spirit would be poured out. Joel had said,

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.”

Acts 2:17

After quoting from Joel, Peter began to speak to his listeners about Jesus. Peter accused them of having slain a righteous man, Jesus, one whom God had approved by the miracles, wonders and signs that God had done through Him (Acts 2:22-23). Death, however, could not hold Jesus (Acts 2:24) and Peter testified,

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”

Acts 2:32

Peter further disclosed,

“Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”

Acts 2:33

With these words, the apostle Peter announced that Jesus is now with the Father and sitting at God’s right hand. Peter also disclosed that it was Jesus that had sent the Holy Spirit.

Then Peter made an even more specific proclamation of Jesus’ kingship. He said,

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.”

Acts 2:36

This was a tremendous announcement. It meant that Jesus is reigning! He sits at the right hand of God! He does not sit in the earthly city Jerusalem, as David had done, and as some of children of Israel expected the Messiah to do. Jesus sits with God on God’s throne in the heavenly Jerusalem. In this way, God’s sovereignty over His people had been restored. God is King again! He is reigning through His Son!

WHAT NOW?

The people were stupefied at Peter’s announcement, for it dawned on them that they had committed a great wrong. They cried out,

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Acts 2:37

Peter answered that they should repent. This meant that they should leave their sinful ways, which had blinded their eyes and which had led them into such a great blunder. Peter also said that each one of them should get baptized for the remission of sins. Here are Peter’s words:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Does this teach that everyone today should get baptized in recognition of the kingship of Jesus? Yes. Does it teach that everyone should get baptized for the forgiveness of his or her sins? Yes. Does it say that everyone will receive the Holy Spirit as a result? Yes. Did the prophets of the Old Testament promise that people would receive the Holy Spirit? Yes. (See Ezekiel 36:26-27, Joel 2:28 and Zechariah 12:10.)

When the people learned what they should do, 3,000 of them requested baptism that very day (Acts 2:41). They were baptized and were thereby ushered into the kingdom. By preaching the gospel, Peter had used the “keys of the kingdom,” which had been entrusted to him (Matthew 16:19). The doors of the kingdom were now open and Christ’s kingdom had begun its march toward victory.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

The kingdom that emerged was different from what many people had been expecting. Many were looking for a kingdom like David’s, in which the children of Israel would be strong and in which they would defeat their enemies in war. Jesus’ kingdom, however, is far different from that.

David’s kingdom was national but Christ’s is international. David’s kingdom was an earthly but Christ’s is heavenly. David’s kingdom was temporal but Christ’s is eternal.

OPPOSITION

The religious authorities in the Jerusalem of that day were not pleased with the way things had turned out. They had tried to put a stop to all the talk about Jesus’ having been resurrected. Now there was even talk of His being King.

The authorities placed the apostles Peter and John under arrest. They warned them not to speak further about Jesus, but the apostles were not intimidated. They answered boldly to the authorities and Jesus’ followers prayed to God as follows,

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word.”

Acts 4:29

WHAT WOULD THE FUTURE BRING?

What would the authorities do to the people who believed on Jesus? Would the believers be allowed to continue their work? Would the Jewish people really accept the fact that Jesus is King? Would His kingdom continue to grow?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. What do you suppose it was in the background of the man who was crucified with Jesus, which enabled him to know that Jesus would enter His kingdom in spite of His death?
2. Why do you suppose it was that the two disciples were able to recognize Jesus at Emmaus when He broke the bread and blessed it?
3. Do you think the “Great Commission” applies today? If so, why?
4. The apostles were slow to understand that Jesus was not going to restore a national kingdom to Israel. Why do you suppose they were so slow?
5. How do you explain the fact that only the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost?
6. Please, explain why it was such a tragedy for the Jews that they put their Messiah to death?
7. Why do you think the religious authorities in Jerusalem did not want the apostles to speak about Jesus?

7.

THE RAPID SPREAD OF THE KINGDOM

The persecution of the citizens of Jesus' kingdom in Jerusalem increased. It increased to the point that it became necessary for many of them to leave the city (Acts 8:1). They were scattered in the regions of Judea and Samaria.

PHILIP IN SAMARIA

Among those scattered from Jerusalem was a man named Philip. He went north to the city of Samaria. Philip was a spiritual-minded man, who had been a leader in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 6:3-5). When he got to Samaria, he began telling the people about "the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12).

Those to whom Philip preached in Samaria may not have been full Jews. The populace there was only half-Jewish, at best. They were a mixture of Israelites and foreign peoples. Although the Samaritans worshipped Jehovah as God, the Jews in Jerusalem did not accept them as being true Jews.

Philip was doing a new and brave thing in telling the Samaritans about the kingdom, and his actions had great implications for the future. For if it were proper to preach good news about the kingdom to half-Jews, then perhaps it would be proper to preach to Gentiles as well.

The people of Samaria turned out to be very receptive of Philip's message. Both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12). Their receptivity to the gospel caught the attention of the apostles in Jerusalem and the apostles sent Peter and John down to Samaria to investigate.

What had happened in Samaria met with Peter and John's approval. They laid their hands on the baptized Samaritans and gave them miraculous power through the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). The story of what happened in Samaria shows that the kingdom was growing. It was bursting the confines of Judaism and spilling over into the non-Jewish world.

Soon the good news was being preached also to Gentile people. The first recorded instance of Gentiles turning to Christ was the conversion of Cornelius and his household (and friends) in the city of Caesarea (Acts 10:24-48).

SAUL OF TARSUS

The man that God chose to spearhead the growth of the kingdom among the Gentiles was a man admirably suited for the job. He was Saul, from the city of Tarsus, a Jew who was trained in Jewish matters. The Lord spoke to Ananias concerning Saul of Tarsus, saying,

“He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”

Acts 9:15

Saul became known as “the apostle Paul,” and the Lord sent him out on several successful mission journeys.

IN THESSALONICA

On the second mission journey Paul came to Thessalonica, a city in Greece. There, Paul went into the synagogue and debated with the Jews concerning Jesus.

In the discussions that ensued, Paul attempted to show that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies regarding the Messiah. Some of the Jews in Thessalonica believed, but others did not and agitated so strongly against Paul that the city was brought into uproar (Acts 17:4-5).

A crowd took a Jewish man named Jason, who had become a believer in Jesus, and dragged him and others before the rulers of the city, where they pressed charges and said,

“These are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king --- Jesus.”

Acts 17:7

The charge that the Jews made against Jason shows what Paul had been preaching. He was preaching that Jesus is King. This type of preaching made some people very nervous, for the Thessalonians were living under Roman rule; and the Roman Empire was a dictatorship, imposed by force. The Romans took very a dim view of anyone talking about there being another king.

OPPOSITION IN EPHESUS SHOWS WHAT THE MESSAGE WAS

On his third mission journey, the apostle Paul and his traveling companions came to the city of Ephesus where Paul went into the synagogue to teach. He taught in the synagogue for a period of three months. The Bible says that Paul was

“reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.”

Acts 19:8

Some of the Jews took offence at Paul because they could not accept his teaching that Jesus is King. Their opposition to Jesus’ reign shows what Paul was preaching kingdom message. Many Ephesians came to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord in spite of the opposition of both Jews and Gentiles. As a result, a large church, which had a mixed national heritage, came into existence in Ephesus.

Months later, after the apostle Paul had left Ephesus and gone to other cities, he passed near Ephesus on his way to Jerusalem. He invited the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus, a nearby port city. In his farewell address to the elders from Ephesus, Paul described the work he had done. He said,

“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.”

Acts 20:25

The elders Ephesus were distressed that their beloved Paul was saying goodbye to them. It is interesting to note how the apostle Paul described his work among them. He said that he had gone about “preaching the kingdom of God.”

The apostle Paul knew that preaching about the kingdom was important. He knew that the kingdom was at that time already in existence and that it was his job to usher people into it.

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF PAUL PREACHING ABOUT THE KINGDOM

After Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner, he sent a message to the elders of the Jewish community in Rome asking them to visit him. Concerning their visit, the book of Acts says,

“So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.”

Acts 28:23

The apostle Paul found a way to witness concerning Jesus even though he was in custody. He continued to do what he had always done since the beginning of his preaching career, namely, to preach about Jesus and His kingdom.

PAUL'S COLOSSIAN LETTER ALSO POINTS TO THE KINGDOM

In the letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian church, Paul speaks of the kingdom in a way that shows that the kingdom already existed at the time of his writing. In his Colossian letter, Paul said,

“He [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Colossians 1:13

Notice the grammatical tense in the above passage. It is past tense. That means that at the time of his writing, Paul and other Christians had already been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. If Paul and others had been translated into the kingdom, then it must have existed. Yes, the kingdom was for them a present reality.

Indeed, the kingdom existed in Paul's day and continues to exist today, for Jesus Christ is still reigning. The fact that some people do not recognize His reign does not change the reality of His reign.

WAS THE KINGDOM REALLY ESTABLISHED?

Some people conclude that Jesus cannot possibly be reigning today since there are so many wicked people in the world. They feel that if Jesus were reigning, He would not allow wickedness and opposition to Himself. Opposition to Jesus' reign, however, only fulfills the prophecy of David, which says,

“The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

Psalms 110:2

Jesus did not wait until all of God's enemies were put down before He began His reign. The reason for this is that Jesus' rule was designed to bring about the defeat of God's enemies.

WHY GOD LAUGHS AT HIS ENEMIES

The reason why God laughs at His enemies and holds them in derision is that He has taken steps, which make their opposition futile. What steps did God take? He put His King on His holy hill (Zion). Here is what David wrote about that:

“He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: ‘Yet I have set my King on My holy hill of Zion.’”

Psalm 2:4-6

When David penned these words, it was still in the future that God would install His Messiah. From our point of view, however, Jesus’ installation is now past. Jesus was installed in His kingdom when He ascended to heavenly Zion and sat at the right hand of God in heaven (Act 2:30-33).

JESUS WILL REIGN UNTIL HIS ENEMIES ARE PUT DOWN

Jesus began to reign while His enemies were still active on earth, and His reign is coextensive with His battle against evil. David wrote:

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right had, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”

Psalm 110:1

The above statement is what the Lord God (Jehovah) said to David’s Lord (the Messiah). Who is David’s Lord? He is the Messiah. Notice that the Messiah, according to this statement, is to rule until God has put the His (Messiah’s) enemies down at His (the Messiah’s) footstool.

The apostle Paul wrote concerning the timetable for this. He said,

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

1 Corinthians 15:24-26

So we see that Paul wrote that Jesus is to reign until all of His enemies have been defeated. Questions: Does Jesus Christ still have enemies today? Yes, of course He does. If that is true, then Jesus must still be reigning.

Another question: Do people continue to die? If the answer is “yes,” then death, which is the last enemy, has not been put down. The fact that people are still dying shows that Jesus Christ is reigning, for He will reign until all of His enemies have been put down; and the last enemy to be put down is death.

JESUS WILL RETURN THE KINGDOM TO HIS FATHER

At the resurrection, when death will have been “swallowed up in victory,” Jesus Christ will have completed His work on earth. He will turn the kingdom over to His Father, for Paul wrote:

“Now when all things are made subject to Him [Jesus], then the Son Himself [Jesus] will also be subject to Him [God] who put all things under Him [Jesus], that God may be all in all.”

1 Corinthians 15:28

This passage shows that Jesus’ reign was not postponed until everything had been put under His feet. Instead, Christ’s reign will end when everything has been put under His feet; for it is after His enemies have been put down that Jesus Christ will return the kingdom to His Father.

Yes, Jesus Christ is really King, and He is reigning now!

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. List some of Paul’s qualifications that made him suited to take the gospel to the Gentiles.
2. Were the Romans justified in their fear that the preaching about the kingdom of Jesus would put their rule in jeopardy?
3. Give a defense of Paul’s positioning of the kingdom so prominently in his preaching.
4. How did the ascension and enthronement of Jesus insure the eventual downfall of God’s enemies (Psalm 2:4-6).
5. What is your assessment of how the battle against Jesus’ enemies is faring today?
6. How would the world be changed if all people were to believe that Jesus is King?

8.

THE MAJESTY OF THE KING

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God and that He existed in Heaven before He came to the earth (John 1:1). He was in heaven in the form of God (Philippians 2:6). Not only was He in the form of God, but He was also the agent through whom God created the world (Ephesians 3:9). That is to say, nothing was made without Him (John 1:3) and everything was made especially for Him (Colossians 1:16).

Since He helped create the world, and since the world was made for Him, the Son of God has a special relationship with the world. It was fitting, therefore, that He should be the one (Hebrews 2:10) to come to earth to save its people. He was aware of this and He came and died willingly (John 10:18).

THE SON OF GOD HUMBLLED HIMSELF.

The Son of God occupied the highest spot in the universe, next to God Himself; yet He did not cling to that heavenly position. Rather, He gave it up. He emptied Himself of His divine status and glory in order to become a man (Philippians 2:7-8). What a great step downward that was! He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7).

When He was on earth, Jesus did not act high and mighty as many people of the earth act. Instead, He humbled himself (Philippians 2:8). He came to serve (Matthew 20:28) and to endure the atrocities that were perpetrated against Him (1 Peter 2:23). He was obedient even unto death (Philippians 2:8). By allowing Himself to be put to death on the cross, He endured the ultimate indignity. Thus He fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament (Isaiah 53), which foretold that the divine Messiah would suffer before entering into His glory (Luke 24:25-26).

HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD AND ELEVATED TO GLORY

Death could not hold Jesus (Acts 2:24), for God raised Him up from the dead (Acts 2:24) and took Him to be with Him in Heaven (Acts 1:9-11). Although

He had been crucified in weakness, Jesus yet lives by the power of God (2 Corinthians 13:4).

Jesus has the honor of having given His life for man. Because of His willingness to suffer, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9). On earth He had been a little lower than the angels, but after He returned to Heaven, God crowned Him with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9; 1 Peter 1:21).

Therefore, God desires

“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Philippians 2:10-11

SPECIAL HONOR IS ALSO DUE TO CHRIST BECAUSE HE CREATED THE WORLD

When Christ finished His work and ascended to Heaven, He returned to the station that He had occupied before coming into the world. It was proper, therefore, that He be enthroned above the world that He had created, for the book of Hebrews says,

“He who built the house has more honor than the house.”

Hebrews 3:3

JESUS WAS ELEVATED BECAUSE HE IS GOD’S SON

Another reason for Jesus’ elevation is that He is God’s own Son. It was God, who said of Jesus,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:17

God attested to Jesus’ divine sonship by resurrecting Him from the dead (Romans 1:4).

Although God has other sons (Hebrews 2:10), none can compare with His Son Jesus, for Jesus is His Son in a special way (Matthew 3:17). Not every detail about the relationship between the Father and the Son has been revealed to us, but

we do know that the Bible says that Jesus is “the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14).

JESUS IS AT GOD’S RIGHT HAND

When Jesus ascended to Heaven, He was given an exalted position (Acts 2:33). He was ushered to the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:20), where a special seat had been reserved for Him. To be seated at God’s right hand is the highest honor that Heaven can bestow. It is fitting that God’s only Son should be at His right hand. If the Son had been forced to sit anywhere else, other than at God’s right hand, it would have been a demotion for Him. It would have been a disgrace,

A vision of Jesus at God’s right hand was granted to Stephen, the first Christian martyr, just before he was put to death. Stephen said,

“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man [Jesus] standing at the right hand of God!”

Acts 7:56

Concerning the enthronement of the Son of God, the prophet Daniel said,

“Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.”

Daniel 7:14a

Daniel also said of Christ’s reign:

“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

Daniel 7:14b

Yes, Jesus is the King of this world. He is rightfully called “the Lord of lords and the King of kings” (Revelation 17:14). The apostle Paul said that Jesus is

“the head of all principality and power.”

Colossians 2:10

In describing Jesus’ high station, the apostle Paul said that Jesus sits

“far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

Ephesians 1:21

For these reasons, then, and perhaps for others, Jesus Christ has every right to be King. No one else will do. No one approaches His stature, His grandeur, His perfection. He is head and shoulders above everyone else.

JESUS' ROYAL POWER

Jesus' position in Heaven is not merely honorary. He has real power and authority. Jesus said,

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Matthew 28:18

Jesus became the Lord of both of the living and the dead (Romans 14:9). He upholds everything by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). He has received an inheritance that is better than that of the angels (Hebrews 1:4). All angels, authorities and powers have been placed in subjection to Him (1 Peter 3:22).

He sits at God's right hand, not as a spectator, but as a participant in the high decisions that are being made there. Jesus is Coregent with His Father. He is the Head of every man (1 Corinthians 11:3). He is the Head, not in name only, for real power rests in His hands. He is not a constitutional monarch, as the British sovereign is. He is a ruler in actual fact. All presidents, all prime ministers, all legislators and all public officials are under Him. God's kingdom has been turned over to Jesus.

Jesus is not far removed from the earth and unconcerned about its affairs (Hebrews 4:15). Rather, He is a participant in the affairs of this world. And He is both compassionate and willing to help (Hebrews 4:16).

With His great power, Jesus works on behalf of His subjects on earth (Ephesians 1:19). He works for them through His mighty angels (Hebrews 1:14) and through His Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). He enables His people to be “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10). He also draws people to Himself through His attractiveness (John 12:32) and through the power of His word (Romans 1:16).

ALL ARMIES ARE HIS

All the armies of the world are by right His. They should stand or march at His command. They may not be aware that Jesus reigns, and they may not act as though He were in charge. Indeed, they may wish that He were not in charge. In spite of this, however, they are responsible to Him, whether they like it or not. One day, everyone will be called upon to give an account to Him. Neither their ignorance of Him, nor their enduring insubordination detracts from the rightfulness of His reign. Their opposition to Him does not make His ultimate triumph less inexorable.

Jesus will continue to reign over His enemies until victory is achieved (1 Corinthians 15:25). When victory is achieved, He will return the kingdom to His Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

ALL PEOPLE SHOULD HONOR THE KING

Due to the fact that not many kings are still reigning in world today, many people have forgotten, or never knew, what a king is like. They do not know, for instance, how a real king should be treated.

