

THE KINGDOM OF GOD PAST - PRESENT AND FUTURE

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CHAPTER ONE THE KINGDOM OF GOD PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

During his ministry upon earth, Jesus preached the gospel. At the beginning of his ministry he declared his mission in these words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel ...” (Luke 4:18). He also commissioned his disciples to do the same, as we read in Lk. 9:6: “And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel ...”

The word “gospel” means “good news” and if we were to ask the question: What did the good news involve? Many would say it related to the hope of salvation and eternal life through the sacrificial death of Christ upon the cross. It is commonly believed that the gospel relates solely and exclusively to the atoning work on the cross.

There is no doubt that this is good news and it became an integral part of the gospel after Christ’s resurrection and ascension to heaven, but it did not form part of the gospel beforehand. We know this because it is evident that the apostles and disciples, right up to the time of the death of Jesus, did not believe he was going to die; yet they were preaching the gospel! Jesus told them on a number of occasions that he was going to be put to death and rise on the third day, but they failed to comprehend it. This can be seen in the following Scriptures: Lk. 9:6, 43-45. 18:31-34. 24:10-24. Mk. 9:9-10, 30-32.

If the disciples did not believe that Jesus was going to be crucified, it is natural to wonder what the gospel was that they were preaching. We are told what it was in Lk. 9:1-2: “And Jesus sent them to preach the kingdom of God ...” This of course was the same gospel that Jesus preached as we read in Lk. 8:1: “Jesus went throughout every city and village preaching and displaying the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God, and the twelve were with him.” It is clear from this that the gospel preached by Jesus and his disciples prior to the cross, related to the kingdom of God.

It was not until after Christ was crucified, risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, that the gospel involved the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (Act. 8:12. 28:23, 31).

WHAT IS A KINGDOM?

Before going any further, we should stop to consider the meaning of the word “kingdom.” Most know what a king is. In Biblical times a

king was a ruler who had absolute power and authority to enforce his will. His word was law and had to be obeyed. Kings in Biblical times were not mere figureheads or puppets like those later in history who did not have absolute power, and who were virtually controlled by parliament, and depended on parliament to make the laws which govern the country. This diminished power of kings was the inevitable result of democracy. But in Biblical times, the rule of kings was autocratic, not democratic. God's kingdom is theocratic, not democratic.

The word "dom" added to "king," giving us "kingdom," is an abbreviation of the word "dominion." "Kingdom" therefore means the dominion of a king, i.e. the dominion ruled over and subject to a king. "Dominion" of course relates to a domain and involves territory along with its population.

A kingdom actually consists of a number of ingredients or elements. Because the type of kingdom we are talking about here is not something abstract, ethereal or spectral; the ingredients of which it consists are elements that have substance, involving concrete realities. They may be listed as follows:

1. King.
2. Throne.
3. Palace.
4. Capital city, where the throne and palace are usually situated.
5. Mother country, of which the king is a native.
6. Other countries annexed by conquest.
7. Subjects i.e. people ruled by the king.
8. Laws, either civil or ecclesiastical or both; i.e. secular and spiritual laws.
9. Administrators, i.e. officials appointed by the king to manage and administer the affairs of his kingdom. Such ministers included priests who were in charge of religious affairs. Such officials, although subordinate to the king, acted as co-rulers with him in his kingdom. They were the king's ambassadors.

These are the elements of which kingdoms in Biblical times consisted; be it the kingdom of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome.

However, the question may be asked: Is it right to conclude that the kingdom of God also consists of the same elements? Is it right to conclude that the kingdom of God will be as physical, tangible, geographical and political as the kingdoms of men have been? The answer to this question is yes, and the reason for this is because the kingdom of God has existed

upon the earth in the past and consisted of these elements.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL WAS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are a number of Scriptures which teach that the kingdom of Israel was the kingdom of God, and it certainly consisted of these elements. For example 1 Chr. 17:14 records God as referring to the kingdom of Israel over which David reigned, as “my kingdom.” Reference is made in 1 Chr. 28:5 to David’s son Solomon who was chosen by God “to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.” This verse quite clearly teaches that Israel was the kingdom of God and that Solomon ruled over this kingdom from the throne at Jerusalem.

Because the kingdom that was ruled from the throne at Jerusalem was the kingdom of God, the throne is referred to as “the throne of the Lord” in 1 Chr. 29:23: “Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David ...” 2 Chr. 9:8 confirms this by referring to Solomon being set on the Lord’s throne, “to be king for the Lord thy God; because thy God loved Israel ...” The throne at Jerusalem represented God’s throne on earth and Solomon ruled from it as God’s viceroy.

The kingdom of Israel certainly consisted of all the elements enumerated earlier, which constituted a kingdom in Old Testament times. The major difference between the kingdom of Israel and other kingdoms was that the elements which made up the kingdom were all appointed and ordained by God, not man. It was “the kingdom of God” in every sense of the term, in contradistinction to the kingdoms of men.

The king (David) was not self appointed, but chosen by God (1 Sam. 16:1. 1 Chr. 28:4-5).

The capital city of Jerusalem (Zion) was chosen by God to be the place for the palace throne and temple, as we read in Ps. 132:13: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. Here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” Also Ps. 78:68-70: “He (God) chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary ... He chose David also His servant ...”

The Mother country i.e. the holy land was specially selected by God to be the territory occupied by the tribes of Israel (Gen. 15:13-21. Ex. 3:8, 17. 6:1-8 etc). Although the whole earth is the Lord’s and the fullness of it, the holy land is very special to Him. It is, as we read in Deu. 11:12: “A land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.” In Scripture, the holy land is not only referred to as “the” land, but

“His” and “My” land, i.e. God’s land, indicating how special it is to Him.

Other countries were conquered by Israel during the reign of king David. Countries such as Edom, Moab, Amon, Syria and Philistia were in subjection to the king of Israel and paid tribute (1 Kng. 4:21-25). 2 Chr. 9:26 says that king Solomon “reigned over all the kings from the Euphrates even to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt.”

Subjects. In addition to the 12 tribes of Israel being subject to the king, the aforementioned Gentile nations were also among His subjects.

Laws. The laws governing the kingdom of Israel came direct from God. He declared the 10 commandments with audible voice at Sinai and was heard by all the tribes of Israel. Due to Israel being too afraid to hear more of the awesome voice, God declared the rest of His laws privately to Moses who wrote them in a book for Israel. The point is therefore made in Ps. 147:19-20 that God declared His laws and decrees to Israel: “He hath not dealt so with any other nation: and as for His rulings, other nations have not known them.” Also see Deu. 4:32-38.

Administrators. Various officials were appointed by the kings of Israel to manage and administer the affairs of the kingdom, and references are made to them in the books of the kings. Such officials, although subordinate to the king, acted as co-rulers with him in his kingdom, assisting with the administration of the kingdom. The priests of course, were chosen and appointed by God. Very early in the history of the nation of Israel, God chose the tribe of Levi to be a priestly tribe (Ex. 32:26-29. Num. 3:9, 11-13, 40-41, 45. Deu. 33:8-11).

In every respect, the kingdom of Israel was God’s kingdom on earth - a divine political dominion as physical, visible and tangible as the kingdom of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon etc. All nations could see it and feel its power and influence in David and Solomon’s day. At one stage during Solomon’s reign, due to hearing reports about this kingdom, the queen of Sheba journeyed by camel to see it for herself. She was so impressed by what she saw, it took her breath away. She was flabbergasted. (Sheba was where Aden is today, at the bottom of Arabia, hundreds of kilometres away from Israel).

THE KINGDOM WAS OVERTURNED “UNTIL”

The kingdom of Israel reached its peak of power and prosperity during the reign of Solomon (ninth century B.C.). There were no wars and peace prevailed: “Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (1 Kng. 4:25). From David to the king who sat upon his

throne for the last time around 587 B.C. the kingdom had many ups and downs, but more downs. Because of persistent apostasy and iniquity, and repeated failure to respond to appeals by the prophets to repent and reform; God sent the Assyrians and Babylonians to destroy the kingdom. Many Jews were slaughtered and the survivors were taken away into captivity. The city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the holy vessels were seized and carried away to Babylon. The throne of David was overturned and the king was taken away as a prisoner to Babylon where he died. From that time to our present day, a period of over 2,500 years, the throne of David has ceased to exist in Jerusalem. Governors, priests, prophets, politicians and presidents have ruled, but the throne of David has never been restored and a son of David has never been reinstated as king.

Some Jews returned to their land from exile and the temple and altar were restored and the city of Jerusalem rebuilt, but the kingship was never reinstated. This could not happen until it was God's time for it to happen.

During the reign of Zedekiah, the last king to sit upon the throne of David at Jerusalem, a very important and significant prophecy was given against him. It is recorded in Ezk. 21:25-27 and reads like this: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come when iniquity shall have an end. Thus says the Lord; remove the diadem and take off the crown; things shall not remain as they are. Exalt him who is low and abase him who is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him."

This prophecy clearly proclaimed that the throne and kingdom were destined to be overthrown, and would cease to exist "until the rightful sovereign comes" (New English Bible). But the word "until," which defines a limit to the overthrow, reveals that it would not be an endless overthrow. It teaches that the throne of David would ultimately be restored, and tells us when; namely, when "he comes whose right it is." When that time arrives, God says: "And I will give it to him."

The personal singular pronouns "he" and "him" indicate that the prophecy relates to a specific individual, not a succession of individuals or a dynasty. Who then is the individual that God had in mind when He said He would give him the throne of David? The answer is supplied in the promise given to Mary concerning Jesus: "He shall be great and shall be called the son of the highest, and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Lk. 1:32-33).

The prophecy in Ezk. 21:27 is clearly a Messianic prophecy,

promising that the Messiah would ultimately restore David's throne at Jerusalem and reign over the kingdom of Israel. Ezekiel was not the only prophet who proclaimed this message. Many prophets were inspired to proclaim it, especially during the reign of evil kings of Israel. The righteous reign of Messiah on David's throne is a central theme in Old Testament prophecy. It is reaffirmed and reinforced time and time again, and is contrasted with the wicked reign of former kings of Israel. Many verses could be quoted but just a small selection should suffice.

Isa. 9:6-7: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it with judgement and justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Isa. 16:5: "Then in mercy shall the throne be established, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tabernacle of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness."

Isa. 22:22: (quoted in Rev. 3:7 and applied to Jesus) "And the key (authority) of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his Father's house."

Jer. 33:14-17: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will cause the branch of righteousness to spring forth for David, and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely. And this is the name by which she shall be called: the Lord our righteousness. For thus says the Lord; David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel."

Amos 9:11-15: "In that day (i.e. after the full number of Gentiles has been called by God-Act. 15:14-17) will I raise up (restore) the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and repair its breach; and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old ... And I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be uprooted from their land which I have given to them, says the Lord thy God."

ALL NATIONS IN THE KINGDOM

These prophetic messages clearly speak of a time coming when the Messiah will restore the throne of David at Jerusalem and re-establish the kingdom of Israel and reign over it. But other prophecies indicate that Messiah will not only reign over the 12 tribes of Israel in the holy land, but over all nations throughout the whole earth. His kingdom will not be confined or restricted to the land of Israel, but will be a world-wide kingdom. It will therefore be a much greater, grander and glorious kingdom than David's and Solomon's which was confined to a small section of the Middle East. Prophecies relating to the world-wide nature of Messiah's kingdom, which will be governed from Jerusalem (Zion) are as follows:

Isa. 2:1-4: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall tower above the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

Jer. 23:5: "Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will raise for David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and deal wisely, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name by which he shall be called: The Lord Our Righteousness. Therefore, behold, the days come, says the Lord, that they shall no longer say: The Lord liveth, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt but, The Lord liveth who brought up and who led the descendants of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries where I had driven them, and they shall dwell in their own land."

Zech. 14:1-9: "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle ... then the Lord shall go forth and fight against those nations (battle of Armageddon) ... his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount shall split in two ... and the Lord shall become king over all the earth. In that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one."

UPON THE EARTH

Because the kingdom of God is also called “the kingdom of heaven,” some have concluded that it will be in heaven and not upon the earth. However it should be noted that Scripture does not say “kingdom in heaven” but “kingdom of heaven.” The Greek word “ek” which is translated “of” means “out of” or “from.” Because the kingdom of God will be established in the earth as a result of Jesus coming with power from heaven, it is called the kingdom “of” heaven. Compare the expression “Bank of England” which, in New Zealand does not mean the bank is in England.

Another reason for it being called the “kingdom of heaven” is because it will be; as stated in the Lord’s prayer: “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” It will be heaven on earth when paradise is restored and all things are made new.

In Dan. 7:27 the kingdom is referred to as being “under the whole heaven” not in heaven. The future kingdom of God upon earth and ruling over the whole earth, is a major theme in Scripture and many Scriptures could be quoted that relate to it. Here are just a few:

Dan. 2:44: “In the days of these kings (i.e. in the “latter days” v28) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed ... but it shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms and it shall stand for ever.”

Rev. 11:15: “The kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” According to this verse, this occurs at the time of the seventh and last trumpet, which is the time of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

It is stated in Rev. 5:10 that the redeemed “shall reign on earth.” Jesus clearly taught the meek “shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the seabed” (Hab. 2:14). “But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21).

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

These prophetic messages relating to the Lord reigning from his throne at Jerusalem over Israel and all other nations upon the earth; constituted the gospel (good news) to those in Old Testament times. It was “the hope of Israel.” It is sometimes not understood or appreciated that the

gospel of the kingdom of God is not new or exclusive to the New Testament. The apostle Paul makes the point in Rom. 1:1-3 that the gospel was “promised in the past by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (i.e. in the Old Testament). For this reason, we read in Act. 28:23 that when Paul explained and declared the kingdom of God, he did so from “the law of Moses and the prophets.” The gospel was preached to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15); to those in Noah’s day (1 Pet. 4:6. 2 Pet. 2:5); to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and to the Israelites in Moses’ day (Heb. 3:17-4:2). No wonder it is referred to as “the everlasting Gospel” in Rev. 14:6. God has planned and predestined His kingdom on earth from the very beginning. It has been the aim and objective - the ultimate goal and purpose of history. This is why Jesus referred to the kingdom being prepared from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34).

From the time that David’s throne and kingdom was overturned by the Babylonians through to New Testament times, the gospel message of restoration of the throne and kingdom preached by the Old Testament prophets, was clearly the one great hope of Israel. Evidence of this is seen in a number of places in the New Testament.

Attention has already been directed to the angel Gabriel’s pronouncement to Mary concerning Jesus, but let it be stated again: “He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:32-33).

At the time that Jesus was born, Israel was not a free, independent nation. The Romans had invaded and occupied the land. In order for Messiah to restore the throne of David and reign over Israel as king, he would obviously have to deal with the occupying forces of the enemy and deliver the Jews from them. This was Israel’s hope and expectation, based on the teaching of their prophetic Scriptures. God confirmed this by inspiring Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, to make this declaration around the time of the birth of Jesus: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us ... and serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness ...” (Lk. 1:68-75).

The restoration of David’s throne and kingdom would obviously be a great comfort and consolation to those who hoped and waited for it, as is

indicated in Lk. 2:25: “And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and the same was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.”

Anna the prophetess is referred to in Lk. 2:38 as speaking to all who “looked for the redemption of Jerusalem.” She was looking forward to the coming of Messiah to establish his throne at Jerusalem, and this was the hope and theme of her prophecies.

The wise men who came from the east to Jerusalem to see baby Jesus confessed that he was “born king of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2). Knowing that the king of the Jews would rule from David’s throne at Jerusalem was the reason they went to that city looking for him. But their attention was directed to a prophecy in Mic. 5:2 which declared the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. However, the same prophecy confirmed that Messiah would be a “governor,” destined to “rule my people Israel” (Matt. 2:6). For this reason Jesus is often referred to as “the king of Israel” or “king of the Jews” (Jn. 1:49. 12:12. 18:33-. 19:14-22).

When Jesus embarked upon his ministry and started preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God to the Jews, he said: “The kingdom of God is at hand.”

In the light of their Scriptures they would inevitably take this to mean that the time had come for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and the reign of Messiah from Jerusalem. This is why, when Jesus entered Jerusalem on one occasion on an ass, they shouted out with great anticipation: “Hosanna (i.e. oh save), blessed is the king of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord: blessed be the kingdom of our father David that is coming” (Mk. 11:9-10. Jn. 12:13). Prior to this, the Jews were so keen for Jesus to fulfil the prophecies by establishing himself as king and restore the kingdom of David, that they threatened to take him by force and make him king. But it was not the right time or way for that event to be fulfilled, so he departed from them and disappeared up a mountain (Jn. 6:15). The Jews did not understand that before Jesus could restore the throne and kingdom of David, he firstly had to sacrifice his life as an atonement for sin, ascend to heaven for some time; after which he would return to accomplish the restoration.

Because Christ’s kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, those who enter it will have to possess eternal life. The problem of mortality and death which is caused by sin therefore had to be dealt with before the kingdom could be established. This is why Christ had to die as a sacrifice for sin before restoring the kingdom. On a particular occasion during his ministry, recorded in Lk. 19:11-12, Jesus explained this: “Because he was

near to Jerusalem, and because they (the Jews) thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear, he said therefore, a certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself kingly power and to return ...” In this parable Jesus referred to himself as the nobleman and taught that he had to go away (to heaven - “a far country”) and return to earth again before the kingdom could be restored.

As we know, Jesus ascended to heaven and received from his Father “all power in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). As a result of ascending to heaven, Father God invited His son to sit next to Him upon His throne, saying: “Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps. 110:1). The word “until” defines a limit to the time Jesus sits on the throne in heaven. He will only sit there until the time comes for his enemies to be made his footstool, which will not happen until he returns and reigns upon his throne (1 Cor. 15:23-25).

TWO THRONES

It should be evident from all this that there are two thrones involved - one in heaven and one upon earth. The one in heaven is the Father’s throne and the one on earth is the son’s throne which will be the throne of David restored at the new Jerusalem. Jesus refers to these two thrones in Rev. 3:21: “To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.”

In relation to the two thrones - the throne of God and the throne of David, it is interesting to recall the words of Gabriel to Mary which assign two fathers to Jesus: “He shall be great and shall be called the son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David.” As a result of Mary, a direct descendant of David, conceiving by the power of the Highest; Jesus became both son of God and son of David. Because of this, he sits upon the throne of both - the Father’s throne in heaven first, and David’s throne on earth afterwards.

Therefore, sitting at the right hand of his Father on His throne in heaven cannot be regarded as a fulfilment of the promises that he would sit on David’s throne. Under no stretch of the imagination or twisting of Scripture can David’s throne on earth be regarded as God’s throne in heaven.

Another verse which indicates that there are two thrones is Matt. 25:31: “When the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.” In this

statement we learn that it will not be until Jesus vacates his Father's throne in heaven and comes to earth, that he will sit upon his throne.

Matt. 19:28 is similar: "And Jesus said to them, verily I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration (restoration) when the son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, you also will sit upon twelve thrones judging (ruling) the 12 tribes of Israel." It is evident from this that the throne will be situated in the land of Israel.

RESTORATION

Talking about the restoration, Act. 3:20-21 records Peter saying this: "And He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached to you, who the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." Prior to saying this, Peter made it clear that the restoration involved Christ sitting upon David's throne. This is what he said: "Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ..." (Act. 2:29-30).

It was because of the apostle's conviction that the kingdom of God they were preaching would involve the restoration of David's throne at Jerusalem, that when they were on the road with Jesus heading for Jerusalem, James and John said to Jesus: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left hand, (on your throne) in your glory." In spite of Jesus having told them that he firstly had to be put to death, they did not understand and were expecting him to restore the throne and kingdom there and then. Joseph of Arimathaea was the same. He "also himself waited for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 23:51) and was no doubt disappointed and had his hopes dashed when Jesus was put to death.

Such was certainly the case concerning the two disciples referred to in Lk. 24, who were not aware that Jesus had risen from the dead and thought he was still dead. They said: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v21). The redemption of Israel by Messiah of course, according to the prophets, involved the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and that was obviously the disciples' hope when they had previously preached the kingdom of God. For this reason we read in Act. 28:20 that the apostle Paul expressed the Christian hope as "the hope of Israel."

Act. 1:3-6 is particularly instructive! During a 40 day period after his resurrection, Jesus spoke to the apostles about “the kingdom of God.” The apostles’ response to this was: “Will you, at this time, restore again the kingdom to Israel?” They clearly understood “the kingdom of God” to be the restoration of “the kingdom of Israel.” In relation to this text, the footnote in the Jerusalem Bible correctly points out that: “The apostles still identified the Messianic kingdom with the political restoration of David’s dynasty.”

Sometimes it is argued that the apostles had a false concept of the kingdom of God - a concept that was too earth-bound and carnal. It is thought by some that the apostles missed the point and that their identification of the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Israel was astray. But what was Jesus’ response? He said: “The Father has control of the times and seasons and they are not for you to know” (v7). This was quite an inappropriate reply if the concept of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel was wrong.

The fact is that Jesus did not rebuke them for believing that the kingdom of God will involve the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and neither did he attempt to correct that concept. He did not say: “It is not for you to know if I will restore the kingdom of Israel” or: “Don’t you know that the kingdom of Israel will never be restored.” No! He said: “It is not for you to know the times ...” The point at issue was not the event of restoration but the time when the event would be accomplished. The apostles had said: “Will you at this time ...” (i.e. now that you have risen from the dead), and Jesus replied: “It is not for you to know the times.”

Jesus’ answer was equivalent to saying: “Yes, the kingdom will be restored to Israel when the right time arrives” i.e: “Yes, I will restore the kingdom, but it is not for you to know when. Times and seasons have been set by the Father for that event, and He has control of them.” In relation to this see Ps. 102:13. Ecc. 3:1. Mk. 13:32. Act. 17:31. 1 Thes. 5:1.

After telling the apostles it was not for them to know when the kingdom would be restored, Jesus went on to say: “But (a consolation!) you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Act. 1:8). Before the kingdom could come, there was much work to be done, especially in relation to preaching the gospel, not only to the Jews, but to all Gentile nations. The Gentiles had to be invited to become part of the true Israel of God - the spiritual seed of Abraham, i.e. people with the same spirit and

faith of Abraham to whom the kingdom belonged.

It is now around 2,000 years since Jesus went to heaven, during which period generations of Gentiles have been given the opportunity to become partakers of God with Israel, and joint heirs of the kingdom of God, sharing the same hope of glory.

God shows His fairness and impartiality in all this. He has allotted a similar period of time for the call of the Gentiles as He did for Israel. From Abraham (the ancestor of Israel) to Christ is approximately 2,000 years. During this period, God dealt exclusively with Israel, inviting them to be part of His ultimate eternal kingdom. But the majority neglected the invitation, not being prepared to meet the demands of discipleship. The majority failed to qualify, and the same applies to the Gentiles during the past 2,000 years. "Many are called but few are chosen." Only the minority in each generation of both Jews and Gentiles have been prepared to respond to the call and remain faithful to it. For this reason, a long period of time has been required to make up the number required by God to fill His house.

THE KINGDOM IS FOREVER ISRAELITISH

Now here is an important point: God's invitation to the Gentiles to be included in His kingdom, does not alter or destroy the Israelitish origin, nature and character of the kingdom. Remember that in Act. 28:20 Paul expresses the Christian hope of the kingdom as "the hope of Israel." God promised the kingdom to Israel first in the holy oracles proclaimed by their prophets and recorded in their Scriptures. The Gentiles' acceptance of this hope of Israel later, does not change or convert it into a new and different Gentile hope! Quite the opposite! Instead of Gentiles converting the hope into Gentilism, it converts them into Israelites. Believers from all Gentile nations become conformed to the Israelitish nature and character of the hope.

In Rom. 11 the kingdom of Israel (the kingdom of God) is likened to an olive tree with many branches which initially represent Jews. Reference is made to "natural branches" (some of which are lopped off), and "wild branches" taken from another wild tree and grafted in their place.

The "natural branches" represent the nation of Israel which alone constituted the kingdom of God up until the time of Christ. They are referred to as being "natural" branches because they came from the original stock, being the natural descendants of those who were given the

promises of God and formed into the kingdom of God in Old Testament times. It is pointed out in Rom. 9:1-5 that they were the descendants of the famous Hebrew ancestors to whom God's promises were given and from whom Christ himself also came.

The special status of this nation is often stated in the Bible. "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth" (Am. 3:2). Also see Deu. 4:32-38. It is stated in Ps. 147:19-20 that God revealed His Word to the nation of Israel and has not done so to any other nation. Rom. 3:1-2 also relates to this: "What advantage then, is there in being a Jew ... much every way! Chiefly because to them the oracles of God were committed."

It is clear that God chose the nation of Israel over and above every other nation, to become the custodian of His Word, recipient of His promises and repository of His revelation. Through Israel came the knowledge of God. They were the channel chosen by God to reveal His Word (Rom. 2:17-20). With the exception of Luke, every inspired author of the 66 books in the Bible was an Israelite. The people of Israel are unquestionably "the people of the book."

The Word of God was Israel's natural heritage. It came from them - it belonged to them. Their scribes wrote it and re-wrote it, preserving it and keeping it alive over the centuries. The nation grew up under its influence; it was their national text book, read regularly at public meetings year after year. Naturally, many could quote large sections of it and knew it like the back of their hand. It would have been unnatural and abnormal had this not been the case.

Therefore, speaking to the Jews, Peter said: "You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our father Abraham ... and so, to you first God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent him to bless you ..." (Act. 3:25).

Reference to them as "the children" of the prophets and the covenant conveys that they were the natural heirs of the kingdom. For this reason they are referred to as natural branches in Rom. 11. Jesus therefore, during his ministry, referred to them as "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 8:12. 21:43).

As we have seen, up until New Testament times, they were exclusively the children of the kingdom. No other nation up to that time had ever been the kingdom of God, or had God's appointed king ruling over them. Because of not having or knowing the Word of God, the Gentile nations were ignorant of it and its promises. They were, as we read in Eph. 2:12: "Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the

world.” They were completely outside the kingdom of God.

In view of this, it was only natural that when Jesus came on the scene, he went to the Jews first with the gospel of the kingdom of God, concentrating on them and confining his effort to them (Matt. 10:5-6. 15:24-. Act. 3:25).

But, in spite of their special privileges, many of the Jews failed to believe and obey God’s promises and rebelled against them; resulting in being rejected and failing to qualify as children of the kingdom. This rejection is referred to in Rom. 11 in terms of natural branches being cut off the olive tree. The “wild branches” grafted in their place, refers to the Gentiles who are willing to believe the promises of God and adopt the same spirit of Abraham, thereby becoming true Israelites. The Gentiles are referred to as being “wild” branches due to having been uncultivated and uncultured in the way of the Word of God. As we have seen, they were originally not part of God’s kingdom, but aliens and foreigners. In order to get into God’s kingdom, they had to be grafted into Israel’s tree and occupy a position there.

It is important to note that Rom. 11 does not say that God cut the natural olive tree down and planted a new and different Gentile one involving different promises, purposes and goals, i.e. a different kingdom. No! He has only lopped off some of the branches (unbelieving Jews), and this has made room for believing Gentiles to be grafted in among the good natural branches, and draw spiritual sustenance from the root of their tree.

The taking away of some of the natural branches due to unbelief, and the making room for wild branches which are willing to believe; is referred to by Jesus in these words which he addressed to the unbelieving Jews: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it” (Matt. 21:43).

The simple central truth of Rom. 11 is that God only has one tree. The root was planted back in Abraham’s day, and for the next 2,000 years grew and developed, consisting almost entirely of his natural descendants. Due to unbelief, some (not all!) were broken off, resulting in the Jews not being able to supply all the branches required to complete the tree. So the Gentiles were invited and grafted in. They didn’t become a new tree with a new root system. No! They joined the branches of an already existing tree and are supported and sustained by the same root i.e. the original promises given to Abraham and David upon which the kingdom of God is founded and established.

As Rom. 11:17 puts it: “Grafted in among them.” The Jews were there first, and the Gentiles have joined them, becoming “fellow-citizens”

and “fellow-heirs” with them (Eph. 2:19. 3:6). Rom. 11:17 goes on to say: “And with them (i.e. with the Jews) you (Gentiles) partake of the rich sap of the olive’s root.” Or, as Rom. 15:27 puts it: “The Gentiles have been made partakers of the Jews’ spiritual things” i.e. the Gentiles now share in the same promises given to Israel and therefore share the same faith and hope. For this reason, in Rom. 15:10 Paul quotes Deu. 32:43: “Rejoice you Gentiles with God’s people” (Israel). It is evident from this that it has always been God’s intention for the Gentiles to share the same hope. There is only one hope (Eph. 4:4) and Paul emphatically characterized it “the hope of Israel.” The hope of the world is bound up in this hope!

A PERVERTED GOSPEL

The reason for pointing all this out is because unfortunately, many Gentiles claiming to be Christians have over the ages, twisted and perverted the facts; resulting in a perverted gospel of the kingdom of God. They have stripped the kingdom of God of its Israelitish nature and character; written off the Jews; deny that Jesus will return to Jerusalem and set up the throne of David, and do not believe that the land promised to Abraham has got anything to do with the eternal inheritance of the church.

This has resulted in negating and neutralizing the Word of God and creating a new and different gospel of the kingdom of God. It has produced a Gentile gospel which is not interested in, and gives no place to God’s promises to Abraham or David, upon which the original gospel was based. It is called “replacement theology” for it has replaced Divine truth with human philosophy - the philosophy of “pie in the sky when you die by and by.”

Instead of believing that death is a sleep, out of which we will be awakened at the resurrection when Christ returns; resulting in becoming immortal bodily beings, living and reigning with Christ on earth in his kingdom which will have its centre in Jerusalem in the holy land; tradition teaches that we don’t really die at all - that we all possess an “immortal soul” which departs to heaven when the body takes its last breath, where we live eternally as disembodied immortals. This is a false gospel and a false hope based on the serpent’s lie: “Thou shalt not surely die.”

