

Basileiology: What the Bible Says about the Kingdom

Introduction to the Kingdom

The Kingdom of God is a topic that appears on almost every page of the Bible. It's strange, therefore, that we Christians don't give much thought to the intricacies of the Kingdom in our daily routine. However, the Kingdom touches everything we believe. Whether we realize it or not, history makes sense only if we relate its events and movements to God. How we live our lives in this present world is dictated by our view of the Kingdom of God. It really is the "grand theme of Scripture." It is foundational to every other branch of Bible doctrine.

Like so many other biblical issues, we don't need to understand the Kingdom in order to be saved. But if our desire is to become mature in our faith – to grasp and to appreciate what God is doing in this universe and why He is doing it – then we must address the question, "What does the Bible teach about the Kingdom of God?" As we'll see in a moment, most of the bizarre heresies that have crept into the Church have been the result of someone's failure to analyze the biblical presentation of the Kingdom.

1. There are **three elements** to every kingdom.

- A _____ with power and authority

You cannot have a kingdom without a king or queen – a monarch of some kind, sitting on a throne or living in a palace.

- A _____ of subjects to be ruled

Maybe the kingdom has little or no physical territory; but if there are people who recognize that they have a king, then a kingdom exists.

- A _____ -- interaction between the two

Even if the duties of the king are merely ceremonial, whatever brings the monarch and the subjects together creates the essence of a kingdom.

The reason we make an issue of these three elements is that there are some theologians who say that we live in a kingdom with no king. God is dead, or God is disinterested in us, or God has lost control of His universe. But the Bible speaks of the human race as existing within the *Kingdom* of God. If it is the Bible which determines what is true

about God, then we must conclude that He is very much interested and involved in the day-to-day operation of the universe. Either the deists are right – those who say that God created the world, set the universe in motion, and then stepped away so as not to interfere – or the Bible is right.

2. These three designations are important because they prevent us from falling into one or more of the errors mentioned below. Throughout the centuries, **eight inadequate and unbalanced views** of God’s Kingdom have confused (and sometimes split) the Church.

- The Kingdom = _____

Most Jewish people have assumed this, and it has led them to conclude that all of God’s kingdom promises and blessings are fulfilled in the modern-day nation of Israel. They believe that the Kingdom of God was established (or revived) in 1948.

- The Kingdom = _____

The Bible does declare that at the Second Coming of Christ, the government of God will be established upon the earth for a thousand years. That is the belief of those who are premillennialists and literalists – taking the Bible at face value regarding the future reign of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But the Millennial Kingdom alone cannot account for the many Scripture references to a Kingdom which has always been in existence.

- The Kingdom = _____

A number of authors have decided that, when the Bible talks about “entering the Kingdom of heaven,” it simply means “going to heaven” at the time of death. But there are future aspects of this Kingdom that must be ignored if it consists only of “going to heaven.”

- The Kingdom = _____

In the Roman Catholic system, people are taught that the Church is the visible hierarchy of the Kingdom of God. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, several groups arose which taught that the Kingdom consists of all true Christians. But there are hints in the Bible that the Kingdom of God extends beyond either the visible Church or the invisible Church.

- The Kingdom = _____

There is a teaching among many evangelical scholars that the Kingdom is merely the human heart – that it isn't connected to any institution, but only to individuals who surrender their allegiance to Christ. There is an element of truth in this idea; but to say that the realm of God excludes everyone but the saved is to do injustice to statements that his Kingdom is universal.

- The Kingdom = _____

This idea was proposed by Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. He said that as long as there are systems of ethics being used by human beings, it was all the Kingdom of God we were likely to see. In fact, he taught that the presence of moral law is the only way we can prove that a God exists at all. A lot of intellectuals have embraced the philosophy of Kant. But he seems to have disposed of the need for faith, and he seems to have disposed of a great deal of plain biblical statements.

- The Kingdom = _____

In the 20th century, a large segment of the population adopted the belief that the Kingdom is the equivalent of society. Many leading theologians declared that “if only we could somehow reconstruct the social climate of our world so that there would be no more war and no more poverty and no more racial strife”, then we would surely “bring in the Kingdom.” But believing in the inherent goodness of man, and believing in the universal Fatherhood of God and believing in the virtues of socialism and believing that God is interested only in satisfying our physical appetites – all of these ideals were dashed to pieces by a couple of World Wars and by rampant poverty and by uncontrollable crime in the streets.

- The Kingdom = _____

There is a King, and there is a Kingdom, but the Lord is so far over and above the nastiness of this world that we cannot possibly hope that our world and God's world will ever intersect. In fact, it is impossible to know anything for certain in a universe that is so distant from God. This happens to be the most popular Kingdom idea at the first part of the 21st century. It is the view being taught in the oldest and most prestigious seminaries in Europe and America. It is the concept that oozes from most of the mainline pulpits in America on a typical Sunday morning.