God desires that all people on earth should recognize the royalty of His Son Jesus. He wants them to treat Him with the respect and honor that is His due. Indeed, God wants people to honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Jesus said,

“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

John 5:23

God wants Jesus' name to take precedence over every name, for Jesus Christ is the great King. His glory and power cannot be exaggerated. If the people of the earth could only recognize that Jesus Christ is in charge, and if they were to honor His rule, the world would be a much better place in which to live.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. What does it tell you about God's nature that His Son, who is in His image, was willing to humble Himself in order to save people?
2. Do you think that Jesus' humiliation and death detracted from His glory? If it did not, why did it not?

3. Do you think that most people on earth realize that this world has a King?
What makes you think as you do?
4. How, in your judgment, would things be changed if more people on earth were to acknowledge the reign of Jesus and were to submit to His rule?
5. Do you think government officials should recognize Jesus' authority over their decisions and actions? How should they should show respect for Jesus' authority?
6. What do you think citizens of the kingdom can do to add to Jesus' glory?

9.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

Many people in Jesus' day hoped that the kingdom would come very soon. Some of them, who were Pharisees, came to Jesus and asked Him when the kingdom would come. Jesus replied to them,

“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ for indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 17:20-21

This shows that Christ's kingdom would not be a kingdom like the Pharisees were expecting. They were expecting an earthly kingdom, with Jerusalem as its capital. From Jerusalem they hoped to rule much of the world, just as David and Solomon had done. Even some of Jesus' disciples appear to have been infected with this concept, for immediately before Jesus ascended to Heaven, they asked Him,

“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Acts 1:6

They thought that Israel would have a kingdom as in the old days, but as time went on their concept of the kingdom changed. Here is a brief account of how their concept changed:

HOW THE KINGDOM CAME TO BE INTERNATIONAL

Due to the persecution of Christians, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were scattered. Wherever they went they preached about Jesus (Acts 8:1,4). They preached first to people in Samaria (Acts 8). Later, as the gospel spread into Gentile lands, people from many Gentile nations came into the kingdom (Acts 11:20-21). Ultimately, the kingdom came to include men and women of all races, as the apostle Paul wrote,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE GENTILES?

The influx of Gentiles into the kingdom perplexed the Jews that had become Christians. They no doubt asked such questions as: Do the Gentiles have a right to be in the kingdom? Should they be accepted as true brothers and sisters?

Paul and Barnabas met with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to discuss what to do about Gentiles that had become Christians (Acts 15). During their discussion, a brother named James quoted the prophecy of the prophet Amos to show that the “tabernacle of David” would embrace Gentiles. This would happen at the time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel (Acts 15:14-17). Amos’ prophecy reads like this:

““On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’ Says the Lord who does this thing.”

Amos 9:11-12

This prophecy of Amos shows that God was planning to restore the kingdom to David’s family. It also shows that when a son of David would sit again on David’s throne, many Gentiles would be brought under the reign of David’s family.

This prophecy could be interpreted to mean that the Jews would gain control of Edom and the Gentiles by conquering them with the sword. Perhaps some Jews interpreted the prophecy in that way. As it turned out, however, the way that the Jews conquered Edom and the Gentiles was not with the sword, but with the preaching the gospel of peace.

Through the influence of Jesus, the knowledge of Jehovah has gone around the world; and it is because of Him that the Jewish Scriptures have come to be known and read in the whole world.

ISRAEL NEEDED A LARGER “TENT”

The house of Israel was greatly expanded when Gentiles came into the kingdom. Isaiah foretold that Israel would for that reason need a larger “tent.” He wrote,

“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations.”

Isaiah 54:2-3

Most Jews were not prepared to accept a large influx of Gentiles into their nation. They hoped to “inherit the nations” by conquering and displacing them, but God had something else in mind. He intended that Israel should “inherit” the nations by having the “tent” of Israel expand so as to include Gentiles.

GENTILE CHRISTIANS ARE GRAFTED IN

The apostle Paul compared the nation of Israel to an olive tree, and Gentiles that became Jesus’ followers are grafted into that tree. Paul wrote to Gentile Christians as follows:

“And you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and the fatness of the olive tree.”

Romans 11:17

When Gentiles are “grafted in” and brought under the “tent” of Israel, an expansion of the house of Israel takes place. Those Gentiles, who had formerly been “far off,” came “near,” as Paul wrote:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.”

Ephesians 2:13

Thus, the distinction between Jew and Gentile is taken away by Christ. The apostle Paul, in describing the status of the Gentiles that accepted Christ, wrote as follows:

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizen with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Ephesians 2:19

LOOK WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM WAS PREACHED IN EPHEBUS

When the apostle Paul came to the city of Ephesus, he reasoned with the people of that city and persuaded to them concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). As a result of his preaching, a church was established in Ephesus.

LOOK WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CITY OF COLOSSE

The gospel was introduced into Colosse by a man named Epaphras, who was a friend and associate of the apostle Paul (Colossians 1:7). When the people of Colosse accepted the gospel, they were buried with Jesus in baptism and “were raised with Him through faith in the working of God” (Colossians 2:12). The apostle Paul, in describing what happens when people obey the gospel, wrote,

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the son of His love.”

Colossians 1:13

After the Colossians thus had been “translated” into the kingdom of God’s Son, they became “saints and faithful brethren in Christ” (Colossians 1:2). And, as a result, there was a church in Colosse.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA MINOR

The people in the seven churches of Asia Minor were both in the kingdom (Revelation 1:6) and in the church (Revelation, chapters 1-3). Wherever the gospel of the kingdom was successfully preached, a church got started; for by becoming citizens of the kingdom people also became members of the church.

IS IT A KINGDOM OR IS IT A CHURCH?

It is both kingdom and church. The kingdom of the Old Testament has certain aspects that remind one of a church. Likewise, the church of the New Testament has certain aspects that remind one of a kingdom. The more one reads

the Bible, the more one realizes that the kingdom and the church are not separate entities. The church of the New Testament is an extension of the kingdom of the Old Testament.

As one reads in the Bible, an amazing thing takes place. Before one's very eyes, the kingdom of David becomes the church of Christ.

Some people may be disappointed to learn that what started out as a "kingdom" under David ended up as a "church" under Jesus. If anyone should happen to be disappointed, however, perhaps it is because he has not fully appreciated the spiritual aspects of the kingdom of the Old Testament. Or perhaps it is because he does not fully appreciate the grandeur of the church in the New Testament.

JESUS' KINGDOM AND HIS CHURCH ARE THE SAME

Jesus used the words "kingdom" and "church" interchangeably. He saw no discrepancy in calling his kingdom a church. This can be seen from what He said to Simon Peter. Jesus said,

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 16:17-19

It is a mistake to think that the kingdom of Christ and the church of Christ are separate entities. Just as there is only one "Shepherd" over God's people (Ezekiel 34:23-24), there is also only one "sheepfold" to contain God's people (John 10:16).

It becomes clear, then, that the kingdom of Christ and the church of Christ are identical. Here are some of the reasons for this assertion:

1. They have the same Head, i.e. Jesus Christ. (Compare Acts 2:36 with Ephesians 1:22-23.)
2. They were both set up at the same place, i.e. Jerusalem. (Compare Micah 4:2-3 with Luke 24:47.)
3. They were both established at the same time, i.e. on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, during the days of the Roman Empire. (Compare Daniel 2:44 with Acts 2:1-47.)

4. They both share the same destiny, i.e. Heaven. (Compare 1 Corinthians 15:24 with Ephesians 5:23.)

IT IS A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

Any difficulty involved in identifying the kingdom with the church is lessened if one realizes that the kingdom of Jesus is a spiritual kingdom. It is not an earthly and materialistic kingdom. A good explanation for what the church is can be found in the words of the apostle Paul, who wrote,

“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 14:17

It is a kingdom in which God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), lives in the hearts of His people. It is a kingdom that is not concerned with whether or not food is ritually clean, but with whether or not a person acts justly, lives at peace with his fellow man and rejoices in the Holy Spirit. This elevates the kingdom to a new level. Jesus told His followers to pray:

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:10

These words equate the kingdom with doing the will of God. This means that the kingdom can be found on earth where people recognize God’s kingship and where they submit to His will. Inversely, where people refuse to obey God’s will, God’s reign is thwarted among them.

JESUS’ KINGDOM IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Jesus frequently referred to His kingdom as the “kingdom of Heaven.” Truly, from every point of view, His kingdom is Heaven’s kingdom:

His kingdom was planned by God in Heaven.

It was built by Jesus who came from Heaven.

Its rules of conduct and method operation are those of Heaven.

Its Ruler is enthroned in Heaven.

And its citizens are destined for Heaven.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why were the apostles slow to understand that the kingdom was not for Jews only? What do you think?
2. Do you think it would be helpful if more people realized the Christ's church is also a kingdom? How would that be helpful?
3. Why do you suppose it is that Christ's kingdom has no headquarters on earth?
4. Do you think it is possible for Christ's kingdom to be in a city without a church being there also? Explain.
5. Why must a church submit to the will of God in order to be the true church?
6. Make a list of things that will help Christians become more spiritually minded.

10.

HOW THE KINGDOM GROWS

It is difficult for us to realize how in three short years Jesus could have set a movement in motion, which was to touch every continent and to influence millions of people. Jesus foretold, however, that this would happen.

Jesus compared the growth of the kingdom to the growth of a mustard seed. He said,

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Matthew 13:31-32

The kingdom started out very small. It started out in Jerusalem. From there it spread across Asia Minor and spilled over into Greece and later went to Rome. In the meanwhile, it was also spreading across North Africa to the west and from Syria to the east.

SOME PEOPLE WERE SEARCHING FOR THE KINGDOM

Some of the people in Jesus' day wanted to be in God's kingdom and were searching for it. Jesus compared such people to a man that was looking for beautiful pearls. Jesus said,

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:45-46

There are still people like that today, who read the Bible and have a concept of what the kingdom should be like. They go from place to place looking for it. When they find it, they take delight in it and embrace it with joy.

OTHER PEOPLE JUST STUMBLE UPON THE KINGDOM

Not everyone is searching for the kingdom. Some people just stumble upon it. They are like a man that found treasure hidden in a field. Jesus said,

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

Matthew 13:44

Imagine the surprise and joy of the man of whom Jesus spoke. He had no idea that he might find a treasure that day. Yet suddenly, it was there! He immediately recognized its value and desired to have it. He was even willing to exchange everything he had for it.

This describes how some people stumble upon the kingdom. Although they may not have been familiar with the Bible and may not have known about the kingdom, yet, suddenly they see it; and they are delighted over it. Therefore, they are willing to do whatever necessary to get into it.

HOW PEOPLE ARE ATTRACTED TO JESUS

People are being drawn to Jesus in different ways. Some are drawn by the power of His personality, some by the beauty of His teaching and His matchless life. Above all, they are drawn to Him by His sacrificial death. Jesus predicted that His death would draw people to Him. He said,

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all peoples to Myself.”

John 12:32

The story of Jesus’ dying on the cross, ugly as it is, has turned out to be the most attractive theme in history. It is attractive because it demonstrates true love. It tells how God showed His love for man by allowing His Son to die for man (Romans 5:8); and it tells how the Son of God showed His love for us by suffering for us (John 15:13).

IS JESUS STILL RECRUITING PEOPLE TODAY?

Yes, Jesus is not only attracting people but also recruiting them. He is recruiting them for service in His kingdom. The apostle Paul felt that Jesus had laid hold of him, for he wrote:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Philippians 3:12

HOW JESUS RECRUIT PEOPLE

Jesus uses the people of His kingdom to recruit others. He compared the kingdom to a dragnet that is cast into the sea. He said,

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind.”

Matthew 13:47

Jesus cast the net into the sea. The way He cast it was by coming to earth to die for man; and just as a fisherman catches all kinds of fish in his net, so Jesus catches all kinds of people for the kingdom.

No one should be surprised that Jesus has turned recruiting over to His citizens of His kingdom, for Jesus said that the kingdom would grow on its own. He said,

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and the seed should sprout and grow he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4:26-29

The kingdom grows like this farmer’s crop. The farmer did not make the crop grow. All that he did was prepare the soil and scatter the seed. The seed sprouted and grew of its own. The kingdom is like that. Jesus spent about three years sowing the seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11). After that, He returned to His Father in Heaven. Just as the farmer in Jesus’ parable trusted the ground to bring forth fruit, so Jesus trusts His people to bear fruit.

Was Jesus’ confidence in His people misplaced? Would His followers grasp the potential of the kingdom? Would they follow His example? Would they keep His commands? Would there be faith on earth when He returned (Luke 18:8)?

Such questions point out how important the efforts of His citizens on behalf of the kingdom are.

JESUS INVITES PEOPLE INTO HIS KINGDOM

Jesus told a parable about a king who invited people to attend the wedding feast of his son. When the feast was ready, the king sent out servants to tell the guests:

“See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”

Matthew 22:4

Some of the people that had been invited made fun of the invitation and went their own way. One of them went to his farm and another to his business. Others seized the king’s servants, treated them badly and killed them.

What does this show about the kingdom? It shows that God has made provisions to receive many guests and that He has sent out His servants to invite people. It also shows that not everyone will respond to His invitation. God will not force them to respond because entrance into the kingdom is voluntary.

After telling this parable, Jesus made a statement that sounds paradoxical. He said,

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Matthew 22:14

This means that although many people are called (invited) to the king’s feast, not all of them accept the invitation. Therefore, only a few of them will be chosen. If all of the people in Jesus’ parable had chosen to attend the feast, their choice would have placed them among the chosen ones; for it depended upon their decision.

After the king in Jesus’ parable punished the people that had rejected his invitation and who had treated his servants badly, the king said to other servants,

“The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.”

Matthew 22:8-9

Since the original guests declined to respond to the invitation, the feast was thrown open to all. Anyone who wanted to be present could attend. This was good news for the people in the highways and byways, namely, for the Gentiles.

The invitation extends to all people of every nation. The gospel is being preached to every nation under the sun so that all people have an opportunity to be in the kingdom. They are being invited (called) by the gospel, as the apostle Paul wrote:

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

It is important for people to hear the good news about the kingdom, because they must hear the message before they can believe it. The apostle Paul said, “faith comes by hearing” (Romans 10:17); but if people are to be able to “hear” a message, someone has to tell it to them. That is why the apostle Paul asked,

“How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

Romans 10:14-15

Telling the gospel is so important that one might expect that God would have turned that task over to the Holy Spirit or the angels, but He did not. He turned it over to human beings. The apostle Paul seemed to be amazed that God had turned such an important task over to humans, for he wrote:

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”

2 Corinthians 4:7

NOT EVERYONE DOES WELL REGARDING THE KINGDOM

Jesus found that people differ in their ability to do well regarding the kingdom. He compared people to the various types of soil into which a farmer sows seed. Some people are like the hard ground on the edge of a path. Of them Jesus said,

“Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.”

Matthew 13:3-4

This shows that when people hear the message of the kingdom and do not understand it, the devil comes quickly and snatches the message out of their hearts (Matthew 13:19). The devil does this so that they will soon forget what they have heard.

Other people are like stony ground. Of them Jesus said,

“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.”

Matthew 13:5-6

This describes people who receive the message of the kingdom with joy but who have no depth of character. They are not able to endure the tribulations and persecutions that arise because of the word of God, and they soon fall away (Matthew 13:20-21).

Other people are like a soil that has thorns in it. Of them Jesus said,

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.”

Matthew 13:7

This describes people that hear the message of the kingdom and accept it, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word of God so that they remain unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

Some people, however, are like good soil. Of them Jesus said,

“But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Matthew 13:8

These are people whose hearts are open to the message of the cross. The Lord can use such people to bear good fruit.

THE KINGDOM ALSO GROWS IN INTENSITY

Jesus knew that His kingdom would not only grow in size but also in intensity. He said,

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Matthew 13:33

A leavening process takes place after a person gets into the kingdom. The teaching of the kingdom keeps growing in him until he becomes like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Spirit of Jesus keeps working in him until he bears fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus' kingdom grow so rapidly at the beginning? What do you think?
2. How can you tell if a person is sincerely looking for the kingdom?
3. What seems to you to be the most attractive thing about Jesus?
4. How does reading the Bible help a person identify the kingdom?
5. Why do you suppose it is that Jesus Christ allows the kingdom to grow on its own?
6. When people in the kingdom do not produce fruit, is it the fault of the seed, the fault of the soil or the fault of the sower? Defend your position.

11.

HOW CHRIST SETS PEOPLE FREE

Slavery was common in Jesus' day. One nation conquered another nation and made slaves of its people. Then the conquerors either kept the slaves to work for themselves or sold them to others. If a slave wanted to get free, usually a ransom had to be paid.

JESUS PAID THE RANSOM PRICE

By paying the ransom price (Matthew 20:28), Jesus sets people free from slavery to sin (Romans 6:18). He buys them out of slavery. He buys them not with silver or gold but with His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19). In this way He redeems them from every lawless deed they have done. He also purifies them so they can become His own special people (Titus 2:14); and after He has purchased them, they belong to God, Jesus' Father (Romans 6:22).

The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought of themselves as free men, but they were actually slaves. In a debate with the Pharisees, Jesus said to them,

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:32

This implied that the Pharisees were not free; and for that reason they did not like what Jesus said, so they responded,

“We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.”

John 8:33

This was not true. Their ancestors had been in bondage in the past, and they were themselves under Roman oppression. What was worse, they were slaves in a way they did not even know. Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”

John 8:34

Yes, they were slaves to sin. This can be seen by the fact that they were plotting to put Jesus to death (John 8:40). Not only were they blind to their slavery, but they were also powerless to get free. They needed someone’s help, so Jesus said to them,

“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

John 8:36

PEOPLE MUST REPENT

Before Jesus can help people get free from sin, however, they have to be willing to come out of it. They must dislike sin so much that they hate being slaves to it. They must be willing to live differently. Therefore, they need to hear about repentance.

Jesus came to earth to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). He taught people to repent in order to be ready for the kingdom, which was approaching (Matthew 4:17). Jesus warned people that unless they repent of their sins they would perish (Luke 13:3, 5). This sounds somber; but actually it’s good news, for it means that God is willing to forgive people. That is why Jesus commissioned His followers to go and tell all nations of the necessity of repentance and of the possibility of remission of sins (Luke 24:47).

The apostles preached at first only to Jewish people, but after the apostles had come to understand that God had granted repentance to Gentiles also, they started preaching to Gentiles as well (Acts 11:19-21).

Jesus asserted that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7). This is because God does not want anyone to perish. He wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). For that reason, the apostle Peter (Acts 3:19), along with others, urged people to repent and be converted.