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is the principle belief in the pagan creed and an apostate church superimposed it upon the church creed. The immortality of the soul was the doctrine adopted by the pagans to take the sting out of death, but the Biblical doctrine is physical

resurrection at the second coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51-55).

Changing the gospel is a serious error that has disastrous consequences, no matter how sincere and zealous a person may be. The apostle Paul makes this clear in Gal. 1:6-9: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. Let me repeat it: if anyone preaches any other gospel unto you than the one you received, let him be accursed.” There is only “one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4) and it does not involve disembodied immortal souls fluttering up to heaven at death!

HOW CAN WE BE SURE?

If someone replied saying: How can we be sure that the view presented in this chapter is correct? The answer is that the same prophecies which predicted the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, also predicted that one of the signs of the coming kingdom, would be the return of the Jews to their land as a precursor for the battle of Armageddon, and the second coming of Christ. Their return is also necessary as a preparation for them to be grafted back into their olive tree (Rom. 11:23-27. Zech. 12).

Consider for example, Ezk. 37:21-22: “Thus says the Lord, behold I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and will gather them from every direction, and bring them into their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king over them all ...”

The king referred to here is clearly the Messiah who will rule in the land of Israel over the children of Israel. Prior to this taking place, the Jews had to be gathered back to their land and become a nation again. This precisely is what has literally happened, and we have witnessed it. It is a truth that cannot be denied or refuted. For nearly 2,000 years the Jews were in exile, dispersed throughout all nations upon the earth, and ceased to exist as a nation. But in fulfilment of the prophecy they have returned to their land and have become a nation again. If the first and second part of the prophecy have been literally fulfilled, there can be no doubt that the third part involving Messiah reigning as king in the land of Israel, will also be literally fulfilled!

Also consider Hos. 3:4-5: “For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without a king ... Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.”

Messiah is referred to here as “David” because he is the special seed promised to David of whom king David was a type. Also, “David” in Hebrew means “beloved” and this is one of the titles of Christ (Eph. 1:6).

The prophecy in Hos. 3:4-5 is similar to the one in Ezk. 37:21-22, revealing that Israel would be without a king for a long time, but eventually Messiah would reign over them as king.

Jer. 30:7-9 refers to Israel’s end time tribulation caused by the invasion of anti-Israel nations. It also refers to the battle of Armageddon at which Messiah deals with those nations and delivers Israel. The result is that “they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king.”

Zech. 14 also refers to the nations invading Israel in the end time, causing tribulation. Verse 3 refers to Messiah coming to do battle with the enemy (battle of Armageddon), and verse 4 says he will stand on the Mount of Olives at that time, which will split in two. Verse 9 goes on to say that “the Lord shall be king over all the earth.”

Even Jesus taught in his prophecy that the Jews would “fall by the edge of the sword and be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down (occupied) by the Gentiles,” but only “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24). This implies that the Jews would return from their exile and repossess Jerusalem again before Jesus returned to reign as king, for he goes on to say in v26-27 that “the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

TURNED FROM THE TRUTH TO FABLES

In 2 Tim. 4:3-4 the apostle Paul warned that the time would come in church history when people would not tolerate sound teaching, but “shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables.” This happened after New Testament times, after the Jews were evicted from their land. Many Gentiles concluded God had finished with them and cast them away for good. Rome became the centre of attention and many false concepts were superimposed on the church, exchanging the truth for lies. Many churches have inherited these lies and vanities and things of no profit today (Jer. 16:19). The prophetic Scriptures clearly teach that the dispersion of the Jews does not mean God has written them off and will never again restore the kingdom of Israel. “God has not cast away His people He formerly acknowledged” (Rom. 11:1-2).

In Matt. 23:38-39 Jesus warned the Jews that their “house” (nation) would become “desolate,” and would not see him for some time. But he

went on to say that they would ultimately see him and when that event occurred they would say: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” for, as we read in Rom. 11:25-27: “Blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the full number of Gentiles come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”

Israel is unquestionably the focal centre of Bible prophecy, and the gospel of the kingdom of God is unmistakably Israelitish in origin, application and future bearing. Anyone who has no place for the Jews in end time prophecy has lost the key that unlocks the prophetic Word, and it would be impossible for such a person to have a correct concept of the ultimate kingdom of God.



CHAPTER TWO THE THRONE OF DAVID

God's promise to David in 2 Sam. 7 that His seed would build a house and establish the throne of His kingdom, is applied to Solomon in the Old Testament (1 Kng. 2:1-4. 8:12-20. 1 Chr. 28:5-10). However, in the New Testament, the promise is applied to Christ, but this does not involve a contradiction. It is Scripture's way of telling us that Solomon was a type of Christ.

On one occasion during his ministry, Jesus declared that he was greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). Although the ancient kingdom of Israel reached its peak of power and prosperity during Solomon's reign, it was only an inferior replica or faint preview of the ultimate greater kingdom of Christ.

It is quite common for men in the Old Testament to be a type of Christ and for statements made in relation to them to be applied to Christ. For example, see Isa. 8:18 and Heb. 2:13. Isa. 22:20-22 and Rev. 3:7.

Careful consideration of the prophecy in 2 Sam. 7 soon reveals that God's promise concerning a son of David establishing and sitting on his throne was not completely and finally fulfilled by Solomon. Consider the following 7 points:

1. Concerning the son promised to David who would sit and rule upon his throne, God said: "I will be his Father and he shall be My son" (2 Sam. 7:14). These words are quoted in Heb. 1:5 and applied to Christ, not Solomon.

It should also be noted in 2 Sam. 7:12 that when God said to David I will set up thy "seed," He went on to say "... and I will establish his kingdom." Usage of the personal singular pronoun "his" here and in v13-15 indicates that God was not referring to a line or succession or dynasty of kings. He was referring to one specific individual, as in Gen. 3:17. 22:17 where Messiah is referred to as the "seed" of the woman and Abraham. Gal. 3:16 plainly declares the seed is Christ.

There is certainly no doubt that Jesus was the seed of David through his mother Mary who was a direct descendant of David. The New Testament constantly emphasizes that Jesus is the son of David, in order to establish him as the Messiah and promised heir to David's throne. For example, see Matt. 1:1. 12:23. Lk. 1:27-33. Jn. 7:40-42. Act. 2:30. Rom. 1:3. 2 Tim. 2:8. Heb. 7:14. Rev. 5:5. 22:16. (Ps. 89:3-4, 19-37. 132:11-13).

2. 2 Sam. 7:13, 16 records God saying to David that his son shall "build an house for My name and I will establish the throne of his

kingdom forever ... and your house and your kingdom shall be established.” These words are quoted in Lk. 1:32-33 and applied to Jesus not Solomon: “ ... and the Lord God shall give to him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever ...” Heb. 3:1-6 also refers to Jesus as the builder of God’s house i.e. the church, which will be the governing body that will rule with him in his kingdom.

3. God also said to David, as we read in 2 Sam. 7:12: “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you ...” It is clear from this that the ultimate promised seed would not come until after David’s death. This cannot refer to Solomon because he was born and ascended the throne before David died (1 Kng. 1:32-).

4. 2 Sam. 7:19 records David responding to God’s promise with these words: “You have spoken of your servant’s house (kingdom) for a great while to come” i.e. “into the far distant future” (Berkley Translation). This also cannot apply to Solomon because he ascended the throne while David was still alive, and started building the temple only 4 years after his death.

5. Concerning the son promised to David, God said: “My mercy shall not depart from him as I took it from Saul” (2 Sam. 7:15). He also said: “I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues resolute in keeping my commandments” (1 Chr. 28:7). These statements imply that the ultimate promised seed would be 100 percent righteous and faithful i.e. sinless. Only Jesus fulfils this. Solomon clearly didn’t (1 Kng. 10:26 to 11:43). He did not continue resolute in keeping God’s commandments and his kingdom did not continue forever.

6. Reference to the throne and kingdom being established “forever” (2 Sam. 7:13, 16) implies that David’s seed would live and reign forever and he would have to be immortal to do this. This implies he would be a conqueror of sin and death, which implies he would be raised from the dead, never to die again. This was revealed to David and he spoke about it in Ps. 16:8-11 which is quoted in Act. 2:22-32. Also see Act. 13:32-37.

7. In 2 Sam. 7:16 we read that God told David that his promised son would establish his kingdom forever “before thee” i.e. in the presence of David, which means David will witness his throne and kingdom being established forever after his death. Does this mean that David ascended to heaven when he died and witnessed Jesus ascending to heaven after his resurrection to sit at the right hand of God upon His throne? No! As pointed out earlier, Jerusalem is the location of David’s throne, not heaven. Not only that, but it is clearly stated in Act. 2:29-36 that David has not ascended to heaven since his death. He could not have therefore

been in heaven when Jesus ascended there.

The promise in 2 Sam. 7:16 simply means that when Jesus returns from heaven to earth to establish David's throne and kingdom, David will have been raised from the dead and will witness it. In his own words in Ps. 17:15: "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake (from the death sleep) with Thy likeness" (i.e. immortal like Christ).

So then, God promised David an eternal seed, an eternal throne and an eternal kingdom. The ultimate seed promised to David was to rule over the kingdom of Israel forever. In every respect, Solomon failed to meet the requirements. Jesus alone meets the requirements.

BRITAIN IS NOT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

British Israelites claim that Britain is the kingdom of Israel and that the throne upon which British monarchs have sat in London is David's throne. Their argument is based on 3 main texts of Scripture: 2 Sam. 7. Ps. 89. Jer. 33.

2 Sam. 7 is of course the passage where a "seed" is promised to David whose throne and kingdom will be established forever. British Israelites claim that the word "seed" means "dynasty," and because the throne is to be established "forever," they maintain that the seed must refer to an unbroken line of successors starting with David's son Solomon. Through much mishandling and misapplication of Scripture and history, they create a genealogical line from Solomon down to Queen Elizabeth, and claim that Britain comprises lost tribes of Israel, and that the British throne is the throne of David. But the fact is overlooked that the personal singular pronoun is used in 2 Sam. 7 in relation to the seed, indicating it refers to an individual not a dynasty. It is also overlooked that Heb. 1:5 informs us that the prophecy refers to Christ, not a dynasty.

Now, it is important to understand that Jesus was not a descendant of David through the high line of Solomon. Through his mother Mary, he came through the low line of a younger son of David (and Bathsheba) named Nathan (Lk. 3:31. 1 Chr. 3:5). It is clear from this that the "seed" promised to David who would sit on his throne forever, related to a descendant of Nathan not Solomon. This was prophesied in Ezk. 17:24 where reference is made to the Lord bringing down the high tree and exalting the low tree.

The last descendant of Solomon to sit upon David's throne at Jerusalem was Zedekiah. He was the king referred to in Ezk. 21:25-27

whose throne and kingdom God said He was going to overturn: “Exalt him who is low, and abase him who is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall no longer exist until he comes whose right it is and I will give it to him.”

This prophecy predicted the termination of the rule of Solomon’s successors on David’s throne at Jerusalem until the Messiah comes and sits on it. It clearly implies that no one would sit upon the throne until Messiah comes. In view of this, there is no way in which the throne in London upon which Queen Elizabeth sits, can be the throne of David, even if she was a descendant of Solomon. David’s “seed” to whom the throne was promised is clearly Christ, a descendant of Nathan, not Solomon, and the throne will be at Jerusalem not London.

The other two texts on which British Israelites base their claims are in Ps. 89 and Jer. 33:17. In these passages of Scripture, God promises that He will not alter or break His covenant with David; that his seed and throne shall be established and endure forever, and that David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.

British Israelites interpret these statements to mean that there would never be a single generation from David’s time forward, when there would not be a descendant of David sitting on his throne ruling over children of Israel. They maintain that this covenant made by God with David was an unconditional promise demanding an unbroken dynasty.

However, if God unconditionally guaranteed a continuous throne, David would not have warned Solomon, as we read in 1 Kng. 2:1-4, that it would only be “if,” i.e. on the condition that he and his sons walk in God’s ways and keep His commandments, that there would always be a man on the throne. The same condition is stated by God in 1 Chr. 28:7 where he speaks to David about Solomon saying: “Moreover I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues resolute in keeping my commandments and my judgements ...” Also Ps. 132:11: “If thy (David’s) sons keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their sons shall also sit upon thy throne forevermore.”

Scripture clearly declares that the continuance of the throne until the promised seed (Messiah) came, was conditional upon obeying God. There was no unconditional guarantee about an unbroken dynasty at all. The guarantee only applied to Christ, the special promised seed who would eventually reign forever, because only he was righteous.

As history testifies, many of the kings (Solomon’s successors) who sat upon the throne of David at Jerusalem, were evil and corrupt and failed to walk in God’s ways and obey His commandments. The last king,

Zedekiah, was no better. He is the one referred to as a “profane wicked prince of Israel” in Ezk. 21, who was told that God was going to overturn his throne and kingdom, causing it to “be no more” (cease to exist) “until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him.” The personal singular pronouns “he” and “him” indicate that the prophecy relates to a specific individual, not a dynasty.

It is important to understand that the context of the statement in Jer. 33:17 that “David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel,” relates to the future reign of Christ from David’s throne. It relates to the time when he sits on the throne forever, not to the time when Solomon’s successors sat on it. The section to which v17 belongs, commences at v14-16 which says: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness (Messiah) to spring forth for David; and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name by which she (Jerusalem) shall be called: the Lord our righteousness.”

There can be no doubt that this relates to the time of the second coming and reign of Jesus from David’s throne at Jerusalem. When he sets up the throne it will remain his forever! It is in this light that the next statement in v17 must be understood: “For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.”

It is interesting to note that after saying David shall never lack a man to sit upon the throne; the next verse, which is a continuation of God’s promise, says: “Neither shall the priests the Levites lack a man before God to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually” (a similar reference is also made in v21).

British Israelites quote the first part of the promise to prove their theory that there would be an uninterrupted continuance of the throne of David, maintaining that the throne upon which British monarchs have sat is that throne. But they do not argue that there has been an uninterrupted continuance of the ministry of the Levitical priests, offering burnt offerings at the altar of God.

If the statement that David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel means an uninterrupted throne, we would be forced to conclude that there would also be an uninterrupted Levitical priesthood and burnt offerings on the altar. It would not be “rightly dividing the Word of truth” to separate the two statements and give them different

applications.

Some British Israelites apply the reference to the Levitical priesthood and burnt offerings to the period of Christ's return. But to be consistent, they should also apply the other statement about a man on David's throne to the same period.

It is impossible to apply the prophecy in Jer. 33 to the throne or monarchy in Great Britain. No monarch in the history of Great Britain has qualified for the title "The Branch," and there has certainly never been a Levitical priesthood operating in Great Britain, offering burnt offerings. Neither can Britain be called "The Lord Our Righteousness," or be described as being "saved," as is the case in the prophecy in Jer. 33:16.

Britain today is rife with pseudo religions, atheism, agnosticism, apostasy, heresy, homosexuality etc. It is an unholy, unrighteous decadent society, deeply in need of being saved and of receiving righteousness. When Jesus returns and sets up the throne of David at Jerusalem and rules the nations, Britain along with all other nations will then experience a salvation and righteousness as never before when her own monarchs ruled! The whole earth will be filled with the glory of the lord.

Scripture never refers to the throne of David being removed from Jerusalem to any other country or place. Neither is there a reference in Scripture to the throne returning from another country to Jerusalem at the time of Christ's return. Jerusalem alone is the place appointed by God for the throne of David. Ps. 132:13 declares: "The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My resting place for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it." Also see Ps. 2:6. 48:1-.

The point is made in Ps. 78:67-68 that God "rejected the dwelling of Joseph, the tribe of Benjamin, but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which He loved." Those in the northern kingdom understood this because when they broke away from Judah, they never attempted to transfer the throne of David to any of their cities. They rejected the throne of David saying: "We have no share in David; neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse (David); you can look after your own house David" (1 Kng. 12:16).

If God did not want the throne of David in the tribe of Ephraim or any other northern tribe in the holy land, and if the tribe of Ephraim and the other northern tribes in the holy land didn't want the throne of David in their cities (Ps. 78); it is not very likely that the throne could or would be transferred to a city in an unholy Gentile land, such as Great Britain, even if members of the tribe of Ephraim or any other northern tribe of Israel lived there.

THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID

“**S**imeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written: After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up, that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, says the Lord, who does all these things.” These are the words of James recorded in Act. 15:14-17.

Because James refers to God visiting the Gentiles to take out a people for His name, and then quotes Am. 9:11-12 to support it, saying: “After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David,” some have concluded that the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David refers to the building of Christ’s church which is composed of Gentiles as well as Jews. If true, this would mean that “the tabernacle of David” should be interpreted spiritually not literally.

However, the words “after this” in Act. 15:16 clearly indicate that the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David takes place after the Gentiles have been called, and cannot be equated with the call. Rom. 11:25-27 relates to this, for it teaches that Jesus will come to Zion (and restore the throne of David) after the full number of Gentiles are called and come in.

The prophecy in Am. 9:11-12 is simply teaching that when the day comes for God to restore the tabernacle of David, Gentiles will have been called by His name. It can be inferred from this that the Gentiles are called before the tabernacle of David is restored. For this reason, after referring to the call of the Gentiles, Act. 15:16 says: “After this I will return and rebuild the tabernacle of David.”

The point being made here is that it is evident from the words of Amos that there will be Gentiles already called of God when Messiah comes and restores the tabernacle of David. From this premise James argues that it is obviously acceptable to God to preach to them before hand in order that they receive the call.

It is particularly evident from the context of Amos 9 that the tabernacle of David was not restored when the Gentiles were being called, and will not be restored until Christ returns to Zion. For example, Am. 9:13 tells us that when the tabernacle of David is restored, “corn will grow faster than it can be harvested, and grapes will grow faster than the wine can be made, and the hills will flow with it.”

The call of the Gentiles did not affect the fertility of the soil in the

holy land. In fact, to the contrary; Jerusalem was trodden down by the Gentiles and the land was subjected to centuries of desolation as foretold in Lev. 26.

Amos 9:14-15 further informs us that in the end, God will restore the fortunes of Israel and shall rebuild their cities which have been desolate, and plant gardens and vineyards. He will place the people back in their land and they shall never again be uprooted and dispersed from it. In A.D. 70 the Jews were uprooted from their land and expelled for centuries resulting in their land becoming desolate. During this period, God was calling the Gentiles. The prophecy in Amos can only be completely fulfilled when Christ returns to Zion, at which time the full number of Gentiles will have been called.

This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that Amos 9:11 says the tabernacle of David will be built “as in the days of old.” This teaches that the tabernacle of David existed in ancient times. But this cannot apply to the church of Christ for it did not exist in ancient times; the Gentiles were not called to be in the church until New Testament times. Likewise Act. 15:16 says the tabernacle of David is “fallen” and in “ruins” and will be “built again.” To be built again also teaches that the tabernacle of David existed in the past but is now in ruins. As already pointed out, Christ’s church with its Gentile converts did not exist in the past and was not fallen and in ruins when Act. 15:16 was written.

THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WAS NOT A TEMPLE

Because Christ’s church is referred to in the New Testament as the temple of God, those who believe “the tabernacle of David” in Am. 9:11 refers to the church, sometimes link it with the reference in 2 Sam. 6:17 to “the tabernacle that David pitched.” This “tabernacle” was pitched in “the city of David” i.e. at Zion in Jerusalem, to act as a sanctuary or temple to house the ark of the covenant.

But it is significant to note that this verse does not say that this tabernacle was “the tabernacle of David” as if to say he lived in it. No! it simply says he “pitched it” - not for himself to dwell in, but the Lord; for it housed the ark of the covenant and the Lord dwelt between the cherubim which were at each end of the ark. It was therefore the tabernacle of the Lord, not the tabernacle of David. This is illustrated in relation to the tabernacle built earlier by Moses. Just because Moses made it, it is never called “the tabernacle of Moses.” Because the Lord and not Moses dwelt in it, it is called “the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses

made” (1 Chr. 21:29).

It should also be noted that the Hebrew word translated “tabernacle” in 2 Sam. 6:17 in relation to the tabernacle that David pitched, is “ohel,” but in Amos 9:11 the Hebrew word “sook-kah” is used in relation to “the tabernacle of David.” “Ohel” means a tent which is usually made out of animals’ skins or some fabric, whereas “sook-kah” relates to a dwelling made out of branches or timber from trees. The two different words relate to two different types of construction. The tabernacle (ohel) pitched by David for the ark of the covenant was a tent, made out of skins or fabric, whereas the tabernacle (sook-kah) of David in Amos. 9:11 which is to be built again was a structure consisting of timber. They were not the same tabernacle but two quite different types of construction.

Isa. 16:5 provides the key as to what is meant by the tabernacle of David: “In mercy shall the throne (of David) be established, and he (the ruler v1. i.e. Messiah) shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and swift to do righteousness.” We learn from this that the tabernacle of David is the palace where the throne was situated. In David’s day the throne was on Mount Zion in the palace which was called “the forest of Lebanon” because it was constructed out of timber from cedar trees in Lebanon (1 Kng. 7:1-3. 10:18-21).

Now, the fact that the prophecy in Amos 9:11 concerning the tabernacle of David being fallen and in ruins, is quoted by James in Act. 15:16; means it was still fallen and in ruins at that time in the first century A.D. This was certainly true concerning David’s palace which had fallen and had been in ruins ever since the Babylonians overturned the throne and kingdom in 587 B.C. But it was not true of the tabernacle which was intended to house the ark of the covenant. It had not fallen at that stage, for a temple still stood at Jerusalem. In view of this, there can be no doubt that “the tabernacle of David” refers to the palace where David lived and where his throne was situated. When Jesus returns, he will build again the tabernacle and restore the throne.



CHAPTER THREE THE PRESENT KINGDOM OF GOD

We have seen that the kingdom of God existed in the past as the kingdom of Israel, and will exist in the future when Jesus returns to restore the throne of David. But there is not only a past and future aspect to the kingdom of God; there is a present aspect also.

Although David's throne was overturned by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. resulting in a vital element of the kingdom missing, and the Jews were evicted from their land; they still remained the kingdom of God. They were still God's domain or dominion over which He reigned. This should not surprise us because even before Israel entered the promised land under Joshua, long before David's throne was established at Jerusalem, the nation, being "called out of" Egypt (Hos. 11:1) was God's "church" (Act. 7:38) and "kingdom" - "a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Israel, the old covenant church, was clearly the kingdom of God before she entered the promised land and before the throne of David was set up.

Jesus recognized and acknowledged that the Jews in his day in spite of not having the throne of David were still "the children of the kingdom" - God's "vineyard" - "the kingdom of God." Reference is made in Matt. 8:12 to Jesus referring to the Jews as "the children of the kingdom," and in Matt. 21:41-43 he refers to them as "the kingdom of God," saying: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it." The "nation" to whom the kingdom would be given is referred to in 1 Pet. 2:9: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a purchased people." The holy nation referred to here of course is the new covenant church which consists of not only Jews but also Gentiles who have the same spirit and faith of Abraham, and who therefore constitute his "seed" (Gal. 3:26-29) - "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:15-16).

When Jesus told the Jews that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them, he was telling them that they were going to cease to be the exclusive domain over which God would reign. The Jews to whom Jesus was referring were of course those who were not of the same spirit and faith of Abraham, and they unfortunately represented the majority in the Jewish nation at the time.

The rejection and removal of these Jews from the kingdom of God is referred to in Rom. 11 in terms of natural branches being broken off an olive tree. And the giving of the kingdom to the Gentiles is referred to in

terms of wild branches being grafted into the olive tree among the remaining natural branches.

THE CHURCH IS CALLED THE KINGDOM

It is reasonable to conclude that if Israel, the old covenant church, was called God's kingdom before she entered the promised land, before the throne of David was established: and was still called the kingdom of God after David's throne was overturned: that the new covenant church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, could also be called the kingdom of God even though she has not yet entered the promised land and the throne of David still remains overturned. The statement of Jesus in Matt. 21:43 that the kingdom of God was going to be taken from the Jewish nation and given to another nation, clearly indicates that the new covenant church was going to become the kingdom of God. Being the master and king, Christ reigns over his church as a king reigns over his kingdom. He rules in the hearts and minds of his servants, conforming them to his image, preparing them to be rulers in his millennial kingdom.

Other verses in the New Testament which indicate that there is a present day application of the kingdom of God relating to the church, are as follows:

Matt. 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been rushed and eager souls are taking it by storm and forcing their way into it." How could people force their way into the kingdom if it didn't exist?

Matt. 13:41: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers." Reference made here to people being gathered out of Christ's kingdom at his return, indicates that his kingdom exists before his return. There will clearly not be sin or evildoers to gather out from the immortal saints in his millennial kingdom.

Matt. 13:47-50: "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind. When it was full, they drew it to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the age: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Considering that those who will be gathered into the millennial kingdom will be righteous and made immortal, equal with the angels; it is evident that the kingdom referred to here into which both righteous and wicked are

gathered, and later severed, is not that future kingdom but the present kingdom - the church.

Matt. 21:31: “Verily I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom before you” (i.e. before the unbelieving religious leaders of the Jews). The publicans and harlots were more willing than the religious leaders to follow Jesus and become part of his church or “kingdom.”

Matt. 23:13: “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither allow those who are entering to go in.” The action of those who discourage people from following Jesus and becoming part of his church is referred to here as shutting them out of the kingdom. Once again the link between the church and the kingdom can be seen.

Mk. 9:47: “If your eye causes you to stumble and sin, pluck it out, for it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.” No one who enters the future millennial kingdom and is made immortal and equal to the angels, will only have one eye! The kingdom referred to here cannot be the future millennial kingdom.

Rom. 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Being in Christ’s church is not about food laws and drink restrictions, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God here is clearly synonymous with the church.

Col. 1:13 says the Father has “delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear son.” Here again Christ’s church is referred to as his kingdom. The same applies in Rev. 1:9: “I John, who am also your brother, and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” When John says here that he is “in tribulation” he was not referring to a future tribulation he was anticipating, but a tribulation he was in at the time. The same applies to the following words: “in the kingdom ... of Jesus Christ.” He was, at the time, in Christ’s kingdom in that he was in his church.

KINGS AND PRIESTS

Rev. 5:10 declares that those redeemed by Christ have been “made unto God kings and priests, and they shall reign on the earth.” This is a repeat of Rev. 1:5-6 which states that Jesus Christ “has made us kings and priests unto God.” Prior to that, the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 2:8) stated

that Christians are “a royal priesthood;” i.e. a priesthood that is kingly in nature, and this links with the references to “kings and priests” in the book of Revelation. These statements speak in the present tense and affirm that all true Christians are kings and priests now.

Now, the function of a priest is to know the Word of God in order to teach the way of the Lord to others (Lev. 10:11. Mal. 2:7). All who belong to Christ are called to function as priests in this sense today. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9 puts it like this: “To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

The references to the saints being priests clearly has a present day application as well as a future application to the millennial kingdom. If so, the same must also apply to being kings, because Scripture mentions both together. This raises the question: In what sense can the saints be kings now? Well, kings rule and reign and there is a certain sense in which believers are called to do this, and failure to do so will result in failure to reign in the future millennial kingdom.

REIGN IN LIFE

We read in Rom. 5:17 that as a result of Adam’s sin, death reigned; but as a result of grace and the gift of righteousness through Christ, believers “reign in life.” This reference to reigning in life relates to walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4), not allowing sin to reign in, and have dominion over our mortal body; refusing to serve and obey its ungodly lusts (Rom. 6:6, 12:14. Tit. 3:3). This involves taking authority by the Word of God over sin, i.e. over all sinful desires and spiritually adverse influences and circumstances in life; refusing to yield and surrender to them, crucifying and putting them to death instead. As the apostle Paul put it: “I severely discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27).

Not long after sin entered the world, Cain was instructed by God to exercise this rule: “If you do well shall you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is towards you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7). “He who rules over his own spirit is better than he who captures and rules over a city” (Pr. 16:32).

In one of his parables, Jesus taught that in the future kingdom, his faithful servants will have authority to rule over cities (Lk. 19:17-19). But only those in the church prior to the millennial kingdom who have diligently taken authority and ruled over their own spirit will qualify. “He

who has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls” (Pr. 25:28). Such a person will not qualify to rule over a city in the millennial kingdom.

So then, ruling and reigning in this present life is not over other people, nations or cities, with observable outward show of power. The ruling is within us because it involves ruling over ourselves - our own sinful self - our own inner spirit which is lustful and envious (Jam. 4:5). This is what qualifies us to rule as kings in the future kingdom of Christ on earth. Some call it “kingdom living.” Failure to take authority over ourselves, as already mentioned, will result in failing to qualify to take authority and rule over others at Christ’s return. It is only those who overcome by exercising a tight and strict reign over themselves, continuing faithfully to the end doing God’s will, that Christ will give authority over the nations, to rule them with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:26-27). “To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne” (Rev. 3:21). “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12).

There is therefore both a present and future aspect to ruling and reigning as kings and priests, both of which are conveyed in the words “have” and “shall” in Rev. 5:10: ... “have made us ... kings and priests, and we shall reign on earth.” The future aspect is emphasized in Rev. 20:4-6 where we read that the saints “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years.” Also Rev. 22:5: “And they shall reign for ever and ever.”