Whatever the Kingdom is, it cannot be reduced to any of these inadequate explanations. The biblical material suggests that the Kingdom has a depth and a transcendence that defies simplicity.

3. Many Bible statements about the Kingdom are paradoxical.

- Is it eternal or temporal?

Psalm 10:16 – “Yahweh is King forever and ever.”

Daniel 2:44 – “(At some undisclosed point in the future, God will) set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed.... It will crush and put to an end all (other) kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”

- Is it universal or localized in a particular geographic area?

Psalm 103:19 – “His kingdom rules over all.”

Isaiah 24:23 – “The Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Zion.”

- Is it direct or mediatorial?

Psalm 59:13 – “Let them know that God rules to the ends of the earth.” (This implies that God can manage the entire globe without any help from anyone.)

Psalm 2:4-6 – “He who sits in the heavens laughs. Yahweh scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury: ‘But as for me, I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.’”

- Is it future or present?

Zechariah 14:9 – “(In a distant, future day) The Lord shall be king.”

Psalm 29:10 – “The Lord sits as King forever.”

- Is it unconditional or covenantal?

Daniel 4:34-35 – “But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’”

Psalm 89:27-29 – “I shall also make him my first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, and my covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”

God would not issue these seemingly contradictory statements about his Kingdom merely to confuse us. The only reasonable solution to these puzzles is **that there must be two aspects of the Kingdom of God**. Theologians have struggled to find ways to differentiate between these two sides of the Kingdom. It’s obvious that most of the biblical material is focused on the Temporal Kingdom, the aspect of the Kingdom in which God sets up his Agent upon an earthly throne. We may refer to this as the Mediatorial Kingdom of God. But before discussing that topic, there is much to be said about the Universal Kingdom.

4. Facts about the **Universal Kingdom** that are clear from Scripture

- It has existed since _____

Psalm 74:12 – “Yet God is my king from of old, who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth.”

Lamentations 5:19 – “You, O Yahweh, rule forever; your throne is from generation to generation.”

By our definition, a genuine kingdom must have a ruler, a realm, and a reign. Before God created the universe and populated it with men and angels, there was no realm. So the Kingdom of God has a beginning, but no end.

- It includes everything in _____

Psalm 103:19-20 – “Yahweh has established his throne in the heavens, and his sovereignty rules over all. Bless Yahweh, you his angels, mighty in strength, who perform his word, obeying the voice of his word!”

The strange notion that the devil is the king of hell has no basis in divine revelation. God is the king of hell, just as he is the king of everything else in time and space. And because this is so, that everlasting prison-house of the lost will not be the noisy and disorderly place that is sometimes imagined by the popular

mind. There is no more orderly place than a well-disciplined prison, even under imperfect human government. There will be no riots in hell.¹

- It is usually administered by _____

Psalm 148:8 – “Fire and hail, snow and fog, stormy winds fulfilling his word....”

Esther 6:1 – “During that night the king could not sleep, so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written what Mordecai had reported....”

Never underestimate the power of God to use normal, everyday occurrences to accomplish his will!

- It is sometimes administered by _____

Daniel 6:27 – “God works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth.”

Psalm 135: 6-9 – “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightning for the rain; who brings forth the wind from his treasuries. He smote the first-born of Egypt, both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants.”

- Its King exerts authority over _____

Ephesians 1:11 – “God works all things according to the counsel of his own will.”

Psalm 75:4-7 – “I said to the boastful, ‘Do not boast,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn ... on high, do not speak with insolent pride.’ For not from the east, nor from the west, nor from the desert come exaltation; but God is the judge; he puts down one and exalts another.”

- It is supervised by _____

Colossians 1:17 – “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

¹ McClain, Alva J., *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 25.

Hebrews 1:3 – “And he is the radiance of his glory, and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power. When he had made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high....”

The very same Person who went to the cross for us, who shed his own blood in payment for our sins, is the one who created the universe, whose job it is to uphold and to sustain the universe, who functions as the manager of God’s Universal Kingdom.

The grandest theme in all the Bible is not the story of man or the story of the cross or the story of redemption. All of those are elements of this one great theme: God is the King, we dwell within his Kingdom, and he exerts kingly authority over everything that exists.

The Kingdom of God cannot be oversimplified. It’s not merely an earthly nation or a future event or an underlying moral foundation to society. The Kingdom of God is as vast and as all-encompassing as time and space.

The Kingdom of God undergirds everything we know about heaven and earth and life and death and God and man.

Every time man has attempted to govern himself or even to govern on behalf of God, man has failed. None of us qualified to serve as God’s “Secretary of State.” No human being has ever succeeded as God’s Mediating King, until Jesus came along. He was and is the only one worthy to occupy the throne of heaven, the throne of Israel, or the throne of the human heart.

The Tarnished Crowns of Yesterday

In the Old Testament, God altered the earthly design of his Kingdom five times to prove that any sinner on the throne would get the same negative results.