DYING TO SIN

Although repentance is necessary before a person can get free from the guilt of sin, there is another, little-known aspect to getting free. It is this: People are set free by death. They have to die with reference to sin before they can actually be free from it (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle Paul wrote:

“For he who has died has been freed from sin.”

Romans 6:7

This means, as we have seen, that people must hate sin and stop doing it. The apostle Paul asked,

“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

Romans 6:2

When a person dies to sin it is a momentous happening. It takes place when a person is baptized (Romans 6:3). This may surprise some people, but it is true. When a person is laid down into water for the purpose of baptism, he is, in effect, entering into the death of Jesus. This is what the apostle said:

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Romans 6:3-5

In baptism a person dies to sin, for it is in baptism that he comes into contact with the blood that Jesus shed. It is here that a person's sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). By reason of his dying with Christ, a person is no longer under the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13). A Christian can, course, sin if he chooses to do so, but he is no longer compelled to do so; for the devil no longer has him under his control. Jesus has set him free.

REAL FREEDOM

Jesus sets people free from all aspects of sin and it is a lasting freedom. He sets people free from:

1. The power of sin. They are no longer compelled to sin (1 Corinthians 10:13).
2. From the pollution of sins. He washes them and makes them holy (1 Corinthians 6:11).

3. From the punishment for sins. His took their punishment in their stead (1 Peter 2:24).

IS IT IMPORTANT?

Yes, one should not doubt that the kingdom of God deals with the vital issues. Being released from slavery to sin is one of the most vital issues in life. The following considerations will show you how vital it is to be free.

JESUS FREES PEOPLE FROM FUTILITY

Some people feel that they are on a treadmill. Their actions seem useless, because their actions are not dedicated to God. Jesus releases men and women from aimless activities (1 Peter 1:18) and gives them a sense of direction. In doing so, He brings meaning into their lives. But there is more:

JESUS RELIEVES PEOPLE OF GUILT

Some people are eaten up with guilt. When they obey the gospel, however, God forgives them of their sins (Acts 2:38). They can rely on God's forgiveness, because God is faithful. He will do what He has promised. When God forgives sin, it is blotted out of His remembrance (Hebrews 8:12), and people can be confident that they are free. But there is more:

JESUS RELEASES PEOPLE FROM THEIR ANGER

Jesus helps people filled with anger, wrath and resentment. He helps them turn these emotions over to God. He helps them to know that God will repay those that have done them wrong (Romans 12:19-20). Jesus helps people bear unjust treatment as He Himself bore it (1 Peter 3:17-18). Yet He does still more:

JESUS FREES PEOPLE FROM WORRY

Jesus frees people from worry and anxiety. He assures them that God will take care of them (Matthew 6:25-34). In addition, He grants them the privilege of being able to pray to God and to ask for His help in difficult situations (John 15:7). But He does still more:

JESUS FREES PEOPLE FROM FEAR

In ancient days, many people were afraid of evil spirit. They thought that evil spirits lurk under every tree and around every large stone. They feared the demons, which they associated in their minds with the idols that they worshipped (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

In some places in the world today people still fear evil spirits and demons. There are still people today trying to placate evil spirits and demons with offerings and incantations. Jesus, however, gives people the courage to turn away from idols (1 Thessalonians 1:9) and helps them not to fear evil spirits.

Jesus frees people from all kinds of fears (Romans 8:38-39): He frees them from the fear of being alone (Matthew 28:20), from the fear of being unable (Philippians 4:13) to cope with rejection (Romans 8:31-34) and more.

JESUS FREES PEOPLE FROM THE FEAR OF DYING

The devil holds people in bondage partly by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15), but Jesus sets people free from the fear of death. Death could not keep Jesus down (Acts 2:24). He gained the victory over death by His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:57). He releases people from the bondage of a decaying body and gives them hope of a resurrection to the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:21). Therefore, those who are in Christ's kingdom do not need to fear death, for if Jesus arose from the dead, they too will be raised. Dying is for them only the entrance into a better life (Philippians 1:21,23). And there is more:

JESUS FREES PEOPLE FROM THE WRATH TO COME

Worldly people are going to be punished for their sins. Wrath is being stored up for them for the day of wrath (Romans 2:5), and every person will be called upon to give an account (Romans 2:6-10). Jesus delivers people from the fear of wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

FREEDOM BRINGS JOY

The sense of freedom that citizens of Christ's kingdom feel is one of their blessings. Although they know that they are serving under a King and that they are bound by the rules of His kingdom, it is not a burden to them (1 John 5:3). They feel free to do whatever they choose to do, within the confines of those rules. In Christ's kingdom, people are free to do what they know to be good. They are free

to develop holiness and godliness to its full potential. This freedom brings a joy that causes no regrets.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so difficult for some sinners to recognize that they are slaves to sin?
2. Do you think that most people would like to get free, once they recognize that they are slaves to sin? Please explain.
3. What advantages do you see in being free of slavery to sin?
4. Does the price that Jesus paid seem to you to be too high? Explain your thinking.
5. If a person sins after he has been baptized, does that mean that he never was free in the first place? Give a reason for your answer.
6. If people have been purchased by Jesus and belong to Him, how should this affect the way they live?

12.

HOW CHRIST MAKES PEOPLE NEW

Jesus changes people. He changed the life of the Samaritan woman whom He met at a well in Samaria (John 4). He changed the life of the woman who wept at His feet in gratitude in the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7). He also changed Zacchaeus, a dishonest tax collector (Luke 19). He changed Saul of Tarsus, who was a persecutor of the church (Acts 9).

Jesus has changed people in times past and He is still changing people today. We see bad men becoming loving husbands. We see loose women becoming faithful wives and mothers. We see wayward children becoming respectful and obedient members of their families.

BEING BORN AGAIN

When people make dramatic changes like these, it is usually the sign that they have been born again.

Concerning the necessity of a person's being born again, Jesus said to a man named Nicodemus,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:3

Nicodemus had difficulties understanding what Jesus meant. He asked Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” (John 3:4).

Nicodemus understood the words of Jesus in their most literal sense. Jesus, however, was not speaking about being reborn in a physical way. He was speaking about a spiritual rebirth. He was speaking about a rebirth in which a person changes how he acts and how he thinks; for unless a person has this spiritual rebirth, he cannot even see the kingdom of God. When a person experiences the

rebirth of which Jesus spoke, that person is born into the kingdom of God, which is God's spiritual family.

The author of the book of James explained how God brings children to life in His spiritual family. James said that they are brought forth "by the word of truth." James wrote:

"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."

James 1:18

This shows that the "word of truth" is the seed that God uses to bring about a new birth. The seed is incorruptible, as the apostle Peter explained:

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through the word of God which lives and abides forever."

1 Peter 1:23

If the "word of God" is the seed, which God uses to bring about a new birth, then the word of God should be taught to as many people as possible.

WHAT A GOOD IDEA TEACHING IS!

Nothing could better demonstrate God's respect for the integrity and freedom of human beings than for Christ to recruit people for His kingdom by teaching. This indicates that God does not force people into His kingdom. Instead, He allows them to see the benefits of their being in His kingdom, so that they can make a decision on their own.

The apostle Paul emphasized how wise it is that God made salvation dependent upon teaching (or preaching). He wrote:

"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

1 Corinthians 1:21

HOW PAUL BEGAT THE CORINTHIANS

When Paul came to Corinth, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said to him,

“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you.”
Acts 18:9-10

The book of Acts describes how the apostle Paul worked in the city of Corinth. Paul “reasoned with” Jews in the synagogue and he “persuaded” both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). Paul “testified” to the Jews that “Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:5). So Paul, being obedient to the Lord’s command, continued to teach the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:11) and the results of his teaching are recorded in the book of Acts:

“And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”
Acts 18:8

Paul later reminded the Corinthians in a letter that he had “begotten them through the gospel.” He wrote:

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”
1 Corinthians 4:15

The same pattern is found throughout the New Testament. Wherever one reads that a man or a woman was changed and made ready for the kingdom of God, one finds that the change was initiated through the preaching (or teaching) of the gospel.

Some people, however, are not happy with this arrangement. They prefer to see people changed in a more mysterious way, perhaps by a vision or by some special feeling. Jesus’ way of changing people was to give them the understanding that comes by teaching. This is the best way for changing people, because it gives them the opportunity to make an informed choice.

WHAT A GREAT IDEA FAITH IS!

The role that faith plays in salvation shows how beautifully God has designed His plan of salvation. If salvation were dependent upon a person’s own righteousness, no one could be saved, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). So if anyone is to be saved, it has to be by faith. Only when salvation is by faith is there room for God’s grace to supplant the retribution that sinners deserve. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace.”

Romans 4:16

When people have faith in Christ, it reveals that they are humble and teachable. God can work with people like that.

Unless people have faith, they cannot be sons of God; for the apostle Paul wrote:

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:26

Faith by itself, however, does not put anyone into Christ, for faith by itself is dead (James 2:20). The apostle Paul described how faith had put the Galatians into Christ, saying,

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Galatians 3:27

The faith of the Galatians resulted in their being baptized. Although God saved the Galatians because of their faith (Galatians 3:26), it was in baptism that their salvation was consummated. It was in baptism that they put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), and only in Christ is salvation to be found (Acts 4:12).

HOW BEAUTIFUL BAPTISM IS!

Like everything else that God has ordained, baptism in water is beautiful. It is beautiful because in baptism one responds to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul wrote:

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the death by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Romans 6:4

Note, only after baptism is a person raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Some people, however, want to be children of God the very moment they start to believe in Jesus. This desire comes from a misunderstanding of what faith is. They define faith, perhaps, as confidence of salvation. So they conclude that at the very moment they think they are saved, they are saved. This, however, is circular reasoning. It assumes the thing to be proved. Such reasoning

is foreign to the Bible, for the Bible defines faith differently. The Bible shows that faith has at least three components:

1. Faith is the conviction that certain facts are true (Hebrews 11:1).
2. Faith is an attitude of trust toward God (Hebrews 11:6).
3. And faith is a willingness to obey what God has said (Hebrews 11:8).

Therefore, true faith leads a person in the direction of obedience to God, and obedience leads a person to baptism. Only after a person has obeyed the gospel by being baptized can he or she have biblical confidence of salvation,

BAPTISM IS CONNECTED WITH THE NEW BIRTH.

Jesus himself is the one that connected baptism with the new birth. He made this connection when He said to Nicodemus,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

John 3:5

Not everyone, however, would agree that the word *water* in this passage refers to baptism. Some people seem to have an aversion to water, but Jesus did not have such an aversion. He himself was baptized (Matthew 3:16) and He taught His disciples to baptize others (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is the demarcation line over which a person must step before he or she gets into the kingdom of God. Prior to a person's being baptized, he or she is still in his or her sins. Until he or she is baptized, his or her sins have not been washed away (Acts 22:16). This is because baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Prior to baptism, the old person is very much alive, but in baptism the old person dies with Christ, as Paul wrote:

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

Romans 6:3

Some people make the mistake of characterizing baptism as a “work.” Yet no one who understands the New Testament would ever think of getting baptized in order to “earn” his or her salvation. Actually, there is nothing more passive, and

less work-like, than baptism; for in baptism a person is entirely passive. This is shown by the fact that there is no mention in the Bible of anyone baptizing himself or herself. He or she has to ask someone to baptize him or her.

BAPTISM BY ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH.

Although baptism is important, water cannot wash away sins. The blood of Christ washes away sins (Revelation 1:5b). It is faith in the heart of a recipient of baptism that gives baptism its power. This was indicated by the apostle Paul when he wrote to the people in Colosse, saying,

“Buried with Him in Baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

Colossians 2:12

Faith in the heart of the person being baptized is what turns his or her being dipped in water into Christian baptism. Faith turns baptism into a spiritual rebirth.

HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS IN THE NEW BIRTH

No one can deny that the Holy Spirit is involved in the new birth, for Jesus said,

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

John 3:6

What does the Holy Spirit do? How is He involved in the new birth? Here are some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is involved:

- (1) The Holy Spirit inspired the men who wrote the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). In the Bible, one finds the words of Jesus, which are themselves “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63).
- (2) Jesus instructed His disciples to baptize people in the name of the Holy Spirit, as well as in the name of the Father and of the Son (Matthew 28:19).
- (3) After people have repented of their sins and are baptized, they receive the Holy Spirit as a gift (Acts 2:38).

- (4) After a person has received the Holy Spirit as a gift, that person is renewed continually by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).
- (5) A baptized person is a temple for the Holy Spirit, who gives life (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- (6) The Holy Spirit bears fruit in a baptized person's life (Galatians 5:22-23).
- (7) The Holy Spirit sanctifies a baptized believer (2 Thessalonians 2:13).
- (8) And the Holy Spirit seals a baptized person for salvation on the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

No one could persevere in godly living without the help of the Holy Spirit.

GOD'S WONDERFUL PLAN OF SALVATION

God's plan for making new people is a masterful plan. It cannot be improved upon. It is perfect and needs only to be implemented. When the whole plan is put into effect, as God intends for it to be, great and startling results occur. It makes people new! It puts them into the kingdom of God!

THOUGHTS QUESTIONS

1. Have you observed dramatic change in the life of a person that has obeyed the gospel? Please tell of it if you have.
2. Do you agree that if a person has faith in Christ, it shows that he is humble and teachable? In what way does faith show humility and teachability?
3. Do you think that it makes any difference to God what method a person uses in an effort to get saved? Will one method work just as well as another? If not, why not?
4. Are faith and baptism of any use to a person if he does not truly repent of his sins? Explain?
5. In what ways can citizens of the kingdom of God be considered new people?
6. Do you think a person can know whether or not the Holy Spirit is working in his life?

13.

JESUS IS PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE

Jesus loves His people. He goes out among them (John 10:3-4) and becomes involved in their affairs.

JESUS PROMISED TO BE WITH HIS PEOPLE

Just before Jesus returned to Heaven, He instructed His apostles to go and make disciples of all the nations. He promised them.

“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20

Jesus’ promise meant, for example, that He would be with Simon Peter in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. It meant that He would be present to comfort the apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. It meant, in fact, that He would go with all of His apostles wherever the work of the Lord might take them.

This promise was not limited to the twelve apostles. Jesus promised to be with all of His people. He also promised to be with them in their assemblies wherever they come together in His name. He said,

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Matthew 18:20

Today, whether His followers assemble in Africa or on the isles of the sea, Jesus is there. If they meet in a home or outside under a tree, Jesus is there. He is aware of everything that happens. He witnesses all their trials and triumphs.

BUT HOW CAN JESUS BE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH AT THE SAME TIME?

No one is fully able to explain how Jesus can be with God in Heaven and with His people on earth at the same time. It is a great mystery, yet judging from what the Bible says, it appears to be true.

JESUS CHRIST IS SPIRIT

A part of the explanation for how Christ can be everywhere is that He is Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). He is like His Father, who is also Spirit (John 4:24).

The New Testament tells some of the things that Jesus Christ does, or has done, in the Spirit. For example, by the Spirit, Christ went and preached to the ancients in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:18-20). Christ's Spirit was also in the prophets of the Old Testament, testifying to them about the future sufferings of the Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:10-11).

God wants the Spirit of Jesus Christ to be in the hearts and lives of all of His people. In fact, the Bible tells us that God Himself sends "the Spirit of His Son" into the hearts of those who are born into His family. Here is what the apostle Paul wrote:

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His son 'Abba, Father!'"

Galatians 4:6

IS JESUS CHRIST REALLY PRESENT?

Some people could assume that, since Jesus is present only in Spirit, He is not really present at all, but that assumption is false. It is false because who can say that the world of the spirit is not just as real as the physical world?

JESUS IS ALSO PRESENT "IN" HIS FOLLOWERS

Jesus not only promised to be present "with" His followers, but He also promised to be "in" them. Here is what He said to His apostles at the Last Supper:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

In this passage, Jesus used the expression: “I in you.” This shows that Jesus expected to be in the hearts and lives of His people. Although Jesus was addressing His apostles with these words, He did not mean that He would be in them only. He showed concern for all of His people when He prayed to the Father in the following manner:

“I do not pray for these [apostles] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.”

John 17:20

In the same prayer Jesus expressed His desire to be in the hearts and lives of all of His people. He said,

“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

John 17:23

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR JESUS TO BE IN PEOPLE?

No one can fully explain how Jesus can live in us. Yet, our inability to explain does not necessarily mean that it is not possible.

There are several illustrations that shed light on how one person can live in another. Take, for example, a schoolteacher: A teacher lives in the minds of students long after the teacher is dead. Or take a married couple for example, sometimes the minds of two people become so intertwined that they do not know which of them had an idea first. Or take demon possession, when people speak about demon possession they mean that an evil spirit comes into the heart of a person and takes over that person’s life. If it is possible for a demon to enter into a person and to influence that person, surely it is possible for God’s Son to do as much or more.

Jesus, however, does not force His way into anyone’s life. Only when He is invited does He come into a person’s life, for He said,

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Revelation 3:20

Jesus either comes into a person's life as an honored guest or He does not come in at all.

The apostle Paul was convinced that Jesus was present in his own life, for he wrote:

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Galatians 2:20

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE CHRIST'S SPIRIT?

It is very important for people to have Christ's Spirit, for if people do not have His Spirit, they are not His, as the apostle Paul wrote:

“Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

Romans 8:9

DOES ALSO THE FATHER LIVE IN THE HEARTS OF JESUS' PEOPLE?

Yes, God also lives in the hearts of Jesus' people; for if Christ lives in the hearts of His people, His Father is living there, too. This is true because of the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Concerning this unity Jesus said,

“That they, may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me.”

John 17:21

Jesus promised that both He and His Father would come and make their home with His followers. Here are Jesus' words:

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”

John 14:23

This agrees with a promise that God made long ago in the Old Testament, namely, that He would one day come and live among His people. Here is God's promise, as quoted by the apostle Paul:

“I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

2 Corinthians 6:16

When the apostle Paul quoted this promise, he applied it to Jesus Christ's people. He said that Jesus Christ's people are a temple (dwelling place) for God (2 Corinthians 6:16), who is living in them. Paul also said that Christ's people are a temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), who lives in them. So both God and the Holy Spirit are living in Christ's people, along with Jesus Himself.