THE PRESENT KINGDOM IS NOT THE ULTIMATE

It would be a fundamental doctrinal error to believe that ruling and reigning with Christ is limited and confined to ruling over our own spirit during this present life. Scores of Scriptures teach that those who belong to Christ will ultimately rule over the nations and cities when he returns to the earth, at which time “the kingdom of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

To believe that the church today or yesterday was or is the ultimate fulfilment and fullness of Christ’s kingdom, would be the result of gross ignorance of the Word of God. It seems that some of the members of the Corinthian church had falsely formed this conclusion. They saw themselves as having attained the fullness of the kingdom and their reign as kings, causing Paul to say to them: “I wish you really did reign as kings so that we could also reign with you” (1 Cor. 4:8). He goes on to point out

how he and the other apostles were despised, reviled, persecuted and treated as filth; to impress upon the Corinthians that the ultimate kingdom of Christ had not yet come, for when it does, believers will not be persecuted and martyred. Quite the opposite: Those who have opposed and persecuted the Christians will be made to come and bow in subjection before them and acknowledge that Christ has loved them (Rev. 3:9).

The church at its best during this present life is only an earnest - foretaste - preview of the ultimate future kingdom. Because sickness, disease and death will be eradicated in the ultimate kingdom of God, the healing of the sick and raising of the dead by Christ during his ministry was a taste of that kingdom. For this reason he said to his disciples: "Heal the sick and say unto them: the kingdom of God has come close to you" (Lk. 10:9-11) i.e. "you have had a close encounter with the power of the coming kingdom of God."

In Heb. 6:5 we are told that the power of the Holy Spirit of which the disciples were made partakers in order to heal and perform miracles, was a "taste" of the powers of the age to come.

While on the subject of previews, we have another example in relation to the kingdom of God in Mk. 9:1, which records Jesus as saying: "Verily I say unto you, that there are some that stand here who shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."

Significantly enough the transfiguration of Jesus immediately follows his statement, and in his transfiguration his face shone like the sun and his garments became dazzling white as bright as the sunlight (Matt. 17:2). Moses and Elijah also appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:30-31 i.e. shining) and spoke with Jesus. According to Matt. 17:9 this was a "vision."

We can link the shining face and garments of Jesus with Rev. 1:13-16 where his countenance is described as being as bright as the noonday sun, due to being glorified and made immortal. Elsewhere in Scripture the face and garments of the immortal angels are also described as being dazzling white (Dan. 10:5-6. Matt. 28:1-3. Act. 10:30).

In Matt. 13:43 we are told by Jesus that "The righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." In other words, they shall be glorified and made immortal like Jesus, "who shall change our lowly body that it may be fashioned like his glorious (shining) body" (Phlp. 3:21). "When Christ who is our life shall appear (i.e. at his second coming) we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2). "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested in glory, then shall you also be manifested with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). All who are endowed with immortal bodies in God's ultimate kingdom, will be equal to the

angels (Lk. 20:36) and will shine like them with the glory of God.

It should be obvious from all this that when Jesus was transfigured and seen talking with Moses and Elijah “in glory,” that it was a prophetic vision - a preview of the ultimate kingdom of God that will come when Jesus comes back to earth in power and glory, to raise the dead and be united with all the faithful servants of God, represented by Moses and Elijah.

The apostle Peter comments on the transfiguration scene and confirms this conclusion. He says in 2 Pet. 1:16-18 that it signified “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus,” and that in that scene the apostles who saw it were “eyewitnesses of his majesty.” It is clear from this that the transfiguration was a preview of the future coming and kingdom of Christ.

MANY SCRIPTURES TESTIFY TO THE FUTURE KINGDOM

Those who believe that the present existence of the church is a fulfilment of all the promises concerning the kingdom of God overlook many Scriptures. For example, we read in 1 Cor. 15:50 that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither does corruption inherit incorruption.” This reference to the kingdom of God is to the ultimate kingdom that Jesus will establish on earth when he returns, as is indicated in v23-26. Because the saints will live and reign with Christ in this kingdom during the 1,000 years referred to in Rev. 20:4, they will obviously have to live for ever, which means they will have to be immortal. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to know that mortals cannot inherit an immortal kingdom. To inherit an everlasting, incorruptible kingdom, one has to live forever and be incorruptible. In view of the fact that at present we have a mortal and corruptible nature, i.e. “flesh and blood,” it is evident that the ultimate kingdom has not yet come, and when it does, we will have to be changed from mortal, corruptible bodies into immortal, incorruptible bodies in order to be able to inherit it. This in fact, is what the following verses in 1 Cor. 15:51-58 go on to teach: “...we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible (body) must put on incorruption, and this mortal (body) must put on immortality ...”

Reference to the ultimate future kingdom of God coming when the last trumpet sounds, is interesting in connection with Rev. 11:15. This

section of Revelation refers to a series of 7 trumpet blasts, each of which signal end time events leading up to the coming and kingdom of Christ. The seventh trumpet is the last and this is what Rev. 11:15 says: “And the seventh angel blew his trumpet; and there were great voices in heaven saying, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” This kingdom had not come when the revelation was given to the apostle John at the end of the first century A.D. and we are still waiting for it!

THE KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

If, when Jesus said “the kingdom of God has come unto you” (Matt. 12:28), he meant God’s ultimate kingdom had come, why would he say, as we read in Jn. 18:36: “My kingdom is not of this world.” If that kingdom had come to the world, he would hardly say it was not of this world.

Some of course read the words of Jesus to mean that his kingdom is not of the earth and will not be on the earth but in heaven. However, the words “world” and “earth” are not always interchangeable or synonymous. The Greek word “kosmos” which is translated “world” means the arrangement, order or constitution of things. The order or arrangement of things in the days of Jesus, as in all other ages when the kingdoms of men are in control, involved sin, injustice, violence, murder, wars, famines, pestilences, death etc. At the time that Jesus uttered the words: “my kingdom is not of this world,” he was a prisoner standing before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, facing the death sentence. This will not be the order or arrangement of things when his ultimate kingdom comes! As he went on to say: “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but the source of my kingdom is not here” (i.e. not from the world).

When the time comes for the ultimate kingdom of God to come - for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of our Lord, he and his servants will indeed fight by engaging in physical combat as many Scriptures testify (Ps. 149. Zech. 14:3. Rev. 16:14-21. 19:11-21). As a result of conquering and subduing the nations and ruling the world; wars, famines, pestilences etc will cease. Paradise will be restored (Isa. 2. Rev. 21:4-5). The whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. God’s will shall be done in earth as it is in heaven.

THE KINGDOM COMES WHEN CHRIST COMES

It is a major theme in Scripture that the ultimate kingdom of God will not be established until the second coming of Christ. Consider the following examples: Matt. 25:31-34: “When the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the king say to those on his right hand, Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom ...”

Lk. 23:42: “And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him: I can assure you today, you shall be with me in paradise.” The future kingdom on earth will be paradise restored but it will not come until Jesus comes!

When all the verses in the Bible which refer to the word “kingdom” are checked, it soon becomes obvious that many of them relate to the ultimate millennial kingdom that will be established when Jesus returns, and cannot be applied to the present day church. For example: Matt. 7:21: “Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” At the moment, all of course, including the insincere, who confess Jesus as Lord can enter the church; but when those who are not sincere and genuine are rejected at the judgement, they will not be able to enter the millennial kingdom. Matt. 7:23 goes on to say that Jesus will “profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” In relation to this, consider the following passages of Scripture:

1 Cor. 6:9-10: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Be not deceived because fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, coveters, drunkards, slanderers, or extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Paul reaffirms this in Gal. 5:21. Eph. 5:5. At the moment, unfortunately, unrighteous people do get into the church from time to time, but they will not inherit the coming kingdom.

Peter adds his voice to these testimonies in 2 Pet. 1:10-11: “So then, my brothers, be diligent to make God’s call and His choice of you a sure thing; if you do, you shall never fall. You will therefore be given full and free admission into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” At the time of writing, those in the church had clearly not gained admission into the eternal kingdom.

When Jesus said: “Many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down (recline) with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God,” he was clearly not referring to a present experience in the church, but to the time of his second coming and millennial kingdom. He went on to say: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Matt. 8:11-12. Lk. 13:28-29).

At the end of his ministry, Jesus said: “From this time forward I will not eat of the Passover or drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come” (Matt. 26:29. Lk. 22:16-18). Once again his reference to “the kingdom of God” was not the present church but the future millennial kingdom.

The same applies in Lk. 22:29-30. Speaking to his 12 apostles, Jesus said: “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me; that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

The doctrine believed and taught by some that the church will bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God by converting all people in all nations through preaching, is a false doctrine and a vain hope. The nations will not be brought into submission to Christ’s rule and reign by preaching alone. The prophetic Word makes it clear that conditions in the church and in the world will degenerate in the end time, not regenerate, necessitating the return of Christ and judgement. For example see: Matt. 24. Lk. 18:8. 2 Tim. 3:1-5. 4:3-4. 2 Pet. 3:1-4. Jude v14-19.

A SIGNIFICANT PROPHECY IN DANIEL

In the second chapter of Daniel, the second coming of Christ is likened to a stone hurtling down from heaven with tremendous force, smashing into and destroying all human governments and kingdoms of men. Only by this means will nations be humbled and made to submit to Christ’s rule, and surrender to his will and the way of his government and kingdom. The stone does not gently float down from heaven and passively absorb and assimilate all nations!

The world is becoming so steeped in sin; and the spirit of rebellion against God’s laws is becoming so deep rooted and widespread; that it will require a very firm hand, and a major shake-up to bring about a situation in which all people everywhere know and acknowledge God, and love Him more than themselves and their own pleasures. The reference in Ps. 2:9 and Rev. 2:27 to Christ and his church ruling the nations with a

“rod of iron” says it all! Only by this means will the pride and arrogance of the flesh be made humble and submissive, resulting in God’s ultimate kingdom being established upon the earth.

In that second chapter of Daniel, the kingdoms of men destroyed by the stone from heaven, are represented by the image of man composed of various metals. The head was gold and represented the kingdom of Babylon. The chest and arms were silver and represented the Medo-Persian kingdom. The belly and thighs were brass and represented the Greek kingdom. The legs were iron and represented the Roman kingdom, which ruled during New Testament times when the church was established by Christ and his apostles. If the church represented the ultimate kingdom of God on earth, one would have expected that the stone in Dan. 2 (which represents Christ) would have been depicted as impacting upon the legs of iron. But it isn’t. It impacts upon the feet and toes of the image which consist of iron mixed with clay.

The feet and 10 toes are related to a beast and 10 horns in Rev. 13, 17 and 19, which represents a coalition of anti-Israel armies which invade the land of Israel in the end time, bringing about the return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16 and 19). This of course results in the kingdoms of the world becoming the kingdom of God. In the words of Dan. 2:44: “And in the days of these kings (represented by the toes of the image) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

It is clear from this that the church established in New Testament times during the period of the Roman Empire, which is represented by the legs of iron, was not the ultimate kingdom of God. Before the ultimate kingdom of God could be established, the Jews had to return from exile to their land and be invaded. This is the event that precipitates Christ’s return and the battle of Armageddon - the mother of all battles - the war that ends all wars!

As many of the prophets testify, the Lord will deliver Israel in that day from the invader and restore the tabernacle of David (Jer. 30:7-9. Ezk. 36:16-38. Joel 3. Zech. 14). Because the Jews knew from their Scriptures that their Messiah would do this, they expected Jesus to do it to the Romans who occupied their land when he first came on the scene. But they overlooked other Scriptures which taught that Messiah firstly had to suffer and die to make atonement for sin, and ascend to heaven before his enemies would be made his footstool. They also overlooked the fact that,

according to the prophecy of the metallic image in Dan. 2, the invader he would fight against at the battle of Armageddon would not be the Romans of the iron legs phase, but the end time invader represented by the feet and toes.

It is indicated in Rom. 11:24-26 that it will not be until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, that the deliverer will come out of Zion to save Israel. The natural branches will ultimately be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Zech. 12 informs us that when Messiah comes to deliver the Jews from the oppressor, they will “look upon him whom they have pierced and mourn ...” When they see the imprints of the nails in his hands and feet, the historical blunder they committed, failing to recognize him as their Messiah and calling for his death, will hit them like a bombshell.

The unspeakable grace seen in his willingness to come and deliver them from the enemy in spite of their rejection of him, will result in profound remorse, repentance and restoration. The story of Joseph, narrated in the book of Genesis, involving him saving his brothers in spite of their rejection and cruel treatment of him, clearly foreshadows this and is one of the most poignant passages of Scripture in the Bible.

In view of all this, a better conclusion could not be stated than Paul’s conclusion at the end of the eleventh chapter of Romans: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and how inscrutable are His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to Him again? For from Him and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM

We have seen that the kingdom of Israel was once the kingdom of God, and that the kingdom of God which Jesus will eventually set up on earth will be the restoration of the kingdom of Israel on a larger and grander scale. It will involve David's throne being restored at Jerusalem in the land of Israel, from which centre Jesus will reign over the restored 12 tribes and all the nations of the earth.

The question that needs to be addressed now is: why the nation and land of Israel? Why did God choose the nation of Israel to be His kingdom? Why not the Egyptians, Assyrians or Babylonians who were larger and stronger nations than Israel? Why choose the land of Israel to be the mother country of the kingdom? Why not some other country? Why choose Jerusalem to be the place where the throne is to be situated and not some other city? Well, of course, had God chosen a different nation, country and city, people would still ask the same questions! But He didn't! He chose the land of Israel and a city in Israel. And if we ask why? The simple answer is - because such was His choice. It all simply boils down to divine election and selection. Rom. 9:11 expresses the principle in these words: "The purpose of God according to election must stand, not on the basis of human will or effort, but by the choice and call of God." God makes choices and we must accept and respect them.

EXAMPLES OF DIVINE SELECTION

Now, this principle of divine selection has been exemplified from the very beginning of the Bible. It all started with His choice of planet earth. Gen. 1:1 declares: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Most would see in this statement a simple assertion that God created the whole universe. But it tells us more, namely, that God selected and separated the earth from the universe and chose to do something special and unique with it. The "heavens" refers to the sun, moon, stars and other planets like those in our solar system including planet earth. But, in spite of this, the earth is referred to separately from the heavens. Gen. 1:1 doesn't say God created the sun, moon, stars planets and earth. No! It says: "The heavens and the earth."

The "heavens" with its multitudes of suns or stars, moons and planets is one thing, but earth is quite another. It is something different and distinct from all other celestial bodies. And the rest of Gen. 1 explains

why planet earth is separated and isolated from the others. God wanted it to be the centre stage i.e. the platform or location of a unique plan to create a kingdom consisting of His own family - people created in His image and likeness, the head of whom would be His own divinely begotten son. In a nutshell, the plan was to fill the earth with God's glory, making it an extension or outpost of heaven. Heaven on earth; that was the plan! The kingdom of God on earth, ruled over by the son of God.

Sometimes it is wondered if there are other planets in the universe that are populated. Some find it hard to believe that only planet earth was selected and singled out among the teeming trillions in the universe. Yet, it is quite possible that this could be the case. The reference in Gen. 1:1 to "heavens and earth" could imply this. There are no statements in Scripture which teach that God has replicated His work on planet earth on another planet. If He has not done this, it would make our planet even more unique, and would provide an incredible example of divine selection. To pick out the earth from the teeming trillions of planets in the universe, would be like going down to the beach and picking out one grain of sand with which to do something special. (Not that the number of stars can be compared with the number of grains of sand on the beaches around the world. There are more stars! Sand is limited by earth's boundaries but space is limitless, having no bounds! There are therefore more stars than grains of sand).

God's choice of planet earth is just the beginning of many examples of divine election and selection, which unfold as we read on from Gen. 1. Like ourselves, God has freedom of choice, but unlike us, His choices are designed to redound to His glory and honour. They all fit into His master plan to establish His kingdom on earth and fill it with glory.

Gen. 2 tells us that God selected a particular area on planet earth to create the first man and woman, namely, the area to which the Tigris and Euphrates rivers belong, known in ancient times as "the land of Shinar" or "Sumer," or "Mesopotamia." It was situated in the country now known as Iraq and was the cradle of civilization. This is where the "Garden of Eden" was situated, commonly called "Paradise." Righteousness and peace reigned there. Perfect harmony existed between man and God; and man and God's creation. There was no sin, sickness, sorrow or death. It was the kingdom of God on earth!

Adam and Eve were told to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth:" and had things remained as they were, i.e. had sin and death not entered the world, the kingdom of God would have quickly spread throughout the earth, and filled it with the glory of God, as men multiplied

and increased. Within the first millennium, God's purpose could have been fulfilled i.e. the earth could have been populated with righteous God-fearing people. But sin did enter; pride came into man's heart and he rebelled against God's will, resulting in the death sentence and other curses coming upon him and the earth. He was expelled from the garden - exiled from paradise. Paradise was lost! The kingdom of God was overturned. But the overturn was not to be perpetual! It would only be "until" a conqueror of sin came to restore what was lost, and fulfil the original plan of filling the earth with God's glory and making it His kingdom. The first prophecy relating to this is in Gen. 3:15 - also see Rom. 8:20.

As fallen man multiplied upon earth, so did sin, as a result of it entering the human race. It reached a crescendo in the days of Noah, at which time "the wickedness of man was very great in the earth. Every thought in his heart was evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). "The earth was corrupt ... filled with violence." "All flesh had corrupted God's way upon earth" (v12).

Reference to "God's way" indicates that God had revealed His will and way. His Word was able to be heard and obeyed by any who chose to do so. But, as usual, the majority chose not to go God's way. Instead they corrupted it, superimposing upon it their own carnal imaginations resulting in idolatry and gross immorality. Judgement was inevitable and it came in the form of a flood. The clock was virtually put back to Gen. 1:2 when the earth was without form and void and water covered it.

After the flood, Noah's 3 sons and wives multiplied and their descendants eventually migrated from Mesopotamia. Nations developed from them and became established in the then known world, known as the Middle East today. They are listed in Gen. 10. These newly formed nations soon ended up going the same way as the people prior to the flood. They too corrupted God's way and degenerated into pagan practise and darkness becoming grossly immoral and ungodly. The pride of man asserted itself, trying to make a name for itself, with no regard for the name of the Lord. Eventually this pride asserted itself to the point of man setting up his own kingdom in which he appointed himself to lord it over his fellow man, and seek world dominion. This is recorded in Gen. 10:8-10 where we read about "Nimrod, who was the first on earth to be a mighty man, and he began his kingdom with Babel ..."

So here was a situation in which men had lost sight of the kingdom of God and no longer believed in it or hoped for it. Instead, they were more interested in their own kingdom and empire-building, making a name for

themselves, by the power of the sword and the scourge of war. Such has been the way of man and the course of history ever since. Kingdoms of men by the dozens have come and gone, risen and fallen. They never last, never satisfy, and never stop wars. None have ever established lasting peace. The saying that: “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” has been true of all of them.

In the Bible, the kingdoms of men (the world) are set forth in sharp contrast with the kingdom of God. Eventually, at Christ’s return, there will be a showdown between the two resulting in the kingdoms of the world being destroyed and replaced by the kingdom of God (Dan. 2. Rev. 11:15).

A NEW STRATEGY

Coming back to the situation after the flood, when nations degenerated into paganism and set up their own kingdoms; the question is: What was God going to do about it? If He let it go, without some kind of intervention, the whole earth would end up worse than what it was in Noah’s day.

God wouldn’t send another universal flood. He had already promised never to repeat that form of judgement, so that people’s hearts wouldn’t be filled with fear every time it rained! Not only that, but the way in which man so quickly degenerated after the flood made it pointless sending another one, because it would become an endless process. So fixed and deep and persistent was sin in the nature of man!

How then, was God going to deal with the problem and prevent paganism from filling the world with darkness, and totally corrupting His way, resulting in faith and hope in His kingdom being lost forever, making fulfilment of it impossible? What new strategy would He adopt?

Well, as we read on in Genesis, we learn more about the divine plan as it unfolds. It is a plan of salvation - a plan by which nations could be rescued from the darkness of their ignorance and be restored to the light of the original Gospel, and know and worship the one and only true God and live according to His truth and righteousness.

To accomplish this work of reclaiming and restoring nations to Himself, God planned to work through a nation - a nation that knew His Word and will and was able to instruct others - a nation that would be an example to others of what God’s kingdom was all about, in contrast to man’s kingdom. Such a nation would be a missionary nation - God’s witnesses - His light and salt to the world.

But, the problem was, which nation could God use to perform such a function? Could He use Egypt, Babylon or the Canaanites? No, none of those nations were useable. All of them were in need of redemption. All had degenerated into paganism and were hopelessly corrupted by it, being steeped in vain myths, legends and superstition. Their minds were like concrete: all mixed up and permanently set; having no flexibility, like old wine skins!

God needed a new wine skin for new wine; i.e. for the new teaching and revelation. God planned therefore, to create and form a new nation - His own special unique nation for a special and unique purpose. To do this, He obviously had to start with a progenitor; someone had to be the “father” of the nation. And so once again, divine election (selection) had to take place, which it did. This brings us to Abraham, who is introduced to us in the latter part of Gen. 11.

We read there that Abraham lived in a place called Ur, in southern Mesopotamia. God spoke to him and told him to leave his country and come into another country which He would show him and ultimately give to him as an everlasting inheritance (Act. 7:2. Heb. 11:8). That “land” of course, turned out to be Canaan (Palestine) which was later called the land of Israel and the holy land. God said to Abraham: “I will make from you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and in you shall all nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

According to Gal. 3:8, those words: “in you shall all nations of the earth be blessed,” constituted the “Gospel,” i.e. the good news that God will forgive sins and justify, and give eternal inheritance in His kingdom, to all who are willing to believe and obey His Word as Abraham did. And the focal centre or geographical platform of this purpose was clearly going to be the land of promise, the land of Israel.

A NEW FOCUS

For 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham, Mesopotamia had been the focal centre of Bible history, but the focus was now going to move to Canaan and a whole new chapter of Bible history was going to begin there. Abraham was like the roots of an olive tree, which was going to grow and develop over a long period. God, of course, planned this from the beginning, for the kingdom of God was planned before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). But He held it as a secret to Himself until the

time arrived to reveal it and implement it.

The land of Canaan was a fitting location for a missionary nation and kingdom of God, for it was situated in the centre of the Middle East nations which constituted the ancient world. As one puts a light in the centre of a ceiling to give even distribution of light to all parts of the room, so God intended to place His chosen missionary nation and kingdom in Canaan, in the centre of the nations. Initially, it was the centre of the ancient world, but ultimately at Christ's return, it will be the centre of a world-wide government encompassing all modern nations in the whole earth.

In an earlier chapter it was stated that the period from Abraham to Christ was also 2,000 years during which period God concentrated on the natural descendants of Abraham, i.e. the Israelites. He then turned to the Gentiles (non-Israelite nations) and concentrated on them, inviting them to inherit His ultimate everlasting kingdom.

Around 2,000 years has gone by since this started taking place, and it is not difficult to see the fairness and impartiality of God in this. He has given Jews and non Jews equal amount of time to receive an invitation to the kingdom, and prepare themselves for it. God's dealings with mankind therefore, can be divided up into 3 major periods each consisting of around 2,000 years.

From Adam to Abraham was the first 2,000 year period during which no distinction was made between Gentiles and Jews or any other nation. There were no specially formed or chosen nations during that period. All nations were free and had opportunity to make themselves special and holy to God, but none took the initiative. God therefore had to take the initiative and specially form one for Himself. This resulted in the second 2,000 year period from Abraham to Christ, during which God concentrated on Israel. Inadequate and insufficient response from Israel resulted in God turning to Gentiles, and inviting them during the next 2,000 years.

Coming back to the call of Abraham and God's promises to him, it is evident that Abraham is a key figure in Scripture, and God's plan. This is indicated by the amount of space given over to him in the Bible. God clearly had a high regard for Abraham and he is referred to several times as the "friend of God" in Scripture; and it is quite crucial to know about, and understand all the promises God gave to him, because they form part of the foundation of the Gospel. Their importance cannot be over-emphasized. Lack of knowledge of these promises results in misconceptions of the Gospel of the kingdom. This is the chief reason for

so many wrong and differing concepts of the kingdom today in various circles.

The importance of the promises made to the “fathers” of Israel (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), is indicated in Rom. 15:8 where we are told that the mission of Jesus was “to confirm the promises made to the fathers.” Zecharias’ prophecy in Lk. 1:72-73 clearly states that God’s purpose in sending Jesus was “to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our Father Abraham.” And in Eph. 2:12 the apostle Paul makes the closest possible link between Christ and the covenants of promise by saying that “without Christ,” a person has “no part in the covenants of promise (made with Abraham) being an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, having no hope and without God in the world.”

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROMISES

Let us then focus on these promises and have a closer look at them. By reading from Gen. 12 to chapter 22, we discover that the promises given to Abraham involve 2 major things: land and seed. Abraham was promised an eternal inheritance (possession) of land, and an everlasting seed (family), who would live with him in the land. On 7 different occasions, between Gen. 12 to 22, God affirmed and re-affirmed these promises to Abraham (12:1-3, 7. 13:14-17. 15:7, 18. 17:8. 22:17-18). These same promises were later re-affirmed to Isaac and Jacob, in exactly the same terms.

At this stage let us focus on the land aspect of the promises. There can be no doubt that the land promised was the literal physical land of Canaan which Abraham could see and walk on. This was the land promised to him and his seed as an everlasting inheritance. This is evident in all the promises, especially Gen. 13:14-17. It is stated here that when Abraham was at Bethel, God told him that the promised land consisted of all the land he could see to all 4 points of the compass, and he was invited to walk through the length and breadth of it. Canaan was clearly the land Abraham was personally called to and promised. Also see Gen. 11:31. 12:5-7. 15:18-21. 17:8. Act. 7:4. Heb. 11:8. Ps. 105:8-11.

Now, God’s promise that Abraham would be given the land “for ever” clearly teaches that it was God’s ultimate purpose for him to live forever in the land. He will clearly have to be immortal for this to be fulfilled. This has never been fulfilled! Abraham remained mortal and died and never inherited the land. He never received the title deeds. He

never owned the land!

Consider Act. 7:1-5: “God appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia ... and told him to get out ... and come into the land that I shall show you ... So he came out into this land in which you (the Jews) now live. And God did not give Abraham any part of the land that he could call his own, not even a square metre of ground, yet God promised to give it to him and his seed.” Note, the land was only “promised” to Abraham; he never “possessed it.” Also the land was promised to “him and his seed,” not just his “seed.” Occupation of the land by his “seed” (Israel) could not therefore fulfil the promise given personally to himself!

Act. 7:16 confirms that Abraham never possessed the land. It refers to a burial site which Abraham purchased for a sum of money from the local Canaanites living in the land, in order to bury his wife Sarah. Had he owned the land, it would not have been necessary for him to purchase a portion of it! Heb. 11:13 makes the point that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob etc “died in faith not having received the promise.”

Now, the question is: If God promised to give Abraham the land, and he died without receiving it, what conclusion must we draw? Several can be drawn:

1. God didn't mean what He said, i.e. it was an ambiguous statement not to be taken literally but intended to be spiritually applied, and really referred to heaven or some other place. If so, why didn't God say “look up” instead of “look northward, southward, eastward and westward” when He told him to look at his promised inheritance?
2. The promise was a lie. No! It is impossible for God to lie.
3. God intended to fulfil the promises but failed. No! it is equally impossible for God to fail.
4. God meant what He promised and still intends to fulfil it. This is the only satisfactory conclusion! The first 3 are totally unacceptable.

This means that Abraham is yet to receive the land, which means he must be raised from the dead and given eternal life. And this is what the Bible teaches, as many Scriptures testify. For example, speaking to the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection, Jesus said: “It is evident that there will be a resurrection of the dead, because God, when speaking to Moses said: “I am the God of Abraham ... God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto him.” Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead in Moses' day, yet God said to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham ...” Jesus quoted this statement to prove the resurrection. Resurrection is so sure that even though Abraham was dead, God said: “I

am the God of Abraham ...” not “I was,” for the dead are as good as alive to God. “God speaks of things which do not exist as if they do exist” (Rom. 4:17).

Lk. 13:28-29 quotes Jesus as saying: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God (restored kingdom of Israel) and you yourselves (i.e. unbelieving Jews) thrust out (of the land). And they shall come from the east and from the west and from the north and south (to the land) and shall recline at table in the kingdom of God.” There is no doubt about it: Abraham will be raised from the dead (from his burial site in Israel) and will inherit the kingdom in the promised land forever, along with all who share his faith (Jews and Gentiles).

CHRIST’S DEATH MADE FULFILMENT POSSIBLE

It should have always been evident that before Abraham could be raised from the dead and live forever, the cause of death had to be removed and power over death had to be accomplished. Now, the cause of death is sin, which had to be conquered before eternal life could be released and before the promises could be fulfilled. And there has only been one conqueror - Jesus! Until he came and got victory over sin and death, God’s promises couldn’t be fulfilled for Abraham or anyone else, for no one could live forever: “Sin reigned unto death ... from Adam to Christ.” During this 4,000 year period, no one could fully master the sinful tendencies of the flesh and render one hundred percent obedience. In view of this, it was obviously impossible for the Jewish occupation of the land under the law up to the time of Jesus, to be a fulfilment of the promises to Abraham.

The fulfilment depended on the righteous life, sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, and especially his second coming; at which time he will resurrect Abraham and make everlasting possession of the land possible. And so, as quoted earlier, Rom. 15:8 says Jesus came “to confirm the promises made to the fathers.” He didn’t come to brush them aside and give new and different ones. No! He came to confirm them by the shedding of his blood.

This is what the “new covenant” is all about. It’s the same covenant made with Abraham, confirmed by the blood and resurrection of Jesus. It is not like the old law covenant, i.e. the one given through Moses which was ratified by the inferior blood of animals. Due to the weakness of the flesh, that covenant could not be kept and could only bring people under

the conviction and condemnation of sin, resulting in death. It was therefore incapable of giving anyone an eternal inheritance in the land. It could not therefore confirm the promises made to Abraham.