1. The Patriarchs as mediators of God’s Kingdom

- _____ dominion ended in disobedience

Genesis 1:26 – “Then God said, “Let Us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Hebrew 2:7-8 – "You have made (man) for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and have appointed him over the works of your hands; you have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in subjecting all things to (man), (God) has left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him."

- _____ mediation ended in worldwide disaster.

Genesis 6:5, 8 – "Then Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.... But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

2nd Peter 2:5 – "...Noah, a preacher of righteousness...."

- _____ reign was marred by doubt.

Genesis 12:1-3 – "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless, you, and make your name great...."

Genesis 12:10-20 – "And it came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, 'See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman.... Please say that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me....'"

Genesis 16:1-4 – "Sarai said to Abram, 'Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her.' And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai."

- _____ inconsistencies led to exile.

Genesis 15:13-16 – "Your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs."

Acts 7:17 – "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt...."

The patriarchs of the human family were chosen by God to rule over his earthly kingdom. And one by one they all proved incapable of handling the job, because of disobedience and weakness and doubt and sin.

2. Moses as mediator of God's Kingdom

- He was God’s first mediator to exercise regal authority over a _____

Acts 7:35 – “This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the Angel who appeared to him at the thorn bush.”

- He delivered the _____ through which God would rule his Kingdom.

Exodus 19:4-6 – “Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

- He was an _____ mediator.
- Numbers 20:2-12 – “And he said to them, ‘Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod...”

3. The judges as mediators of God’s Kingdom

- They were _____ chosen.

Judges 2:16 – “Then the Lord raised up judges to deliver them from those who had plundered them.”

- They functioned as _____

1st Samuel 3:19-4:1 – Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord.... Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

- They were endowed with the _____

Judges 3:10 – “And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel.”

- They were not _____

Judges 9:56 – “Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father, by killing his seventy brothers.”

- They were _____

Judges 21:25 – “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

4. The monarchs as mediators of God’s Kingdom

- The significance of Israel’s monarchs

-- To God: It was part of _____

Genesis 17:6 – “And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.”

1st Chronicles 17:14 – God, speaking to David regarding Solomon, says, “But I will settle him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”

-- To Israel: It took the place of _____

1st Samuel 12 (especially verses 24-25) – “Only fear Yahweh and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king shall be swept away.”

-- To the nations: It was _____

1st Samuel 8:4-18 (especially verse 7) – “And Yahweh said to Samuel, ‘Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.’”

Even if Israel did want a king “like all the other nations around us,” what they got was a king who did something completely different from any other king in the world: he prayed to the one true God. And the word got around: The God of Israel was genuine. The people of Jericho had already heard about the miracle-working God who led Israel, and they knew their walls couldn’t keep him out. The Philistines had heard about the all-powerful God of Israel, and they knew it was impossible to defeat him. How ironic that the heathen enemies of Israel often had more faith in their God than Israel did!

- The glory of Israel’s monarch

-- _____ dominance

Chapters 5 and 8 of 2nd Samuel give the details of David's brilliant career as a wartime king. He drove out the Philistines and other marauders. He captured the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital. He struck fear into the hearts of every king with 10,000 miles.

-- _____ wealth

Read 1st Kings, chapters 9-10. "So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth came to Solomon, to hear the wisdom which God had put into his heart."

-- _____ continuity

1st Kings 2:2-3 – In David's final words of wisdom to his son Solomon, he said, "I am going the way of all the earth; therefore, be strong; be a man; obey the commands which you have received from the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his laws, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do."

Whatever may have been unique and impressive about the kingdom of Israel under the reign of David and Solomon, it was still the same dominion that God had established under Moses, and was governed by the same laws that Moses had brought down from Mt. Sinai.

- The decline of Israel's monarchy

-- The sin of _____

In spite of his God-endowed wisdom, the man failed in one arena after another. He became the very king against whom Samuel had warned 60 years earlier. In fact, he openly violated the first three rules that God had said should govern the conduct of a king: He multiplied his armed forces beyond reason; he multiplied wives; and he amassed a personal fortune.

And finally, it is said of him in 1st Kings 11:4 – "For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been."

-- The rupture of _____

1st Kings 12 recounts the end of the united monarchy and the beginning of yet another 400-year period of defeat and disgrace with ten tribes splitting off to the north and calling themselves Israel while only Judah (along with the tiny tribe of Benjamin) remained in the south. Over the years they were at war with one another as much as they were at war with outside kingdoms. In the north, they never had one righteous king in 400 years; and in the south, the few good kings they had were soon gone.

-- The failure of _____

1st Samuel 8:19-20 display the key to this whole sad segment of history. The people insisted on having a king 'that we may be like all the nations.' They wanted a king who could help them "fit in' with the worldly, wicked, blasphemous populations surround them. They wanted a king who could "judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" – a king, in other words, who depended on his own strength and his own wisdom to lead.

And that's exactly what they got. And the monarchy failed, the kingdom split, the glory of the Lord departed from Jerusalem, simply because when you put a sinner on the throne, you're going to have a sinner as king.