ARE CHRIST'S SPIRIT AND GOD'S SPIRIT THE SAME AS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Yes, they are the same. A Scripture passage already referred to identifies Christ's Spirit and God's Spirit with the Holy Spirit. The passage says,

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

Romans 8:9

This passage suggests that the people who are “in the Spirit” have both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ living in them. This implies that all three are the same. Indeed, if they are not thought of as being the same, that would contradict the passage written by the apostle Paul, which says,

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.”

Ephesians 4:4

Therefore, one must conclude that when Christ's Spirit is living in the heart of a person, God's Spirit and the Holy Spirit are living there too. For the three are one on earth just as they are in Heaven.

All of this may sound complicated, but it is comforting to know that Christ's people are not alone. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are with them.

It is also comforting to know that Christ's Kingdom is a real Kingdom and that it really works. It may not work in the same way that earthly kingdoms and earthly governments work, but it works nonetheless. It works according to its own methods and toward its own goals.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. In what way or ways is Christ present with His followers today?
2. How does the knowledge of Jesus' presence in the assembly enhance one's worship?
3. Does the unity of Jesus' people help the people of the world to know that God sent Him? (See John 17:21.) How does the unity of Jesus' people help other people to believe?
4. Is it true that people cannot bear as much fruit as God wants them to bear unless Jesus is living in them? (See John 15:4-5.) If it is true, why is it true?
5. How can you tell whether or not Jesus is living in your heart and life?
6. How is a person's life changed by the recognition that he or she is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

THE HIGH STATUS OF CITIZENS IN THE KINGDOM

John the Baptist was one of the greatest men that ever lived, yet the citizens of the kingdom of Christ are greater than he (Matthew 11:11). They are greater because John was not in the kingdom.

John the Baptist knew that the kingdom was coming and even announced its approach (Matthew 3:1-2). He also pointed to Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:29-34), but he died before Jesus was elevated to God's throne. Therefore, citizens of Christ's kingdom are greater than John the Baptist because they have the privilege of being in the kingdom, which John did not have.

THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS THANKFUL TO BE IN THE KINGDOM

The apostle Paul described how it happened that he (Paul), and others, had gotten into in the kingdom. He said,

“He [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Colossians 1:13

Notice that Paul said that he had been “delivered” (rescued) from the power of darkness and had been “translated” (transferred) into Christ's kingdom. Paul knew that he was in the kingdom and he was glad to be in it, for he wrote that he was

“giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”

Colossians 1:12

CITIZENSHIP

The words “citizen” and “citizenship” come from the word “city.” These words go back to a time when there were city-states in the Mediterranean world

many people were citizens of one city-state or another. The apostle Paul, for example, was a citizen of the city of Rome, even though, as far as it is known, he was not born there. But Paul, like others, looked to Rome for protection (Acts 22:25). The citizens of Rome considered it an honor to be under the protection of such a powerful city.

In a similar way, Christ's people are associated with a city. It is the city concerning which the apostle Paul wrote:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 3:20

The citizens of Christ's kingdom live under the rule of the heavenly city. They feel honored to be associated with such a city. They give their allegiance to that city and look to it for their protection.

THE CITY OF JERUSALEM

While some of the Jews of Paul's day were Roman citizens, they did not always give full allegiance to Rome. In their hearts they were devoted to a different city, the city of Jerusalem. This is the city where King David had reigned and where the temple was located. As they had opportunity, Jews traveled to Jerusalem to worship God.

Psalm 137 dramatically expresses the affection that many Jewish people felt, and still feel, for Jerusalem. It says,

“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth.”

Psalm 137:4-6

It is difficult, however, for those who believe that Jesus is reigning in Heaven to have such devotion for any earthly. Yes, Christ's people look to a different “Jerusalem,” as Paul wrote:

“But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Galatians 4:26

The heavenly Jerusalem is the city to which Christ's people look with longing. This is properly so, for Paul wrote:

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”

Colossians 3:1

Indeed, Christ's people identify so closely with Christ that it seems as if they are already sitting with Him in Heaven. The apostle Paul described how it is, when he wrote:

“And [God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:6

HEAVEN IS THEIR LEGAL RESIDENCE.

Although Christ's people have been detained here on earth for a while, they know that Heaven is the place to which they really belong. They also know that it is the place to which they are going. Jesus said to some of His disciples,

“Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

Luke 10:20

This means that Christ's people are not nameless statistics. They are known by name in Heaven; and preparations have been made, or are currently being made, to receive them when they finally arrive there, as Jesus said,

“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

John 14:2-3

THEY ARE ROYALTY

The book of Revelation says that Christ

“has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.”

Revelation 1:6

There has been some discussion as to whether this passage should say that Christ has made His people to be “kings” or whether it should say that He has made them to be “a kingdom.” In either case, the passage shows that Christ’s people have been placed so close to the seat of power that they can have input into the way things are run on earth. That is not say that they dictate to Christ what He should do, but through petitions to the Father they participate in the high decisions that are made in heaven concerning the earth, as the apostle Paul wrote:

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.”

1 Timothy 2:1-2

While it is true that Christ is not compelled to do what His people request, He is disposed to pay close attention to their requests and to fulfill them as the Father directs. Since Christ’s people have the ear of the Father, they are in a sense reigning with Christ.

Many people think that Christ’s people will participate in the kingdom only at some future date, but in reality they are participating in it now. At the time that they were adopted into Christ’s family they began to reign with Him and they will continue to reign with Him, both in this world and in the life to come. Jesus said,

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcome and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

Revelation 3:21

CITIZENS ARE VERY RICH

As befits royalty, Christ’s people are very rich, because Christ has made them rich. They have “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3). The apostle Paul wrote:

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

Observe how rich Christ’s people are: They have a heavenly Father who loves them. They have an elderly brother (Jesus) who cares for them. They are

enriched by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. They have the pleasure of associating with good and kindly people in the church, who have been taught to treat each other with royal courtesy (James 2:8).

In addition to blessings they enjoy in this present age, citizens of the kingdom are in line for a grand inheritance in heaven, as Paul wrote:

“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Galatians 4:7

The apostle Paul prayed that those who are in the kingdom would come to recognize the true value of their inheritance (Ephesians 1:16-18).

THE HIGH STATUS OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE

On earth, the status of royal persons depends on the might and grandeur of the nation over which they rule. If a nation is weak, its royal house does not receive many honors; but if a nation is rich and powerful, its royal family is accorded great honor. Since Christ's people belong to the greatest kingdom that ever was or ever will be, they are worthy of the highest honor.

Even the angels serve those that are in Christ's kingdom. Concerning the angels one can read in the book of Hebrews the following question:

“Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

Hebrews 1:14

For these reasons, then, let no one look down on Christ's people on earth; and let no child of God depreciate his or her high status.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Is John the Baptist made less great by Jesus' statement that the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than John?
2. Should a person be thankful that he or she is in the kingdom of Christ? If so, why?
3. Explain how the Jerusalem that is above is our mother. (See Galatians 4:26.)
4. Why should Christ's people rejoice over the fact that their names are written in Heaven?

5. Do you think that Christ's people are accustomed to thinking of themselves as royalty? Should they think of themselves in that way? Give reasons for your reply.
6. Do you think that most citizens of Christ's kingdom realize how rich they are? Please describe their wealth.

THE BEAUTY OF THE BRIDE

God often assured the children of Israel in the Old Testament that He loved them as dearly as a husband loves his bride. He explained to them how He had prepared them to become His bride. He said to them through the prophet Ezekiel,

“Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty.”

Ezekiel 16:9-13

In such glowing terms, God described (in a pictorial way) how He had done everything possible to prepare the children of Israel to become His bride.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND THE BRIDE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The picture of a bridegroom and a bride is carried over into the New Testament. We read in the New Testament that certain people came to John the Baptist and inquired of him about Jesus. In response to them, John said,

“You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who

stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled."

John 3:28-29

John the Baptist admitted that he was not the Christ (Messiah). If he had been the Christ, he would have been "the Bridegroom;" but John knew that he was only the "friend of the Bridegroom." He pointed to Jesus as "the Bridegroom."

JESUS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE IS "THE BRIDEGROOM"

When certain people asked Jesus why His disciples did not fast, He asked them a question in return,

"Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Matthew 9:15

Jesus' disciples did not fast because Jesus, "the Bridegroom," was still with them. Later they would fast.

WHO IS THE BRIDE?

If Jesus is "the Bridegroom," who is the bride? The answer is obvious. Christ's people are "the bride." The church, or the Kingdom, is the bride. The apostle Paul described the relationship between Christ and the church when he wrote:

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church."

Ephesians 5:23

This shows that the relationship that exists between Christ and His church is similar to the relationship that exists between a man and his wife.

THE APOSTEL PAUL CONSIDERED HIMSELF A MATCHMAKER

Paul compared his work to that of a matchmaker. He felt that he was arranging a bride for Christ. To the Corinthian church he wrote:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 11:2

By preaching the gospel, Paul (and others) were arranging a bride for Christ.

WHO IS IN THE CHURCH?

The people that obeyed the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:40-41) became thereby members of the church at its inception. All of the people that were subsequently saved by their obedience to the gospel were added to the church. The book of Acts of the Apostles says,

“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:47

The church, therefore, is composed of those that have been saved. Christ inducts them into the church upon their being saved.

CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH

A husband can learn much about how he should treat his wife by observing how Christ treats the church? The apostle Paul wrote:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it.”

Ephesians 5:25

Christ’s love for the church prompted Him to give His life for it. He gave His life for the church in order...

“that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”

THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT TO CHRIST

Christ demonstrated by His actions that He would take care of the church, which is His bride. Therefore the bride, in response, should not be afraid to submit

to Him; for He would never tell His bride to do something that would be harmful to her. Nor would He ever tell His bride to avoid doing something, unless the avoidance of it would be good for her. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.”

Ephesians 5:24

If the bride trusts Christ, she will try to please Him.

THE CHURCH IS BEAUTIFUL

King David described the beauty of Christ’s bride in the following words. He said,

“The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; Her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors.”

Psalm 45:13-14

David addressed the future Bridegroom in these words:

“Kings’ daughters are among Your honorable women; At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.”

Psalm 45:9

David also wrote concerning the bride:

“She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors.”

Psalm 45:14

David also made an observation regarding the wedding party. He said,

“With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought, they shall enter the King’s palace.”

Psalm 45:15

The above verses describe a royal wedding, not of a human king, but of a divine King (Psalm 45:6).

THE BRIDEGROOM WILL RETURN

Jesus told a parable about ten young women that were waiting for the arrival of a bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-12). Five of the young women had prepared for the wedding by bringing extra oil for their lamps, but five of the young women were unprepared. When the bridegroom arrived, only the five that were prepared were taken into the wedding feast.

In this parable, Jesus showed that “the Bridegroom,” after having been away for a time, would return. In commenting on the parable, Jesus said,

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.”

Matthew 25:13

On another occasion, Jesus indicated that when He returned He would take the bride to be with Himself. He said,

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

John 14:3

IS IT IMPORTANT TO BE A PART OF CHRIST’S BRIDE, THE CHURCH?

Yes, it is important, because the church is going to be with Christ in Heaven. When Christ returns, He will take the bride to be His own (Ephesians 5:27).

THE WEDDING FEAST

The apostle John described in the book of Revelation a vision that he had of Christ’s marriage to the church. John witnessed the grand wedding ceremony. The significance of the marriage was indicated by a loud voice, which came from the throne of God, saying,

“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelations 19:6b-8

A voice also spoke to John:

“Blessed are those who are called [invited] to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Revelations 19:9

THE CHURCH IS GLORIOUS

The apostle Paul wrote that Christ’s church is:

“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, ... holy and without blemish.”

Ephesians 5:27

To say that the church is “glorious” means that she is royal. Her garments are not wrinkled and have no spots on them. They are clean and bright. This view of the church shows that Christ’s people will be pure and holy in Heaven. It also shows that Christ wants them to be pure and holy here on earth.

WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD ONE HAVE TOWARD THE CHURCH?

Since Christ loves His church, all people on earth should love her, too. If Christ died for her, it shows that she is worthy of respect. Therefore, no one should despise the church or speak evil of her. Everyone should be willing to suffer for her (Colossians 1:24).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why do you supposed God considered the children of Israel to be His bride?
2. How would you explain that Jesus’ disciples did not fast as long as He (“the Bridegroom”) was with them?
3. In what way did the apostle Paul resemble a matchmaker?
4. Do you think marriages would be different today if husbands treated their wives with the same respect and affection that Christ shows for the church? Have you known such marriages? What were they like?
5. Does a person have to be in the church in order to go to Heaven? Give a reason for your answer.

6. Do you think people should show respect for Christ's church, His bride? In your judgment, do most people show proper respect for her? How should a person show his or her respect for Christ's church?

HOW CHRIST BRINGS ORDER INTO HIS FAMILY

Christ's kingdom is an orderly kingdom. It is orderly because there is harmony between God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and also because the Holy Spirit is in harmony with them both.

THE SON AND THE FATHER

God loves His Son Jesus Christ (John 10:17) and is pleased with Him (Matthew 3:17). That is why the Father honors (John 8:54) and glorified the Son (John 17:1,5).

The Son's attitude toward the Father reflects the Father's attitude toward the Son. The Son is aware of the goodness of His Father (Matthew 19:17) and He is in agreement with the Father (John 10:30). The Son is also in submission to His Father and seeks to do His will (John 5:30). That is why the Son spoke only what His Father would have Him speak (John 8:28). He went to His death in order to show that He loves His Father (John 14:31).

Here is a key question: Does it lessen the Son's glory that He is submissive to the Father and that He serves Him? No, not at all. It is an honor to the Son to serve such a Father and to submit to Him.

What would happen if the Son were to have a different attitude toward the Father and were to rebel against Him? Would there be serious repercussions? Of course, there would be. It would break the Father's heart and sow discord in the Father's Kingdom.

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT FIT IN?

The Holy Spirit has no difficulty working under both the Father and the Son because the Son is in agreement with the Father. If, however, the Son were out of line with the Father, it would confuse the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would not know which of them to obey. As a result, He would be brought into conflict with the one or the other. But since the Father and the Son agree in all things, the Holy Spirit can easily carry out the wishes of both. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son (Romans 8:9).

MAN IS SUBJECT TO CHRIST

The harmony and order that exist in Heaven should be reflected among humans on earth. The apostle Paul wrote:

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

1 Corinthians 11:3.

This passage teaches that Christ is the Head of every man. Therefore, a man ought to give honor to Christ, who is his Head, and join Christ in loving, serving, and worshipping God the Father of all.

A HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF HIS WIFE

Just as Christ is the Head of a man, so also is a man the head of his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3). To be the head of a wife is a great honor. It is also a responsibility; for a husband should take care of his wife, as the apostle Paul wrote:

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”

Ephesians 5:28-29

This passage shows that a man should nourish (feed) and cherish (take care of) his wife just as he would his own body.

A WOMAN'S SUBMISSIVENESS TO HER HEAD

Just as a man should be subject to Christ, who is his Head, so should a wife be subject to her husband, who is her head (Ephesians 5:22,24).

There is a lot of confusion on this point. Many men and women are not willing to be submissive to anyone. Let us ask, therefore, does it lessen a wife's honor to be in subjection to her husband? No, it is an honor to her to be associated with her husband provided he is trying to serve Christ. She receives honor and respect partly because of her identification with her godly husband.

Does a woman run a personal risk by being subject to a godly man? Not necessarily. Being subject to a husband creates no risk to a woman, provided her

husband truly respects Christ. If he respects Christ, she can entrust herself to him with confidence. She can be confident that he will do the best he knows her, because he respects Christ, his Head. For this reason, a young woman ought to choose her husband wisely, with an eye to his attitude toward Christ.

The submission of a wife to her husband is a loving gift that she bestows upon him. Her submission to her husband enables him to act responsibly on her behalf. Unless she submits to him, he cannot care for her as he should.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Submission, however, is not a one-way street; for not only is a wife to be in submission to her husband, but he is also to be in submission to her. It is a mutual arrangement. Indeed, all of Christ's people should submit to each other. The apostle Paul wrote that every follower of Christ should be

“submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Ephesians 5:21

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION

Are there serious consequences when a man rebels against Christ, his Head? Yes, of course there are. Rebellion sows discord in Christ's Kingdom. Rebellion also stunts a man's spiritual growth. Consequently, a rebellious man will be without the divine blessings that would otherwise be his. He will be robbed of his rightful joy and will give Satan cause to rejoice.

A husband's rebellion against his Head (Christ) has a disastrous effect upon his wife, too. It confuses her. It forces her to choose between her heads. She will ask, “Should I obey my husband, who is out of line with his Head? If I do, will I not be out of line with Christ, my Lord?” So, rebellion on the husband's part forces his wife into rebellion either against himself or against Christ.

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL DISAGREEMENT UPON THE CHILDREN

If both parents are in line with their respective heads, the children will not be confused. They will know what to do. There will be harmony in the family because the parents are agreed. But if either the husband or the wife is out of line with Christ, it will have a disastrous effect upon the children. They will become confused. They will not know who is right. They will not know with whom they should side.

If a woman is in rebellion against her husband, she makes it impossible for her husband to be the head of his house. When she rebels against him, it forces the children into rebellion, usually against their father, but sometimes against both of their parents. All too often, it is from their own mother that children learn to be rebellious.

ORDER IN SOCIETY

Today, most of the troubles of society can be traced back to a breakdown of the family. God's program for achieving an orderly society is for every man, woman, and child to be brought under Christ's gentle control (Ephesians 1:10). If that were to take place, society would be under His control.

RESPECT FOR CIVIL AUTHORITY

Christ desires that His people be in subjection to civil authority (Romans 13:1-5; Titus 3:1). Christ desires that His people respect the laws of the society in which they live (1 Peter 2:13), provided those laws do not involve disobedience toward God (Acts 4:19).

ORDER IN THE CHURCH

Tragically, the church on earth today is largely in disarray. Even though Jesus prayed for unity among His followers (John 17:21-22), unity is not always apparent among them. That is a part of the reason why so many families are in disarray. The churches, which should work for harmony and order, often contribute to the confusion.

Disunity among Christ's followers is the most grievous wound that Satan has been able to inflict upon Christ's kingdom. By disuniting the churches Satan has infected Christ's kingdom with the virus of disorder. Divine order, however can be restored to the churches, if the citizens of the kingdom realize who their Head is and where their headquarters are (Galatians 4:26). It is from Heaven that they should get their marching orders. All of Christ's soldiers need to recognize that Christ is their Commander. The apostle Paul wrote:

“And He [God] put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:22-23

When citizens of the kingdom hold to human heads, and get their guidance from human sources, they divide into sects and parties. The apostle Paul admonished the members of the church at Colosse to let no one prevent them from holding onto their Head (Christ). He wrote:

“Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God.”