How then, did Jesus confirm the promises? By making their fulfilment possible! How did he do that? By removing the cause of death! How? By breaking the power of sin. How? By his sacrificial death upon the cross and resurrection, he brought life and immortality to light! (2 Tim. 1:10). “Christ suffered and was the first to rise from the dead” (Act. 26:23). He is the “firstfruits.” Afterwards, at his coming, he will raise from the dead all who belong to him for he is the resurrection and the life (1 Cor. 15:23).

Some may say, “No, you’ve got it all wrong. Heb. 11:13 says that Abraham Isaac and Jacob etc confessed that they were strangers and foreigners in the land. They obviously didn’t like the land and didn’t want it to be their eternal homeland. In fact, Heb. 11:16 plainly states that they desired a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God has prepared for them a city. What could be plainer than this! They didn’t want to stay on earth. They wanted to go to heaven. So God has prepared a city up there for them, and that’s where they have gone. At death their immortal soul departed to the celestial city. They don’t need resurrection; they already live unto God and are basking in His glory. They don’t need the second coming of Christ. They have already gone to be with him.”

Well, what can be said in answer to this? To start with, Heb. 11:13 explicitly states that “These died in faith not having received the promises.” Verses 39-40 go a stage further by saying: “These all received not the promise, because God had decided on an even better plan. His purpose was that only in company with us would they be made perfect.”

Abraham etc will not attain to eternal life and obtain the kingdom until all who have been invited are ready to attain it. God wants all the wedding guests (members of the kingdom) to come at the same time - “together.” (Imagine guests invited to a wedding turning up on different days!) 1 Thes. 4:17 says that the living and the dead will be caught up together. No one will precede i.e. go before others (v15). Rom. 8:17 declares that believers are “joint heirs” and will be “glorified together,” not in dribs and drabs at different intervals.

In the meantime, Abraham and all the others who have died, are “asleep,” not aware of the passage of time - not conscious of the centuries that have passed since death.

Abraham clearly didn’t depart at death to be with his heavenly Father. Tradition affirms that he did, but Scripture does not teach this. God

Himself said to Abraham: “You shall go to your fathers in peace (i.e. join your ancestors in death), you shall be buried in a good old age” (Gen. 15:15). This is quite different from saying: “You shall come to Me; you shall wing your way to heaven when you reach a good old age.” Abraham’s father Terah certainly wasn’t in heaven for he was an idolater. Even David did not ascend to heaven (Act. 2:34). No one, in fact, except Jesus, has ascended (Jn. 3:13).

A BETTER HEAVENLY COUNTRY

Regarding the reference to Abraham etc desiring a better country - “a heavenly one; therefore God has prepared a city for them.” There is no justification for concluding that the “better,” “heavenly” country is up in heaven itself, and that one has to leave earth to get into it and the city. Heb. 13:14 also refers to the city, saying: “For here (on earth at the moment) we have no continuing (lasting) city (all shall be shaken). But we seek one to come.” The city of God is to “come” to us. It is coming to earth.

In Rev. 21 a very dramatic picture is presented of the city descending from heaven to earth. It is four-square, like the holy of holies in the tabernacle and temple, which represented heaven, but astronomically larger (600 kilometres square). We learn from this that heaven is not another planet but a mobile city-temple in which the throne of God is situated. It is the “new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:2) which comes to replace the old, and John saw it in prophetic vision descending to earth. It will be the centre from which the world-wide kingdom of God will be ruled.

This is the “city” that Heb. 11:10 says Abraham was looking and waiting for: “... a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God” not man, as in the case of the cities in Canaan. The emphasis in Scripture is clearly on the city coming to earth from heaven, not on Abraham leaving earth to go to heaven!

When God’s kingdom comes, in fulfilment of the Lord’s prayer, and His will is done in earth as it is in heaven; Canaan and every other country will of course be a “better one,” a heavenly one. Paradise will be restored (Rev. 22) and the glory of the Lord will fill the earth (Num. 14:21). “Everything in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord ... and in that day there shall no longer be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 14:21).

When Abraham lived in Canaan, the land was occupied by the Canaanites, who had built cities throughout, including Sodom and

Gomorrah. Heathen shrines were everywhere. The land was full of idolatry and immorality. God referred to their “iniquity” when speaking to Abraham (Gen. 15:16). Other references to their conduct reveals them as a pack of perverts: Gen. 19. Lev. 18:19-25. 20:23. Deu. 18:9-12. Canaan was a heathen country not a heavenly because of the way it had been corrupted by Canaanites. This is why Abraham was a “stranger and foreigner” there. He was an outsider with totally different beliefs, standards, concepts and customs. He didn’t fit in or conform with the Canaanite communities. He felt out of place and was not of the world. This is one of the reasons why he lived in tents in the hills, away from the cities.

Heb. 11:15 points out that Abraham could have left Canaan and returned to Mesopotamia. But he didn’t, because, although Canaan was a “bad” country, he knew that when God’s time and purpose had run its course, it would become a “better country, that is, an heavenly” (v16). This is what Abraham desired and looked for in faith. This was his hope and became the same hope of Israel.

ABRAHAM SAW THE PROMISES AFAR OFF

Heb. 11:13 says Abraham etc “all died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.” What do the words: “having seen” mean? Well, it is stated in Heb. 11:1 that “Faith is conviction of things not seen.” And 2 Cor. 4:18 says “Faith looks at the things not seen.” Faith sees the invisible! (Heb. 11:27). In the faith realm of the spirit, believing is seeing! In the flesh realm where people live by the feelings and physical senses of the flesh, the opposite applies which is: “Seeing is believing.” Cp doubting Thomas (Jn. 20:24-29). Because Abraham believed the promise of the coming kingdom, he could see it by faith, but “afar off” i.e. in time not distance. This is indicated in Gen. 15:13-16 where God told Abraham that he would die before the promise would be fulfilled, and that it would be a long time after that (at least 400 years) before fulfilment took place. David was also told it would be “a great while to come” (2 Sam. 7:19).

Jn. 8:56 records Jesus saying: “Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad!” He did not say: “Abraham rejoiced to see me,” but “my day,” which refers to “the day of the Lord” which is a common phrase relating to the second coming of Christ. Abraham was “looking” towards; not the cities of the Canaanites, which were all destined to be shaken and collapse (for which reason he also lived in tents); but “for a

city which has foundations (that cannot be shaken) whose builder and maker is God.” He rejoiced at the prospect of this city coming and was glad. “Therefore (says Heb. 11:16) God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.” For this reason God said to Moses: “I am the God of Abraham.” Abraham’s faith and patience was clearly very pleasing to God! We are therefore exhorted in Heb. 6:12 to “not be slothful, but imitators of those who through faith and patience, inherit the promises.” All who do, become the seed of Abraham and heirs with him of the promised kingdom of God!



CHAPTER FIVE OCCUPATION UNDER THE LAW DID NOT FULFIL THE PROMISE.

In the last chapter, attention was given to the promises to Abraham, which, according to the New Testament, constituted the “gospel.” We saw that the promises related to the land of Canaan, which God promised to give to Abraham and his “seed” for an everlasting possession. We also saw that this promise was never fulfilled, and will not be fulfilled until Jesus, the promised seed, returns to the land; raises Abraham etc from the dead and bestows eternal life. At that time he will restore the kingdom of Israel, making Canaan the mother country of his world-wide kingdom. (Zion will be the “first dominion” Mic. 4:8).

Being the promised land, Canaan is clearly a very special geographical centre as far as Bible history and prophecy are concerned. The majority of Biblical characters lived there. Abraham was called to go there; Isaac and Jacob lived there; The 12 tribes of Israel dwelt there before famine drove them to Egypt. Moses set out from Egypt to take the 12 tribes there, and Joshua led them across the Jordan river into the land. All the Judges, kings, prophets and priests lived and ministered there. Jesus was born, baptized and anointed there. He also ministered, died, was buried and resurrected there. It was also from that land that Jesus ascended to heaven and he will return to the same land at his second coming, to rule the world, making it a very strategic centre indeed!

The land of Israel is the most important land in the world, being the centre-stage on which the Bible unfolds and develops its Gospel theme. No wonder it is called “the land of the book.” After all, most of the events recorded in the Bible, took place in that land.

The promised land is often called the “holy land.” “Holy” means set apart for divine use, and as we have seen, God chose it to be the focal centre of His purposes! It is “His land” in a way that no other land was, is, or will be, and He refers to it as “My land” in a special exclusive sense. It is referred to in Deu. 11:12 as “a land which the Lord cares for: the eyes of the Lord are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year.” And again in Ezk. 20:6 He says it is “a land that I selected ... which is the glory of all lands.” Why is it the “glory of all lands?” Because the God of glory chose it and has revealed His glory there and will do so again, as in no other land. This is the land to which the city of God, the “New Jerusalem” descends from heaven, in all its divine glory (Rev. 21). The land is described by God in Jer. 3:19 as “a

pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of all nations.”

A CONTRAST BETWEEN THE PROMISE AND THE LAW

Now, the question that needs to be considered, which was touched on briefly in the last chapter, is: Could Israel’s occupation of the land in the past, be regarded as a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham?

It clearly was not a fulfilment because it failed to meet the terms of the promise. You see, the Jews occupied the land under the terms of the law given at Sinai through Moses, and not the promise made to Abraham 400 years before the law was given. And, as we shall see, only a temporary possession was possible under the law, but the promise involved eternal possession. We read this in Rom. 4:13-16: “The promise to Abraham and his seed that they should be the heirs of the world, was not through the law ...” i.e. the law of Moses could not fulfil the promise to Abraham. The promise was not fulfilled by living in the land under the law.

Paul says this in Gal. 3:17-18: “What I mean is this: the law, introduced through Moses 430 years after the promises were given to Abraham, cannot set aside those promises.” This is clear enough. The law (i.e. living in the land under the law), cannot negate, abolish, satisfy or fulfil the promises made to Abraham. Paul continues by saying: “For if the inheritance (the promised land) depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham by promise.” Here again it is clear that the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham did not depend on the law of Moses; it depended upon a promise.

A contrast is clearly made between inheriting the land through the law and through the promise. There is obviously a difference between law and promise. It is the same difference between law and grace, works and faith, payment and a present i.e. reward and gift.

Let me explain: By grace (unearned favour), God promised to give the land to Abraham as a gift, for an everlasting inheritance. Abraham did not inherit it during his life, but was required to have faith and believe that one day he and his seed would live forever in that land. This was his “hope” and is the hope of the gospel. During Abraham’s life there was no sign of the promise being fulfilled. The Canaanites occupied the land and Abraham had no seed. However, in spite of this, he still believed. Such faith pleases God and puts a man right with God and makes him God’s friend! Now, 400 years after Abraham, Israel went into the land under

Joshua and possessed it and lived there for 1,500 years under the terms of the law of Moses. They defeated and dispossessed the Canaanites, took the land over and built their own cities throughout the length and breadth of it.

If this was what God had in mind when He promised the land to Abraham, then faith was turned into sight and hope was realized and became a concrete reality. In other words, the promise to Abraham would have been fulfilled and therefore “set aside” as Paul puts it (Gal. 3:17-18). And if the promise was fulfilled, then faith in it was no longer necessary or possible. And if faith in the promises was no longer necessary, then the very basis of getting right with, and pleasing God, and becoming His friend, was nullified.

Someone might say: “No! they could get right with God and please Him by keeping the law.” If so, then keeping the law instead of believing the promise would become the means of being justified. And this, basically, is how the Jews came to regard the law. They regarded the keeping of the law as the all important thing to do in order to occupy the land, rather than keeping faith in the promises to Abraham. This resulted in causing the Jews to settle and be satisfied with their temporary, mortal sojourn in the land under the law of the “old covenant,” and not look in faith and hope beyond that to the better covenant and eternal occupation which was promised to Abraham when the gospel was preached to him.

And this, unfortunately, resulted in the Jews not understanding the need for their Messiah to die as a sacrifice for sin, in order that death might be conquered and eternal life released, making possible the everlasting possession of the land promised to Abraham.

The Jews became so proud, pre-occupied and obsessed with the law, that it put a veil over their eyes and blinded them. It made them think that keeping the law was the way to get right with God and to keep occupying the land, rather than by keeping faith in the promises to Abraham.

JUSTIFICATION IMPOSSIBLE UNDER THE LAW

There is no way that anyone can “get right” with God (i.e. be justified or regarded as righteous) by the principle and process of the law. Law is too rigid and stringent, judgmental and condemnatory. To gain eternal life by the law required one hundred percent obedience. Just one slip or failure to conform, is disobedience which is sin and this brings death. Keeping the law was an impossible uphill battle. It could be likened to a mountain climber who travails hour after hour up a precipitous peak.

One slip and he would fall to his death. The law of gravity has no mercy and does not take into account previous successful efforts. It is the same with one small drop of black dye in a glass of pure water. It only takes one drop to discolour and contaminate the whole glass. Remember Moses - he made one mistake and so failed to enter the promised land. He represented the law (Jn. 1:17). Joshua entered the land and represented Jesus (Joshua's name in Greek is Jesus).

Except for Jesus, no one is strong enough to never transgress law and therefore never sin. Law therefore, no matter how good, (and the law given by God to Israel was a good law Rom. 7:12) cannot put a man right with God and give him eternal life. Quite the opposite: it can only convict him of sin and condemn him as a sinner - bringing him under the sentence of death due to his being too weak to keep it (Rom. 8:3).

The Bible makes it clear that exercising faith and hope in the promises of God in Christ is the only way to get right with him and qualify for eternal life and inheritance. Keeping a set of rules and laws doesn't require faith, but hard work and effort! There are of course, rules to be kept, but there is no way that God will allow justification and eternal life to be earned or deserved by the human effort involved in keeping them. That would result in man feeling he worked for it and earned it and received it as a reward, making him feel proud of his self-achievement.

But this is not the way of God. Eternal life is a gift by grace through faith in His promises. It cannot be earned so there is no ground for boasting. In the divine scheme of things, God alone gets the glory. We will come back to this theme shortly, but will read Rom. 4:13-16 before doing so. Hopefully it will make more sense in view of what has been presented:

“The promise to Abraham and his seed that they should be the heirs of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness (i.e. becoming right with God) which comes through faith. For if those under the law are the heirs (i.e. heirs of the everlasting inheritance promised to Abraham) faith is nullified and the promise is worthless and ineffective; because the law can't produce a promise (i.e. it can't promise eternal life), it can only produce wrath (i.e. a divine sentence of death) upon all who transgress it, for only where no law exists will there be no transgression (i.e. there will always be sin where there is law). Therefore, the promise (i.e. of the eternal inheritance) depends on faith, so that it may be by grace, and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's seed - not only to those who grew up under the law (Jews), but also to those who have adopted the faith of Abraham (Gentiles). As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations.”

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LEASE AND AN INHERITANCE

Under the law, occupation of the land was conditional - conditional upon keeping the law (Deut. 28. Lev. 26). It was more of a lease than an inheritance. (A lease is a contract by which land is rented out under certain conditions for a specified period of time). In the case of the law, it was for the term of natural life. But an inheritance is something left to someone else as a permanent possession by the will of its owner. In the case of God's promise to Abraham, it was forever.

The difference between the two is taught in a parable in Mk. 12:1-7. Verse 1 says a certain man (God) planted a vineyard (promised land) and let it out (Diaglott: "leased it") to cultivators. This refers to God preparing Palestine for Israel and letting them enter with Joshua under the conditions of the law.

Verses 2-5 say the owner (God) sent servants (prophets) to the cultivators who occupied the land asking for some fruit, i.e. fruit of the spirit; faith and obedience, in return for letting them live in, and use the land. But they refused and abused the servants, and even killed some of them.

Verses 6-7 give God's response: "The only one left to send was His one and only well-beloved son (Jesus). So He sent him, thinking to Himself, they will reverence my son. But the cultivators said among themselves, this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." This was prophetic of course of the killing of Jesus, instigated by the Jewish leaders.

But notice that Jesus is referred to as the "heir." The heir of what? The vineyard of course, which refers to the kingdom of God in the promised land leased out to Jews under the law (Isa. 5:7). Now, if Jesus is the "heir," then he must be going to inherit the vineyard. This in fact is implied in Mk. 12:7 which records the response of the cultivators: "Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours."

This parable reveals the difference between the occupation of the land in Old Testament times under the law of Moses, and the ultimate reign of Christ. It is the difference between the past kingdom of Israel and the future. Under the law it was a temporary lease which only lasted for the natural term of life, i.e. "all the days of mortal life." Under Christ's reign, it will be a permanent inheritance, lasting forever.

The reference to Jesus being the "heir" of the vineyard, and of it being his "inheritance," confirms what has been said in previous chapters;

that he will restore the kingdom of Israel in the land of promise, set up his throne there and reign. The land is his inheritance and ours, and we will live there with him as co-heirs.

So then, under the law, occupation of the land was conditional - conditional upon keeping the law. Under that law, one had to work hard at keeping its rigmarole of rituals, services and injunctions. Failure to keep one little part of the law constituted sin and resulted in death (Gal. 3:10-12). Because no one could keep the law without sinning, no one could live forever, which means no one under the law could inherit the land as an everlasting possession. Occupation was therefore temporary and limited. Such occupation under the law was clearly not what was promised to Abraham! He was promised “everlasting” possession, which, of course, implied living forever i.e. eternal life.

THERE HAD TO BE ANOTHER WAY

If it was impossible to earn eternal life by working for it under the law, it obviously had to come some other way. And so it did - through God’s grace in Christ, who was the special “seed” promised to Abraham (Gal. 3). By His grace, God promised eternal life and everlasting inheritance as a gift, on the basis of our faith in His redemptive work in His son. “What the law could not do ... God did” (Rom. 8:3). “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Through Christ, God has confirmed the promises made with Abraham. Through our faith in this, and our identification with all that the cross stands for, God promises us a participation in the promises made with Abraham. Faith is clearly the key! Abraham was justified (regarded as righteous) by faith i.e. by believing in God’s promises relating to Christ, and so are we! (Rom. 4:18-25).

It should be emphasized that this does not mean that no works and effort, rules and commandments are involved in the Christian life. Paul declares in Eph. 2:8-10: “By grace you are saved, through faith. It is not the result of your own works but God’s gift, so that no one can boast about it. For we are God’s workmanship (i.e. it is God’s work and effort that has made us what we are) having been created anew in Christ Jesus to do good works ...” Hence, we are not saved by good works and efforts because the best effort still falls short. We are saved by faith in Christ’s work. But, as a result of believing in him, we are expected to do good works; not to try and earn or deserve our salvation, but to show our appreciation for it.

The works required of us are not the “works of the law” involving ritual, ceremony and outward ordinances like sacrifices, food and drink regulations, annual festivals, monthly and weekly observances. Heb. 9:10 says these were “carnal ordinances imposed until the reformation.” The works now required are the works of love, for love fulfils the law and is referred to as “the law of Christ.” Love treats its neighbour as self (Jam. 2:8). Hence love never steals, murders, or commits adultery.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Someone might say: “What then was the purpose of the law?” Paul anticipated this question as we read in Gal. 3:19: “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added (i.e. given to Israel after the promises were given to Abraham) because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come.” During Israel’s sojourn in Egypt, she drifted away from God’s way and transgressed against Him. Hence, the law was given “because of transgressions” i.e. sin, for the purpose of law is to reveal and restrain sin.

Law brings a knowledge of sin. Without law there is no knowledge of sin, because sin is transgression of law. Man would never have become aware of the dark forces of evil in himself, if left free to do as he pleased. One would not know it was wrong to want another man’s wife or possessions, were it not for the law which says: “Thou shalt not covet.” It is the sinful desires of the flesh which result in sinful acts which offend God and alienate people from Him. And, if laws were never given against these sinful desires and acts, people would not be aware of their own sinful nature and that certain desires are wrong and offensive to God. Law therefore reveals man’s sinfulness and rebelliousness. It reveals that “in my flesh dwells no good thing” (Rom. 7:18).

Failure to keep the law revealed how weak the flesh is and how strong the propensity is to sin. The law revealed how impossible it was to earn eternal life. It could not save anyone but condemned everyone to death, for “the wages of sin is death,” and all sin. The law was designed to humble people and cause them to look beyond it for some other way of salvation, and to reach out to God for help, acknowledging the need and dependence on Him and their need for His love, grace, and mercy.

The law was, in short, an effective preparation for Christ, who said: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” As Paul puts it in Gal. 3:24: “Therefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” The law was a schoolmaster in the sense

described, and also in the sense that all the works of the law (sacrifices and ordinances, rituals and ceremonies), pointed forward to Christ as types and foreshadows.

The trouble was that the Jews treated them as an end in themselves; they loved the pomp, ceremony and ritual, and tried to earn salvation by going through the rigmarole of the law instead of receiving salvation as a free gift by faith in the work of Christ, which confirmed the promises of a better covenant. So they sweated it out, struggling and striving under the heavy and stringent demands of the law, imagining that salvation depended on such effort.

So Jesus appealed to them saying: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest ... my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” There was certainly no rest or light burden under the law. The priests never sat down because offerings had to be continually offered due to not being able to take away sin. (The only example of a priest sitting down is Eli and he fell off his seat backwards and broke his neck!) The priests stood daily, even on the Sabbath day when they worked overtime due to more offerings having to be made. Gal. 5:1 refers to the law as a “yoke of bondage,” and Act. 15:10 refers to it as “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.”

IT IS FINISHED

But Jesus came on the scene and once and for all offered himself for sin and sat down at God’s right hand. As he died on the cross, having gained victory over the power of the law and sin, he said: “It is finished.” And all who believe in him are “seated” with him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Sin has been conquered. A true “rest” is now possible from the works of sin. There is no more need for sacrifices and a Levitical priesthood, for a change of the priesthood changes the law (Heb. 7:12). By being baptized into Christ which is symbolic of death and burial, we die to self and cease doing our own works. We become a “royal priesthood,” and worship the Lord every day, for every day is holy.

The full effect of our “rest” in Christ will not be seen or felt until he returns and fashions our body like unto his glorious immortal body. When he returns he will establish his kingdom and reign for 1,000 years, and this is referred to in Heb. 4:9 as a “Sabbath rest.” God’s seventh day of rest pointed to this. (One day to the Lord is as 1,000 years to us - 2 Pet. 3:8). The kingdom “rest” is also referred to in Isa. 11:9-10. Jer. 30:8-10. 2 Thes. 1:6-8. Abraham rejoiced to see this day for on that day he and his seed

“will possess the gate of their enemies” and rule and reign over all nations. Then and only then will wars cease and peace prevail.

Now, if the promises to Abraham were fulfilled in the past Jewish occupation of the land under the law, they should have entered into the promised rest of God at that time. But Heb. 4:7-8 tells us that Joshua did not give Israel rest, even though they conquered cities and possessed the land. Moreover, 400 years after Joshua, God spoke to David of the rest as something still to be fulfilled in the future. Paul then concludes (centuries after David): “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). It is clear from this that the everlasting occupation of the land promised to Abraham, has not been fulfilled and will not be fulfilled until Jesus returns. At that time, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the saints will “sit down” (rest) in the kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11).

As a precursor to this, Abraham’s natural seed (the Jews) had to return to the land, resulting in a bitter controversy over ownership of the land between themselves and Moslem nations. It is referred to in Isa. 34:8 as “the controversy over Zion,” because Zion (Jerusalem) is at the centre of the land controversy and is likened to a “burdensome stone” in Zech. 12:3. All of this had to happen, and is now happening as a lead up to Israel being invaded by a powerful confederacy of Moslem nations whose aim and goal is to destroy the nation of Israel and possess the land themselves.

This will act as the catalyst for the return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon - the mother of all battles - the war that will end all wars. In that day ownership of the promised land will be settled once and for all. It shall be given as an everlasting possession to Abraham and his seed i.e. to Christ and his church which consists of men and women from all nations, kindreds and tongues, both Jews and Gentiles. Such a body is the true Israel of God! Today we are well down the road to Armageddon. The storm clouds are gathering on the horizon. But at man’s darkest hour the brightness of the glory of the Lord will break through and the old earth will never be the same again! There will be a new heavens and a new earth!



CHAPTER SIX

WHO IS THE “SEED” OF ABRAHAM?

In a previous chapter, the point was made that the promises given by God to Abraham involved 2 aspects: land and seed. God promised Abraham that he himself would personally inherit the land as an everlasting possession. He also promised him that his “seed” would inherit the land with him.

We have seen that the land promised to Abraham was clearly Canaan. The question that now needs to be addressed is: who is the seed of Abraham that will inherit the land with him? The Jews say they are; the Arabs claim they are and Christians affirm they are. All regard Abraham as their father and therefore claim title to the promises made to his seed.

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Let’s go back to the beginning to where it all started. Abraham had 2 sons: Ishmael and Isaac, and in that order, about 13 years apart. Arabs descended from Ishmael and the Jews from Isaac. Abraham is the father of both races. Who then, constitutes Abraham’s seed to whom the promises apply? Are both of them Abraham’s heir? What does Scripture say?

We read in Gen. 16 that due to Abraham’s wife Sarah not being able to have a child, she asked Abraham, in accordance with the custom at that time; to have a child through her Egyptian slave Hagar. Hagar conceived and had an arrogant attitude towards Sarah and despised her (Gen. 16:4). After Hagar conceived, she was told by an angel that she would give birth to a son “and call his name Ishmael, and he will be a wild ass of a man; he will be against everyone and everyone will be against him” (Gen. 16:11-12).

The angel also said that Ishmael would “live to the east of all his brothers” (v12 New American Standard version). It was not the divine intention for Ishmael to live in the land of Canaan, but to the east of it, and history confirms that he did. The Arabian peninsula became the homeland of the Arabs, not Canaan.

Some years later, after the birth of Ishmael, the Lord spoke to Abraham and told him that he was going to have a son through his wife Sarah, who would be his heir. But Abraham had become very attached to Ishmael and had resigned himself to accepting him as his heir. He actually pleaded with God to let Ishmael be his heir (Gen. 17:18). But God said:

“No! Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (v19).

In due course Isaac was born and several years later a weaning festival was held for him. Ishmael no doubt had a battle with all the attention being shown towards Isaac, not being the only son anymore and having to play second fiddle. We read in Gen. 21:9 that Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac at the feast. The nature of the mocking must have been serious because the New Testament describes it in terms of a persecution (Gal. 4:29). It was like a sign of the envy, hatred and hostility that the descendants of Ishmael would later manifest towards the descendants of Isaac - the Arab-Israeli conflict which will ultimately lead to a great tribulation for Israel and climax in the return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon.

When Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac, she said to Abraham: “Cast out this slave girl and her son, for her son shall not be heir with my son” (Gen. 21:10). Sarah was opposed to the prospect of the land of promise being occupied and shared by both Isaac and Ishmael.

Sarah’s proposal seemed wrong to Abraham and the thought of expelling Ishmael from the land was grievous to him. But God intervened and said: “Let it not be grievous in thy sight ... do what Sarah has said, because in Isaac shall thy seed be called” i.e. the promised seed will come through Isaac not Ishmael.

Sarah’s words to Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael are quoted in Gal. 4:30. But, instead of attributing the words to Sarah, they are attributed to Scripture, indicating that what Sarah said was the Word of God. Isaac not Ishmael, was clearly to be the son of Abraham through whom the promised seed would come and through whom the promises would be fulfilled.

A NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

As we shall see, the seed of Abraham has both a natural and spiritual application. “Howbeit, the spiritual does not come first, but the natural, and afterwards the spiritual.” This is seen in the temporary occupation of the promised land by Abraham’s natural descendants, the Israelites, who were the descendants of Israel (Jacob) who was the son of Isaac. History and archaeology clearly testify to the fact that the Israelites, not the Arabs, went into Canaan under Joshua. When Israel entered the land, the Arabs were not there! From the time of Ishmael they had 400

years to move in but they didn't. No! The Canaanites, who were descendants of Ham, occupied the land. For this reason the land was called "Canaan" not "Ishmael."

After Sarah's death, Abraham remarried and had more sons. Their names and the names of their descendants are recorded in Gen. 25:1-4, and can be identified with various Arab tribes. But once again, Abraham would not let them remain in the promised land. We read in Gen. 25:6 that "He sent them away from Isaac his son eastward, to the east country."

In view of this history, it is rather ironical that the Arabs built a mosque over the rock on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem where Abraham was commanded by God to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. The mosque was built several thousand years after Abraham by the Moslems to protect the rock due to Mohammed's contact with it. But it testifies against them because long before Mohammed was even thought of, God chose the rock to be an altar upon which Isaac, the son of Abraham, not Ishmael, was to be offered as a sacrifice to point forward to the sacrifice of Christ. In fact, in spite of Ishmael being a son of Abraham; when God told Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah, He referred to him as "thine only son Isaac" (Gen. 22:2). Although Abraham had other sons, including Ishmael, Isaac is referred to as the "only" son because he alone was chosen by God to be the channel through whom the promised seed would come, and through whom the promises would be fulfilled.

Prior to Ishmael and Isaac being born, God told Abraham that after his death, his seed would be enslaved in another country for 400 years and then be delivered and return to Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16). Egypt of course was the land of slavery and the seed of Abraham that was enslaved there was Israel, not Arabs. Moses, a descendant of Isaac, was chosen to lead them out of Egypt, and Joshua, another descendant of Isaac, led them into the promised land. He fought against the Canaanites and took the land from them around 1,440 B.C. From that time forward until A.D. 70, (except for 70 years exile in Babylon) Israel occupied the land for almost 1,500 years and archaeological evidence confirms this.

As a result of Roman invasion in A.D. 70, the Jews were uprooted from their land and dispersed throughout all the nations in the earth. For about 1,900 years they were exiled from their land and Gentile nations such as the Romans, Turks, Crusaders, Arabs and English occupied it. This was in fulfilment of a prophecy uttered by Jesus which stated that the Jews would be "led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24).