5. The prophets as mediators of God's Kingdom

- They pinpointed Israel's _____

Isaiah 5:20 – "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

Nobody liked the prophets. The prophets were constantly in danger for their lives, because they didn't mince words. They told the truth about the cause of Israel's problems. The cause was sin.

- They called the nation to _____

Jeremiah 6:16 – "Stand by the way and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls."

Even though these people who had all of the blessings and privileges that God could pour out upon them, had responded to those blessings by consistently turning their backs on him – even though these people had made a mockery of God's love and had scorned his law – still the Lord stood with arms open wide and invited his people to

come home. As he said in a vision to Solomon in 2nd Chronicles 7:14, “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

- They warned of divine _____

Malachi 3:2-5 – “But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. And he will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.... “

- They reasserted God's _____

Zechariah, after filling the peoples' ears with messages of doom and gloom, reassured them (14:7, 9), “Even when things seem to be getting darkest, you will see a light...and the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and his name will be the only one.”

As the last pages of the Old Testament history were being written, and Israel faded into a second-rate nation constantly beaten up and passed around from one conqueror to another, still there were glimmers of hope. God wasn't finished with the Kingdom, and God had not given up on the idea of placing a human king on an earthly throne and ruling his Kingdom through the agency of a Mediator.

But God had altered the design of his Mediatorial Kingdom five times in history. He had worked through the patriarchs, through Moses, through judges and monarchs and prophets. But they had all failed. But God's plan had not been thwarted. He knew that the human king needed for his Kingdom would have to be perfectly sinless; and that the only one qualified to be such a King was his own Son. So, in a move that Jewish scholars could not comprehend, God prepared to send his Son to be not only the King of his Kingdom, but the Savior of his people.

The Kingdom as They Expected It

The Old Testament sometimes reads like a very long, very tedious load of bad news. But that would only be true if it were not for the prophecies. From one end of the Old Testament to the other, the prophets filled God's people with hope, as one writer after another delivered this message from the Lord: "Someday I will give you a King and a Kingdom that will never disappoint you, will never fail you, and will never end."

1. Introduction to Kingdom prophecy

- There are two unique features of Kingdom prophecy

-- Every prediction has a _____ context

Isaiah 9:6-7 – "For unto us a child will be born; unto us a son will be given. And the government will rest upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace. On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this."

Suppose we could ignore the historical context of words like "child" and "David" and "government" and "kingdom." We could twist this passage to mean that God will continue to influence the hearts of men from his throne in heaven. This is precisely the way many have interpreted Isaiah 9:6-7. They refuse to acknowledge any historical foundation for the prediction, and they make it mean whatever will fit their already-constructed scenario for the future.

-- Many prophecies have a _____ fulfillment

Malachi 4:5-6 – "Behold, I am going to send back the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord."

Many people assumed that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of that, because he was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. They even asked him, "Are you Elijah?" He said, "No, I'm John." But when they asked *Jesus* if John had been the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, he said, "If you were to accept me as your king, you would discover that John *was* Elijah."

But they didn't accept Jesus as king. They nailed him to a cross and he died there for our sins, just as God knew they would. He was buried and rose again, he went back up to heaven, and he said, 'I'm coming again.' There is biblical evidence that upon Christ's second coming, the actual Elijah will appear to pave the way.

- The methods of interpreting Kingdom prophecy²

-- The skeptical method: "Literal but _____"

Skeptics have studied the Bible and have concluded that its prophecies are absurd. They attack Isaiah's picture of a future kingdom in which all wild animals will become tame and a little child will be able to control them (Isaiah 11:6-8). They scoff and say, "It would require a miracle for that to happen!"

The skeptics deride anything that suggests the supernatural or the miraculous. They don't mind that Joel or Amos or Obadiah foresaw a worldwide kingdom filled with holiness and righteousness. They just don't believe it will ever happen. So they interpret every word about the future Kingdom with the same air of intellectual snobbery and doubt.

-- The selective method: "Non-literal but _____"

Since the Renaissance infected the Church's theology, whole segments of the Church have preferred to accept few biblical statements at face value. Every verse, every line is assumed to have a hidden meaning.

For example, some will agree that the Book of Revelation says that the Lord Jesus will rule and reign for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). But their hermeneutic demands that the number 1,000 is symbolic for "a very long time." Other numbers are viewed with equal suspicion: the six days of creation, the forty years of Israel's wandering, the three days and nights of Jesus' burial – all symbolic, none literal.

-- The normal method: "Both _____"

This method starts with a hypothesis: The God who desired to reveal himself to people through the pages of Scripture would expect us to attach normal meanings to his words. It assumes no logic to the bending and twisting of the

² For a broader discussion of this topic, see "Biblical Interpretation," pages 4-8 of this syllabus.

Bible to give magical, mystical meanings to its words. Those who regard this as the “normal” method in interpretation are satisfied to take the words of God in their plain, normal sense.