Colossians 2:18-19

The apostle Paul encouraged the Ephesian brethren to “grow up in all things unto Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Paul said that Christ is the one who causes the church to grow. It is from Him that

“the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:16

The church then, should be subject to Christ (Ephesians 5:24), and not to some human head.

CAN ORDER BE BROUGHT INTO HUMAN AFFAIRS?

Yes, order can be brought into human affairs. How can it be done? Our bringing everything under Christ’s control would do it, whether in the family, in society or in the church. Sadly, this has not yet been done (Hebrews 2:8); but at the proper time, God will gather all things together and put them under Christ (Ephesians 1:10). Of this we can be assured.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. What is involved in a wife’s “submitting” to her husband?
2. How does a wife that is unwilling to submit to her husband complicate her husband’s job of protecting and caring for her?

3. Do you agree that some women are influenced to be rebellious toward their husbands when they see that their husbands are out of line with Christ? Can you elaborate on this?
4. Give specific examples of some ways a husband is supposed to submit to his wife.
5. What are some of the things a wife can do in order to help her children feel good about their father?
6. List some ways in which the lack of unity among Christ's followers hinders the expansion of the Kingdom.

THE LAW OF THE KINGDOM

Some people do not realize that the kingdom of Christ has a law. They think that in it people can do as they please; but this is not the case; for Christ does have a law for His kingdom.

Although His law is different from that of Old Testament, it is just as stringent. In some ways it is even more stringent, for Christ expects not only outward compliance with His law but inner agreement to it as well.

JESUS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE OLD TESTAMENT

Jesus did not come into the world to destroy the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17). Instead, He came to fulfill them. He fulfilled them in at least three major ways:

1. He lived by the laws of the Old Testament. He is unique in that He did it without sin (Hebrews 4:15).
2. He fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament (Acts 3:18).
3. He distilled all the laws of the Old Testament into one supreme law, namely, the law of love. He called the "law of love" a "new commandment" (John 13:34).

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

With Jesus taught that love for God is the most important commandment. He said,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”

Matthew 22:37-38

Jesus also taught that there is a second commandment, which is similar to the first commandment. He said,

“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 22:39-40

If a person truly loves God and his fellowman, he will live in accordance with this “royal law” (James 2:8). That is to say, he will treat others in a royal manner. In doing so, he will carry out all the essential elements of the old law even though, as a citizen of Christ’s kingdom, he is not under the old law as such (Galatians 3:24-25).

“THAT’S AN EASY LAW”

Someone may say, “Oh, if all I have to do is to love, that is an easy law.” Yes, indeed, the “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) is an easy law. It is easy (1 John 5:3), if a person has truly learned to love; but how does a person learn to love? The answer is that love comes from a heart that has been purified (1 Timothy 1:5). The next question is, “How can a person purify his heart?” The answer is found in Hebrews 10:22, where it says,

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Hebrews 10:22

This passage indicates that a person’s heart is cleansed when it is “sprinkled” with the blood of Christ. This takes place when he, in faith, turns from his sins and gets his body “washed” (baptized) in water (Acts 2:38) in the name of Jesus Christ. Following that, God’s Holy Spirit comes flooding into his heart (Acts 2:39). The Holy Spirit, being present, bears love as a fruit (Galatians 5:22).

When a Christian begins to love, he usually loves in a primitive way; but as his or her love develops, it grows toward perfection (1 John 4:18). Attaining to perfect love, however, may take a while (2 Peter 1:5-7).

There are many different kinds of love in the world, of which some are acceptable and some are not. For example, someone might say, “I love ice cream.” While it may be true, such love is not much of an accomplishment.

Or someone might say, “I love a good fight,” but that is not real love.

Others may say, “I love you for what you do for me.” That is a self-oriented love.

We humans sometimes get our emotions mixed up. Often, what we think is love ends up being something quite different. Many a young man has fallen in love with a girl without understanding how to protect her. Many a mother has spoiled a child by loving unwisely. Therefore, no emotion should be called “love” unless it is patterned after the love that God showed through Jesus.

LOVE CAN BE TAUGHT

Here is where the New Testament comes in. In it one sees Jesus, who is the epitome of divine love. No one knows for sure whether or not his love for God is acceptable to Him unless he measures it by Jesus’ love for God.

Jesus did what God told Him to do and, as a result, He remained in God’s love (John 15:10). If a person is keeping the commandments of God, as revealed by Christ in the New Testament, he needs have no fear about the quality of his love. The apostle wrote:

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.”

1 John 5:2

The New Testament has something to say, for example, about how children should treat their parents. It says,

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise.”

Ephesians 6:1-2

By carrying out these words, children will ease any guilty conscience they may have regarding their parents.

Or, if parents are worried about their responsibility to their children, let them follow the admonition, which says,

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4

Or still another example: If unexpected guests arrive for a visit, let a host remember the words of New Testament, which say,

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”

1 Peter 4:9

PRESCRIPTIONS AND RESTRICTIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are many prescriptions and restrictions in the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament traced out in considerable detail how love should express itself in action. Yet all of the “do’s and don’ts” in the New Testament are rooted in love. The words of the New Testament were written to help and guide us. If anyone ignores what the New Testament says on any subject, he does it to his own hurt and possibly to the hurt of others. The apostles and prophets of the New Testament would not have written, had they not thought their words would be helpful.

AN OBJECTION

Someone may object, saying, “If love requires that I do all that the New Testament says I should do, am I not again under a legal system, just as in the Old Testament.”

No, for the New Testament is different from the Old Testament. What was imperfect about the law of the Old Testament was NOT that a person was required to do it. Rather, it was that he was not ABLE to do it (Romans 7:19-20). He was not able to do it, because there is nothing in the old covenant that gave a person the power to do it. So, all that the old law accomplished was to point out a person’s sins, and thus, to bring condemnation over him (Romans 7:10). This is vastly different from the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). Under it a person is given the power to do what the law requires. The apostle Paul wrote:

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Romans 8:3-4

ANOTHER OBJECTION

Someone may also object, “If a person tries to live by the word of the New Testament, he is hampering the work of the Spirit, for a servant of Christ lives by the Spirit and not by the letter.”

It is not true that living by the New Testaments hampers the work of the Spirit. Anyone who tries to draw a distinction between what the Holy Spirit wants and what the New Testament says has forgotten the source from which the New Testament came. It came from the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus said,

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”

John 6:63

While it is true that the servant of Christ lives by the Spirit of Christ and not by the letter of the Law of the Old Testament (2 Corinthians 3:6), he is, nonetheless, still under a law: He is under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21).

In addition, Jesus made a promise to His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit to them and that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth (John 16:13). Jesus remembered the promise that He had made and sent the Holy Spirit to them (Acts 2:1-4). As a result, they spoke and wrote through the influence of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the inspiration of the apostles, Paul wrote:

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

1 Corinthians 2:13

STILL ANOTHER OBJECTION

Someone else may say, “If it is true that I must do what the New Testament says, then salvation comes by works and not by faith.” Not at all. Doing what the New Testament says does not war against faith. The New Testament embodies the “law of faith” (Romans 3:27). Furthermore, a child of God does not live by the prescriptions of the New Testament so that he can be saved from past sins and become a child of God. He was saved from past sins and became a child of God by obeying the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

To be specific, he obeyed the gospel by confessing his faith (Romans 10:9), by repenting of his sins and turning from them (Acts 2:38) and by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27).

The reason why a Christian follows the New Testament is because he wants to please God and be like Him (Ephesians 5:1). Furthermore, he wants to be found blameless “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The New Testament shows him where in life the dangers are and gives him advice about how to avoid them. The New Testament says,

“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Ephesians 5:18

If a person follows this warning, he will not become enslaved to alcohol. Therefore, following the teaching of the New Testament in this regard will keep him free of alcoholic addiction. That is why the “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) has been appropriately called a “law of liberty” (James 2:12). It makes people free.

BAD THEOLOGY

Some people think, “Since I have faith, I don’t need to do what the New Testament says.” Wrong! Real faith leads a person toward obedience to Christ, not away from it. Abraham, for example, obeyed God because of his faith (Hebrews 11:8).

A person with real faith says, “Because I have faith, I will do what Christ has said, as best I can.” Christ does not demand more of His people than that.

Any theology that keeps people from doing what Jesus and the apostles have taught is bad theology. Such a theology is inspired by the enemy of Christ. It is a theology that strikes a blow at Christ’s kingship and undermines His reign.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Does it offend you that Christ has given rules by which His people should live? Why do you suppose Christ gave rules?
2. Do you find it difficult to apply the teaching of the New Testament to real life situations? If so, why is that?
3. Do you feel that you are growing in your ability to love people? Please elaborate.
4. Are you acquainted with anyone who, in your judgment, lives according to the “royal law?” How would you describe that person?
5. Why is Satan opposed to your following the New Testament?

HOW JESUS CHRIST SUPPLIES NOURISHMENT TO HIS PEOPLE

God elevated Jesus to be the head of the church. The apostle Paul wrote:

“And He [God] put all things under His [Jesus’] feet, and gave Him [Jesus] to be head over all things to the church, which is His [Jesus’] body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Ephesians 1:22-23

This passage shows that there is an intimate connection between Jesus Christ and the church. The church is His body. Just as a body cannot live without its head, so can the church not live without Jesus Christ. It is from Him that the church receives its nourishment.

The church differs from a human body in that it does not receive its nourishment from the stomach, but from the head. Nourishment flows down from the head through various parts of the body until it reaches each individual member of the body. Jesus Christ is the one

“from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God.”

Colossians 2:19

HOW IS THE NOURISHMENT TRANSMITTED?

Jesus Christ has arranged for certain individuals in the body to serve as conveyors, or transmitters, of spiritual nourishment. The apostle Paul wrote:

“And He Himself [Christ] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:11-12

According to this, Jesus arranged for there to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in His church. Although each of these has a different function, they have in common that they are teachers. Their job is to bring Christ's spiritual nourishment to people by teaching. Let us look at their individual functions:

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Jesus chose His apostles and sent them out (John 20:21) to be His witnesses to all the nations (Acts 1:8). The Apostles bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:22). Their function was unique and it cannot be repeated, nor does it need to be. Jesus placed them in the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

THE PROPHETS

As the apostles went to various places to preach and teach, they laid their hands (in a ceremonial way) on certain individuals, whom they deemed to be worthy. As a result, those people received the Holy Spirit in a special way (Acts 8:17). This enabled them to become prophets (1 Corinthians 12:10). Therefore, they were able to speak for God.

The prophets of the New Testament were very useful in the early church. They lived at a time when the books of the New Testament were still being written. In those days, not all of the churches had complete collections of the books of the New Testament. Consequently, they often had to rely on prophets to tell them what they should do.

Gradually, however, as those individuals upon whom the apostles had laid their hands died out, the gift of prophecy ceased. It ceased just as the apostle Paul had foretold (1 Corinthians 13:8). In fact, all of the miraculous gifts ceased at the same time and for the same reason. They were no longer necessary. They ceased just as the New Testament was approaching completion.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Every congregation of believers in those early days was eager to get a copy of all of the writings of the apostles and of other inspired writers. Many churches were making collections of the inspired writings. As a result, the New Testament came together at about the same time in many different places. All of the books that make up the New Testament were carefully scrutinized and approved by many churches and many inspired leaders before they were generally accepted. Gradually, complete copies of the New Testament became available.

The New Testament has been a great blessing to Christ's people throughout the centuries, for the New Testament enables everyone to compare what he or she hears with what Jesus and the apostles taught. The existence of the New Testament has made the work of prophets superfluous, for if prophets bring only what is already written in the New Testament, their words are not necessary. If they, on the other hand, bring something contrary to the New Testament, their words are harmful and should be rejected (Galatians 1:8-9; 1 John 4:1). Therefore, having the New Testament as an objective reference has proven to be providential. It is much better than having to depend upon prophets.

EVANGELISTS

Jesus also planned for there to be evangelists at work in the world (Ephesians 4:11). Evangelists should be involved in the outreach of the Kingdom. They are teachers (or preachers), who go out to new places and tell people about Jesus Christ, as Philip did for example (Acts 8:5). As a result of Philip's work in Samaria and in other places, he became known as "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8).

The need for evangelists is still great today. Many people in the world do not believe in Jesus. In vast areas many people know little or nothing about Him.

ELDERS, PASTORS AND BISHOPS

The words "elders," "pastors" and "bishops" in the New Testament all describe the same group of men. They are the men that look after the local congregations of Christ's followers. They are called "elders" because of their age. They are called "pastors" because of their similarity to shepherds. They are called "bishops" (overseers) because they oversee a congregation of Christian people.

When the apostle Paul was passing near the city of Ephesus, he invited the "elders" of the Ephesian church to meet him at a place named Miletus (Acts 20:17). After the elders arrived at Miletus, Paul said to them,

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with his own blood."

Acts 20:28

Paul was here speaking to men whom the Book of Acts calls "elders" (Acts 20:17). He referred to them also as "overseers" (bishops). Paul said that their job was to "shepherd" the church (Acts 20:28). This shows that the titles for these

men are interchangeable and that their functions are identical. These are the men that have the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of the members of the congregation. These men, however, should not consider themselves “as being lords over those entrusted” to them but as being “examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

A PLURALITY OF ELDERS IN EACH CONGREGATION

It is important to note that there was a plurality of elders in local congregations in New Testament times. These elders, however, were to oversee only the congregation to which they themselves belonged (Acts 20:28). They had no jurisdiction over other congregations. This is a wise arrangement, for it enables each congregation to be independent.

INDEPENDENT CONGREGATIONS

As a consequence of congregations’ being independent, the worldwide church has no “handles” on it. There is no legitimate hierarchical organization by which unscrupulous people can gain control over all of the congregations. A person or a group of persons might gain control over one congregation, or even over several, but not over all of them. The independence of the congregations helps to protect them from being led away into digression by persuasive teachers of false doctrines and by men with high personal ambitions.

THE POTENTIAL OF INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATIONS IS UNLEASHED

When congregations are left under local control, they have an enormous potential for effective evangelism. Their autonomy allows them to be free to carry on an evangelistic program of their own. Autonomy also makes it possible for congregations to cooperate with each other in spreading the gospel. This can result in an ever-expanding network of mission efforts.

ELDERS ARE TEACHERS

One of the qualifications of an elder, or a bishop, is that he should be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). His job is to see to it that members of the church know the Scriptures. He should be able to protect the flock from false teaching by

“holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict [the teaching].”

Titus 1:9

Holding faithfully to the teaching of Jesus and His apostles is very important. It is a mistake to think that the body of Christian teaching is still growing. There has not been one single reliable item discovered (or revealed) about the will of God, which is not found in the Bible. The body of teaching stands complete. This was emphasized by Jude, who wrote:

“Beloved...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Jude 3

This passage clearly indicates that “the faith” was given once for all time. The teaching of the New Testament has neither been superseded nor improved upon. The New Testament is fully adequate for all spiritual needs. It gives an answer to every important religious question. It provides a person with all that he or she needs to know in order to serve God faithfully on earth (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and become a successful candidate for Heaven (2 Peter 1:3).

DEACONS

Deacons are mentioned in the New Testament as serving along with the elders (Philippians 1:1). The elders need younger men to help them look after the congregation (Acts 6:2-4).

TEACHERS

Since Jesus was Himself a teacher, He knew firsthand the importance of teaching. Yet He did not chosen to do all of the teaching Himself. He has reserved a teaching role for His people (Ephesians 4:11). He wants His people to experience the joy of teaching. Of course, not everyone can be a teacher (James 3:1); but people who have the ability to teach should exercise their gift with diligence (Romans 12:6-7).

HOW DOES ONE QUALIFY TO BECOME A BIBLE TEACHER?

Preparation for becoming a Bible teacher involves reading and studying the Bible. The apostle Paul gave sound advice to young Timothy. He wrote:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
2 Timothy 2:15 (King James Version)

JESUS IS STILL TEACHING HIS PEOPLE.

Jesus is still teaching His people from the bible. Practically nothing is known about Jesus apart from the Bible. So, if people want to learn about Jesus, they must read the Bible. The Bible is the spiritual food that the citizens of the Kingdom need. Leaders of churches need to be passing on to the members of the churches knowledge from the Bible. Each member needs to become a diligent, lifelong student of the Bible. The apostle Peter wrote:

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby.”

1 Peter 2:2

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been a member of a congregation that had elders and deacons? Please describe what it was like.
2. What do you think can be done to encourage young men to become evangelists?
3. What do you think a congregation can do to develop good Bible teachers?
4. Can you think of any new truth about the will of God that has been discovered or revealed since the Bible was completed?
5. Have you ever read the Bible all the way through? If so, how many times have you done this?
6. What can a person do to get started reading the Bible more?
7. Do you think that praying about reading the Bible would help a person get started reading the Bible more? What should a person say in such a prayer?

THE KINGDOM IS AT WAR

A war has been going on for a long time. It started as far back as the Garden of Eden.

After God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan, who originated sin (1 John 3:8), came along (Revelation 12:9) in the form of a snake and deceived Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3). Satan caused both Adam and Eve to disobey God and that took away their innocence. As a result they were cast out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23-24) and Satan has been at war with Adam and Eve's children ever since (Genesis 3:15).

WHAT KIND OF A WAR IS IT?

It is a spiritual war. It is a struggle for the minds of men. It is a conflict between right and wrong. It is a clash between what is false and what is true. It is a war between love and hate.

God wants people to obey His laws for their own welfare. Satan is determined to prevent this if he can. So while God is working to establish order, Satan is working to bring about chaos. While God is working for mankind's life, Satan is working for mankind's death. God makes things beautiful while Satan makes them ugly. Therefore, a furious conflict is raging and every person is involved, whether he wants to be or not.

SATAN IS AN ACCUSER.

Formerly, Satan had access to Heaven (Job 1:6), where he appeared before God. There he accused men and women (Revelation 12:10). Finally, however, war broke out in Heaven. The angels of God fought against Satan and his angels (Revelation 12:7), and Satan and his angels were cast to the earth (Revelation 12:9). Jesus said that He had seen Satan fall from heaven "like lightning" (Luke 10:18).