It is important to understand that the Gentile nations, including the Arabs, which have occupied the promised land, did so as a result of the Jews being exiled from their land. But the words: “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,” indicate that there would be a time limit to the period during which the Jews would be exiled from their land and Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles. It implies that at some point in time the Jews would be regathered to their land and repossess Jerusalem their ancient capital.

Other prophecies also predicted this. For example, Ezk. 37:21-22 affirms that the children of Israel would be gathered from the nations back to their own land and become one nation again in the land upon the mountains of Israel. The prophecy goes on to say that one king shall be king over them all.

The first two parts of this prophecy were fulfilled in the twentieth century when, as a result of the holocaust, Jews by the thousands streamed back to their land. In 1948 they were officially declared to be a nation - the nation of Israel.

The third part of the prophecy concerning one king reigning over them is yet to be fulfilled for the king is Jesus. He is referred to as “David” in the prophecy (v24) because David means “beloved,” and is one of the titles given to Jesus (Eph. 1:6). Also, David was a type of Christ and Jesus will restore his throne and reign upon it. The second coming of Jesus is required in order for this third part of the prophecy to be fulfilled. The Jews clearly had to return to their land, become a nation and repossess Jerusalem as a prelude to the return of Christ.

As a result of Arabs taking advantage of Israel’s exile and moving into their land while they were in dispersion, controversy and conflict has inevitably eventuated as a result of the Jews returning. The conflict of course is over ownership of the land. Whose land is it? To whom does it belong? Having occupied it for centuries, the Arabs naturally think that it is their land. But on the basis of divine promises and assurances well documented in Scripture, and a long history of occupation; the Jews naturally claim that it is their land, and feel justified fighting for it, even if it means resisting world opinion and U.N.O. resolutions!

DIGGING DEEPER

At this point there is an important question that needs to be addressed: Does the fact that God chose Abraham’s son Isaac instead of Ishmael, to inherit the land in the past, mean that Isaac’s descendants

alone are the seed of Abraham to whom the future promise of eternal inheritance belongs, and no one else? Or, does the fact that Ishmael and Isaac were both begotten by Abraham and both could claim him as their natural father (yet Ishmael failed to be regarded as Abraham's seed), teach us that factors other than natural physical factors determine who is the seed of promise?

What does Scripture say about this? A good starting point is Gal. 3:16: "Now God made His promise to Abraham and his seed. He did not use the plural "seeds," meaning many people, but the singular "seed," meaning one person only, namely, Christ."

We learn from this that God had a specific individual in mind when He made His promises concerning Abraham's seed, namely, His own son Jesus. This means that when God said to Abraham, as we read in Gen. 21:12: "... in Isaac shall your seed be called," He meant that Jesus would come through the line of Isaac, not Ishmael or any of Abraham's other sons. It was in fact because Messiah had to come out of the line of Isaac and be born in the promised land, that God preserved the 12 tribes of Israel and gave them possession of the land.

That God had a specific individual in mind in His promises concerning Abraham's seed, is indicated by the personal singular pronoun "his" in Gen. 22:17. In this verse God told Abraham that "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed." The same seed was promised back in Gen. 3:15 when God told Eve that there would be enmity between her seed and the serpent's seed, and that "he" would bruise the serpent's head, and the serpent would bruise "his" heel.

King David was promised the same seed. God said to him: "... I will set up thy seed after thee ... and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:12-14). We know that these words relate to Jesus because they are quoted in Heb. 1:5 and applied to him.

Jesus was clearly foreordained and is the special promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. According to Gal. 3:8, the promise that all nations will be blessed by Abraham's seed, constitutes the Gospel. The blessing that comes from this seed is justification by faith in his atoning work, which results in eternal life. It is all based of course, on God's grace, and is therefore an unmerited gift.

A MULTITUDINOUS BODY

Coming back to Gen. 22:17, it is significant to note that the first part of the verse says: “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.” The second part says: “And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”

The seed referred to in the first part is plural, referring to a multitudinous seed, but the seed in the second part is singular, referring to a single individual. There is no contradiction here for it relates to a multitudinous body and speaks of multiplicity in unity.

The key to the understanding is conveyed in Gal. 3:26-29: “For you are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.”

So then, Gal. 3:16 says Abraham’s seed is Christ, and v29 says that all who belong to Christ are also Abraham’s seed. The reason for this is because those who belong to Christ are his church which is his body. Christ is the head and the church is his body. As a head without a body is incomplete, so you cannot separate Christ from his church. Together they constitute Abraham’s seed. In fact, in 1 Cor. 12:12 the title: “The Christ” is given to the church, revealing the intimate and inseparable connection between Christ and the church. For this reason, the inheritance promised to Christ will also be inherited by his church.

It is therefore quite evident that Abraham’s seed cannot be confined or restricted to Christ. It starts with him and then broadens out and encompasses a multitude of people from every nation who belong to him, who constitute his body.

In view of this, reference in Gal. 3:16 to the promised seed being “one” does not only have a numerical definition. This is how it reads in the Authorised Version: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” The recurrence of the word “one” in v28 in relation to all believers being one in Christ can be linked with v16. The point that is being made seems to be that the promises to Abraham don’t cater for many kinds of seeds, but only one kind - the kind characterized by Christ.

The word “one” also of course signifies “united,” and refers to divine unity. Abraham’s seed is a multitudinous body with one and the same spirit - the spirit of Christ. For this reason Scripture refers to Christ’s

church as “his seed” (Isa. 53:10).

HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

Gal. 3:29 says that if we belong to Christ and are Abraham’s seed, we are heirs according to the promise. What promise? According to v18 the promise relates to “the inheritance” promised to Abraham. What inheritance? There can only be one answer: the promised land! As we have seen, this land was clearly promised to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession. It will constitute the mother country of Christ’s world-wide kingdom, and the city of God; the New Jerusalem will be there. It is the ultimate home and habitation of all who belong to Christ.

Those who belong to Christ will not of course be confined to the promised land. It will be their home base, but as Christ’s ambassadors and co-rulers with him over the whole earth, they will be sent out into the earth to rule the nations. For this reason it is stated in Rom. 4:13 that God’s promise to Abraham and his seed involves them being heirs of the world. In the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

In view of the fact that the promised land is our ultimate homeland, is it no wonder that those who believe this are intensely interested in the land of Israel, not just because of what Bible history says about it, but especially Bible prophecy. Those who belong to Christ are, according to Gal. 6:16, the true “Israel of God” - the spiritual Israel who God wants to possess His land for ever, in contradistinction to the temporary possession under the law by natural Israel.

NO NATIONAL DISTINCTIONS

It is clear that there are no national distinctions in the true spiritual seed of Abraham. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile ...” (Gal. 3:26-28). Abraham’s seed of promise consists of all nationalities. Anyone in any nation who is willing to belong to Christ and follow his example becomes part of Abraham’s seed. Abraham was taught this when he was told that: “In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). “In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18).

If anyone from any nation can become part of Abraham’s seed and an heir of the promise, this obviously includes not only Jews but also Arabs. The conflict between these two races over ownership and occupation of the land can be settled in Christ! By belonging to him, both Jews and

Arabs can become united and qualify for eternal occupation together in the kingdom of God. Temporary occupation in the land now, cannot be compared with the future eternal occupation with Christ!

The qualifying factor of Abraham's seed clearly has nothing to do with race or the colour of the skin. It has to do with having the same faith as Abraham and believing the same promises, as we read in Gal. 3:7: "Those who have faith are the children of Abraham." Rom. 10:11-13 states that: "Whosoever believes on him (Jesus) shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jews and Gentiles: for the same Lord over all is rich to all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Again we read in Rom. 4:11-12 that it was God's purpose for Abraham to "be the father of all those who believe, not only the Jews but also the Gentiles who walk in the steps of that faith of Abraham."

WALKING IN THE STEPS OF ABRAHAM

Walking in the steps of Abraham involves obedience (Gen. 17:1. 18:17-19). It was on the condition that natural Israel obey God and be witnesses to His righteousness and truth, that He made a covenant with them and allowed them to enter the land (Ex. 19). He expected them to remember the faith and obedience of Abraham and follow His example and be his true spiritual seed. Listen to the words God spoke to them in Isa. 51:1-2: "Hearken to me, you who follow after righteousness; you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him."

As history testifies: many Israelites were stubborn and rebellious and failed to follow in the footsteps of Abraham. They failed to qualify as his promised seed and will therefore fail to attain to the everlasting possession of the land with him and Christ. However, there were natural Israelites in every generation who were also spiritual. They will therefore qualify like David who was a man after God's own heart. Another example is Zacchaeus of whom Jesus said: "He also is a son of Abraham" (Lk. 19:9). Also Nathanael to whom Jesus said: "Behold an Israelite indeed (i.e. a genuine Israelite worthy of the name) in whom is no deceit."

It is important to understand that although the majority in the Jewish race during their history have disqualified themselves as the true seed of Abraham, God has not rejected them as a race. The door is still open to

them as it is to all other races to qualify as Abraham's seed of promise. The apostle Paul is adamant about this. He said: "God has not rejected His people whom He chose from the beginning" (Rom. 11:1-2). He goes on to say that although the majority in the nation failed to attain, "a remnant according to the election of grace" will attain i.e. some will attain as a result of being elected by God's grace.

In Rom. 11:25-27, Paul makes the point that only some, not all Jews, have suffered blindness or hardness of heart, but it is a temporary, not a permanent situation. He says it will only be like this "until the full number of Gentiles come in" i.e. until the complete number of Gentiles respond to the call and come to Christ. When this takes place, Christ will return, at which time "all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

Ultimately, all who are natural Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah and Lord, and will become the true spiritual seed of Abraham. The conversion of the nation at Christ's return is prophesied in Zech. 12:13. Reference in Rev. 7 to 144,000 Christian Jews living in the end time prior to Christ's return, indicates that the Spirit will be moving among them even before the end comes.

A REAL JEW IS ONE INWARDLY

Considering that the seed of Abraham to whom the promises were made, relates to believers in all nations; confirms that the solely Jewish occupation of the land in the past cannot be regarded as a fulfilment of those promises. Because the Jews thought that Abraham's seed was confined to his natural descendants, they naturally thought that they alone could be the seed of Abraham. They therefore applied the promises exclusively to themselves, and regarded themselves as God's elite, resulting in deep national pride. They put confidence in the flesh i.e. in natural birth, physical descent and circumcision. The good standing that they imagined was given to them due to Abraham being their natural father is seen in Jn. 8:33 which records the Jews' objection to Jesus' statement that they were not free. They said: "We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to anyone." Jesus replied: "If you were Abraham's children you would do the works of Abraham, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I have heard from God. This is not how Abraham acted" (v39-40).

Once again it is clear from this that as far as Jesus was concerned,

any Jew who did not manifest the same spirit as Abraham, was not a child of Abraham.

When speaking to Nicodemus, one of the rulers of the Jews, Jesus did not say: “You’re okay Nicodemus, you will be in the kingdom with Abraham, because you are a direct descendant. Your natural birth qualifies you to inherit the promised land forever.” No! Jesus as good as told him that being born of the flesh a natural descendant of Abraham did not automatically and inevitably make him the promised seed of Abraham. He said: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:3, 5).

Being born again involves true heartfelt conversion followed by baptism in water and being led by the Spirit of God, instead of sinful flesh.

When John the Baptist saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism; knowing how hard hearted, self-righteous, legalistic and critical these leaders of the Jews were; he said to them: “O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Prove your repentance by your fruit. And do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father. I’m telling you that God can make children for Abraham out of these stones here” (Matt. 3:7-9).

These Jews felt secure and proud because they were born a Jew and circumcised on the eighth day. But, as the apostle Paul points out in Rom. 2:28-29: “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is true circumcision something external and physical. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, whose circumcision is spiritual, not literal and physical, affecting the heart, resulting in praise from God and not man.”

Again in Plp. 3 Paul wrote these words: “We are the circumcision which worship God in spirit and boast in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (i.e. physical circumcision as is indicated in the context). Also Gal. 6:15-16: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision. What counts is being a new creature (i.e. being born again). And as many as live by this principle are the true Israel of God - His chosen people. Peace and mercy on them!” Like the prophets in Old Testament times, Paul taught that the all-important thing was not circumcision of the flesh but the heart (Deu. 10:16. 30:6. Jer. 4:4. 9:25-26).

Being a natural descendant of someone spiritual and being circumcised by them as an eight day old baby, cannot give a person good standing before God for the rest of his life without personal faith in Jesus

Christ, commitment to him and obedience. Such is the effect of the new spiritual birth and circumcision!

There are people today who think that because their parents were or are good Christians, and had them Christened by sprinkling when they were a baby; gives them good standing before God, without personal faith and commitment being necessary. In such cases the words of Jesus to the Jews are equally as relevant: “Except you be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God.”



CHAPTER SEVEN NOT ALL ARE ISRAEL WHO ARE OF ISRAEL

Paul wrote in Rom. 9:6: “Not all are Israel who are of Israel,” which means not all natural physical descendants of Israel (Jacob) measure up to God’s idea of a true Israelite. Seeing that “Israel” signifies God’s prince or ruler, implies that not all will qualify as God’s appointed rulers in His kingdom.

Verses 7-8 say: “ ... nor are all Abraham’s descendants the children of God. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.” “Children of the flesh” is rendered “natural children” (New International Version); “those born in the course of nature” (New English Bible); “the children born in the usual way” (Good News Bible). It refers to those whose birth results from the will of the flesh of man.

Rom. 9:8 continues by saying: “But the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” The “children of the promise” refers to the children born as a result of God’s promise; i.e. those born through the will, initiative, purpose and spirit of God. Such children are the true seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise God made with him. They are the kind of children God had in mind when He gave the promise to Abraham that he and his seed would inherit the promised land forever.

THE EXAMPLE IN ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

In his exposition Paul has in mind the birth of Ishmael and Isaac. As pointed out in the previous chapter, both were natural physical descendants of Abraham, but the circumstances surrounding their births were entirely different - so different, that in Gal. 4:23-29 Paul says that Ishmael (ancestor of the Arabs) was “born according to the flesh” and Isaac (ancestor of the Jews) was “born according to the spirit.”

Isaac was “born according to the spirit” because he was born as a result of the will and Word and power of God. He was promised by God. Paul points this out in Rom. 9:9: “For this is the Word of promise.” Paul then quotes from Gen. 18:10 which records God saying this to Abraham: “I will certainly return to you next spring and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” This was God’s “Word of promise” concerning Isaac. And, being a “child of promise,” faith was required on Abraham’s part to believe, hope, and patiently wait for it to be fulfilled.

At the time, Abraham was 99. His and Sarah’s reproductive powers

were “now dead” (Rom. 4:19) making it physically impossible to beget and conceive. So faith in God’s quickening power was required for this child to be born (Rom. 4:18-22. Heb. 11:11).

Isaac was truly, as Paul says: “born of spirit,” and not through the will of flesh or man. It was God who took the initiative! (In this respect, Isaac’s birth was a type of the birth of Jesus). At the time, Abraham was satisfied with Ishmael being his heir and did not feel the need for another son. Moreover, the sexual desires required to cause Sarah to conceive were absolutely dead. So there was no way in which Isaac could be born according to the normal flesh processes. He was a promised gift of God - a man of God’s choice - a product of divine election.

Ishmael however, was not born according to the spirit, but entirely according to flesh processes. He was not born as a result of God’s will, promise, power, or initiative. He was born as a result of the will, word and initiative of the flesh (Gen. 16).

Faith in God’s Word was not required in Ishmael’s birth, because God hadn’t promised him. Faith in God’s power wasn’t required, because Abraham’s own reproductive powers at that stage were still alive. Ishmael’s birth was a natural birth - a product of the flesh - born in the usual way in the normal course of nature.

And, because the law of the land in those days allowed and encouraged Abraham to have a child through his servant Hagar, one might say Ishmael was born according to the law, or under the law. Isaac however, being born according to the Word, promise and power of God, was born according to the spirit. Here again, we see a contrast between law and promise or law and faith. It is the difference between 2 covenants: the “old covenant” and “new covenant,” which is the difference between occupation of the land under the law of Moses (temporary lease), and occupation under the better promises to Abraham (eternal inheritance).

THE TWO SONS ILLUSTRATE TWO COVENANTS

In Gal. 4:23- Paul actually points out that these 2 sons of Abraham illustrate the 2 covenants, i.e. the one given through Moses at Sinai relating to temporary occupation under law, due to the law of sin and death: and the one given to Abraham relating to everlasting occupation of the land due to being set free from the law of sin and death. In this passage of Scripture Paul points out that Ishmael’s Egyptian mother was a slave woman and Isaac’s mother was a free woman. The slave woman represents those who were under the bondage of the law given through

Moses at Sinai, who thought that Jewish occupation of the land under the law was a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, and who therefore were trying to get right with God and attain to eternal life by keeping the law, instead of faith in the promises.

Such a covenant, says Paul, “gendereth to bondage” i.e. produces children for the bondage of sin and death because no one could render one hundred percent obedience to the law. Sooner or later, everyone sinned by transgressing the law, which resulted in death; for “the wages of sin is death.” Under law, death was inevitable and eternal life impossible. Such was the position, as Paul says, “to Jerusalem which now is.” He was referring to the Jews in his day, bound by the law of Moses which had its nerve centre in the old city of Jerusalem where the temple and altar were situated.

But, as Gal. 4:26 goes on to say: “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” This refers of course, to the new Jerusalem - “the city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God” - “the heavenly Jerusalem which is to come” (Heb. 11, 12, 13) which Abraham looked for and waited for - the city which John saw descending from heaven to earth in Rev. 21. This city will of course supersede the old Jerusalem and become “the city of the great king the joy of the whole earth.” This is the city from which Jesus will reign over the whole earth on his throne, the restored throne of David, and his church will reign with him.

JACOB AND ESAU

Coming back to Rom. 9: it is evident that being a natural descendant of Abraham does not automatically make a person a child of God and heir of the promises. If natural birth was all that was required, then Ishmael would have qualified. By this example, Paul proves his point that not all of Abraham’s physical descendants are necessarily children of God. And the implication clearly is that not all Jews are necessarily God’s children, and therefore not all will inherit the kingdom.

Such teaching of course would not be welcomed with open arms, or get a favourable response from Jews. They gave Paul a hard time for such teaching. To counteract Paul’s argument they would argue that Ishmael’s mother Hagar, was an Egyptian slave girl and not Abraham’s real wife. So naturally Ishmael was rejected and Isaac given priority!

Anticipating this argument, Paul continues in Rom. 9:10-13 with these words: “And this is not all. For Rebecca’s 2 sons (Rebecca was

Isaac's wife, and her 2 sons were Jacob and Esau) had the same father, our ancestor Isaac. But in order that the choice of one son might be completely the result of God's own purpose, God said to her, the elder will serve the younger. He said this before they were born, before they had done anything either good or bad; so God's choice was based on his call, and not on anything they had done. As Scripture says: Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have loved less" (Good News Bible).

Here was a situation where not only did 2 sons have the same father, but also the same mother. Not only that, but the sons were twins, conceived at the same time in the same womb. And, contrary to the law and natural expectations, the younger son (the one who came out second) was preferred before the first born. He was made heir over and above the older son. God's promise had power over, and superseded the law!

But once again the important point is that it was the Word of God (spirit) - the Word of promise and faith in it, that made the difference between one son becoming heir and the other not. Unless the Word of God had come to bear on the situation, it would have been impossible for Jacob to become the heir of the promises.

THE DIVINE SEED

It should again be evident from these examples that being Abraham's seed and heir of the promises, is not determined by natural, normal birth which is caused by the implantation of a man's seed. It is determined by the divine seed, the spirit or spirit-inspired Word of God. The implantation of this seed is crucial for spiritual birth! Unless the Word of God penetrates and influences a person's life, it is impossible to become a child of Abraham and God! Unless one comes in contact with the promises of God and believes in them, they will not take effect and eternal inheritance will not be gained.

Addressing the Christian community which consisted of Jews and Gentiles, Paul said: "Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise" (Gal. 4:28). Now, if Isaac could not become a child of promise through a natural, normal birth, but had to be "born of the spirit," i.e. be born as a result of the intervention of God's promise and power; and faith in such on Abraham's part; then obviously to become "children of promise" (Christians), something more than a natural birth is required!

And so it is that we read these words - Jn. 1:12-13: "But as many as received him, (Jesus) to them he gave power (authority) to become the sons of God, to those who believe on his name, who were born, not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

In this passage the natural birth is referred to by the words “born of blood - the will of the flesh - the will of man.” Such a birth cannot give anyone the authority to become a son of God and the true seed of Abraham. To be born of God and become a son of God requires a new and different seed and new birth, namely, a spiritual seed and birth. And this, according to Jn. 1:12-13 involves receiving Jesus Christ and believing on his name.

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Jesus directly relates to this new spiritual birth in his discussion with Nicodemus, as recorded in Jn. 3:1-8. Verse 6 reads: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.” “The flesh” refers to the fallen sinful nature of man which contains a natural bias or propensity towards sin and evil. All are born with it and inherit it through birth. Some of the sins produced by the flesh are listed in Gal. 5:19-21, such as adultery, fornication, lust, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, quarrels, jealousy, envy, bad temper, factions, drunkenness, murder.

“The spirit” is the antithesis of the flesh. It is the opposite and is contrasted with it. “The spirit” signifies the higher heavenly nature of God, which is good and righteous, pure and holy. We come in contact with it in the Word of God. And the renewing and transforming effect it can have on us if we believe and receive it and take it seriously, is described in Gal. 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

No wonder it is stated in Jn. 3 that those who are only “born of the flesh” cannot enter the kingdom of God. This is just another way of saying they can’t be Abraham’s seed and therefore won’t inherit the promised land with him as an everlasting possession. It is crucial to be born again - to be born of the spirit, in order to enter the kingdom, and the proof of this will be seen in the fruit of the spirit displayed!

When you consider what the works of the flesh are and the fruit of the spirit, it soon becomes evident that there is a vast difference between them. In order for a person doing the works of the flesh to produce the fruit of the spirit instead, requires a great change and transformation. In short, it requires conversion which involves repentance. This basically is what being born again signifies. It involves the miracle of conversion which is the greatest of all miracles!

THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD

As in natural birth, it starts with a seed; not the seed of man, but of God. Jesus plainly taught that “the seed is the Word of God” (Lk. 8:11). It is stated in 1 Pet. 1:23 that the Word is “incorruptible seed.” And because the Word of God is inspired by the spirit of God, Jesus taught that the Word is spirit. He said: “The words that I speak, they are spirit and life” (Jn. 6:63).

To hear or read the Word of God is as good as hearing God’s voice. To fill our mind and heart with the spirit-inspired Word is to be filled with the spirit. The fact that the message breathed by the spirit is now in print, does not diminish its power or the impact it can have on those who believe. To be “born of the spirit” clearly requires hearing and believing the Word of God, and allowing it to impact upon our life, causing a new “conception” resulting in a “new creature.” A positive response to the Word of God changes us from being carnal, worldly, fleshly-minded people who are earth-bound in their thinking; into spiritual people who are spiritually minded and kingdom-bound in their thinking.

This connection between the spirit of God and the Word of God, and the vital part the Word plays in the born again experience, is taught in a number of Scriptures:

Jam. 1:18: “Of His own will God begat us with the Word of truth.” The words: “of his own will” mean God took the initiative. The new birth has nothing to do with the will of the flesh. Reference to being begotten with “the Word of truth” clearly relates to being born of the spirit, confirming that “the Word” can relate to “the spirit.”

Jam. 1:21 goes on to say that it is the Word that saves us: “Submit to God and receive with meekness the Word He has planted (like a seed) in your heart, which is able to save you.”

1 Pet. 1:23: “You have purified yourselves (i.e. become holy people) through obeying the truth (the Word of God) ... being born again, not by corruptible seed (human seed), but by incorruptible (divine seed), by the Word of God which lives and abides forever.” It is very clearly stated here that it is through the implantation of the Word of God that we are “born again.”

ALIVE AND POWERFUL

In the natural realm, a seed contains tremendous potential if planted in fertile ground and watered. Certain seeds when they take root can even

crack hard concrete as they force their way up above the ground or earthly level.

God's spirit-inspired Word can also break the hardest hearts and lift minds above the earthly level, into the heavenlies with Christ. "For the Word of God is alive (not dead print or cold lifeless pages), and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, cutting deeply into our innermost being, exposing us for what we are, separating that which is soulish (of the flesh and carnal) from that which is spirit" (of God and according to His Word).

Yes, the Word of God, when believed, is very powerful, having powerful effects on a person's life. It converts the soul, makes wise the simple, and cleanses the way of a young man. (Ps. 19:7. 119:9). Jesus put it like this to his disciples: "You are clean through the Word I have spoken to you" (Jn. 15:3). For this reason he prayed that his Father would "sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). And the apostle Paul adds his testimony to this by saying Christians are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the Word" (Eph. 5:26).

So then, being born a natural descendant of Abraham ("born of the flesh") is not sufficient to qualify for the kingdom of God. One has to be "born of the spirit." This involves coming under the powerful influence of the Word of God, which convicts a humble believer of sin, bringing about repentance and reform, conforming to the image of Christ.

BORN OF WATER

However, we read in Jn. 3 that Jesus did not only say it was necessary to be born of the spirit, but also water. He said: "Except a person be born of water and of spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Two things are therefore involved in the spiritual birth: 1. The divine seed. 2. Water.

Significantly enough, the process involved in natural birth also involves these 2 aspects. It starts with the implantation of the human seed, causing conception, resulting in major changes taking place as the embryo forms and develops into a foetus.

At the end of a 9 months gestation period, when the time comes for the child to be born and to publicly and officially become a member of the family, the "waters" break and the child is born - born of (out of) water! During infancy it feeds only on milk and progresses to solids and eventually meat.

As it is in the natural, so also the spiritual. Being "born of water" in

the spiritual, relates of course to baptism. It is by the act of baptism that one becomes publicly, formally and officially recognized as a child of God, and member of God's family, the church. For this reason when 3,000 Jews responded to the Gospel preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost, saying: "What shall we do?" Peter did not say: "You don't have to do anything because you are descendants of Abraham." No! He said: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Act. 2). This was consistent with the teaching of Jesus. He said: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised shall be saved, but he who believes not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:15-16).



CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST - WHY, HOW, WHERE, WHEN?

The return of Christ to planet earth is often referred to as “the second coming.” The reason for this of course, is because he came to earth on a previous occasion, as is evident from our reckoning of time in terms of B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (anno domini which means “in the year of our Lord”).

Our history is dated from the first coming of Christ, but he is coming again, and his second coming will be the beginning of a new and exciting era and a new calendar.

The second coming of Christ has been proclaimed from the beginning of Bible history. It is not just a New Testament doctrine. Enoch, the seventh generation from Adam, made this declaration: “Behold, the Lord will come with myriads of angels, to execute judgement upon all, and to convict all who are ungodly of the ungodly deeds they have ungodly committed, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude v14-15). Many of the Old Testament prophets proclaimed this.

As far as the Bible is concerned, the second coming of Christ is not a vague, unclear or uncertain subject. It is a major Bible doctrine, clearly taught time and again. There are 1527 direct and indirect references to it in the Old Testament, and 318 verses in the new Testament, which works out at one in every 25 verses.

Once upon a time the literal physical ascension of Christ to heaven and return to earth was put by some into the same category as science fiction, especially in the pre-aviation era. It was felt that it was inconceivable that a man could leave the earth and go out into space and then return again. But, as is often the case, science has proved that what was regarded as science fiction, can become scientific fact. Due to the advent of aviation and space travel, many men and women have ascended above the earth, travelled into space and even into a space city, not to mention the moon, and returned.

If man can do this by the power provided from the resources of the earth, then the God who created the earth and its energy resources, can certainly do it by the power of His Spirit!

WHY?

If it be asked: “Why is Christ coming back?” The answer is: to attend to unfinished business. Various prophecies and promises of God depend upon Christ’s return to be fulfilled. For example, the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham that he and his seed will inherit Canaan as an everlasting possession, necessitates Christ’s return.

The promise to David that his seed will sit upon his restored throne at Jerusalem and rule Israel and all other nations forever, also requires the second coming of Christ. Without the second coming, the kingdom of Israel which was the kingdom of God, would never be able to be restored. In other words, the kingdom of God in its ultimate universal form, along with the righteousness and peace that will go with it, would not be able to be established in the earth.

Also, because resurrection from the dead depends entirely upon the second coming of Christ, there can therefore be no life after death without the return of Christ. In view of this, it is not surprising that Christ’s return is referred to in Tit. 2:13 as “the blessed hope” of the Christian faith.

The second coming of Jesus is not only the Christian’s hope, but also the hope of the world, for without this hope, the world would ultimately be destroyed by man. The world does not want Christ, but it desperately needs him. Without him life is meaningless and hopeless, and the future would be very grim.

During his ministry, Jesus often referred to the fact that at the end of his earthly ministry he would go away, but he made it clear that he would return. He said: “If I go away, I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am (at Jerusalem) you may be also” (Jn. 14:1-3).

On one occasion when he was entering Jerusalem, the Jews thought he was going to restore the throne of David and establish the kingdom there and then. Because of this he told them that he firstly had to go on a journey to heaven to receive kingly power and then return to rule. He explained this in the form of a parable, saying: “A nobleman went into a far country to receive kingly power and then return ...” (Lk. 19:11-).

When the apostles asked Jesus what the signs of his coming would be, he warned that prior to his return, false teachers would claim that he had already returned and was hiding in the wilderness. He said: “Don’t believe it, for as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, so also shall the coming of the son of man be” (Matt. 24:23-27). There will be nothing secret, hidden, or concealed about the coming of Christ. It will be a very bright, glorious and earth-shaking event. It is referred to in 2 Thes.

2:8 as “the brightness of his coming.” We read in Rev. 1:7 that every eye shall see him: “Behold he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him ...”