- The extent of Kingdom prophecy: It covers _____ of the Old Testament.

Generally we may say that Old Testament prophecy of the future Mediatorial Kingdom of God begins with a few scattered references in the Pentateuch; opens up clearly in the records of the historical kingdom, grows in volume and brilliance as the historical kingdom declines, and comes to its close in Malachi.³

2. Generalities regarding Kingdom prophecy

- The Kingdom will be _____

Obadiah 17-21 – “But on Mt. Zion there will be those who escape, and it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.... Then those of the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain; also they will possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead....” These are real places in a real land.

Isaiah 24:23 – “The Lord will reign on Mt. Zion and in Jerusalem.” This is a real place in a real capital city.

In order to dismiss the Kingdom as “underground” or “invisible” – very influential but always working below the surface of the *real* earth – one must dispose of many hundreds of Bible references which paint God’s Kingdom as a tangible, literal earthly government.

The Kingdom will be _____

Joel 2:30-31 – “And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”

Joel 3:9-16 (especially verses 12-14) – “Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the

³ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 145-146.

vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”

Joel is a fireworks display of what the world is going to see when God is ready to usher in his Mediator. Cosmic disturbances and worldwide catastrophes will convince every human being that Yahweh is just about to appear.

- The Kingdom will be _____

Isaiah 7:14 – “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.”

Isaiah 11:1-5 – “...And the Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. And he will delight in the fear of Yahweh, and he will not judge by what his eyes see, nor make a decision by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth.... Also righteousness will be the belt about his loins, and faithfulness the belt about his waist.”

Isaiah 65:17-25 – “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.... I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping.... For as the lifetime of a tree, so shall be the days of my people.... Before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.... They shall do no evil or harm in all my holy mountain....”

Throughout history, God’s Kingdom upon this earth has flickered and faltered and stumbled and fizzled; and there is no visible remnant of it today; because there has never been a perfect man to mediate God’s realm. We have gotten by on earthly governments with earthly leaders who have often ignored or even resisted the Spirit of God. Life on this planet has gotten less and less enjoyable even in our lifetime. We long for the leadership of the Perfect Man, whose reign is so gloriously portrayed by Isaiah!

- The Kingdom will control _____

Read Jeremiah 31:27-34. Instant justice and spiritual truth injected directly into us by God himself – these will be characteristics of the Kingdom.

Zechariah 14:20-21 – “In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, ‘HOLY TO THE LORD.’ And the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like the bowls before the altar. And every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of Hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them.”

Imagine! In that day even the most mundane thing, like a pan or a horse’s bridle, will be dedicated to the Lord. Everything will be under his wise and wonderful control.

- The Kingdom will endure _____

Isaiah 9:7 – “There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.”

Daniel 7:13-14 – “...His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and his kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”

Apparently, at the end of the thousand years, the Lord Jesus is going to deliver the kingdom over to his Father; God will cleanse and remake the universe in a spectacular show of creative power; and eternity will proceed in the way that is described in the last two chapters of Revelation.

At this time Christ will hand over the Mediatorial Kingdom to God, to be merged into the eternal Kingdom, so that the Mediatorial Kingdom is perpetuated forever, but no longer having a separate identity.⁴

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah delivered their messages to the people of God at a period in history when there seemed to be no hope. Under the rule of King Solomon, about 800 years before Christ, Israel had become the jewel of the Mediterranean. It had been the most powerful, most wealthy, most feared and respected nation of the Middle East. Within a few generations there was nothing left but ashes and smoke. The sin of a nation, particularly the sin of her leaders, had brought the glory that was Israel to ruin.

Yet, out of the ashes and smoke there arose men of God whose message always began, “Thus says Yahweh....” These men described a day when God’s kingdom would appear on this earth in a fashion that would dim the very glory of Solomon himself. With that Kingdom there would a King, a man, a bonafide descendent of the house of David, but more than a man. When people would speak of this King, they would name him, “God with Us.”

⁴ McClain, Alva J., with revisions by Whitcomb, John C. Jr., *Christian Theology: The Kingdom and the Church* (Winona Lake, IN: Unpublished lecture notes, 1974).

When the King Walked Among Us

As the last embers of Israel's glory faded into history, God sent prophetic messengers to describe a future day when a Son of David would suddenly appear to take up the scepter once again. This King, however, would exhibit the power of God. He would be pure and righteous. The wicked of this world would find him to be a ruthless judge; the innocent would find him gentle. Nature itself would bow down to him.

Now, after so many centuries, hardly daring to hope, people were hearing rumors of a man who could cure blindness and raise the dead, a man who forgave sins, a man who said, "The Kingdom has arrived!"

Various groups reject the concept that Jesus intended to fulfill Kingdom prophecy. The so-called liberal branch of the Christian faith has decided that Jesus only intended to improve mankind, that his kingdom was a new and improved social order that would operate on the principle of love.