Although God subsequently placed restrictions on Satan's activities (Matthew 12:29; Revelation 20:2), he is still very powerful. He can still wreak

havoc in the lives of men and women (1 Peter 5:8) for he is the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30); and he has a kingdom (Luke 11:18) and great following. Many people worship him. Some of them worship him knowingly, while others worship him unknowingly.

SATAN OPPOSES THE GOSPEL

Satan stands behind the opposition on earth to the gospel of Christ. He frequently blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is sometimes able to take away the word of God after it has been sown in the hearts of men and women (Mark 4:14-15) and before it can bear fruit. He tries to destroy the Bible so that people will not believe it and obey the gospel and be saved.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel is good news. It is good news to those people that are held captive by Satan. When it is preached to them, great things happen. Jesus instructed the apostle Paul to preach the gospel to people. Jesus instructed Paul:

“To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Acts 26:18

The apostle Paul described the change that took place in the lives of those that were liberated from Satan’s power. He wrote:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the price of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.”

Ephesians 2:1-2

JESUS INVADED SATAN’S TERRITORY

When Christ came to earth, He was, in effect, invading Satan’s ill-gotten territory. He came in order to release those whom Satan held hostage (Hebrews 2:15). He came to destroy Satan (Hebrews 2:14). Satan is well aware of the

danger in which he found himself and he has not taken lightly Christ's intrusion into his realm. Jesus' intrusion makes Satan furious. He is furious that people can be snatched from his power. Therefore, he is making a counterattack.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM IS UNDER COUNTERATTACK

Since Satan is not powerful enough to fight against Christ and the Father directly, he goes after Christ's people (Revelation 12:17). He tries to deceive Christ's people (2 Corinthians 11:13-14) and to recapture those whom Christ has set free. He does this by setting snares (traps) for them (1 Timothy 3:7). He tempts people in hopes of robbing them of their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:5). He tries to take advantage of them (2 Corinthians 2:11); but Christ's people are on the alert. They are not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

Jesus told a parable in which He described Satan's underhanded activities against Christ's kingdom. Jesus said that the kingdom is like a man that sowed wheat in his field. Then an enemy came and sowed tares (weeds) in the same field. So, when the seed finally sprouted and produced a crop, the difference between the wheat and the tares became apparent. Then the man's servants suggested that they be permitted to go into the field and pull out the weeds. But the owner of the field would not permit it, lest good plants be rooted up along with the bad. The owner of the field said to his servants,

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Matthew 13:30

This implies that there are people in the kingdom, who do not belong there. They may be false brethren who came in by stealth (Galatians 2:4). Such people listen to Satan rather than to God. The day will come, however, when Christ will send His angels to together out of His kingdom all of those that offend and practice lawlessness (Matthew 13:41).

MEANWHILE, THE BATTLE IS RAGING

Christ's people find themselves engaged in a struggle. The apostle Paul wrote:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 6:12

It is a struggle that no human being can possibly win unless he has help from above; but the apostle Paul gave assurance of God's help. He wrote to the people of Christ in the city of Corinth, saying,

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13

The apostle Peter gave similar assurance, saying,

“Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

2 Peter 2:9

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

Christ wants His people to do what they can, of course, to defend themselves. For this reason Christ has made certain weapons available to them. These weapons are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4), but spiritual.

One of the weapons that Christ has made available to His people is “TRUTH,” with which they must surround themselves as with a girdle (Ephesians 6:14), so they will be protected from Satan's deceptive lies.

Christ has given His people a “BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,” which protects them from a frontal attack on their morals (Ephesians 6:14).

He has shod their feet with “THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE,” so that they can keep on going when the terrain gets rough (Ephesians 6:15).

He has given His people “THE SHIELD OF FAITH” (Ephesians 6:16), which helps quench doubts, which come at them like fiery darts.

To protect their heads from the death-dealing blows of physical persecution, Christ has provided “THE HELMET OF SALVATION” (Ephesians 6:17).

These are mostly defensive weapons; but Christ has also put a mighty offensive weapon in the hands of His people. It is “THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT,” the Bible, the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). This sword is very sharp. It overcomes ignorance and falsehood. It is a critic of the thoughts and intents of people’s hearts (Hebrews 4:12).

When Christ’s people put on the whole armor of God, they do not need to be intimidated by Satan. They can stand up against him (Ephesians 6:13-14). When they resist Satan, he will flee from them (James 4:7). As the apostle Paul wrote, they should be praying always,

“With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

Ephesians 6:18

JESUS HAS WON THE VICTORY

The darkest day in history was when Jesus was nailed to the cross (Luke 23:44-45). The power of darkness was then at its peak (Luke 22:53). Satan appeared to have gained the upper hand, but appearances can be deceiving; for never has the contrast between Jesus and Satan been more evident than at the cross. While Jesus was dying for man, Satan was destroying Jesus’ earthly life. When Satan brought about the crucifixion of Jesus, he exposed himself as a murderer; and his doom was sealed. The cross robbed Satan of any claim to honor. The apostle Paul said that Christ,

“having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Colossians 2:15

Jesus summed up the matter when He said,

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

ALSO CHRIST’S PEOPLE HAVE GAINED THE VICTORY

Christ’s people have overcome Satan, not by themselves, but by the “blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). Their eternal salvation is certain, provided they hold fast what they have gained until Jesus comes again (Revelation 2:25). Jesus said,

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Revelation 2:10

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Judging by your own experience, would you say that opposition to the gospel of Jesus is great or small?
2. Have you ever known anyone who was obviously under the power of Satan? How could you tell?
3. Do you think that people can stand against Satan if they do not take up the weapons that Christ supplies? Why not?
4. Have you ever experienced what you perceived to be divine intervention in your fight against temptation? Explain.
5. Do you think that prayer is an important part of resisting temptation? (See Matthew 6:13.) How does prayer help?
6. Do you think that people should speak to Satan and rebuke him? (See Jude 9.) If not, why not?

HOW CHRIST'S PEOPLE ARE TRAINED FOR SPIRITUAL WARFARE



The apostle Paul said that the Scriptures “were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). When Paul said that, he was thinking, in all likelihood, of the Scriptures of the Old Testament; but his statement is true for the New Testament as well (1 Corinthians 14:37).

THE NEW TESTAMENT OUGHT TO BE READ AND FOLLOWED

Everything in the New Testament is important. No teaching in it should be cast aside, for the New Testament helps people see the dangers that confront them. The New Testament helps them avoid defeat at Satan’s hand.

Here is an example of how the New Testament helps: The apostle Paul said that it is permissible for widows in the church to remarry, but “only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39). This advice was not given in order to bring hardship on widows. Rather, it was given to protect them. Many godly widows have found that they were worse off than they were before, after having gotten married to a man that does not honor Jesus. Many other examples could be cited of how the New Testament helps people stay out of trouble.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A MIRROR

The New Testament can also serve as a mirror (James 1:23-24) in which people can see themselves. By comparing the way they live with what they read in the New Testament, they can tell whether they are truly Jesus’ disciples or not (John 8:31). The apostle John wrote:

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

1 John 2:3-4

If people will pattern their lives after Jesus' teaching and His example, many blessings will come their way. Jesus said,

“... blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Luke 11:28

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM ARE SUPPOSED TO TRAIN EACH OTHER

It is important that Christ's people learn to encourage each other (Hebrews 10:24-25). James wrote:

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

James 5:19-20

Teachers who make other people aware of what the Bible says render a great service to them. The service may always be appreciated, for some people are very sensitive about being told what they should or should not do. Consequently, those who venture to teach the Bible must be careful how they do it. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Galatians 6:1

Not everyone, however, should try to correct people. This is a job for those that are spiritually mature.

THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH HAVE A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

The church of our Lord is one large training camp. The teaching that is done in a local congregation of the church should prepare people for the spiritual conflicts of life. The elders of a congregation share the responsibility...

“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:12

Elders need to be training the members of the church to look after each other.

ALSO PARENTS NEED TO BE PREPARING THEIR CHILDREN FOR THE STRUGGLES OF LIFE

The apostle Paul wrote:

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

Ephesians 6:4

It is not only fathers that have the responsibility for training their children. Mothers have this responsibility too. Timothy was indebted to both his mother and his grandmother for the early training that he received at their hands (2 Timothy 1:5).

There is even an explicit command in the New Testament for the older women of a congregation to train the younger women (Titus 2:3-5).

GOD USES KINDNESS IN HIS TRAINING

God, the Father, assists Christ in training people. There are various methods that God uses. He has an appropriate method for each individual. His favorite method is to lavish His kindness upon His people. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”

Romans 2:4

When good things happen, it should make people aware of God’s kindness. His kindness to people should make them love Him all the more. It should make them sorry for their misdeeds and determined to serve Him better.

GOD USES OTHER MEANS, TOO, FOR TRAINING PEOPLE

What if some of God's people are not willing to learn from Jesus, what then? Or what if some do not respect the Scriptures? What if they are not willing to listen to those who counsel them? What if they are blind to God's blessings? What should God do? Should He abandon such people and let them continue in their obstinate ways?

Sometimes, God does abandon people, especially if He concludes that they are beyond hope of correction (Romans 1:26, 28). What would an earthly father do with an obstinate child? Would he not resort to some corrective measures in hope of changing the child's attitude?

SOMETIMES GOD HAS TO DISCIPLINE HIS CHILDREN

When God disciplines His children it is not simply to punish them but to make them holy (Hebrews 12:10).

The discipline that God lays upon His children is not pleasant while it is happening (Hebrews 12:11); but later, after people have had time to think and to change the direction of their lives, they find peace (Hebrews 12:11).

HOW THE GREEKS TRAINED THEIR CHILDREN

The Greek verb "paideuo," which is translated "to chasten" (in Hebrews 12:6-7,10) means "to train." The Greek's concept of training differs from that of many educators today. Physical punishment was sometimes to be used in the education of Greek children. Even the children of rich and powerful families were not above being chastened physically. The intended result of the chastening was not to discourage the children but to make them resilient and strong.

God sometimes deals with His children in a similar way. He loves His children and He wants them to be resilient and strong. The letter to the Hebrews says,

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Hebrews 12:5-6 (and Proverbs 3:11-12)

If God goes to the trouble to train His children by chastening them, it shows two things: (1) It shows that they are His children (Hebrews 12:7-8), and (2) it shows that He loves them (Hebrews 12:6).

Therefore, when trials and troubles come, God's people should not be discouraged and think that God has abandoned them. Rather, they should humbly accept the discipline. The apostle Paul said,

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

2 Timothy 2:3

THE ATTITUDE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

The apostle Paul was afflicted with an ailment that he called his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Three times he asked the Lord to take his affliction away (2 Corinthians 12:8), but the Lord refused, saying to him,

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

2 Corinthians 12:9

The Lord had a good reason for not taking away Paul's affliction. He thought it best for Paul to endure the affliction so that he would not be overly proud of the many revelations that he had received (2 Corinthians 12:7).

There may be similar reasons for the afflictions that the Lord allows His people to endure today. The reason may not be apparent at the time of the suffering; but after the suffering has passed, often the reason becomes apparent.

Some afflictions are so severe, however, and the reason for them so baffling, that no explanation can be found during this present life. In such cases, Christ's people have no recourse but to trust God and to wait for the explanation. The apostle Peter wrote:

“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

1 Peter 4:19

GOD CARES

Christ's people can be assured that God is aware of what is happening to them and that He cares for them. Jesus asked,

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.”

Matthew 10:29

Jesus said further,

“Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Matthew 10:31

Nothing shows humility before God better than the willingness to accept suffering and to learn from it. The apostle Peter wrote:

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoices to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

1 Peter 4:12-13

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Give examples of how people can avoid troubles by doing what the New Testament says.
2. How do you react when someone corrects you using the Bible?
3. What is meant by the statement: “[God’s] strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9)?
4. How do you feel about God’s promise to chasten His people?
5. Do you suppose that physical suffering can sometimes help a person in his fight against the sins of the flesh? (See 1 Peter 4:1.) If so, how does suffering help?
6. What words of comfort would you have for a Christian that is terminally ill?

HOW CHRIST DIRECTS HIS SUBJECTS

This is an attempt to point out some of the ways in which King Jesus directs His people.

Since Jesus Christ is King, it is only natural that He would direct the activities of His subjects. He does not send them into battle without guidance and help. Much of what He does is beyond human knowledge, but some of what He does is described in the Bible.

JESUS LEADS BY EXAMPLE

Jesus said that a good shepherd goes before His sheep, showing them the way (John 10:3-4). This is what Jesus did. He went before His people, showing them the way. He never asked His people to do something that He Himself was not willing to do. Therefore, He is their example. Concerning this, the apostle Peter wrote:

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.”

1 Peter 2:21

By following in the steps of Jesus, and by gazing on Him as portrayed in the New Testament, people are changed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18). They begin to think and to act like Jesus.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IS LIKE A SOLDIER’S MANUAL

Many people do not realize what a wealth of instruction there is in the New Testament. Teaching, admonition and warnings are found there. Therefore, citizens of the Kingdom need to be reading the New Testament regularly in order to find out how the King wants them to wage war.

THE NEW TESTAMENT GIVES THE ANSWER TO MANY QUESTIONS

Here is a sampling of the questions that the New Testament answers:

Question: Should citizens of the kingdom keep special holy days? The answer: No. See Galatians 4:10-11.

Question: Should women preach in the assemblies? The answer: No. See 1 Corinthians 14:34.

Question: Should poor people be treated respectfully? The answer: Yes. See James 2:2-6.

Question: Should people in the kingdom help each other? The answer: Yes. See 2 Corinthians 8:14.

Question: Should citizens do good to people who are outside of the Kingdom? The answer: Yes. See Galatians 6:10.

Question: Should Christ's people seek to avenge themselves? The answer: No. See Romans 12:19.

The New Testament answers many questions such as these. By reading the New Testament all citizens have equal access to the will of the King. The teachings are there in the New Testament for all to read. Fortunately, most of the New Testament is not too difficult to understand. The difficult part is getting our stubborn wills to conform to the will of Christ.

IS IT PROPER TO USE THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A GUIDEBOOK?

Many believers feel uneasy about approaching the New Testament as a guidebook. They feel uneasy about examining the New Testament closely. They fear that it turns the gospel into law; but such uneasiness is not justified, because the New Testament is not a law book. It is a Spirit-filled book. It shows what a Spirit-filled life should be like.

HOW CHRIST DIRECT THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE

Christ not only guide the conduct of His people, but He also directs their hearts, for example, to love and patience. We know this from what the apostle Paul wrote:

“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ?”

2 Thessalonians 3:5

How does Jesus direct the hearts of His people to love and patience? He does it by putting His Spirit into their hearts when they come into His family (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit, upon coming into people's hearts, strengthens their "inner man" (Ephesians 3:16) so that Christ can dwell in their hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17). As a result, they are able to "know the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:19) and to bear the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23).

The apostle Paul wrote:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Romans 8:14

From reading the Bible, Jesus' people not only gain instruction, but they also acquire a knack for identifying which of their own desires and intentions are compatible with Jesus' thinking. Jesus' people are thus led by the Spirit of Jesus, even in matters concerning which He has not explicitly spoken (1 Corinthians 7:39-40).

Let it be clearly understood, however, that being led by the Spirit and being led by the New Testament are basically the same. That is because the Holy Spirit and the New Testament teach the same thing. The Holy Spirit would never tell anyone to do anything that is contrary to the New Testament. This is because the Spirit, which Christ's people have in their hearts, is the same Spirit that inspired the Bible (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, it would be foolish to ignore the instructions in the New Testament and expect to find different instructions from the Holy Spirit by miraculous means.

If it should happen, however, as it sometimes does, that the Spirit seems to be prompting a person to do something contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, let that person know that something is wrong. Either the instructions of the New Testament are not clearly understood, or the spirit that is prompting a person is not the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1).

MAKING PERSONAL DECISIONS

Many decisions confront a person with regards to how best to serve the Lord. How does he decide, for instance, where he should work or with which ministry he should be involved? Does Christ send signs and wonders to direct His people in such decisions? No! If He did, that would leave His people woefully dependent upon subjective interpretations of their own experiences. Christ would rather see His people reading the Bible (2 Timothy 2:15) than trying to decipher their emotions and figure out the meaning of the happenstances of their lives. The

Scriptures, in contrast to experiences and happenstances, give an objective frame of reference. Experiences are subjective; and people can easily misread them and suppose that something is in harmony with the will of Christ when it is actually far removed from His thinking.

It is also true, of course, that people can place an arbitrary interpretation on what the Bible says, and thereby be misguided. But there is less likelihood that an honest person will be led astray by reading the Bible than there would be if he were to seek subjective interpretations of supposed signs and wonders. If a person keeps on reading the bible and continues trying to do what it says, he will grow spiritually. And this will increase his ability to understand the Bible. But if, on the other hand, a person relies on signs and wonders, his growth will be stunted. He will not come to know the mind of Christ. He will only know his own mind and will, therefore, remain an infant forever. He may never be able to make mature decisions. He will possibly be “tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine” and by “the trickery of men” (Ephesians 4:14).

JESUS GIVES HIS PEOPLE MUCH LEEWAY

Although the New Testament gives a lot of detailed instruction, it does not deal with every possible contingency. It appears that Christ wants His people to be able to decide (largely for themselves) where and how they should serve. He knows that if they have His Spirit in their hearts and His Scriptures in their minds, their decisions will not be far off the mark (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

An illustration for this can be found in the relationship that adult children have with their earthly parents. If the children have been properly taught while they were young, they will not need to call home to ask advice about every little decision they make. They already know, in essence, what their parents would say.

THE DESIRE TO DO A SPECIFIC WORK

Some of Christ’s people have a burning desire to serve in some particular way. One person might desire, for example, to become an elder in a local congregation (1 Timothy 3:1). Another might desire to become a doctor, while another might desire to be a nurse. Still another might desire to be a missionary. These desires should not be ignored. God is Himself the one who places the desire to do a certain work in the hearts of His people (Philippians 2:13).

God has various devices for installing the desire to do a good work in the lives of His people. He might do it through the reading of the Bible, through a wise parent, through a godly Bible teacher, or in some other way.

PUTTING A TALENT TO WORK

Sometimes a person recognizes within himself a certain talent that cries out to be used. If he can find a use for that talent that is consistent with the Scriptures, he should put that talent to work (Romans 12:6-8); for a talent is a gift from God and should be regarded as such.