Revelation is the last book in the Bible and contains the last message of Christ to his church, and it is not surprising to find that he emphasizes that he is coming back (Rev. 2:25. 3:3, 11). In the very last chapter of this last book, Jesus affirms three times: “Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). And it is made clear in v12 that it will not be until he comes, that the Christians will receive their reward. Until he comes, their reward is in heaven with him, and it will come with him when he returns.

According to Jesus, the earth will be plunged into darkness just before he returns, and this will be one of the last signs of his coming. This is what he said: “The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light ... and then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn and they shall see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:29-30).

The darkness of the earth will accentuate the brightness of his coming. The history of man’s mismanagement will therefore culminate in his darkest hour, causing widespread fear and panic. But Jesus shall arise like the sun and inaugurate a new era. Mal. 4:2 refers to this: “The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.” Also Isa. 60:2-3: “For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the nations shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

CAUGHT UP INTO THE AIR

Matt. 24:31 goes on to say that when Jesus comes, “he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four corners of the earth, from one end of the horizon to the other.”

When Jesus descends to Jerusalem, and his friends are in all parts of the earth, he is not going to ring them up or send them an e-mail telling them to book a seat on the next plane to Israel. No! He will send the angels who accompany him at his coming, to gather them up to meet him. The statement of Jesus in Jn. 14:1-3 which was quoted earlier, relates to this: “If I go away I will come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.”

The apostle Paul also related to this. He said: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

Elsewhere in Scripture we are taught that as the Lord descends from heaven to earth there will be “an hour of judgement,” during which the whole planet will be violently shaken, resulting in mountains tumbling down and the cities of the nations collapsing, causing huge loss of life. It would clearly not be appropriate for those who are godly and who belong to Jesus, for whom there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1) to be upon the earth when it is shaken as a judgement of condemnation upon the ungodly. They will therefore be caught up into the air to meet Jesus as he descends while the earth is convulsed, and they will accompany him on the last leg of his descent to Jerusalem.

It is important to note that when Paul says we will be caught up to “meet” the Lord in the air, he did not say that the Lord will then turn around and ascend back to heaven where he came from, and take us with him. The Greek word “apanteesis” which is translated “meet,” does not convey this. It is a special word used in relation to a welcome party which goes forth from their city to officially welcome a newly arriving dignitary who is heading for their city.

A good example of this can be seen in Act. 28:15 where reference is made to Christians venturing forth from Rome to a market town about 60kms out of Rome called Appii Forum. They went there to “meet” (apanteesis) the apostle Paul who was heading for Rome. When they met him, he did not turn around and take them all back to where he had come from. No! They accompanied him on the last leg of his journey to Rome.

As has been pointed out in a previous chapter, it will not be until Jesus comes, that he will sit upon the throne promised him - the throne of David at Jerusalem. Matt. 25:31 relates to this: “When the son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory ...”

PREACHED BY THE APOSTLES

When the importance of the second coming of Christ is understood and appreciated, it is not surprising to find that it formed an

integral part of the gospel preached by the apostles. For example, Act. 3:19-21: “Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached to you, who the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Among the 318 verses in the New Testament which teach the second coming of Christ, many of them are in Paul’s epistles. For example, 2 Thes. 1:7-10: “... the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They shall be punished with everlasting destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all who believe ...”

There was no doubt in the mind of all the apostles that Jesus would come again and return to the earth. They never said that he “might” come or “possibly.” They were emphatic that he “will” come, as we read in Heb. 10:37: “For yet a little while, and he who shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

In the second epistle of Peter chapter 3, the whole chapter is devoted to the subject of the second coming of Christ. He warns that in the last days there will be a lot of scoffing scepticism towards the event. People will argue that a long time has passed since the second coming was first preached, and it still hasn’t happened; nothing has changed or will change. Things will continue on the same as always.

In reply to this Peter points out that such scoffers are ignorant of two facts. Firstly: there have been changes in history as a result of divine intervention and judgement. He gives the example of the flood in Noah’s day and could have given more examples such as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. After referring to the flood, Peter then says the earth is ultimately destined to experience another judgement of similar severity, not by water but by fire.

Secondly, Peter points out that although it may seem that a long time has passed since Christ promised to return, it is only a long time from a mortal human perspective of time. Because God is immortal and eternal, He views time differently. Peter therefore says: “Be not ignorant of this one thing, that a thousand years to us is as one day to the Lord.” Putting it into modern terms, Peter is saying: “So what if a few thousand years goes by without Christ coming back; it’s only like a couple of days to the

Lord.”

Peter then goes on to say that the length of time involved should not be regarded as an indication of slackness on God’s part. It should rather be interpreted as an exhibition of longsuffering and merciful compassion, for the longer God waits, there is an increased opportunity for more people to qualify for salvation.

“But,” says Peter, “the day of the lord will come as a thief, and then the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are in it shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, think what sort of persons you ought to be in all holy conversation and godly conduct, looking eagerly for the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, wait for a new heavens and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. Therefore beloved, seeing that you wait for such things, be diligent that you may be found by him at peace, without spot and blameless.”

LITERAL, PERSONAL, PHYSICAL AND VISIBLE

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ is basically a very simple and straight-forward concept, and it is clear from what the Bible says on the subject that it will be very literal, personal, physical and visible. This is particularly evident in Act. 1:9-12. These verses teach us that Jesus chose the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem to be the place from which he wanted to ascend to heaven. As he ascended in full view of his apostles until a cloud removed him out of sight, an angel declared to them these words: “You men of Galilee, why stand here gazing into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall come in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.”

Because the Jesus who ascended to heaven was a physical, visible, bodily being, and could be seen ascending; and this same Jesus will come in the same way as he was seen going; we are forced to conclude that his return from heaven will be just as personal, physical and visible as his ascension to heaven. “Behold, he comes with clouds, and every eye shall see him” (Rev. 1:7).

Now, if Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, and is going to come back in the same way as he departed, it would not be surprising if the Mount of Olives, being the launching pad of his departure, will also be the touchdown pad of his return. According to

Scripture, this in fact will be the case. Amazingly enough, 500 years before Jesus was even born, the Spirit of God inspired the prophet Zechariah to proclaim these words concerning his second coming: “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:14. This prophecy no doubt led Jesus to choose the Mount of Olives as the launching pad for his ascension to heaven.

The return of the first man put into space was a very dramatic event, but it will pale into insignificance compared to Christ’s return. The second coming will be the most world-shaking event in the whole of human history, unprecedented in magnitude. In view of this, it would not be an over-statement to say that the Mount of Olives is the most strategic spot on earth!

HUGE LAND CONVULSION

Now, according to Zech. 14:4, a mighty earthquake is going to occur as Jesus descends to the Mount of Olives, resulting in an enormous convulsion in the land of Israel. It will be the epi-centre of a world-wide convulsion. The prophecy says that it will cause the Mount of Olives to split in half. Half will move to the north and the other half to the south, creating a valley which will run from east to west.

Tremendous physical changes will occur in the land as a result. Verse 10 says that all the hill country around Jerusalem, up to 50kms southward and 10kms northward, will be levelled and turned into a plain. The site of Jerusalem however, will be heaved up by the earthquake to a height higher than any other place in the land, and possibly higher than any other mountain in the whole earth, due to the levelling effect that all mountains will suffer when the whole earth is shaken. The new elevated site of Jerusalem will, of course, be accentuated as a result of the surrounding hills and mountains being levelled.

Zech. 14:8 also refers to a subterranean river being opened up by the earthquake and flowing out from the new elevated site of Jerusalem. It flows in two directions: half goes into the Dead sea and the other half into the Mediterranean sea. Other prophecies mention this as well. One of them in Ezk. 47 says the Dead sea will be healed as a result of the inflow and will end up teeming with fish of all species like those in the Mediterranean.

Such prophecies as these make it clear that the return of Christ will be physical and visible and will have very physical and visible effects in the earth, particularly in the promised land.

WHEN?

So then, in relation to the question: Why is Christ coming back to the earth, we have seen that he is coming to attend to unfinished business. He will raise the dead and give eternal life to his faithful followers, and establish the kingdom of God upon the earth, resulting in righteousness and peace prevailing upon the whole planet.

In relation to how Jesus will come, we have seen that he is coming in the same manner as he went: through the air, physically and visibly.

In relation to where he is coming, we have seen that he is coming to earth, and his feet will touch down on a particular place in the earth, namely: the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem in the land of Israel.

This brings us to the question of when is he coming? We are told in Act. 17:31 that God has appointed a day, but Jesus taught that no man knows the day (Matt. 24:36). But we can be sure of one thing: although some will conclude that he is tarrying, i.e. delaying his return (Matt. 24:48) and others will scoff at the prospect of his second coming (2 Pet. 3), he will not tarry. When the appointed day on the divine calendar arrives, the last trumpet will sound and he will descend from heaven and the result will be, as we read in Rev. 11:15: “The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

“For yet a little while, and he who will come shall come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37).

SIGNS OF HIS COMING

Although no man knows the specific day of Christ’s coming, he predicted certain signs to indicate the era of his return. He did this in response to a question put to him by his apostles: “What shall be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). The verses which follow, record a number of signs which can all be seen on the horizon today. He said there would be the continual threat of wars, famines and pestilences on an unprecedented scale, and earthquakes in many different places. He also said there would be many false prophets and teachers, and that there would ultimately be great tribulation such as has never happened since the beginning of history and will never happen again. He went on to say that unless there was divine intervention, no living thing would survive.

The prospect of the annihilation of all forms of life on planet earth

was never a threat until the nuclear age. But there are now enough nuclear weapons stockpiled to exterminate man. Unless Jesus returns, man will destroy himself.

Jesus also warned that prior to his return, conditions in the earth would be like they were in Noah's day and Lot's day (Matt. 24:36-39. Lk. 17:26-30). In Noah's day, the thoughts of men's hearts were evil continually; violence and crime filled the earth, and God's way (truth) was corrupted (Gen. 6:5, 11-12). In spite of Noah building the ark and warning the people of impending judgement, they mocked and scoffed and carried on with their carefree and indulgent life, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, as if nothing was going to happen, right up to the day that Noah and his family boarded the boat and the door was shut.

Regarding Lot: He lived in Sodom where gross immorality was rife. Homosexuality was socially acceptable and men were perverted to the core in every way possible to the flesh, even to the point of wanting to sexually violate two dignified men who came to visit Lot. They happened to be angels who came to warn Lot to leave the city because it was going to be destroyed (Gen. 19). Lot warned his sons in law about the impending judgement of God, but they didn't believe him. They thought he was only mocking or jesting (Gen. 19:14). They and the inhabitants of Sodom continued on their merry way, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, right up to the day that Lot and his wife and two daughters evacuated the city and fire rained down from heaven and destroyed them all, along with their city and possessions.

So then, in view of the increase of wars and violence and crime in the earth today; the threat of unprecedented famines and pestilences due to over population; the threat of nuclear war and the extermination of all life on planet earth; the corruption of God's way and truth by many false teachers and prophets; the decline in moral values, seen particularly in the widespread acceptance in society of sex outside of marriage and homosexuality along with the increasing scoffing scepticism towards the return of Christ, accompanied by a grossly materialistic and godless attitude; it is clear that we are living in the era of the second coming of Christ - the era referred to by Paul when he said: "In the last days perilous times (i.e. difficult and trying times full of perils) shall come. For men will be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, inhuman ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

THE REVIVAL OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL

Jesus concluded his list of signs concerning his second coming, by giving a parable concerning a fig tree. He said: “When his branch becomes tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, know that he is near, even at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things be fulfilled” (Matt. 24:32-34).

Because the fig tree is used in the Bible as a symbol for the nation of Israel, it is possible that Jesus had the revival of the nation in mind when he talked about the fig tree putting forth its leaves. If so, his statement: “When you see all these things,” which he made after mentioning the revival of the fig tree, could include the fig tree among the signs. Be that as it may, other prophecies certainly teach that the revival of the nation of Israel is a sign of Christ’s return e.g. Ezk. 37:21-22.

In order for the nation of Israel to revive, Jews obviously had to return from their world-wide dispersion to their land. Various prophecies in Scripture teach that they would do this in the last days, and they have been doing it in earnest since the holocaust. For the first time in nearly 2,000 years they have become a nation again displayed on the world map, and have become a force to be reckoned with in the middle east.

It is clearly taught in Ezk. 37:21-22 that God would gather the Jews from the nations where they were dispersed and bring them back to their own land and make them a nation in that land, prior to Messiah their king coming to reign over them. In this prophecy, the return of the Jews to their land and the revival of their nation, are presented as two major signs of the second coming. These signs have been fulfilled, indicating once again that we are living in the era of Christ’s return and the countdown period to Armageddon.

In addition to this there are prophecies which teach that as a prelude to Armageddon, the Moslem nations surrounding Israel would become anti-Israel and eventually attack her, seeking her downfall and destruction. Moslem nations today are certainly anti-Israel and some have openly stated their desire and ambition to destroy Israel. This also confirms that we are living in the era of the second coming of Christ.

THE TIME FACTOR

Finally, there is the time factor to consider i.e. although no man will know the day of Christ’s return, can we know the century or

millennium when that day occurs? Possibly! A hint of the answer to this question is given in Gibbon's reference to the doctrine of the millennium as believed by the early church in his book on the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. He says that the early Christians believed the millennium would be "a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years." This connection between the millennium and Sabbath is quite Scriptural, for in Heb. 4:9 the coming kingdom and reign of Christ is referred to as "a Sabbath rest." It is also referred to as a "rest" in Isa. 11:10, and the word "rest" here is the same word used elsewhere for the seventh day Sabbath rest.

Because the Sabbath was the seventh day, and one day to the Lord is as a thousand years to man, some have concluded that the seven day week instituted by God at the very beginning was prophetic of the history of man. This has led many to expect that the millennial reign of Christ will be the seventh millennium in man's history.

We are in that era now, for according to Bible chronology, it was around 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham, 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ, and 2,000 years from Christ to the year 2,000 A.D. The 21st century has ushered us into the seventh millennium! Significantly enough, this period coincides and synchronizes with the fulfilment of the signs given in Scripture of the second coming. This constitutes a double confirmation that we are living in the end time era.

We cannot of course, work out the precise day in the twenty first century when the seventh millennial rest of Christ will begin. The reason for this is because it will probably be dated from the fall of man when sin first entered the world resulting in many scourges, stresses and burdens, necessitating the "rest" and the Bible does not say how long it was after man was created that this happened.

NOT IN DARKNESS

In view of the signs of the times that we in the twenty first century are privileged to witness, the words penned by the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians are more relevant than ever: "But of the times and the seasons brethren, you have no need for me to write to you, for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of the light,

and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thes. 5:1-5).

In relation to the return of Christ, a pertinent question is asked in Mal. 3:2: “But who may abide (endure) the day of his coming? And who shall stand (survive) when he appears?” A later verse in Mal. 3:16 provides the answer: “Those who revere the Lord and speak often to one another (about the Lord). The lord listens and hearkens to them, and a book of remembrance is written in His presence concerning those who revere the Lord and who give thought and honour to His name. And they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts; my special jewels on the day when I act; and I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him.”

The fact that Christ is coming to reward the righteous and punish the wicked should have a deep effect on the lives of those who believe it. It should be an incentive to holy living and a stimulus to watchfulness and faithfulness. As the apostle John puts it: “Every man who has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as he (Jesus) is pure” (1 Jn. 3:1-3). And if we purify ourselves and are truly sanctified servants, we can, like the apostle John, confidently and unhesitatingly reply: “Even so come Lord Jesus,” in response to his promise: “Surely I come quickly.”

A test can be made concerning ourselves and Christ’s return by honestly asking ourselves how willingly and readily we can make the same answer as John’s faith. Whatever it is in our life that makes us hesitate to say: “Even so come Lord Jesus,” is the thing that should not be in our life. Whatever ambition or goal, no matter how good and legitimate in its own right it might be; if it makes us want the Lord to delay or postpone his return to a later date, it is an impediment to full development of faith and needs to be made to take second place in our life and be subservient to Christ. All who profess Christ to be Lord of their life must come to the place where they fit into the category of those referred to in 2 Tim. 4:9 who “love his (Christ’s) appearing” and therefore look forward to it and do not regard it as an unwelcome intrusion. Those who “love his appearing” in v9 are contrasted with those in v10 who “love this present world” and who end up forsaking Jesus as a result.



CHAPTER NINE THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST

Prior to the year 2,000, there was a lot of speculation and anticipation about the new millennium. Some even questioned if it was attainable in view of the stock-pile of nuclear weapons and the inevitable extermination of life on our planet in the event of an all-out nuclear war.

During the year or so leading up to the year 2,000, the prospect of the new millennium created a lot of media interest. And on the eve of the new millennium, millions around the world hyped up into party mode, with extravagant and expensive celebrations and fanfare.

The question is: What was all the celebration about? Did the sun look any different as it rose in the east? Did it rise faster or slower? Was it brighter or dimmer? Film crews from all around the world converged on Gisborne in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands where the rising sun would first be seen, inaugurating the year 2,000, in order to film it. But they could have filmed it anywhere in the world on any day of the year, and no one would have known the difference.

Did famines and pestilences, poverty and pollution cease when the new millennium ticked over? Did earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, depletion of the ozone layer cease to be a threat? Did all wars, violence, murder and crime stop? Did all governments become righteous, causing justice and equity to prevail and oppression and exploitation to disappear? Did all forms of sickness and disease get abolished. No! Nothing changed. Not even the price of eggs came down! Everything remained the same and will continue to remain the same and get worse under man's rule. It takes more than a page turned on the calendar, drinking champagne, fireworks displays, streamers and popping balloons, to change those things and put the world right.

So what was all the hype about? What was everyone so excited about? Why the celebration? Optimism for the future caused some to celebrate. They hoped that the new millennium would produce a new and better world. But as long as mortal fallible man is in control, and as long as human governments prevail, such hope is a vain optimism. Man is a war-monger at heart; very proud and selfish, and history testifies to the truth of what the Bible says, that it is futile to put our trust in man. Time and again the bubble of hope put in human governments and rule has burst and disappeared, resulting in disappointment and despair. No sooner are peace pacts signed, then war breaks out again somewhere else.

For this reason many did not have an eager anticipation for the new

millennium but an apprehension due to the prospect of more of the same of wars and man's inhumanity to man. In addition to this, there are the fears of the effects of over population, global warming, the rising level of oceans, changing weather patterns, pollution of the air, land and sea; not to mention man's weapons of mass destruction.

Bible prophecy confirms these apprehensions. It teaches that the history of man and human rule will, in the end, reach a crescendo of trouble, involving wars, violence, famines, pestilences and earthquakes on an unprecedented scale. References to "stars" falling from heaven upon earth also indicate that projectiles such as meteorites or even asteroids will bombard planet earth.

This climactic period is referred to as "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" (Dan. 12:1. Matt. 24:21). Jesus said there will be upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity (Lk. 21:25). The word "perplexity" means in a state of quandary; at one's wits end due to no solution; being at a loss how to solve the dilemma. As a result, Jesus goes on to say that men's hearts will be failing them for fear due to what confronts them. He also said that if he did not return, i.e. if divine intervention did not take place, no living thing would survive (Matt. 24:22). Under man's rule, the world clearly has a bleak future.

As we have seen, what the world needs is one ruler, one government and one religion. If the world could be united under one and the same ruler, government and religion; all conflicts between the different ideologies of governments and the different doctrines of religions would cease. Such a ruler of course would have to be immortal, righteous and infallible, unable to be assassinated or die, and never make mistakes or errors of judgement. He would have to be absolutely fair, just and impartial. 2 Sam. 23:3 says: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Obviously no ordinary man could qualify for this. It requires someone supernatural who possesses divine power by which he could exercise control over both the nations and the elements, able to enforce his will, establishing justice, righteousness and peace. Such a man could never be produced by the normal course of nature. Only divine power could produce such a man. And it has - 2,000 years prior to the new millennium. The year 2,000 has been dated from that event, testifying to the historicity of it.

Jesus Christ of course is the man, divinely begotten around 2,000 years ago. And his ultimate destiny and mission is to rule the earth and establish righteousness and peace. This, as we have seen, is what the

ultimate kingdom of God is all about.

Now, if you could start a new millennium with this, that would be something worth celebrating and getting excited about! Well, the good news is that such a millennium is coming, and it will be the millennium - the millennium of millenniums - the mother of millenniums. All other millenniums in history and their celebrations will pale into insignificance by comparison. All the fireworks displays and razz matazz which inaugurated the year 2,000 around the world, will be totally eclipsed by the display of divine power that will inaugurate the millennium of Christ's reign.

The word "millennium" is derived from the Latin word "mille" which means "one thousand," and "annum" which means "year" The word millennium does not actually occur in the Bible, but references are made to "a thousand years." Reference is made 6 times in Rev. 20:2-7 to the specific period of one thousand years in relation to Christ's future reign on earth. Although many Scriptures relate to the reign of Christ, nowhere else in Scripture is this time period given in relation to his reign. It is a "revelation," as the title of the book indicates.

The passage in Rev. 20:2-7 clearly states that those who belong to Jesus will reign with him for a thousand years, and other passages in the book of Revelation teach that his reign will be upon the earth (Rev. 2:26-27. 5:10. 11:15. 19:15). The one thousand year reign commences at Christ's return, for it is stated in Rev. 20:4-6 that it commences at the time of the first resurrection, which is elsewhere referred to as occurring at the second coming.

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS BELIEVED IN THE MILLENNIUM

The millennial reign of Christ promises a glorious future for the earth in which the nations will be blessed with righteousness, peace and prosperity. Unfortunately considerable indifference is shown in many churches towards this glorious hope, due to misconceptions of the purpose of God. As a result, a hope has been embraced which conflicts with, and negates the doctrine of Christ's reign on earth.

Due to the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the hope of many has no relation to the earth. Their hope is to leave the earth at death and wing their way to heaven and receive their reward and inheritance there. But although the doctrine of Christ's millennial reign on earth is lightly regarded today, there is evidence that in former days it held a much more important place in the church. Gibbon, in his history of the decline

and fall of the Roman empire (Ch. 15) declared:

“The ancient and popular doctrine of the millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ ... a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years, when Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints, and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth ... The assurance of such a millennium was carefully inculcated by a succession of fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus who conversed with the immediate disciples of the apostles, down to Lactantius ... Though it might not be universally received, it appears to have been the reigning sentiment of the orthodox believers ... But when the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside. The doctrine of Christ’s reign upon earth was at first treated as a profound allegory; was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion, and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism.”

This is a valuable piece of evidence, showing that the nearer we approach the apostle’s days, the more prominent this doctrine becomes. But as we journey down the stream of time, we find it losing its hold upon the minds of men, until it is at length rejected as heresy. This should not surprise us because the apostles warned that the church would not continue to hold the truth, but would, in course of time, depart from the faith and turn to fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). History has shown the fulfilment of this prophecy in regard to the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. The doctrine of the second coming of Christ to reign on the earth, upon which the hope of the early Christians was set, was eventually rejected, and hope in an immortal soul going to heaven at death was embraced instead as a substitute.

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE MILLENNIUM

Before Christ can reign, his kingdom must be established. He will do this at his second coming, and the details of this work are revealed in the Scriptures. In fact, a complete programme of events leading up to the millennium is given in the Word of God. Time and space will not allow a detailed presentation of all the events, but it will be sufficient to look at the principal features.

The first event of course will be the second coming of Christ which was covered in the preceding chapter. When he comes, the resurrection of the dead takes place, and those among Christ’s followers who are judged to be faithful, will be gathered up by the angels and caught up to meet him

in the air as he, along with all the angels and the city of God, descend to the earth. Those who are judged to be unfaithful will be banished from his presence and fail to gain entrance into the city of God.

When Christ returns, a confederacy of anti-Israel armies will have invaded the land of Israel and occupied it for three and a half years, during which time many Jews will have been killed and the surviving remnant will have suffered great tribulation. Were it not for the return of Christ, the nation would be exterminated (Ps. 83).

Upon his return, Jesus enters into battle with the enemy in order to save and deliver Israel. The battle is known as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16). It is at this time that an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude shakes the land and indeed the whole earth, causing the cities of the nations to collapse and mountains to tumble into valleys. The Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem will split in half and all the surrounding hill country of Judea will be levelled into a plain, while the site of Jerusalem will be heaved up to a much greater height (Zech. 14). Hailstones weighing over 50 kilos, torrential rain, fire and pestilence will also be unleashed from heaven upon the anti-Israel and anti-God armies, causing panic among them, resulting in mutual slaughter (Ezk. 38:18-23. Rev. 16:14-21).

As the feet of Jesus come down upon the Mount of Olives, the city of God will probably come down to the newly elevated Mount Zion. Various Scriptures state that myriads of angels will be seen coming with Jesus, but myriads of saints who are caught up to meet him in the air will also accompany him on his descent. The reference in Zech. 14:5 to the Lord coming “and all the saints with thee” could refer to this. The reference in Rev. 19:14 to armies in heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, following Jesus, could also refer to the saints (Cp v7-8).

Jesus is also depicted in Rev. 19 leading the saints on a white horse, and out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword with which he smites the nations, and he rules them with a rod of iron. The saints who follow him on white horses no doubt share in the same mission of smiting the nations and ruling them with a rod of iron. We read in Rev. 2:26-27 that Jesus will give all overcomers power over the nations and authority to rule them with a rod of iron. In view of this, it seems that the saints will do battle with Jesus against the nations at the battle of Armageddon.

Ps. 149:5-9 also relates to this: “Let the saints be joyful in glory (i.e. rejoice in the glory of God of which they partake); let them sing aloud upon their couches in the city of God. Let the high praises of God be upon their lips and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon

the nations and punishments upon the peoples; to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgement written (preordained): This honour have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord.”

According to Zech. 12 and Mic. 4:11-13 the Jewish remnant in the land of Israel at the time of the battle of Armageddon will also be encouraged and strengthened to smite the enemy. After the battle is over they see that their Messiah who delivered them has pierced hands and feet and realize that it is Jesus who they crucified. This results in a national repentance and mourning, followed by restoration (Zech. 12:10-14). Eventually, all 12 tribes of Israel will be restored in their land (Ezk. 48). This leads to “ten men from the nations of every tongue taking hold of the robe of a Jew, saying: we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:20-23).

GOD’S JUDGEMENTS EXTEND TO ALL NATIONS

The judgements of God that fall at the battle of Armageddon upon the invading armies will not be confined to those armies in the land of Israel. According to Ezk. 39:6 and other prophecies, fire will also be sent upon the nations from which the armies come. Combined with the devastating earthquake which flattens cities and levels mountains, along with the pestilence that follows, the death toll throughout the earth will be huge - astronomical. For example, we read in Isa. 24:5-6 that due to the earth being defiled by its inhabitants who have transgressed God’s laws, His curse will: “Devour the earth, and those who dwell therein will suffer for their guilt. The inhabitants of the earth are scorched and few remain.”

Isa. 51:6 makes this declaration: “... the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wear out like a garment, and those who dwell in it shall die like flies” (i.e. in swarms).

Again Isa. 66:15-16: “For behold the Lord will come with fire and his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebukes with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord execute judgement and those slain by the Lord will be many.” Also Jer. 25:33: “And those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. No one will mourn for them and they will not be taken away and buried. They will stay lying on the ground like dung.”

THERE WILL BE SURVIVORS

In the days of Noah when God's judgements fell upon the earth, there was wholesale destruction. Except for Noah and his family, everyone else in the earth perished. However, in the end time judgement that takes place at Christ's return, although multitudes will perish, there will be survivors. This is indicated in a number of Scriptures. For example Zech. 14:16 says: "All the survivors from the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go there each year to worship the king." These survivors are not the soldiers involved in the attack on Jerusalem, but the civilian population of the nations from which the soldiers came. All the soldiers involved in the invasion of Israel will be killed in the battle of Armageddon, but there will be survivors among the civilian population of all nations.

Isa. 66:23-24 also refers to "all flesh" (i.e. mortals from all nations) coming up to Jerusalem to worship after God's judgements have been poured out upon the earth.

There is no way of knowing how many will survive God's judgement, but due to the huge population of the earth prior to the judgement, the number of survivors could be substantial. This is indicated in Isa. 2:2-3 where reference is made to "all nations" and "many people" going up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

Another Scripture which speaks of a mortal population during the millennium is Isa. 65:17-25. In these verses we are told that after the Lord has created a new heavens and a new earth, and Jerusalem a joy, "no longer will babies die when only a few days old; no longer will men be considered old at 100. Only sinners will die that young and it will be the sign of a curse." Reference to babies in this passage also indicates that marriage will continue to take place among the mortal population during the millennium, resulting in reproduction and an increasing population.

Reference to "all flesh," "men that have transgressed" and their dead "carcasses" covered with "worms" in Isa. 66:23-24, along with the reference to "the sinner" and those who "die" in Isa. 65:20, reveals that the survivors of God's judgements will be the same mortal sinful flesh that we are at the moment, able to sin and die.

Although sin will be greatly restrained among this mortal population due to the "rod of iron" rule of Christ, resulting in the average length of life being extended and increased, it will not stop sin. This is evident in Zech. 14:16-19 where we are told that nations will be able, if they so choose, to refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, resulting in

them being punished.

We also read in Rev. 20 that nations will rebel against Christ's rule at the end of the millennium, probably as a result of the divine restraint being lifted in order to manifest their evil hearts and deal with them. It is evident from this that there will be a mortal population upon earth until the end of the millennium.

It is an unfortunate fact that the flesh is weak and one of its weaknesses is that it allows familiarity to breed contempt. Because of this, even the visible divine presence of the Lord does not stop sin or rebellion. This was evident during the Exodus when God led Israel through the wilderness by a cloud of glory during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Being able to see and witness this presence of the Lord day after day, did not prevent them from sinning and rebelling. Due to the power and deceitfulness of sin, no matter how powerful, influential and impactful the presence of the Lord might be, it can lose its impact on the flesh due to familiarity and lack of discipline, control and respect.