Another segment of the Christian world thinks that Jesus was trying to change people's hearts in the manner that the Old Testament kingdom attempted, but that he never meant to reestablish a throne or to be literal earthly king.

Still another "Christian" group (a highly critical and skeptical group) has speculated that Jesus started out desiring to rebuild the kingdom of David, but he changed his mind and settled for a quasi-kingdom of inwardly changed people.

But the simplest way to interpret the Bible is to assume that, when Jesus chose the word "Kingdom" to describe his objective, he meant it in the same way that biblical authors had always meant it: a thousand-year period of time when God's own Son would be sitting on the throne of Israel, ruling the world, controlling everything, making life wonderful for those who worshiped him.

Many Bible concepts hang on the meaning of this one. This is not a peripheral matter. It colors everything else we believe.

1. Four reasons why we believe that the Kingdom he offered was the same one which had been foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures
 - He appealed to _____ descriptions

Matthew 5:3 – “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
 Isaiah 66:2 – “‘To this one I will look,’ declares the Lord, ‘to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word.’”

Matthew 5:4 – “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Isaiah 61:1 – “The Lord has anointed me to bind up the broken-hearted.”

Matthew 5:5 – “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Psalm 37:11 – “The humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves with abundant prosperity.”

Matthew 5:6 – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Isaiah 55:1 – “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat.”

Matthew 5:7 – “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Compare all of Psalm 18!

Matthew 5:8 – “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Psalm 24:3-4 – “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully.”

- The _____ connected the two.

Matthew 3:3 – Matthew heard John say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and Matthew’s comment was, “This is the man of whom Isaiah was thinking when he wrote, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord.’””

- Christ’s _____ fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Micah 5:2-5 (700 years before Christ) – “Blessed are you Bethlehem, so small among the cities of Judah. From you one will go forth whose existence is from eternity.”

Zechariah 9:9-10 – “Rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem! Your king comes to you with humility, mounted on a donkey’s colt.”

- His _____ paralleled Old Testament prophecy.

See Matthew 5:19-20; 11:2-6. The Sermon on the Mount stands as one of the most profound collections of ethical teaching found anywhere in literature. We are told that, at the end of that sermon, the people were amazed; because he didn't teach like a normal rabbi; he taught as one whose authority was equal to God's. His teaching was the kind of thing that Jeremiah 31 foretold we would experience in the Kingdom.

In Matthew 11:2-6, John the Baptist had been put in prison by an angry ruler. He was just about to face execution. He wanted to be certain in the closing days of his life that he had done his job, paving the way for the coming of the Messiah. So he sent a delegation to Jesus to ask, "Are you the Expected One, or should we be looking for someone else?" Jesus answered, "Go and tell John: The blind receive sight and the lame walk; leprosy and deafness are being cured; the dead are being brought back to life; and the poor are hearing Good News." Jesus knew, and John knew, that in Isaiah the coming King would be a man who could control physical healing. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Kingdom that he offered was not a new idea or a new system. It was the same government that God had intended to establish on earth since the beginning of time. It was the Kingdom of God.

2. Seven new truths that Jesus revealed about the Kingdom

- The King would offer himself _____

He said this to the disciples as he sent them out Matthew 10:5-7 – "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" See also Matthew 15. God made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and God intended to keep that promise. That's why the Messiah was born to the Jews.

- The King would be _____

See Luke 19:41-44. Almost from the very beginning of his public ministry, Jesus faced opposition. People in his hometown of Nazareth didn't believe in him. The religious leaders hated him. Individuals, cities, and the entire nation rejected him. He knew all along this would happen. That's why, as he entered Jerusalem on the donkey's back, he paused and wept. "O Jerusalem! If only you knew the significance of this moment. Soon this city will be destroyed, because you did not recognize the day that God visited you."

- The King would _____

Matthew 16:21 – Jesus had been hinting to his disciples on many occasions that his destiny was to die for the sins of his people. But they were not getting the message. So just a few months before he was to go to the cross, he told them plainly, “I’m going up to Jerusalem. I’m going to be arrested, tried, and crucified. But three days after I am buried, I will rise again.” He repeated this message several times.

Isaiah had foretold that Messiah would be a great King and that he would also die for his people. Jewish people had always puzzled over this. How could one man do both things? They speculated that there might be two Messiahs. Only Jesus could have foreseen that the answer was in his resurrection.

- The Church Age (and a few other things) would _____

Read Matthew 13:1-52 with 16:13-20. A new episode of the Kingdom story, a new arrangement between God and man, would be inaugurated before the Mediatorial Kingdom would be established. God would open the door to Jews and non-Jews alike. He would invite them to attach themselves to his Son by faith. He would forgive their sins and bring them together into one Body. Then at a preset time he would whisk them together out of this world.