CIRCUMSTANCES SOMETIMES DEMAND ACTION

Citizens of the kingdom are occasionally faced with circumstances that demand a certain action. For example, when the church in Jerusalem was persecuted and the members were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), the members of the Jerusalem congregation went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Their going was occasioned by circumstances, but their response to the circumstances was dictated by Jesus' command to preach the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19-20).

CHRIST WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO ASK FOR GUIDANCE

In one of his letters, the apostle Paul mentioned his desire to visit the church in Thessalonica, which he had established on a previous journey. Paul wrote:

“Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.”

Thessalonians 3:11

Paul requested the Lord to “direct” his way to the Thessalonians. Was it proper for Paul to make a request like this? Yes, the Lord wants His people to enter into a conversation with Him concerning their desires and intentions. The Lord would like to fulfill all the desires His people have and will do so if possible. Jesus told His disciples:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Matthew 7:7

The Lord honored Paul's request to visit Macedonia again by making it possible for him to go there (Acts 20:1-3).

PARTNERS WITH CHRIST

Christ's people are not like pawns on a chessboard. They are Christ's partners in the ongoing progress of His kingdom (2 Corinthians 6:1). Christ intends for His people to take the initiative in advancing the kingdom and to be on the lookout for things to do.

When Jesus was on the earth, He encouraged His disciples to lift up their eyes to see the fields that were white unto harvest (John 4:35). By seeking out places where constructive work can be done, Christ's people interact with Christ and thus participate in the grandest work on earth, namely, that of leading men and women to Christ.

CHRIST LIKELY DOES MANY OTHER THINGS IN LEADING HIS PEOPLE

This brief description of how Christ leads His soldiers cannot fully satisfy anyone. Everyone would like to know more. There is more to be gleaned from the Scriptures on this subject, but there is likely much that Christ does that is not revealed in the Scriptures.

The purpose behind this chapter is to show that Jesus is active in the affairs of His people and that He helps them in their struggle against ignorance and evil.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Why do some people have difficulty making decisions? Do you have that difficulty?
2. Is it proper for a Christian to ask God for wisdom in making a decision? (See James 1:5)
3. After you have made a decision, do you worry about whether or not you made the right decision? Is it wrong to worry about past decision? If it is wrong, why is it wrong?
4. List some of the reasons why people should read the New Testament. Did your list include "to find out what Christ wants me to do"?
5. Do you feel that you have a lot of leeway in serving Christ, or do you feel that you are very restricted? Explain.
6. Have you ever had the feeling that Christ was leading you to do a certain work? If so, can you give a specific example?

THE BATTLE THAT THE CHURCH APPEARS TO LOSE

The book of Daniel in the Old Testament tells of a “time of trouble” that would come upon the people of the world. It would be a time such as there never was before (Daniel 12:1).

The apostle Paul, in the New Testament, also speaks of bad times to come. He calls them “perilous times” and says that they will come in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1).

DANIEL’S VISION

The prophet Daniel tells of a vision in which he saw four great beasts. Each of the beasts represented a king or a kingdom (Daniel 7:17) that was to come. All four of the kingdoms in Daniels’s vision were to be oppressive dictatorships, and the fourth of them would be the worst of all (Daniel 7:7,19). It is generally understood by people that read the Bible that the fourth beast represents the Roman Empire.

On the head of the fourth beast (the Roman Empire), Daniel saw ten horns (Daniel 7:7, 20). Each of the horns represents a king (or kingdom) that was to grow out of the fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire) (Daniel 7:24).

In addition to the ten horns, Daniel saw another horn come up on the head of the fourth beast (Roman Empire). To begin with, it was only a little horn (Daniel 7:8); but it would grow. The little horn that Daniel saw represents an especially oppressive ruler or empire (Daniel 7:20-21).

The little horn that Daniel saw represents the last of the oppressive rulers. We know that the little horn was to be the last, because Daniel said that that ruler, or empire, would continue to exist until the Day of Judgment (Daniel 7:21-22, 26).

A WICKED RULER

Daniel foretold that the little horn's kingdom (or empire) would start small, but that it would grow until it became greater than all the other kingdoms (Daniel 7:20); and three kingdoms would be subdued by it (Daniel 7:8, 20, 24). This little horn ("beast") would be a very audacious ruler. He would speak "pompous words," even against God (Daniel 7:8, 20, 25).

The New Testament takes up the prophecy of the little horn and speaks of him simply as a "beast" (Revelation 13:1-2). The book of Revelation (in the New Testament) says that this particular beast will open...

"his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His
name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven."

Revelation 13:6

THE INFLUENCE OF SATAN ON THE "BEAST"

The book of Revelation says that Satan (the dragon) will have great influence over the "beast" (wicked ruler, or evil empire), which Daniel called the "little horn." Satan will give this beast power, a throne and great authority (Revelation 13:2). All the people on earth except those who believe in Jesus (Revelation 20:4) will worship this "beast" (Revelation 13:4,8). They will say, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Revelation 13:4).

The "beast" (wicked ruler, or evil empire) will have authority over every tribe, tongue and nation (Revelation 13:7). He will attempt to change established times and laws (Daniel 7:25). No one will be able to buy or sell unless he has a certain mark on his right hand or on his forehead (Revelation 13:16-17). An image will be made of the "beast" (Revelation 13:14) and people will be encouraged to worship the image (Revelation 13:15).

Christ's people, however, will resist receiving the "mark of the beast" on their foreheads or on their hands, and they will refuse to worship the image of the "beast" (Revelation 20:4).

PERSECUTION OF THE KINGDOM

A major objective of the littler-horn "beast" (wicked ruler, or evil empire) will be to wage war against God's people (Daniel 7:21). In his war against God's people, the little horn (beast) will shatter the power of God's people (Daniel 12:7) and overcome them (Revelation 13:7); and they will be given into his hand for a while (Daniel 7:25).

The apostle Peter gave advice to Christians people undergoing trials in the first century that will be applicable for people in the last days. Peter wrote,

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

1 Peter 1:6-7

Jesus also gave some advice. He said,

“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.”

Luke 12:4.

THE FALLING AWAY

Persecution during the last says will be so severe that some of the citizens of Christ’s Kingdom will fall away. The apostle Paul foretold the time in which there would be a falling away. He wrote as follows:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”

1Timothy 4:1-2

The apostle Paul gave two clues in this passage as to the identity of those who would depart from the faith. They will be people who...

1. Forbid people in the kingdom to marry (1 Timothy 4:3).
2. And who command people to abstain from certain foods (1Timothy 4:3-4).

THE “MAN OF SIN”

The falling away in the last days will be aided and abetted by a man that is described by the apostle Paul as “the man of sin” and “the son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This “man of sin” will oppose God and exalt himself above

God. In fact, he will even claim to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4); but he will actually be only a “beast” (Revelation 13:11). He will arise from among the believers (Acts 20:7). He may even occupy some distinguished office. He will appear to be a lamb (Revelation 13:11), but he will reveal his character. He will speak like a dragon (Revelation 13:11). He will do miracles and signs (Revelation 13:13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9), which will deceive many people (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). “The man of sin” will cause people to make an image of the first “beast” (wicked ruler or evil empire) (Revelation 13:14) and to worship the image that they will have made. If anyone does not worship the image of “the beast,” he will be killed (Revelation 13:15).

The “man of sin” and “the beast” will continue their deceptive ways right up until Jesus returns; but they will be destroyed by the Lord when He comes (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 20:10).

CHRIST’S TWO WITNESSES WILL BE KILLED

As a result of persecution in those days, the public testimony of Christ’s people on earth will be laid silent. The “two witnesses,” who give testimony concerning Christ before the people of the world, will be put to death (Revelation 11:7).

There are various theories concerning the identity of the “two witnesses.” The best interpretation seems to be that they are the bible and the church. Whatever the “two witnesses” represent, their death spells trouble for Christ’s people on earth. It appears that Satan will put an end to their public testimony.

WICKED PEOPLE OF THE EARTH WILL REJOICE

When the wicked people of the earth see that the public testimony of the church and influence of the Bible have come to an end, they will rejoice; because they were pained by the church and the Bible (Revelation 11:10). The wicked people of the earth will make merry and send gifts to one another over the demise of the two witnesses; but their rejoicing will be premature, for God will not allow their wicked deeds to go unpunished (Revelation 11:11-13).

WICKEDNESS IN THE LAST DAYS

The “beast” (wicked ruler, or evil empire) will greatly influence the people of the earth for evil in the last days. The apostle Paul said that in the last days people would be...

“lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power.”

2 Timothy 3:2-5

Such people will take “pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12). They will not love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10), and they will hate those who follow Jesus (Matthew 24:9).

A TIME OF TROUBLE

As a consequence of the wickedness on the earth, there will be a “time of trouble” for the whole world. Foul sores will afflict those who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image (Revelation 16:2). Even the natural world will appear to be disintegrating. Many trees and all green grass will be burnt up (Revelation 8:7). Much of the sea will become polluted (Revelation 8:8, 16:3). Many creatures of the sea will be destroyed, as well as many ships (Revelation 8:9). The water in many rivers and springs will not be fit to drink (Revelation 8:10-11; 16:4,6). There will also be disturbances among the heavenly bodies (Revelation 16:8); and men will be scorched with great heat (Revelation 16:9). Yet in spite of all of these afflictions, the people of the earth will not repent (Revelation 16:9). Instead, they will blaspheme God all the more because of their sores and their pain (Revelation 16:11).

CHRIST’S PEOPLE WILL HAVE A GREAT ADVANTAGE OVER OTHER PEOPLE

While the hearts of others will be failing for fear of the things that they see coming upon the earth (Luke 21:26), the hearts of Christ’s people will be strengthened. They will follow the advice that Jesus gave, when He said,

“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

Luke 21:28

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever experienced any persecution because of your faith? If you have, what was it like?
2. If you were told to fall down before a statue of the ruler of your nation and do homage before it in order to show your loyalty to the government, would you do it?
3. If the government were to tell you that you would not be permitted to buy or sell anything unless you allowed its representatives to put some kind of a mark on your body to show your approval of the evil government and of its wicked head, what would you do?
4. What can Christians do to keep from falling away in such a time of trouble?
5. Could you believe in and support a person who claims to be God? Would it make any difference in your attitude if that person were able to back up his claims by doing signs and miracles?
6. What would you say to encourage a Christian that is being persecuted for his or her faith?

23.

THE RETURN OF JESUS AND THE GATHERING OF THE ELECT



One of the clearest teachings of the Bible is that Jesus will return. The book of Revelation says:

“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him.”

Revelation 1:7

It has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus ascended to Heaven. It may seem that a long time has elapsed since He went away; but the Lord does not count time as we humans do. To Him a thousand years are but as one day (2 Peter 3:8). The reason why Jesus has not yet returned is so as to give people more time to repent (2 Peter 3:9); but the day of His return will come. It will come as “a thief in the night” (2 Peter 3:10).

The day and the hour of His return are a well-kept secret. No one knows when it will be. Jesus said that the Son of Man will return at a time when people do not expect Him (Matthew 24:44). He said that neither He nor the angels of Heaven knew when it would be (Mark 13:32). He said that only the Father knows.

When Jesus said that He would return “as a thief” (Revelation 3:3), He did not mean that He would come unnoticed. He meant that He would come unexpectedly. He said that if a householder knew when a thief would come, he would watch and not allow the thief to break into his house (Luke 12:39). Many people will be unprepared for His return. We know that when He returns, He will be highly visible, for Jesus said,

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the

Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”
Luke 21:25-27

Everyone will know that He has arrived, because every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7).

HE WILL RETURN IN THE SAME WAY HE WENT TO HEAVEN

The twelve apostles stood watching as Jesus was taken up to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9). While the apostles were looking toward heaven, two men asked them,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

Acts 1:11

THE RESURRECTION

When Jesus returns, He will bring with Him all His people who have died. The apostle Paul wrote:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 4:14

The apostle Paul further described what will happen, saying,

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16

THE LAST DAY

The day on which Jesus will return and the dead will be raised will be “the last day.” Jesus said,

“And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”

John 6:39

This passage shows that the resurrection of the dead will take place on “the last day.” Here are some of the other passages that show the same thing: John 6:40, 44, 54 and John 11:24.

THE GATHERING OF THE ELECT

On that day, those who are on the housetops should not go down to get their belongings. Those in the fields should not turn back to their houses to get anything, either (Luke 17:31); for material possessions will not have any value on that day.

After the all the dead in Christ have been raised, Jesus will turn His attention to His people that are still alive on the earth. He will send out His angels to gather them. Jesus said,

“And He [the Son of Man] will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Matthew 24:31

Two people will be in a bed and one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34). Two women will be grinding grain and one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:35). Two men will be in the field and one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:36), and all of Jesus’ people will be drawn to Him much as birds of prey are drawn to a carcass (Matthew 24:28; Luke 17:37).

THE PUTTING ON OF IMMORTALITY

Jesus’ people that are alive on earth when He returns will not die. They will be changed. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

It will make no difference, as far as eternity is concerned, whether a person is alive on earth when Jesus returns, or whether he or she has previously died (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10), for all of Christ’s people will put on immortality (1

Corinthians 15:53-54). It will be something like the putting on of an additional layer of clothing (2 Corinthians 5:2-4).

The bodies of Jesus' people will be made to conform to Jesus' glorious body (Philippians 3:21). That is, they will resemble Jesus. The apostle John wrote:

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what he shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

1 John 3:2

Christ's people will no longer have bodies of flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 15:50). Instead, their bodies will be incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:42). The new bodies will not get sick and die, nor will they wear out. They will last forever. The apostle Paul wrote:

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

1 Corinthians 15:53-54

The new bodies will be glorious (1 Corinthians 15:43). If they are glorious, they will also be beautiful. They will be raised in power (1 Corinthians 15:43). The new bodies will be spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44) and well suited for life in heaven (1 Corinthians 15:48-49).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE SAINTS AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN GATHERED FROM THE EARTH?

Will Jesus take His people to Jerusalem and there set up His headquarters after He returns? No, for He has already set up His headquarters in the heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26).

Will He, upon His return, establish His kingdom? No, for He long ago established His kingdom and has been reigning at the right hand of God ever since (Ephesians 1:20-22).

The apostle Paul described what will happen to the elect after Christ takes them from the earth. Paul wrote:

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 4:17

This passage says that those whom Christ will gather from the earth will meet the Lord in the air. When they meet Him in the air, they will be united with the rest of His people, who will have been resurrected from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:17). And so, Christ’s people will be united. They will be together with the Lord. There they will be safe. They will be sheltered from the things that will thereafter come to pass on the earth.

BE READY

The most important thing is to be ready. Jesus said,

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.”

Luke 12:35-36

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Jesus wants His people to be continually expecting His return? If so, why do you think as you do?
2. How do you think it will feel as you are being resurrected?
3. Would you like to be alive on earth when Jesus returns? If so, why?
4. What characteristics of the resurrected (or changed) body appeal to you the most?
5. How do you account for the fact that some people will be taken to be with Jesus, while others will be left behind? See Luke 17:34-36.
6. In your judgment, what can people do in order to get ready for the Lord’s return?

CHRIST'S FINAL VICTORY OVER SATAN



It is difficult to see how Satan could possibly think that he could win the ultimate victory over Christ and His kingdom. There seems to be no explanation for his continuing opposition to Christ, unless he sees himself as a grand warrior that is going down to defeat and is determined to do as much damage as possible beforehand.

SATAN RELEASED FROM PRISON

Jesus implied that He had somehow “bound” Satan (Matthew 12:29). Had Jesus He not bound him, he would not have been able to plunder Satan’s house. That is to say, Jesus would not have been able to “steal” people out of his (Satan’s) kingdom unless He had bound Satan in some way.

As is recorded in the book of Revelation, the apostle John saw an angel come down from heaven and bind Satan and shut him up in the bottomless pit for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3). The “thousand years” should not be taken literally, since “a thousand years” are as “one day” with the Lord (2 Peter 3:8). After a period of time has passed, which is described as “a thousand years,” Satan is to be released from his prison. The apostle John wrote:

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison.”

Revelation 20:7

After Satan is released, he will know his time is short (Revelation 12:12) and he will be filled with wrath against the inhabitants of the earth. When people today see some much evil in the world, they conclude, perhaps correctly, that Satan has already been released from prison, or they conclude that he is currently in the process of being released.

SATAN WILL DECEIVE THE NATIONS

The apostle John described what Satan would do when he is released. John wrote:

“And [Satan] will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.”

Revelation 20:8

It is difficult to be certain which nations are meant by “Gog and Magog.” They likely are some of the nations to the north and east of Palestine. Satan will deceive not only “Gog and Magog,” but all the other nations as well (Revelation 20:8). He will deceive them through three unclean spirits that go forth. One of the unclean spirits goes forth from Satan himself. Another goes forth from the wicked ruler, who is called the “beast.” And the other goes forth from a spiritual leader, who is called the “false Prophet” (Revelation 16:13). These three evil spirits will go forth to the rulers of the earth and will perform signs before them in order to gather them for battle (Revelation 16:14).

THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

The place where the rulers gather is called Armageddon (Revelation 16:16). The word *Armageddon*, or *Harmageddon*, means the “hill of Megiddo.” There is a real place called Megiddo, about 20 miles south and east of the city of Haifa. The apostle John described the movement of the armies, as follows:

“They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city.”

Revelation 20:9

It looks as if there will be a two-pronged attack: one against Christ’s spiritual kingdom (“the camp of the saints”) and the other against the city of Jerusalem (“the beloved city”).

It would be wonderful if, by the time this final battle takes place, the kingdom of Christ and the city of Jerusalem are untied. That is to say, it would be wonderful if the Jewish people were finally to accept their Messiah (Jesus), as many Gentiles have done, so that Christians and Jews might be untied under one banner.

As war clouds gather and the combined armies of the nations prepare for battle, things look bad for Christ’s people and for the city of Jerusalem. But wait!

HELP IS ON THE WAY!

Christ's people can take courage from the fact that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Christ will not treat kindly those who do not know God and who did not obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

In a vision, John the apostle saw Jesus sitting on a white horse prepared for battle. Jesus is the one who judges and who (justly) makes war (Revelation 19:11). His name is "the Word of God" (John 1:1,14; Revelation 19:13). His eyes are like a flame of fire (Revelation 19:12). On His robe and on His thigh are written the words: "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16); and there is a sharp sword proceeding out of His mouth (Revelation 19:15). With the sword He will smite the evil nations (Revelation 19:15).