TO RULE REQUIRES SUBJECTS TO RULE OVER

It is evident then, from Scripture, that there will still be ordinary mortal people upon the new earth during the millennial reign. Were this not so, who would Christ and the saints rule and reign over? There could be no rule or reign without people to rule over. As we have seen, a kingdom not only requires a king and co-rulers, but also subjects, i.e. people in subjection to the rule. The many Scriptures therefore which refer to Christ and the saints ruling, imply that there will be subjects.

The saints of course who will reign with Christ, will be immortal like Christ himself. Jesus bestows immortality upon them at his second coming. So it will be a case of immortals ruling over mortals. However, this will only be a temporary and transitional arrangement, for it will terminate at the end of the 1,000 year reign. At that time, those who lived and died during the millennium will be raised at the second resurrection and judged. Those who qualify for eternal life will join the immortal saints, and those who are rejected will perish, as a result of which death and hell will be abolished. The final result will be that there will no longer be any mortal flesh, sin or death upon the earth. All will be immortal and equal with the angels. At that time all things will be subdued to Christ and he will hand it all over to God his Father who shall be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:23-28).

A PREDETERMINED NUMBER REQUIRED

Now, it would be natural to wonder why the millennial reign is necessary. Why couldn't Christ wrap things up at his second coming and be done with it? Why spend another 1,000 years giving mortals the opportunity to become immortal and further increase the number of the redeemed in the divine family? The obvious answer to this question is: Because the number redeemed for immortality prior to the millennium does not fulfil the number required by God to complete His family!

It can be inferred from Scripture that God has a predetermined number that He desires to make up His family and fill His house. But, because so few (relatively speaking) respond to His call in each generation (Matt. 7:14. 20:16) it has required many generations to make up that number.

The fact of the matter is that when Jesus returns, the number of people who qualify from the preceding 6,000 years from Adam to the second coming, shall not be sufficient to make up the number required by God. It will require another 1,000 years of a special dispensation of God - the millennial reign of Christ - a harvest time of souls, to make up the number. But whatever the total number of people redeemed prior to the millennium might be, it will be insignificant compared to the number redeemed as a result of the millennium. Those who are called to the kingdom prior to the millennium are "firstfruits" (cp Jam. 1:18); the "harvest" will be gathered at the end of the millennium.

That God has a predetermined number that He requires to fill His house is taught in a parable in Lk. 14:15-23. In this parable Jesus refers to a certain man who invited many to a great supper, which refers to God inviting many to His kingdom. But those who were invited made excuses for not being able to attend. So a second invitation went out into the streets and lanes to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, but there was still room for more. So, for the third time an invitation was sent out into the highways and hedges to "compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." This parable reveals God's intention to fill His house and His determination to do it, even if it takes several attempts. Some relate the three attempts in the parable to the call of the Jews, the call of the Gentiles and the call during the millennium.

NOT FAIR?

Some may feel that it is not fair that those who live prior to the millennium do not have the advantage of Christ's physical presence and his kingdom upon the earth, whereas the mortals living during the millennium do, making it easier for them to believe. However, those who live prior to the millennium who qualify for immortality, have the advantage of ruling and reigning with Christ in his kingdom during the whole millennium. Those who qualify for immortality during the millennium do not have this advantage. They live out their mortal life and die and will not attain their immortality until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. This is a fair arrangement which you would expect from a righteous God.

AN IRON RULE

As a result of the awesome and destructive judgements of God which shall come crashing down upon the earth at the second coming, the nations will be plunged into disarray and humbled. Governments and law and order will be in tatters and will cease, resulting in anarchy, chaos and confusion. If left in this state, conditions would go from bad to worse, resulting in many more millions of people suffering and dying with no hope for the future.

But into this vacuum Christ and the saints will step and take control, and establish a new world-wide government - the kingdom of God which has its power centre at the new Jerusalem, the city of God. This is depicted in Dan. 2 where Christ's return is likened to a stone hurtling down from heaven, smiting and pulverizing the kingdoms of the world. After smashing them to pieces, the stone then gradually grows larger and larger, eventually filling the whole earth. The meaning of this is stated in Rev. 11:15: "The kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." Scripture assures us that: "All the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the sea covers the depths" (Hab. 2:14. Num. 14:21).

As has been stated before: what the world needs is what it is going to get in Christ, namely: an immortal, infallible, righteous dictator. Not only will his rule be infallible, but it will be omnipotent. He will have absolute power to enforce his wise decrees, like no other ruler in history has been able to do. Due to the limitations of man's power and authority, not to mention the many rulers who have been corrupt; evil has continually

triumphed in the world and wickedness has abounded. The world needs a government with absolute power to compel righteousness and justice among the nations, and this will be a special feature in Christ's reign. "He shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15). His government will be absolute and vigorous, firm and irresistible, enforcing obedience and compelling submission. He will reign until all his enemies are his footstool (Ps. 110). In vain will it be for the oppressor, the tyrant or the unrighteous to strive to evade his law. "Every soul who will not hear him, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Act. 3:23).

RAIN WITHHELD

An example of the power in Christ's hands to enforce obedience can be seen in Zech. 14:16-19. We are told here that the rain will be withheld from any nation which refuses to come up to Jerusalem to acknowledge and worship the Lord. And, if the nation of Egypt (which would not be so badly affected by lack of rain due to having the river Nile) refuses to come, then she shall be inflicted with the plague. The Lord will also smite other nations in the same position, with the plague. Who would dare to resist a king with such power and authority as this?

However, there is a prophecy in Isa. 19 which indicates that Egypt will comply with the Lord's requirements and will not need to be inflicted with the plague. Reference is made in this prophecy to Egypt giving allegiance to the Lord and offering worship to him. According to Dan. 11:40-, Egypt will be invaded and smitten at the same time and by the same armies which invade and smite Israel prior to Christ's return. When Jesus deals with those armies at the battle of Armageddon, and delivers the remnant of Israel, Egypt will be delivered as well. Jesus will be their Saviour as well as Israel's Saviour. It is no wonder therefore that they will worship him!

Isa. 19:23-25 says that "In that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria (Iraq today) and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall worship (the Lord) with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third (i.e. united in worship of the Lord) with Egypt and with Assyria, and become a blessing (instead of a curse) in the centre of the region, whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying: Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance." Also see Isa. 11:15-16.

Not only will Christ rule with a rod of iron, but so also will the saints. Rev. 2:26-27 records a promise made by Jesus to each overcomer: "To

him will I give power over the nations and he shall rule them with a rod of Iron ...”

In one of his parables, Jesus taught that when he returns, he will give his faithful servants authority over cities. Some will be given authority over 10 cities and others over 5 cities, all depending on the degree of diligence they have demonstrated while waiting for their Lord’s return (Lk. 19:12-19). The city of God will be their home base with which they will be in contact and to which they return, as do ambassadors today who are sent out to other countries to represent their government. They all have a home base in their mother country.

As Christ’s ambassadors, ruling and reigning with him, the saints will be invested with his power and authority and will employ his “rod of iron rule” in his name and on his behalf. This is signified by his promise in Rev. 3:21 that: “To him who overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne ...”

The 12 apostles will actually be given 12 thrones in the land of Israel, from which they will exercise authority over the 12 tribes and rule over them (Matt. 19:28).

THE LAW SHALL GO FORTH FROM ZION

Many illustrations are given in Scripture of the power and authority that Christ will exercise to enforce obedience among the nations when he rules from his throne at Zion. Many Scriptures also describe the beneficial effects on mankind and the environment as a result of the righteous reign which the nations will experience. Isa. 2:1-5 presents a beautiful picture of Christ’s millennial reign. Starting at v2 we read: “It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain (Zion) of the Lord’s house (temple) shall tower above the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it.” Reference is made here to the nations coming up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord in the 1.6 kms (1 mile) square temple prophesied in Ezk. 40:48 which will be situated on the southern side of the elevated site of Zion.

“And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (v3).

This speaks of an amazing turn-around among the nations. Today, many nations worship false gods and idols and many are atheists and do not believe in God. Many of the world’s religions have no respect for the

God of Israel. But when Christ returns and becomes king of the nations, reigning from Jerusalem, all nations will acknowledge that he is indeed Lord, the only begotten son of the God of Israel. Polytheism will be a thing of the past and there won't be a single atheist or evolutionist upon earth! As Zech. 14:9 declares: "The Lord will become king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord, and His name one."

The prophecy in Isa. 2 indicates that people will take the initiative to go up to the house of the Lord, desiring to be taught His ways and wanting to walk in His paths, which involves being obedient to His Word. The education and enlightenment of all nations in the way of God will be an outstanding characteristic of the millennium. There will be no argument or controversy about Bible in schools or prayer in parliament and government functions in that day! The result will be that the moral and spiritual standards of the world will rise to a higher plane and so also will the standards of hygiene and sanitation. The world will become a much cleaner and healthier place.

No human law shall govern the world when Christ reigns. "The law shall go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The days will be over when men in every nation devise their own laws according to their own wisdom. There shall be one law for the whole earth proceeding from the one centre - Zion, where Christ will be enthroned. The laws devised by man are weak and imperfect, and require continual reform and amendment; but "the law of the Lord is perfect," and "the Word of the Lord is sure." There will be no defects in that law; it will require no amendment. Being devised by divine wisdom, it will go forth from Zion a perfect law for the utmost good of the nations, perfectly adapted to human needs.

Isa. 2:4 says: "And he shall judge (decide disputes) among the nations and shall rebuke many people." Today there is not a single man who has the power and authority to deal with a nation that steps out of line by oppressing and exploiting its people, or by making war with neighbouring nations. Even The United Nations is powerless most of the time to act and help due to its members disagreeing on issues and engaging in vetoes, resulting in atrocities continuing while they helplessly look on. What a contrast the reign of Christ will be! He won't have to depend on a majority vote among members of a council to take action. He will, without hesitation, lay down the law and command instant obedience or else his iron rod will come crashing down upon the offender.

NO MORE WAR

Isa. 2:4 continues by saying that as a result of the Lord judging among the nations and rebuking many people, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall there be any more training for war.”

A marvellous change is predicted here involving the abolition of war. Defence departments will be defunct and military camps will be empty. Armies, navies and airforces along with their weapons of destruction, will be a thing of the past - obsolete. During human history, nations have squandered and wasted billions of dollars on weapons of destruction while people lived in poverty, suffering starvation, sickness and disease. But conditions will be radically different when Christ is in control! There will be an entire absence of war and strife among the nations. He shall “speak peace to the nations” (Zech. 9:10) and for that reason he is called: “The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

He shall compel the nations to destroy all weapons of war and use all their energy and resources for positive and productive purposes, instead of negative and destructive purposes. Turning swords into plows and spears into scythes signifies this.

If nations today harnessed all their energy and utilized all their resources for production, and didn't fritter it away on weapons of destruction, there would be plenty of food for everyone. Millions of tonnes of food are even dumped by some nations just to inflate the price, while people are starving to death for lack of it. There is a terrible imbalance caused by greed. So God cannot be blamed for suffering. Man's inhumanity to man is the cause. It all comes down to human selfishness and greed, but it will change when Christ takes control. At that time, the promise in Lk. 2:14 will be realized: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”

In the grounds outside The United Nations headquarters in New York, stands a statue of a man turning a sword into a plow. It represents the mission of the U.N.O. The United Nations Organization was formed as a result of the second world war. Their goal was to stop war and prevent a third world war. The League of Nations was set up in Geneva in 1920 after the first world war for the same reason. But it failed because nations failed to remain in league. The U.N.O. has also failed because nations have failed to remain united. There have been more wars among the nations since the U.N.O. was set up, than what there were before! No wonder some call the U.N. “United Nothings.”

The failure of their mission was predictable because the statue of a man turning a sword into a plow, was based on the prophecy in Isa. 2:4 which relates to Christ's mission, not the mission of the U.N.O. or any other human organization. The U.N.O. has in a sense, attempted to usurp Christ's role and it was presumptuous and foolhardy to do this.

Only God knows how many billions of people have been killed, maimed and suffered damage to themselves and their property as a result of war throughout human history. Well, the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of God is that it is all going to stop at Christ's return. Instead of living in fear of the carnage of war and running for cover, people will, as we read in Mic. 4:4: "Sit under their fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken it."

It will be said in that day, as we read in Isa. 16:4-5: "The extortioner is at an end; the plunderer has ceased; the oppressors have been consumed out of the land. And in mercy shall the throne be established; and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness."

A MERCIFUL AND JUST KING

We only need to reflect upon the character of the coming king to realize the blessings that will prevail under his rule. Not only is he all-wise and all-powerful and unerring, but he is merciful, kind and pitiful. He can be touched with the feeling of human infirmity and have compassion. His rule therefore, will not be actuated by pride and selfishness. It will be framed for the benefit of those who are in need, especially the humble and poor, whose needs are so often neglected and unheeded by human rulers and governments.

Ps. 72 is a beautiful messianic chapter which presents a glorious picture of Christ's millennial reign. It refers to him having "dominion from sea to sea to the ends of the earth," and of rulers of the nations bowing before him, being in subjection to him and bringing gifts to him. As is stated in v20, the Psalm is a prayer of David and initially relates to his son Solomon during whose reign the kingdom of Israel reached its peak of power and prosperity and peace. Being a type and foreshadow of Christ, the Psalm was prophetic of the ultimate greater and more glorious reign of David's greater son, Jesus Christ.

In connection with this, an interesting speculation has been made. During Solomon's reign, the queen of Sheba came to pay her respects to him and gave him gifts. Sheba occupied the country now known as Aden,

which used to be a British protectorate in subjection to the reigning monarch in England. At the moment queen Elizabeth is the reigning monarch, and in Hebrew, Elizabeth is “Elisheba” which means “God of the oath.” On this basis some have wondered if Christ will return while Elizabeth is still reigning as queen. If so, it would not be difficult to imagine her paying homage to him and giving him gifts as did the queen of Sheba to Solomon. Queen Victoria is reputed to have said that if Christ returned during her reign, she would like to be the first to lay her crown at his feet.

Ps. 72 also refers to the king exercising justice for the poor and needy and breaking in pieces all who exploit and oppress, resulting in righteousness flourishing, and peace prevailing.

INCREASED FERTILITY IN THE EARTH

Reference is also made to increased fertility in the earth, no doubt due to a change of climatic conditions, not to mention the eradication of crop pests and weeds. Various prophecies predict that Christ will create a new heavens and a new earth when he comes. This means he will renew the atmosphere and the earth, and this will involve the eradication of all pollution in the air, land and sea.

On account of sin, the earth was cursed as we read in Gen. 3:17: “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you.” The consequence of this cursed condition of the ground is that toil and arduous labour are necessary to cause it to bring forth its produce for the sustenance of man. Adam was told that “in the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,” and such has been the lot of mankind from the day Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, where life had been much easier and more pleasurable.

Man has become so accustomed to the cursed condition of the soil, that it is regarded as a natural characteristic. Scripture however declares that the curse on the ground is a temporary condition and will disappear when Christ returns and removes it. Rev. 22:3 affirms that the time is coming when “there shall be no more curse.” Paradise will be restored! Speaking of this, Ps. 67:6 declares: “Then shall the earth yield her increase.”

Ps. 72:16 says: “There shall be abundance of grain in the earth upon the highest hills.” High hills are normally more likely to be the least fruitful places. The prophet Amos also declared that “the days are coming

says the Lord, when corn will grow faster than it will be harvested, and grapes will grow faster than the wine can be made” (Am. 9:13). The earth will yield in such profusion that the people will not be able to gather its fruit before time again comes round for ploughing and sowing seed.

A similar prediction is made by God in Ezk. 36:29: “I will call for the corn and will increase it, and will lay no famine upon you; and I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field.” It is evident from these prophecies that the fertility of the ground is going to be greatly increased in the renewed earth.

Isa. 35:1-7 even goes so far to say that the wilderness and desert shall burst into bloom, and that water shall gush forth from the desert, causing the burning sand to become pools of water, resulting in grass sprouting. Vast deserts and sterile tracts of useless land will be transformed into fertile plains, abounding with vegetation and blossoming with flowers. Such a transformation could only occur as a result of a change of climatic conditions and weather patterns, and only the supernatural son of God will be able to do that!

Isaiah the prophet was inspired to declare: “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree” (55:13). “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree and the myrtle and the olive. I will set in the desert the fir tree and the pine and the box tree together” (41:19). This marvellous change will be a source of blessing to all the inhabitants of the earth, and allow huge populations to be sustained.

HARMONY BETWEEN MAN AND CREATION

Not only will the earth be transformed and nations united and at peace, but even wild animals will be transformed and brought into harmony with the rest of creation. Their savage nature will be tamed, and the enmity existing between them and man will be removed. All creation will be brought into that state of peace and friendship which originally existed in the paradise in Eden.

This is what we read in Isa. 11:6-9. 65:25: “The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed together and their young ones will lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. Even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a poisonous snake. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the

knowledge of the Lord as the oceans cover the depths.”

Reference to the lion not attacking and devouring a calf and eating straw like an ox, and of a wolf not attacking and devouring a lamb, indicates that carnivorous animals will become herbivorous, which they originally were in the Garden of Eden.

The effect that the curse upon earth has had due to sin, is expressed in Rom. 8:22: “The whole earth has been groaning and travailing in pain together until now ... waiting for redemption ...” For 6 millenniums there has been conflict, pain and misery in every department of creation. The sky produces storms or drought; the ground produces thorns and thistles, poisonous plants, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; the insect kingdom produces poisonous pests and spreaders of disease; the reptile kingdom produces potent poisons that kill humans and animals; the animal kingdom produces wild and vicious animals which also kill humans and animals; the marine kingdom produces man-eating sharks and a variety of highly toxic creatures. And man himself is his own worst enemy, having killed millions of his own fellow man, and is in the process of destroying his own environment.

What dramatic changes must therefore be going to take place to put an end to all the groaning and travailing that has been taking place in creation. Every single aspect of life and living will be changed, be it political, economic, military, medical, education, environment, agriculture, climate, zoological etc.

SICKNESS AND DISEASE DECLINE

The millennial reign of Christ will certainly bring to an end all medical problems. Sickness and disease will be, if not things of the past, at least heavily reduced. So too will physical defects. Life will lengthen and good health will be evident everywhere. Hospitals, pharmaceuticals, doctors and all the paraphernalia of the modern powerful medical establishment, will be redundant and swept away.

According to Rev. 22:1-2 a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. The throne is, of course, in the city of God which towers above Mount Zion, and the tree of life is on either side of the river. “The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

It can be inferred from Ezk. 47 that the river of water must flow out of the city down Mount Zion to the mortal worshippers’ temple on the southern side of Zion, exiting from under the southern entrance from

which it flows east. According to Zech. 14:8, half of the river flows down into the Dead sea, and the other half flows into the Mediterranean sea. Having its source at the throne of God, it must be impregnated with the healing virtue of His Spirit for we are told in Ezk. 47:8 that the Dead sea will be healed as a result of the water flowing into it and will teem with fish of the same varieties that swim in the Mediterranean sea. It is also stated in Ezk. 47:12 that trees will grow on each side of the banks of this river and their leaves will be used for medicinal purposes.

Many medicines today are extracted from leaves, but the medicinal value of these leaves will be much more powerful and effective for good health and long life due to having drawn their nourishment from the river of water of life that proceeds from the throne of God! Access to such leaves, along with improved food supplies, hygiene, sanitation and less stress, will dramatically increase life expectancy among the mortal population - men and women in all nations will live longer. This is conveyed in a passage of Scripture quoted earlier in Isa. 65:20: "There shall no longer be an infant that lives but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days. To die at the age of 100 will be to die young. Not to live to be 100 will be the sign of a curse."

All the information given in the Bible about the 1,000 years reign of Christ describes a wonderful era of peace, safety, good health and contentment upon the earth. It will not be a time of complete perfection because sin and death will still exist among the mortal population. But when the millennium has run its course and God becomes all in all; sin, mortality and death will disappear forever.

In view of the fact that during the millennium there will be no more wars, famines, pestilences or premature deaths; and the life expectancy of the mortal population will be increased; the human population will obviously rapidly increase during the 1,000 years period. Although the earth's population will be greatly depleted as a result of God's destructive judgements at Christ's return, it shall be repleted during the millennium.

THE POTENTIAL TO SIN REMAINS

However, although the devil power of sin will be greatly restrained during this period, due to the iron rule of Christ; the potential to sin will remain in the flesh as strong as ever and will be as deceitful as ever. As has always been the case: the flesh hates being denied the pleasures of sin and hates being told what to do. It reluctantly buckles under the restraint of authority but secretly resents it and uses any excuse to

challenge it and rebel against it. Such is “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Due to its pride and selfishness, self-centredness and ingratitude, sin is capable of incredibly dumb and outrageous actions, and history is full of examples of this. An example is of Israel rebelling against God and seeking to kill Moses in spite of the visible presence of God being with them in the form of a cloud of glory during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Familiarity with the divine presence led to very contemptible attitudes and actions, resulting in being deceived by sin to follow a foolish course that proved to be suicidal. Truly: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9).

During king Josiah’s reform, he enforced righteousness, resulting in sin being restrained. Everyone was forced to tow the line, giving the impression that all his people had turned to God with their whole heart. But it is pointed out in Jer. 3:10 that it was not genuine or deep rooted. God declared: “You have not turned to me with your whole heart but feignedly.” It was not sincere but false - a pretence and hypocrisy - a sham! When the presence and restraining influence of Josiah was withdrawn at his death, the nation reverted to its old rebellious and wicked ways, resulting eventually in divine judgement falling heavily upon them, bringing to an end the era of their kingdom.

A similar thing will happen at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, bringing that era to a dramatic end. While the saints occupy the cities of the nations during the millennium, and exercise the iron rule of Christ, sin will be restrained preventing revolt, rebellion and war. From year to year all nations will be compelled to send representatives up to Zion to worship the Lord. But not everyone will be pleased with the new order. Secretly in their hearts many will be resentful and will be saying: “We don’t want this man to rule over us, let us break the fetters and cast away the yoke.”

In order for the true condition of hearts to be exposed, the restraint on the devil power of sin will be removed. The symbolic language of Rev. 20:7 puts it like this: “When the thousand years have expired, satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations.” The following verses reveal that the nations will be deceived into marching up against the city to attack it. It should be evident that they would not be able to organize such a rebellion while the saints are ruling over their cities. In order for such a rebellion to take place, the saints and their restraining influence would need to be withdrawn. The saints would need to retreat from all parts of the world. This is clearly what will take place because it is stated in Rev. 20:9 that the saints will be in the city of God

when the nations march up to attack it.

TWO CATAclySMIC EVENTS

It is interesting that the millennium is inaugurated and consummated with two cataclysmic events. It begins and ends with the direct intervention of God, both of which involve very similar dramatic circumstances.

The millennium begins as a result of the fiery judgement of God falling upon the forces of Gog from the land of Magog, which invade the holy land and attack Jerusalem (Ezk. 38). And it ends as a result of the fire of God falling upon Gog and Magog and their forces from the four corners of the earth, which come up to attack the holy city (Rev. 20).

The rebellion is obviously very wide-spread, involving all nations and multitudes of people, for it is stated in Rev. 20:8 that the nations deceived are in “the four quarters of the earth ... the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” This indicates a huge world-wide dissatisfaction and discontent with the restraint placed upon the flesh during the millennium.

Fire falls from heaven upon the army of rebels and devours them before they even reach the gates of the city of God. The second resurrection and judgement then takes place for those who lived and died during the millennium. Those approved by the Lord will be made immortal, and live on endlessly with those who were made immortal at the first resurrection, who lived and reigned with Christ during the millennium. Those rejected will be consigned to the second death from which there is no recovery. There is not a third resurrection.

These events will formally and officially close the millennium. The result will be that no mortals with sinful flesh will be left on the earth. All will be righteous and immortal, and for the rest of eternity will live with Christ in the city of God in the presence of God.

1 Cor. 15:23-28 tells us that Christ must reign till all enemies have been put under his feet. It is therefore inevitable that rebellion is doomed to failure. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. “And when all things shall be subjected unto him, then shall the son also himself be subject to Him (his father) who put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (i.e. “everything to everyone”). At that time, God’s Spirit and power will indwell every single soul redeemed from the human race. All will be equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36). Mortality, death and hell will be things of the past and will be confined to oblivion (Rev. 20:14).

So then, the millennial reign of Christ is both a consummation and a

transitional period. It is a consummation inasmuch as it will bring to a close God's work of calling mortals to be part of His divine immortal family. And it will also be a transitional period because it will be a temporary phase during which there will be a mixture of mortals and immortals. But it eventually leads into a fullness of immortality which will never end, described as God being "all in all."

The biblical revelation ceases at the end of the millennium. We are not told what lies beyond throughout eternity. All we know is that we shall forever be with Christ in glory in an idyllic and euphoric atmosphere, and utopian conditions in which there will be no pain, suffering, sorrow or sadness, but everlasting joy and happiness. Borrowing the words from 1 Cor. 2:9: "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Consider this: If mortal finite man has been able to invent and create things that could not have been conceived or believed by former generations, which have given mankind much enjoyment and pleasure, then think what an immortal infinite God who created man could create for those who love Him! One thing is certain: God is a master at creating new things! Living eternally with God will not be boring!

CHAPTER TEN

JERUSALEM, CITY OF REMARKABLE HISTORY AND DESTINY

Jerusalem is one of the world's famous cities. It dates from at least the second millennium B.C. and is considered sacred (a "holy city") by the adherents of the 3 great monotheistic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The first reference in the Bible to Jerusalem occurs quite early. It is in Gen. 14 which relates to the time of Abraham, about 2,000 B.C. Verse 18 of this chapter refers to "Melchizedec king of Salem" who was also "the priest of the most high God." ("Salem" is an abbreviation of Jerusalem Ps. 76:2).

Melchizedec was both king and priest of Jerusalem, and he went out to meet Abraham, who was returning from a victorious battle against the enemy, who had invaded the land and taken captives, including his nephew Lot. Melchizedec gave Abraham bread and wine and blessed him. He also blessed the most high God. Abraham then gave him a tenth of everything.

On this basis, it is concluded in Heb. 7:1-7 that Melchizedec was greater than Abraham. It is also concluded in Heb. 5 and 7, on the basis of a Messianic prophecy in Ps. 110:4, that Melchizedec was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophecy declares: "The Lord has sworn, and will not change His mind; you (i.e. Jesus) are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." This implies that Jesus, like Melchizedec, will be both king and priest at Jerusalem.

Because the name "Melchizedec" means king of righteousness, and "Salem" means peace (Heb. 7:1-2), he foreshadowed the righteous reign of Christ which will bring peace to the earth when he rules the nations in righteousness from Jerusalem. For this reason Jesus is referred to as "The Lord our righteousness" in Jer. 23:6 and "Prince of Peace" in Isa. 9:6.

Jesus is unquestionably both king and priest. Many Scriptures testify to this. For example, a prophecy in Zech. 6:13 says: "... he shall sit and rule (i.e. as a king) upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." Because the two offices of kingship and priesthood shall be united in one man, there will never be any of the antagonism that divided and disgraced these offices in the past through rivalry when they were held by two men - a king and a high priest.

It is clear then that as far back as the time of Abraham, the Lord

chose and desired Jerusalem as His special dwelling place on earth. The point is made in Ps. 132:13 that: “The Lord has chosen Zion (synonym for Jerusalem); He has desired it for His habitation.”

Not only was it indicated back in Abraham’s day that Jerusalem would be the place where God’s ultimate king-priest, the Messiah, would rule and reign; but it was also indicated that it would be the place where he would be sacrificed. This is seen in God’s command to Abraham in Gen. 22:2 to “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom you love, and go into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I shall show you.” (The “land of Moriah,” according to 2 Chr. 3:1 was where Jerusalem was situated.)

Being “born of the Spirit” (Gal. 4:29) and the promised seed and heir of Abraham, Isaac was a type of Jesus. The journey to Moriah to be sacrificed was a parable in action, portraying the sacrifice of Abraham’s ultimate seed, the only begotten son of Father God. It even portrayed the resurrection as we read in Heb. 11:17-19: “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called. He considered that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which also he did receive him back, in a parabolic sense.”

“THE PLACE”

From the time of Abraham to the time of Moses, a period of about 400 years, Jerusalem disappears from sight. It is not mentioned by name in Scripture during this period. During part of this period, Israel went to Egypt to escape famine in Canaan, and ended up staying there till the time of the exodus, when Moses led them back to the promised land.

During the exodus, God told Israel that when they finally enter the land and become established, there would be a special “place” of his choosing in that land for his name and habitation, which would be the centre of administration and worship for all 12 tribes (Deu. 12:5-7 etc). That “place” was of course Jerusalem.

When Joshua led Israel into the land to conquer it, Jerusalem was possessed by the Canaanites. The first reference to this is in Josh. 10:1. The city was also called “Jebus,” for which reason the inhabitants were called “Jebusites” (Judg. 19:10-11. 1 Chr. 11:4-5). Joshua defeated the king of the Jebusites and his allies on the battle field, but no attempt was made at that stage to enter or possess the city (Josh. 10). The Jebusites continued to dwell in it and occupy it.

Later, during the life of Joshua, the men of the tribe of Judah attempted to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem but failed to do so (Josh. 15:63). However, after the death of Joshua, the men of the tribe of Judah managed to conquer and burn the city (Judg. 1:8). But it seems that the Israelites did not at that stage appreciate the importance of Jerusalem, because although they conquered it, they moved on to the south to fight more battles and did not occupy it.