Then God would refocus his attention upon Israel. In the midst of horrible persecution, they would finally turn to their King, and he would rescue their souls. In Daniel 9, God told Daniel that it would be seventy weeks until the end, until the Kingdom would come. But it would go like this: After 69 weeks the Messiah would suddenly appear and just as suddenly would be cut off. The 70th week would be a time of trouble for Jacob’s people. But then Messiah would reappear and save them.

Until Jesus came along, no one could understand the prophecy of Daniel. It hadn’t occurred to anyone that the 69 “weeks” (i.e. heptads, groups of seven periods each) were weeks of *years*, not days. It hadn’t occurred to anyone that about 69 years times seven, or 483 years, had gone by from the time of Daniel to the time of Christ. It hadn’t occurred to anyone that God would insert the Church and at least 2,000 years of time between the 69th week and the 70th week.

In Matthew 13, Jesus told his people how the Kingdom was going to grow in the centuries ahead. It would grow in a way that no Old Testament prophet had foreseen, a huge tree that would spread its branches and become home for every

conceivable kind of bird. Then in Matthew 16, in a private conversation with the disciples, Jesus explained: “I will build something new: my Church.”

- Kingdom fulfillment would be _____

The disciples thought Jesus was going to take charge of his Kingdom at any moment. The crowds thought that their King was ready to kick the Romans out of Israel and reestablish the monarchy of David immediately. But in Matthew 25:19, Jesus told a story about a king who went away and then returned to settle accounts with his servants “after a long time.”

Even though it has been two millennia since Jesus spoke those words, we may be certain that the Kingdom has not been cancelled. It has been put on “hold” while God finishes with the episode called “the Church Age.”

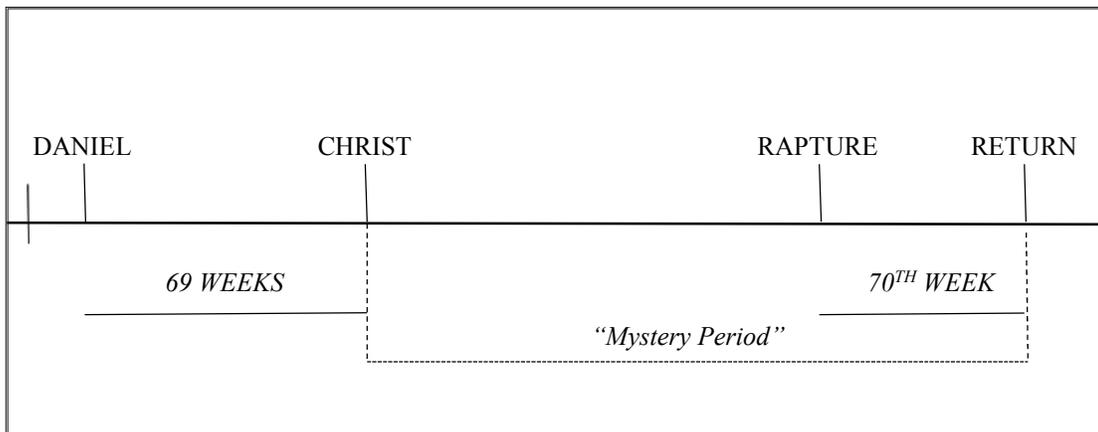
- The King would return _____

Matthew 16:27 – “The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.”

- The King would share his _____

Matthew 19:28 – “You who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Jesus shared many more details about the future, but all of them fit into the pattern of these seven new truths – truths which had never been specified by the Old Testament prophets, truths that only the Messiah could possibly have known.



3. Six reasons why Jesus was rejected as King

- Because he required _____ from those who would enter the Kingdom.

Mark 1:15 – “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent!”

Luke 18:12 – “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.”

John 3:3 – “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

People didn’t want to hear this. They were ready for the kingdom, but they wanted it on their own terms. They wanted the king, but they didn’t want to change. The lofty spiritual requirements that Jesus laid down were too much for them.

- Because he refused to establish a merely _____ kingdom.

In Luke 12:13-30, someone said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But Jesus answered, “Man, who appointed me a judge or arbitrator over you? Beware and be on your guard against every form of greed; because even when a man has an abundance, his life does not consist of his possessions.”

In John 6, he fed the 5,000 miraculously by breaking up a boy’s lunch. When it was all over, the people wanted to come and take Jesus by force, to make him king. But Jesus wouldn’t have anything to do with that plan. He didn’t come to be a judge or a philanthropist. It was not his purpose to make everyone rich. He had a much higher priority than that. So the people rejected him.

- Because he denounced _____ as a substitute for true worship.

Luke 11:37-54 – He said to the Pharisees, “You clean the outside of the cup, but on the inside it’s still full of robbery and wickedness. You give God 10% of your kitchen spices, but you don’t give justice and love. You like being in the religious limelight, but you’re just like your fathers who executed God’s messengers.”

They knew how to say all the right words and perform all the rituals. They had religious traditions up to the eyeball, and they thought that should be enough. But Jesus came to establish a Kingdom in which the heart came first. They couldn’t make it in a Kingdom like that. So they rejected him.