The apostle John also saw Christ's heavenly armies following on white horses. The riders are clothed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:14).

HOW WILL THE BATTLE GO?

Have no fear. The wicked ruler (the "beast") and the other kings of the earth, who come with him to make war against Christ and His people (Revelation 19:19), will be captured (Revelation 19:20); and their forces will be killed at Christ's command (Revelation 19:21). They will be devoured by fire, which will fall from God (Revelation 20:9); and the slaughter will be great. John, in his vision, saw an angel calling for birds of prey to come and eat the bodies of all the dead lying on the battlefield, both of men and of horses (Revelation 19:17-18).

When all of this will have taken place, Christ, the Lamb, will have overcome His enemies (Revelation 17:14); and the dominion of the "beast" (wicked ruler, or evil empire) will be at an end (Daniel 7:26). The "beast" will have been slain and his body consumed by fire (Daniel 7:11). The "man of sin" (the "false prophet") will have suffered a similar fate, having been consumed with "the breath of Christ's mouth" and destroyed "with the brightness" of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). But this will not be the end of their punishment, for both the beast and "the false prophet" will be thrown into "the lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Revelation 19:20).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE EARTH?

It appears that the forces that hold the physical world together will start to come unraveled shortly before Jesus comes again. Jesus said,

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Luke 21:25-27

The total destruction of the earth, however, will not take place until after Jesus has safely gathered His saints (Matthew 24:31,35) from it. It appears, however, that the harvesting of evil people from the earth will coincide with the earth’s destruction. If so, evil people will see the physical world dissolving around them. The apostle John described how it will be. He wrote:

“Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid the themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

Revelation 6:14-17

The Bible indicates that not only will all buildings on earth be destroyed, but the earth itself will be destroyed also. The apostle Peter wrote:

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with the great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.”

2 Peter 3:10

Not only will the earth be destroyed, but the heavens will be destroyed, too; for Peter wrote:

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of

god, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”

2 Peter 3:11-12

The earth will be destroyed before the final Judgment begins. The apostle John indicated this. He wrote,

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”

Revelation 20:11

Who would want to be on the earth if no place can be found for it before God? Certainly not God’s children, who will inhabit the “new heaven and the new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

THE FATE OF SATAN

The apostle John described what will happen to Satan. John wrote:

“And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Revelation 20:10

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. List several reasons why a wicked ruler might not like Christian people.
2. Why do you suppose it is that the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:10) will try to deceive people?
3. Which of the following statements do you consider to be true?
 - a. Satan has already been loosed from his prison.
 - b. Satan is in the process of being loosed from his prison.
 - c. Satan has not yet been loosed from his prison.
4. Do you think Christ’s people will be afraid when they see the nations of the earth gathered against them? What should their attitude be?
5. What can Christ’s people do to overcome their fear for the future?
6. How do you feel about God’s promise to destroy this beautiful earth?

CHRIST'S ROLE IN THE JUDGMENT

Jesus called the Day of Judgment “the last day” (John 12:48). On that day, Jesus’ saints will be gathered from the earth (Luke 17:30-37) and the dead in Christ will be raised (John 11:24). In addition, evil people will be “threshed” from the earth (Revelation 14:14-19). Then the earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:7,11-12).

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

After all these things have taken place, a great white throne will be set up (Revelation 20:11). It will look like a fiery flame (Daniel 7:9). Someone named the “Ancient of Days” will sit upon on the throne (Daniel 7:9). The garment of the Ancient of Days will be as white as snow, and His hair will look like pure wool (Daniel 7:9).

All the graves will have been opened, and all the dead will have been raised (John 5:28-29). The sea will have given up the dead in it (Revelation 20:13). All the people who ever lived will stand before the throne (Judgment Seat) (2 Corinthians 5:10). Rich and famous people will be there. Politicians, generals, soldiers and common people will be there. Slaves and free, both men and women, will be there. No one will be missing (Revelation 20:12).

WHO IS SITTING ON THE THRONE?

The “Son of Man” will be sitting on the throne (Matthew 25:31). Since it is the Son of Man who sits there, it must be Jesus; for Jesus is the Son of Man (Matthew 16:13). Yes, indeed! God has turned the judging of the world over to Jesus (John 5:22). Authority has been given to Him to execute judgment (John 5:27). He has been ordained by God to judge both the living and the dead (Acts 10:42); and He will judge the world justly (John 5:30).

THE BOOKS WILL BE OPENED

A record has been kept of everything that is said and done on earth. Every word that is spoken will be remembered (Matthew 12:36-37). No event will be forgotten, unless God chooses to blot it out (Psalm 51:9). Everyone will be judged according to his or her works (Revelation 20:12). All concealed sins will be made known (1 Timothy 5:24). Every work done in darkness will be brought to light (1 Corinthians 4:5). The secrets of men will be judged (Romans 2:16), and everyone will be called to give an account before God (Romans 14:12).

People will be measured by what Jesus taught (John 12:48). They will be measured by His teaching, because Jesus did not speak for Himself but spoke what God sent Him to speak (John 12:49).

The Jews that sinned while they were under the Law of Moses will be condemned by the Law of Moses (Romans 2:12). The Gentile's own laws and consciences will condemn them for their sins (Romans 2:14-15).

The Judgment will be especially harsh on those who knew the will of the God and did not do it (Luke 12:47-48). For example, the men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, will rise up to accuse the people of Jesus' generation, because the people of His generation did not turn from their sins when Jesus preached to them (Matthew 12:41).

The Queen of the South, who traveled a long way to hear the wisdom of Solomon, will rise up and condemn the people of Jesus' generation, because they had the opportunity to learn from Jesus but did not learn (Matthew 12:42).

It will be more tolerable for the people of Tyre and Sidon (Matthew 11:21-22) than for the inhabitants of the cities around the Sea of Galilee, who saw Jesus' works and yet rejected Him.

The people that disown Jesus will be disowned by Jesus before the Father (Matthew 10:33). No mercy will be shown to those who showed no mercy to others in their lives (James 2:13). No kindness will be shown to those who refused to share their food with the hungry and to give water to the thirsty. Kindness will also not be shown to those that were inhospitable to strangers; nor will it be shown to those who did not clothe the naked or visit (i.e. take care of) the sick and people in prison (Matthew 25:41-43).

The condemnation of such people will be according to truth (Romans 2:2); and consequently they will be placed on the left side of the throne (Matthew 25:33), where they will have to await what will happen to them. They had, perhaps, "a form of godliness," but they canceled out its power (2 Timothy 3:5). They will try to extricate themselves by saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders

in Your name” (Matthew 7:22). Yet, Jesus will declare, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23).

WHO THEN WILL BE SAVED?

No one would be saved were it not for the mercy of God, which caused Him to send His Son Jesus “to seek and save” the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus did not come to the world to condemn the world (John 3:17). He came into the world to save those who, because of their sins, were condemned already (John 3:18). So, unless people accept Jesus’ offer of forgiveness, they remain under condemnation (John 3:36).

THERE IS SALVATION IN CHRIST

The apostle Paul wrote,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Romans 8:1

The people “in Christ Jesus” are the ones who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). As a consequence, their names are written in the “Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27).

THE LAMB’S BOOK OF LIFE

The people that are in Christ will have nothing to fear from anything written in the books that record the evil deeds of wicked people (Revelation 20:12), for their names are recorded in the “Book of Life” (Philippians 4:3). Jesus told His disciples that they should rejoice, not because evil spirits had been subject to them, but because their names were written in Heaven (Luke 10:20). The Book of Life contains the names of those that will be in Heaven. No one will get to Heaven unless his (or her) name is recorded there (Revelation 21:27), for those whose names are recorded there are the ones that have passed from death to life and who will not be condemned at the Judgment (John 5:24).

A DAY OF SEPERATION

As a shepherd separates sheep from the goats, so Christ will separate His people from those that have persisted in doing wrong (Matthew 25:32). Christ's people will be placed at His right hand (Matthew 25:33), which is the place of honor. Christ will say to those at His right hand,

“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was named and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.”

Matthew 25:34-36

Those who have done these things will ask, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?” (Matthew 25:37); and Jesus will respond,

“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Matthew 25:40

THE SAINTS WILL HELP JUDGE THE WORLD

Christ's people will also participate in judging the world (1 Corinthians 6:2). They will not judge independently, of course, but they will concur in Christ's judgment (Revelation 15:3-4). In a similar way, they will even take part in judging angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). Imagine that! Human beings, who are made of dust and born of flesh, will have a part in passing judgment on angels!

THE CONDEMNATION

To those that are on His left hand Christ will say,

“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Matthew 25:41

Then they will go away to everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46); but to those on Christ's right hand He will say,

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

Matthew 25:23

They will go into eternal life (Matthew 25:46).

CAN CHRIST'S PEOPLE BE CONFIDENT OF SALVATION?

Yes, of course, they can; for the Day of Judgment will bring out the fact that they belong to Christ. If they have been victorious over temptation in this life after they obeyed the gospel, or have been forgiven of their sins, their names will stay in the Book of Life and will not be blotted out (Revelation 3:5). Their lives are hidden for safekeeping with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

Even if Christ's people, after their initial cleansing at baptism, should happen to sin, all is not lost for them. God will forgive them, provided they confess their sins (1 John 1:9), turn from those sins and ask for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). If Christ's people do this, they can look forward to the Judgment with hope; for if they continue in doing good, they will receive glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:7). A crown of righteousness will be placed on their heads (2 Timothy 4:8). The apostle Paul wrote:

“Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?”

Romans 8:33-34

The apostle Paul also wrote,

“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Thessalonians 5:9

Yes, Christ intends for His people to be comforted with regards to their future (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, which of these statements is correct:
 - a. Faith is the most important thing in obtaining salvation.
 - b. Doing good deeds is the most important thing in obtaining salvation.
 - c. Obedience is the most important thing in obtaining salvation.
 - d. All three are important. Please give a reason for your answers.
2. Do you think a person that does not believe in Jesus can live as good a life as he or she could have lived if he or she had believed in Jesus? Explain.
3. Is it foolish of a person not to get baptized for the remission of sins? Why is it foolish, if it is?
4. What about a Christian who sins and does not repent of his sins? Do you think he will be saved? Please, give a reason for your answer.
5. What about a Christian that has committed a lot of sins, but who repents and turns from those sins and asks God to forgive him? Do you think he can be saved? Why do you think as you do?
6. What about a person whose name was once written in the Book of Life, but who does not continue to show kindness in his dealings with others? Do you think such a person's name will be left in the Book of Life? Why is kindness important?

CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM IN HEAVEN

Jesus Christ has been sitting at the right hand of God ever since He arose from the dead and ascended to Heaven (Acts 2:32-33). He has been attending to the affairs of His Kingdom (Ephesians 1:20-22) from Heaven.

Jesus went to Heaven as a forerunner (Hebrews 6:20) in order to arrange a permanent home for His people (John 14:2). He is arranging a home for them in the city that God has prepared (Hebrews 11:16). Jesus will come again and receive His people to Himself so that they can be where He is (John 14:3).

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

After the last Judgment is over, Christ's people will be honored with a triumphal entry into Heaven (2 Peter 1:11). He will welcome them and show them every kindness (Ephesians 2:7). To each, a position of honor, will be assigned (Matthew 25:21); and all of them will see Jesus' face (Revelation 22:4). They will behold His glory (John 17:24), for they will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

ASSOCIATION WITH JESUS IN HEAVEN

One of the pleasures of Heaven will be the association with Jesus. His people will walk with Him, dressed in white (Revelation 3:4). The whiteness of their robes will show that they have become clean and holy in the "blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). They will look very much like Jesus (1 John 3:2), for He will have changed their vile bodies to be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:21). As an indication of ownership, Jesus' name and His Father's name will be on their foreheads (Revelation 3:12; 14:1, 22:4).

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

In times past, kings were frequently referred to as "shepherds" of their people. So is it with Jesus. He is the Shepherd of His people. By laying down His life for them, He showed Himself to be the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11).

Since a shepherd's job is to look after the sheep, Jesus will look after His "sheep" in Heaven (Revelation 7:17). They will follow Him wherever He leads them (Revelation 14:4). He will not allow them to go hungry (Revelation 7:16) but will help them to find pasture (John 10:9). He will not allow them to suffer thirst (Revelation 7:16), for He will lead them to springs of living water (Revelation 7:17). He will shade them so that the heat of the day will not afflict them (Revelation 7:16), and He will give them rest (Hebrews 4:9-10). His sheep will be safe with Him, for no one will be able to snatch them out of His hand or out of His Father's hand (John 10:28-29).

THE GREAT WEDDING FEAST

John the Baptist identified Jesus as "the bridegroom" (John 3:28-29). The apostle Paul identified the bride of Christ as being the church (Ephesians 5:22-24). Those who preach the gospel faithfully on earth are preparing the church to be presented to Christ as a "chaste virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Although the church is engaged to (promised to) Christ while she is on earth, the actual wedding ceremony will not take place until she is in Heaven (Revelation 19:7-9). It is clear that Jesus loves the church very much (Ephesians 5:25). He paid a high price for her, having purchased her with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

The church will make a glorious bride (Ephesians 5:27). She will get herself ready for the marriage (Revelation 19:7). She will be dressed up and adorned for her Husband (Revelation 21:2). She will be clothed in fine linen, clean and white, which symbolizes the "righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). Her wedding gown will not have a spot or a wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). She will be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27).

This marriage will be permanent. The church will be known as "the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9). Christ will have only one wife. The two will be one. The oneness of the church with Christ is a great mystery (Ephesians 5:32). It sets the pattern for how marriages on earth should be.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

The Twelve Apostles will be there. They will have positions of honor and will eat and drink at Jesus' table (Luke 22:29-30). Jesus will drink with them anew of "the fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be there (Matthew 8:11), along with the prophets of the Old Testament (Luke 13:28). Christ's people will come from the east and west, from the north and south and will sit down with Him in His kingdom (Luke 13:29), and He will put on an apron and serve them (Luke 12:37).

HEAVEN IS GLORIOUS

Everything associated with God is glorious (John 17:5). All the grandeur of the kings of the earth is but a dim reflection of majesty of God in Heaven. As many of them as will be saved, will add to the glory and honor of God (Revelation 21:24).

Heaven is a bright place and there is no night there (Revelation 21:25). Neither sun nor moon are needed, because the glory of God will provide light for the city (Revelation 21:23). Since Jesus is the radiance of God's glory (Hebrews 1:3), He will be the lamp of the city (Revelation 21:23); and the nations that are saved will walk in the light of the city (Revelation 21:24).

CHRIST'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER

Jesus is God's Son (John 20:31). He is the very image of the Father (Colossians 1:15). When people saw Jesus, they saw the Father (John 14:9). In fact, they are so closely identified with each other that they are considered as one (John 10:30), for the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father (John 14:10-11). They sit on the same throne together (Revelation 3:21), where Jesus leans on the chest of the Father (John 1:18). God loves His Son (John 17:24) and the Son loves His Father (John 14:31).

In spite of their closeness, however, the Father is greater than Christ (John 10:29), for He is the Head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). Although the Father put everything under Christ's control (Ephesians 1:20-23), the Father did not put Himself under Christ's control (1 Corinthians 15:27). Nor would Christ want that to happen (Philippians 2:6-7); for by coming to the earth, He demonstrated that He is not grasping for position or honor (Philippians 2:6). Rather, He desires to be in submission to the Father. After He has defeated all His enemies (1 Corinthians 15:25), He will return the Kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24), so that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

GOD WILL HONOR HIS SON

Christ gave up His station in Heaven in order to come to earth and to die for mankind. In doing this, Christ glorified the Father (John 17:4). It is for that reason that the Father desires to glorify His Son (John 17:5). God has decreed that all people should honor the Son, just as they honor the Father (John 5:23). It is characteristic of God's generosity that He would share His glory with His Son.

JESUS WILL BE WORSHIPPED IN HEAVEN

God has exalted His Son and given Him a name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9). Jesus is “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14). God has decreed that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Philippians 2:10). Even the angels of God are subject to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:22). Jesus, the Lamb of God, will be an object of worship in Heaven.

Just as Jesus’ followers serve both Jesus and His Father on earth, so will they serve both in Heaven. A great crowd of redeemed people will worship God and the Lamb. There will be so many of them that no one will be able to count them all. They will come from every nation, every tribe, every people and every language. They will be dressed in white and will have palm branches in their hands (Revelation 7:9). They will shout with a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 7:10

CHRIST IS THE HEIR OF ALL

Even while He was on earth, Jesus was aware that great possessions had been entrusted to His hands (John 3:35). He knew that everything belonged to Him, just as it belonged to the Father (John 16:15). Yet the Son did not claim anything to be His own independent of the Father. What He owned, He owned jointly with the Father.

THE SAINTS WILL INHERIT WITH CHRIST

Christ’s people will not be strangers and pilgrims in Heaven as on earth. In Heaven, they will be at home. Since they are citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), they will have privileges there. Being the bride of Christ, they are a part of God’s family. They are God’s children. As children, they are also heirs (Galatians 4:7). That means that they will inherit all things (Revelation 21:7). This will make them joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Thus, they will be co-owners of Heaven. The Father and the Son will gladly share with them all things. As a result, they will be rich beyond their wildest dreams.

THE SAINTS WILL RULE WITH CHRIST

God will glorify His saints along with Christ (Romans 8:17), and Christ will share His throne with His saints (Revelation 3:21). Christ will make them rulers over all His goods (Matthew 24:47). The kingdom that God has been preparing for the saints since the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34) will be given to them at last (Daniel 7:27). Their possessions and their station will never be taken from them, for their inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled. Nor will it ever fade away (1 Peter 1:4) and they will be with their Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to talk with Jesus face to face? Do you think you would have the courage to speak to Him? What would you say to Him?
2. How will the wedding feast of the Lamb be different from other weddings you have attended?
3. Do you feel that praising God and the Lamb in heaven will be boring? Give a reason for your answer.
4. Do you enjoy associating with good and important people? Do you like to hear about the experiences of others? Do you like hearing about good and brave people who have overcome great difficulties? What are some things that you think might be spoken of in Heaven?
5. What godly relative or friend would you like most to see in Heaven?
6. Do you like beautiful surroundings? Do you like bright and shiny places? Do you think you will be happy in Heaven? What do you think you will enjoy most about it?