The Jebusites must have rebuilt and repossessed the city, because the Benjamites whose tribal territory included Jerusalem (Josh. 18:21-28) could not drive out the Jebusites when they attacked them (Judg. 1:21). (Although Jerusalem was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, the Benjamin-Judah border ran through the city, but Judah ultimately took possession of it).

The city originally commanded a portion of the territory of both tribes (Josh. 15:8. 18:28). It was not until the time that David became king of Israel that the Jebusites were conquered and dispossessed of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-10). It seems that the times and seasons of God decreed that Jerusalem was not to be possessed by Israel till the time of David. In the meantime another place called Shiloh, which was situated about 30kms north of Jerusalem, was used as a spiritual centre. The tabernacle was pitched there and sacrifices were offered upon an altar there (Josh. 18:1. 1 Sam. 1:24. Ps. 78:60).

Even before David became king, it seems that he knew that he was destined to conquer Jerusalem and establish it as the centre of the kingdom of Israel. The reason for drawing this conclusion is because after he defeated Goliath, he cut off his head and took it to Jerusalem (1 Sam. 17:54). Davis' Bible Dictionary suggests he erected the head on a spear outside the walls and in view of the city, displaying it before the eyes of the Jebusites as a sign of what awaited them. It was as if to say: "Your turn next."

It was not, of course, due to personal preference that David chose Jerusalem. We read in 2 Chr. 6:1-6 that God himself said to David: "I have chosen Jerusalem that my name might be there."

When David conquered Jerusalem, he established it as the centre of the kingdom of Israel over which he reigned as king. He built a palace on Mount Zion and set up a throne there. He also collected materials for a temple which his son Solomon built on Mount Moriah. Jerusalem became "the place" where the name of the Lord was named and exalted, and where all the tribes of Israel gathered to offer their sacrifices and worship.

David was a righteous king - a man after God's own heart and he

executed righteousness and justice in the land. He put to rout all of his enemies and subdued the nations around Israel and established peace and prosperity. The kingdom he reigned over was a model kingdom. It was the kingdom of God on earth - an outpost of heaven!

David was a type of Christ; so much so that Christ is referred to in some prophecies as “David” (Jer. 30:9. Ezk. 34:23-24. 37:24-25. Hos. 3:5). David’s kingdom based in Jerusalem was a forerunner of the coming kingdom of Christ which will, as we have seen, be the restoration of the kingdom of Israel on a greater and grander scale.

During his life, God promised David on a number of occasions that the Messiah would be his seed and that he would establish his kingdom and reign from Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7. Ps. 2. 110. 132). Many of the prophets after David confirmed this: (Isa. 9:6-7. 55:1-5. Jer. 23:5-6. Ezk. 37:21-22, 25. Hos. 3:4-5. Am. 9:11. Mic. 5:2). But, before Christ’s kingdom comes, the kingdom of Israel and the city of Jerusalem were destined to suffer many upheavals and changes. As a result of apostasy, the throne of David was overthrown and ceased to exist; the children of Israel were uprooted from their land and scattered into all nations, resulting in the kingdom of Israel ceasing to exist, and Jerusalem being trodden down by the Gentiles.

These events were all prophesied, but the prophecies made it clear that this situation would not be permanent or perpetual. When Zedekiah, the last king to reign on David’s throne at Jerusalem, was told by the prophet Ezekiel that God was going to overthrow the throne, the prophet said it would not exist again “until he comes whose right it is, and I will give it to him” (Ezk. 21:25-27). The word “until” defines a limit to the time during which the throne would not exist, and implies that it will be restored when “he comes whose right it is” to sit on it and rule God’s kingdom. The one whose right it is to do this is of course Jesus. This is confirmed by the angel Gabriel’s promise to Mary that the purpose of the Lord was to give her son the throne of David from which he would reign over Israel forever, and of whose kingdom there shall never be an end (Lk. 1:31-33).

The same applies to Jerusalem. When Jesus said the Jews would go into exile and the city would be trodden down by the Gentiles, he added the all-important promise that it would only be “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24). Once again the word “until” implies that the Jewish exile and Gentile occupation of Jerusalem would not be permanent. Ultimately the Jews would return to their land, and Gentile rule over Jerusalem would cease. The time to which Jesus referred was of

course his second coming when he will restore the throne of David at Jerusalem.

Although the Jews have, during the last few decades, returned to their land and regained control of Jerusalem, this has not fulfilled the prophecy. They will again be invaded and conquered by Gentile nations prior to Christ's return. One of the reasons for Christ's return will be to deliver them from the enemy and this will be accomplished as a result of the battle of Armageddon. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, it will not be until Jesus comes that he will "then sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matt. 25:31).

A CITY OF REMARKABLE DESTINY

Jerusalem is certainly a city of remarkable destiny. Ps. 48 refers to it as: "The city of the great king" and "The joy of the whole earth." That these words are prophetic of Christ's future reign from Jerusalem is evident from his quotation of them in Matt. 5:35. He said that Jerusalem "is the city of the great king." He did not say that Jerusalem was the city of the great king, but is the city of the great king, because in the divine programme, it is to be the city where he will reign as king over the whole earth. In that day, due to his righteous reign, there will be joy and peace in the whole earth.

Isa. 65:17-18 relates to this time. God says: "... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people; the voice of weeping shall not be heard in her anymore, nor the voice of crying ..." Also see Isa. 60.

The Jews of course were familiar with these prophecies concerning Jerusalem and were therefore in great expectation when Jesus came on the scene. They expected him at that time to expel the Romans, set up the throne of David at Jerusalem and reign as king over Israel. We read in Lk. 19:11- that on one occasion when he was heading for Jerusalem, the people were expecting him to set up the kingdom then and there. He therefore gave a parable to teach them that he firstly had to go away "into a far country" (heaven) and then return before he would set up the kingdom.

On another occasion he addressed Jerusalem saying: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you; how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not let me. Behold, your house (the temple) is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you,

you will not see me again until you say, blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:37-39).

There can be no doubt that the Jerusalem to which Jesus was referring was the literal physical city known by that name in the land of Israel. His statement clearly teaches that when he comes, he will come to that particular location on the planet.

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, this truth is taught in Acts 1:9-12 which refers to Christ’s ascension to heaven. He chose the Mount of Olives on the east side of the city of Jerusalem as his launching pad. And as he ascended, an angel said to those who were witnessing the event: “This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.” It can be concluded from this that the Mount of Olives will be the touchdown pad at his return.

Around 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Holy Spirit proclaimed through the prophet Zechariah that this indeed would be the case. He said: “ And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is east of Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:4).

The previous verses say that prior to this, all nations will be gathered against Jerusalem and will conquer and occupy the city, causing great tribulation and distress. Verse 3 says: “Then (at the end of the tribulation) the Lord shall go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle.” This refers of course to the battle of Armageddon. It is at this time that “his feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives ...”

The following verses reveal that a mighty earthquake will split the Mount of Olives in half, and will level the hill country around Jerusalem for miles, turning it into a plain. At the same time the site of Jerusalem will be heaved up to a much greater height. Verse 9 declares that in that day “the Lord shall become king over all the earth ... there shall be one Lord, and His name one.”

In the history of the earth there have been too many rulers and religions - too many conflicting ideologies and philosophies, resulting in divisions, conflicts and wars. In order to have peace on earth, there needs to be one ruler and one religion - a righteous, immortal, infallible ruler with absolute power and authority to enforce his righteous will. Jesus Christ, the divinely begotten son of God, alone qualifies. He is “the Lord” who “shall become king over all the earth.” He is “the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) and there will never be lasting peace in Jerusalem or any other part of the earth until he comes and reigns over the nations from Jerusalem. For this reason we are told in Ps. 122:6 to “pray for the peace

of Jerusalem: Those who love you shall prosper.” There will never be peace in the world until there is peace in Jerusalem, and there will never be peace in Jerusalem until Jesus, the Prince of Peace is in the city ruling on his throne.

TRODDEN DOWN BY THE GENTILES

As a result of the Romans expelling the Jews from their land in A.D. 70 and sending them into exile, and other nations moving in to take over, Jerusalem has been “trodden down by the Gentiles” as foretold by Jesus. When the Jews returned to their land in the twentieth century, Moslems occupied Jerusalem, and a Mosque they set up there is regarded as the third most holy site in the Moslem world. In the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, Jerusalem became divided between Israel and the Moslems. Israel held west Jerusalem and the Moslems controlled east Jerusalem. But as a result of the brief 6 day war of 1967, Israel won east Jerusalem and combined it with the western zone. West Jerusalem is the modern part of the city. East Jerusalem includes the old city, the site of many ancient holy places, including the temple mount.

In Biblical times, for about 1,000 years, Jerusalem was regarded by the Jews as the capital city of Israel, because it was their political and religious centre. The Jews today naturally still regard it in the same light. But the Moslem nations and other non-Moslem nations influenced by them, refuse to regard the city as Israel’s capital. They strenuously contend that the city belongs to the Moslems and point to the Mosque as proof. All sorts of pressures are continually exerted against Israel to relinquish Jerusalem, resulting in much tension and division. Bible prophecy refers to this as “the controversy over Zion” (Isa. 34:8) and it will ultimately lead to the battle of Armageddon.

Controversy over Zion and ownership of other parts of the land of Israel has raged many times in the U.N. assembly, and has become a heavy burden for the nations. Significantly enough, this was prophesied in the Bible. Zech. 12:3 declares that Jerusalem would become “a burdensome stone for all nations,” and warns that: “All who burden themselves with it, shall be cut in pieces” i.e. all who take it upon themselves to support Israel’s enemies in an attempt to take Jerusalem away from Israel, will suffer terribly.

Zech. 12:3 goes on to say that the nations will ultimately be gathered together against Jerusalem, which will involve invasion of the land of Israel. But v4 goes on to say that the Lord will intervene and smite them.

This will be the time of the second coming of Christ and the battle of Armageddon. The following verses declare that the Lord will save the Jews and strengthen them and pour upon them the spirit of grace. Verse 10 reveals that it will be at that time that “they shall look upon him whom they have pierced.” They will realise that their Messiah who delivered them is indeed Jesus of Nazareth whose crucifixion they instigated. They will be overwhelmed with remorse by his grace which saved them in spite of their rejection of him. Verses 11-14 tell us that every Jewish family will mourn profoundly due to the realization of the historical blunder they had committed.

From that day forward, Jerusalem will never again be a “burdensome stone” to the nations, but “the joy of the whole earth,” for, as we read in Isa. 24:23: “The Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his elders in glory.”

JERUSALEM SHALL BE CALLED THE THRONE OF THE LORD

In Biblical times when the temple of the Lord was at Jerusalem, it housed the ark of the covenant in the most holy place. The ark of the covenant represented the Lord’s throne on earth, and His presence was manifested upon it. Only the high priest ever got to see the ark and only once a year when he went into the most holy place to make atonement for Israel. No one else was ever able to see it. However, as worshippers came up to Jerusalem from year to year, they would think about it. It would be foremost in their mind, because they knew the presence of God was there.

As a result of the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C. the ark of the covenant and David’s throne disappeared and have never been seen since. To the Jews, this disappearance was a huge loss. The ark of the covenant was a vital and key element to their religion and the throne was a key element to their government. Ever since the disappearance of these precious and priceless articles of furniture, they have been the continual topic of conversation.

However, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes in his glory and manifests the presence of God, and restores the throne of David at Jerusalem, the ark of God will be forgotten and will never be discussed again. The surpassing glory of Christ will overshadow it! Jer. 3:16-17 relates to this: “When your land is once more filled with people, says the lord, you will no longer wish for the good old days of long ago when you possessed the ark of God’s covenant. Those days will not be missed or

even thought about, and the ark will not be reconstructed. At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall be gathered into it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem, (for the Lord Himself will be there); neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.”

This is a rich theme in Scripture and many prophecies present it. A particularly good presentation is in Mich. 3:12 to 4:3: “Because of you (i.e. Israel’s sins) Zion shall be plowed as a field and Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the temple mount a jungle hill. But in the last days it shall come to pass that the temple mount shall tower above the mountains, and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come, and say, come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house (temple) of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people and settle disputes for strong nations afar off. They shall hammer their swords into plows, and their spears into sickles; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall there be training for war anymore.”

There is almost a verbatim version of this prophecy in Isa. 2:1-5.

TOWER ABOVE THE MOUNTAINS

Both prophecies in Mic. 4 and Isa. 2 refer to the temple mount towering above the mountains. This connects with the prophecy in Zech 14 which says Jerusalem is going to be heaved up to a much higher position by the mighty earthquake that occurs at Christ’s return. Other prophecies also relate to this. For example, Ps. 48:2 says Mount Zion will be “beautiful in elevation” when Jerusalem becomes “the city of our God” and “the joy of the whole earth.”

Ps. 68:15-16 indicates that it will be the highest mountain in the land, higher than Mount Hermon which is the highest in that part of the earth at the moment, being 2,773 metres (9,100 feet) high. This is suggested by the fact that Mount Hermon (Mount Bashan) is asked the question: “Why do you look with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the Mount (Zion) which God desired for His abode, where the Lord will dwell forever?”

The end time earthquake is going to reduce the height of mountains around the world, causing them to tumble down into, and fill valleys, and even disappear in some cases (Isa. 40:4. Ezk. 38:20. Rev. 6:14. 16:20). In view of this it is possible that Mount Zion could end up being the highest mountain on the earth.

Ps. 102:13 declares that God's purpose is to "arise and have mercy on Zion" when "the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come." It will be, of course, when Jesus comes in power and glory and manifests himself, that he will "arise." Verse 16 goes on to say: "When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." The Hebrew word translated "build up" is used elsewhere for building something to be elevated. For example, the tower which reached up to heaven which men "builded" in Gen. 11:1-5. When the Lord's appointed time arrives to come and appear in his glory, he shall "build up" Zion by a mighty earthquake, elevating it to a greater height. This seems to be the message in Ps. 102:16 and is, as we have seen, confirmed elsewhere.

THE TEMPLE IN EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

With these thoughts in mind, we go to Ezk. 40 where reference is made to the prophet being taken in prophetic vision to the land of Israel. In this vision he saw and sat upon "a very high mountain," on the south side of which (not on the top!) was a structure the size of a city. The following chapters reveal that it was not a city, but a temple, the size of a city, measuring about 1,600 metres (one mile) square. Not only will this temple be larger than the Old Testament temple built by Solomon, and the New Testament temple built by Herod; but according to Hag. 2:9, "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." And the "very high mountain," on the south side of which the temple will be built, is the elevated site of Jerusalem referred to in the Scriptures quoted before.

The ensuing chapters in Ezekiel's prophecy reveal that the temple will be used by the mortal population among the nations, to worship the Lord during the Millennial reign of Christ. This is "the house of the Lord" referred to in Mic. 4 and Isa. 2 to which the nations will go, saying: "Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways ..."

Other prophecies also refer to this. For example, Isa. 56 refers to both Jews and Gentiles being gathered by God to His holy mountain and making them joyful in His house of prayer. He says: "Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (v7). The words "shall be called" indicates that the statement is prophetic of the future, when not only Jews, but also Gentiles will be allowed to have access. Jesus quoted this prophecy during his ministry and retained the words "shall be,"

indicating that the fulfilment was in the future (Mk. 11:17). It did not relate to Solomon's or Herod's temple. It is also clear from the context of his statement that "the house of prayer for all nations" related to a literal temple.

Isa. 66:15 refers to the Lord coming in anger with fire to rebuke and execute judgement upon all nations, resulting in many being slain. Verse 22 goes on to say that it will be around this time that the Lord will make the new heavens and the new earth, i.e. renew the atmosphere and earth by eliminating all pollution. Verses 13-24 conclude by saying that month by month and week by week "shall all flesh (mortal population) come to worship before me, says the Lord. And on their way out (from the temple) they will see the carcasses of those who have transgressed against me: for their maggots shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and the sight of them shall be disgusting to all mankind."

The prophet Zechariah was also inspired to proclaim messages concerning worship at Jerusalem in the age to come. He said: "Thus says the Lord of hosts; peoples shall come, even the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying: Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I am going. Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the favour of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of one who is a Jew, saying: we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zech. 8:20-23).

Again in Zech. 14:21 we read: "And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be that the rain shall be withheld from any nation that refuses to come to Jerusalem to worship the king, the Lord of hosts ... In that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'holiness to the Lord:' and the cooking pots in the Lord's house shall be like the sacred bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness (sacred) to the Lord of hosts. And all of those who sacrifice shall come and take them, and boil the flesh of the sacrifice in them; and in that day there shall no longer be the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts."

A GREAT AND HIGH MOUNTAIN

There is one more important reference to consider in Rev. 21 to a “high mountain” and Jerusalem. Verse 2 says the apostle John saw “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.” In order to see this he was carried away in the spirit from the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) to a “great and high mountain” (21:10). The fact that John had to be transported to this mountain to see the city descend, indicates that the city was descending to the geographical area or country to which the mountain belonged.

It is generally accepted that this great and high mountain is the same “very high mountain” to which the prophet Ezekiel was carried in prophetic vision. It is plainly stated in Ezk. 40:2 that this mountain was in the land of Israel, and it is evident from the following chapters that it incorporates Mount Zion.

The fact that the city is called “new Jerusalem” indicates that it replaces the old Jerusalem, and that the high mountain is where the old Jerusalem was situated. In Heb. 12:22 “Mount Zion” is inseparably linked with “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

Although Ezekiel and John saw the same high mountain, they did not however, see the same structure in relation to that mountain. Two different structures are involved! The structure seen by Ezekiel was not on the top of the mountain, but on the southward side of the mountain. Due to its size (1,600 metres square) it looked like a city but it was not a city. The following chapters reveal that it was a temple for mortal worshippers. Because it is situated on the side of the mountain, those who go there to worship the Lord are described in Scripture as going up to the mountain of the house of the Lord. The mountain will be seen from afar due to its height, and for those who are heading for the temple and cannot see the temple at a certain distance but who can see the mountain, it will seem like they are going to the mountain.

Although Ezekiel did not see the holy city of Jerusalem descending to Mount Zion, he did however later see another city, but it was nowhere near Mount Zion. It was about 24 kilometres (15 miles) further south in the area of Hebron and was therefore not the holy city of Jerusalem. It is therefore not called Jerusalem but “Yahweh Shammah” (Ezk. 48:35). Instead of being a “holy city” built on a holy mountain, it is described as being in “a profane place” (48:15). “Profane place” means a place for the general or common use of mortals. This city measures about 2,250 metres (1½ miles) square and will provide accommodation for the mortal

worshippers who come to worship the Lord at the temple. The fact that the temple is 1,600 metres square indicates that large numbers of mortals will come to worship the Lord. It is not surprising therefore that the city which will accommodate these worshippers is 2,250 metres square.

A REVELATION

So then, the question that naturally arises is this: If the mortal worshippers will worship in the temple on the southward side of Mount Zion, and will be accommodated in the city south of Zion, where will the multitudes of immortal saints be based and where will the holy city of the new Jerusalem be? The answer is provided in Revelation chapter 21 and it truly is a revelation!

John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, in prophetic vision, coming down from heaven. It is evident from this that the city will not be built upon earth by man. Heb. 11:10 plainly states that the “builder and maker is God,” and Heb. 13:14 confirms that the city is “one to come.” It is referred to as “Jerusalem above” in Gal. 4:26; “heavenly Jerusalem” in Heb. 12:22 and “the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God” in Rev. 3:12.

This is the city that Abraham (and his seed) looked for as we read in Heb. 11:10. Because Abraham looked for a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God, he refused to take up residence in a heathen city built by the Canaanites. Instead, he preferred to live in tents as a stranger and foreigner while he waited for the city of God to come (Heb. 11:9-10).

The wonderful prospect of the blessed Christian hope is described in Heb. 12:22-23 in terms of us looking forward to: “Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels in high festival, and to a church of firstborns which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all ...”

In this passage we learn that access to the city will be gained from Mount Zion, and that the angels, the church and God Himself will all be in the city. Rev. 7:9-12 actually refers to both the angels and saints joined together in worship before the throne of God.

Because there are at least 100 million angels (Rev. 5:11) and possibly a similar number of saints, the city would have to be huge to accommodate them all. It certainly is! Rev. 21:16 reveals that it is of mind-boggling proportions. The total circumference of the city is 12,000 furlongs or stadia, which is 2,400 kilometres or 1,500 miles. The length, breadth and height are equal, which means the city is a perfect

geometrical shape - a cube - a cubical city 600 kilometres (375 miles) square. This is surely significant in view of the fact that the most holy place in both the tabernacle and temple was a cube and represented heaven.

Reference in Rev. 22 to the throne of God being in the city teaches that the city is indeed heaven, and it is coming to earth. From this we learn that heaven is not some ethereal or spectral or nebulous state, neither is it another planet in a fixed orbit somewhere in space like planet earth. No! It is a city - a mobile city that can traverse space and settle wherever God wills. The throne of God is also mobile as we read in Ezk. 1. It is not fixed to the city and can be transported outside the city.

In passing, it should be pointed out that the throne in heaven is referred to in the book of Revelation as “the throne of God and the Lamb” (22:1-3). The throne is unmistakably the Father’s, for Jesus referred to it as “His throne” (Rev. 3:21). However, because Jesus has been invited to sit at the right hand of his Father (Ps. 110:1), the throne is referred to as “the throne of God and the Lamb.” However, the restored throne of David will be in the inner court of the temple on the southern slope of Mount Zion, referred to in Ezekiel’s prophecy (43:5-7). “The Prince” (Jesus) visits this temple once a week on the Sabbath day and departs on the same day (Ezk. 44:1-2. 46:1-2). He clearly does not live there. He lives in the city of God.

We read in Ps. 132:13-14 these words: “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.” In the past, David’s throne, which represented the throne of the Lord on earth, was situated upon Mount Zion, and the temple consisting of the most holy place which represented heaven, was situated on Mount Moriah. Well, both Mount Zion and the temple mount are going to be heaved up by the end time earthquake at Christ’s return, and the city of God which descends at the same time, will “rest” upon the mountain. The city will therefore be suspended over and above the holy land like a canopy. Reference is made to this in Isa. 4:5-6: “The Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies, a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion. It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.”

Seeing that heaven, the holy city, is coming down to rest on Mount Zion, it is not surprising that it is stated in Ezk. 43:12 that the top of the mountain “shall be most holy.” The expression “most holy” is used

elsewhere to describe the most holy place in the tabernacle and temple which represented heaven. Because the holy city is heaven and is coming to rest upon Mount Zion, it is appropriate that the top of the mount should be referred to as being “most holy.”

When Mount Zion is heaved up, it will not be a narrow peaked mountain. It will be more like a table mountain for we read in Rev. 14:1 about 144,000 standing on it.

Many believe that the city of God came down to Sinai when God gathered His people there to speak to them and give them His law. This is believed on the basis of a statement in Ps. 68:17 that Yahweh was at Sinai with His angels. If so, the city was concealed by clouds from Israel, but Moses may have seen it when he ascended the mount. The same could be true of the city in the future when it descends and is suspended over the holy land i.e. it could be concealed from mortal gaze.

As already pointed out: access will be gained to the city by ascending Mount Zion. (Ps. 15 and 24 can be related to this). However, there are 12 gates around the city; three on each side. This suggests that access to, or departure from the city will also be possible at these gates. If so, there may be a stairway from each gate, as in the case of Gen. 28:12 where reference is made to angels ascending and descending upon a stairway that extended from the land of promise to heaven. The city of God must have been hovering above, probably out of sight above the clouds.

A LITERAL CITY NOT SYMBOLICAL

Some of course, have spiritualized away the city of God and claim that it is not a literal city but symbolical of the church. One of the reasons for doing this is because Rev. 21:2 says the city is “as a bride adorned for her husband.” Because the church is elsewhere referred to as Christ’s bride, it is concluded that the city is the church. But Rev. 21:2 does not say that the city is the bride, but is “prepared as (i.e. like) a bride adorned for her husband.” The beautiful adornment of the city, which the following verses describe, is compared to the beautiful adornment of an Eastern bride. Such brides were decked out with gold and precious stones, and so also is the city of God, as was Solomon’s temple at Jerusalem (1 Chr. 29:2-8. 2 Chr. 3:6).

Because Rev. 21:9 refers to John being told to “come here, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife,” and then in v10 it says he was shown the holy city Jerusalem descending out of heaven; some have concluded that the city must be the bride. But this is only an assumption.

It could just as easily be assumed that the bride was in the city as a result of having been caught up into the air to meet the Lord as he descends from heaven, and therefore to see her, John had to firstly see the city and give a description of it.

If the city is not literal, why is the particular physical measurement of 12,000 furlongs given to describe its size, not to mention the 144 cubit high wall and 12 gates with 12 angels standing at the gates? Those who spiritualize the city away cannot give a convincing answer to these questions. They accept that reference to 1,000 years reign is literal but won't accept that 12,000 furlongs is literal. Some have even tried to spiritualize away the temple in Ezekiel's prophecy and the attempts that have been made are as unconvincing as the attempts to spiritualize away the city of God. If the city is the church, how can the references to the throne of God being in it, as well as a street, gates, the tree of life and a river be explained?

Rev. 20:9 refers to armies coming up against "the camp of the saints, and the beloved city." A distinction is made here between the church and the city. It is evident that the city is the dwelling place of the church, not the church itself.

Rev. 21:27 and 22:14 say that those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will be permitted to enter through the gates into the city. This clearly teaches that the church is not the city, but enters the city! The same distinction between the city and the church can also be seen in Heb. 12:22 where Mount Zion, the city of God, the angels and the church are all treated as separate entities. To equate the city with the church would be as unjustified as equating the church with the angels or Mount Zion.

Can it be seriously believed that the reference in Heb. 11:8-10 to Abraham preferring to live in tents rather than a city, because he looked for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God, means he was looking for the church? The statement relates to the place where Abraham hoped to live, not the people with whom he would live. The contrast is clearly between the temporary, flimsy and foundationless habitation of a tent, and the larger more durable structure of a city. The contrast is not between a small company of people and a larger company, although that can be inferred.

WHERE WILL THE SAINTS SIT WITH ABRAHAM?

When Abraham and his “seed” - the multitudinous body of Christ, which will involve millions of people, are gathered together to Zion in the promised land to sit down or recline, as we read in Matt. 8:11, where are they going to recline - out in the paddocks? No! Paddocks are for tents and Abraham will not be reverting to that form of habitation. He and his seed will have the city of God. The church will certainly not be waiting for the nations to come together to build a city or temple before being able to recline with Abraham.

The concept of the city of God being literal may be regarded as bizarre by some, but it is not very long ago that even the concept of man building a city in space was regarded as impossible, and something that should be confined to science fiction. Truth sometimes turns out to be stranger than fiction, and this will prove to be the case in relation to the city of God.

Without the city of God, a huge hole or vacuum is created in one’s concept of the kingdom of God, even if it is accepted that the temple and Yahweh Shammah city in Ezekiel’s prophecy will literally be built. But both of these structures are clearly for mortal worshippers and would be far too small to accommodate the hundreds of millions of angels and saints. It is an inescapable conclusion that the city of God will have to be of gigantic proportions and the measurements given in Rev. 21 meet that requirement.

From a purely human point of view, the dimensions of the city of God are staggering and unbelievable, defying all human imagination. It is natural to be repelled at the thought of it being literal. A city of such mammoth proportions is so mind boggling that the finite mind immediately has an urge to reject a literal interpretation and regard it as highly symbolic and spiritualize it all away. But if we do this, and spiritualize it all away into aerial nothingness, how unmeaning, yea, even bordering on folly, do the descriptions of size etc become!

To reject such a city by frittering it all away into vague symbolism, would be tantamount to taking the solid reality of it away from Scripture. It is therefore significant that it is in the very context of the prophecy of the city of God that the warning is given that those who take anything away from the prophecy, will be excluded from the city. This of course would be just. It is reasonable to expect that those who don’t believe in the city and who mock at the concept of it, will not be granted access to it, much in the same way that it is sometimes argued that those who do not

believe in the land promised to Abraham, will not be allowed to inherit it.

As things stand in some circles, there is no city of God in their theology for Abraham and his seed, only the land - land without a home! This is a huge and serious omission. Abraham not only expected to inherit land but also a city.

If, as is the case in some circles, the temple for mortal worshippers in Ezekiel's prophecy is regarded as important enough to write a 300 page book about and have an artist's impressions of it displayed on the walls of their places of worship, then think what kind of attention should be given to the city of God in which the immortal worshippers will live and worship with the angels and Christ, and bask in the very presence of the eternal God Himself!

It is clearly important to know and understand the true significance of the city of God. So much is at stake. It is a major issue. The importance of the city is surely indicated by the fact that the revelation of it is withheld until the last two chapters of the last book of the Bible. It is the crown and culmination of divine revelation - the grand climax to the prophetic Word! A real revelation in every sense of the word.

If the city of God is literal, imagine the reaction of those who do not believe this when it finally appears in the sky at the return of Christ. How embarrassing, especially for those who have claimed to possess the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, to have not believed in it and therefore not anticipated it. Taken by surprise when they see it they will exclaim: "What is that?" And Jesus may reply: "I told you about this and gave you a detailed description, but it was too big for your little minds and faith to receive, so you symbolized it all away."

Truly, as we read in Ps. 87: "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." The whole text from verses one to three reads like this: "On the holy mount stands the city He founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God."

It would truly be an awesome experience to ascend the holy hill of the Lord and enter His city, even heaven itself and behold His glory. But the pertinent question is: Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? This question is asked and answered in Ps. 24:3-6: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not pay homage to worthless things nor swears deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of His salvation. Such are the people who seek Him, that seek thy face O God of Jacob."

“Blessed are they that do His commandments (“who wash their robes” R.V.) that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14).

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And he who sat upon the throne said: “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:2-5).



A more comprehensive treatment of this subject is available in a 70 page book entitled: “The City of God - Literal not Symbolic” written by the same author.