- Because he scolded the _____

Matthew 23 – “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Don’t try to get people to call you ‘rabbi.’ You have one teacher, and that’s God. Don’t try to get people to call you ‘father.’ You have one Father, and that’s God. Whoever is greatest among you will be your servant in the Kingdom. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

That wasn’t an attractive proposition to confirmed capitalists. So when Jesus offered a Kingdom where humility was rewarded and pride was punished, they rejected him.

- Because he associated with _____

In Matthew 9 and Luke 15, the power brokers of Israel grumbled because Jesus had a habit of sitting down and eating with known sinners and Roman collaborators. They thought he ought to mix only with royalty.

It was obvious that Jesus enjoyed – maybe even preferred – the company of society’s riffraff. He often said that the person who has been forgiven for the most sins will love God the most. When the elite saw that Jesus intended to build a Kingdom where commoners were given places of prominence, they rejected him.

- Because he made himself _____

John 5:16-18 – “My Father has been working up to now, and in the same way I also am working.”

John 10:24-33 – “I and the Father are one.”

John 18:37 – Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you a king?” Jesus answered, “That’s right. For this purpose I came into the world.”

The Jews could barely stand a king who demanded goodness. They could tolerate a king who was more interested in the quality of the heart than the quality of the clothes. They could put up with a king who enjoyed the company of social outcasts. But they could not have a king who claimed to be God. That was too much. So they rejected him.

They didn't need more proof that Jesus was the Messiah. He had already given them more than ample evidence that he was the King of whom the prophets had written, and that the Kingdom he offered was exactly the same as the one which God had promised to them. But he was different from what they expected. He demanded from them things that they didn't want to give; and he offered them things that they didn't think they would enjoy.

In spite of his miracles, in spite of his rich teaching, in spite of his compassion, in spite of his sinless behavior, in spite of every evidence that the prayers of centuries had suddenly been answered, they turned their backs on him. "He came unto his own, and those who were his own did not receive him."

God's Kingdom Today

When the disciples saw that Jesus had risen from the dead, they assumed that he would inaugurate his Kingdom immediately. In Acts chapter one they were walking with him and someone asked, "Lord, is today the day? Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

They didn't realize that a whole, mysterious, new era was opening up before them. God's Son had presented himself to the nation of Israel to be their King. They rejected him. As the Book of Hebrews describes it, God was about to cut off that worthless branch and to graft in a different one. God was going to set Israel on the back burner and turn his attention to a new and unforeseen group: the Church of his Son, Jesus Christ.

There are two goals of this segment: to highlight the events of the Book of Acts which prove that a major change took place after Pentecost; and to examine the Church today, to see how it fits into the Kingdom of God.

1. The Kingdom in transition: The Book of Acts

There were at least five milestones in the Book of Acts which made it obvious that the times were very definitely changing.

- The Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20 – "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...."

Mark 16:14-16 – "Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation...."

Luke 24:47-49 – “Here is the Gospel: Christ had to suffer and rise again.... Repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations; and you are witnesses of these things.”

Acts 1:6-11 – “You will receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

There were four new things about this message:

-- New Gospel: Christ _____

1st Corinthians 2:2 – “I made up my mind to preach only one message: Jesus Christ crucified.”

In the old days the Gospel message was, “The King is coming; get ready for him!” Now it was a new message: “The King has already come, and he has paid for your sins with his own death on the cross.”

-- New focus: the _____

Previously, Jesus had sent his disciples exclusively to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Now there was a new strategy. The doors were open wide. Everyone in the world was invited to come and experience the forgiveness and the blessing of God.

-- New resource: the indwelling _____

In Old Testament days you would read that the Spirit of the Lord “came upon Samson” or “came upon David” – temporarily filling the person with supernatural power. And yet you would also hear David praying, “Lord, please do not take your Spirit away from me.” Apparently, whatever the Spirit of God did with people in those days, it had a distinctly temporary effect.

After Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit came to take up permanent residence in the body of every believer. According to John 16, he stays there to give spiritual strength, to help us understand the Word, and to remind us when we are misbehaving.

-- New hope: the _____

We have a great expectation that someday the Lord Jesus suddenly will whisk all Christians up into the air and away to heaven (1st Corinthians 15:50-58; 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18).

The Old Testament said that the King was going to appear someday and set up his Kingdom. The Gospels added an important piece of new information: the King had to experience death and resurrection, then go away, and then return to establish his Kingdom. Not until the writings of Paul did it become clear that there is another event tucked between the two advents of Christ: the Rapture.

When the Lord Jesus gave the Great Commission to his men, complete with these strange new elements, it was a sign that God's emphasis on the Kingdom was in a state of transformation.

- The Pentecost message

If you read Acts chapter 2, you will notice that it is full of Old Testament quotes and Old Testament ideas. That's because Peter was preaching to Jewish people, who had looked for the King but who hadn't realized that Jesus was that King. Peter wove the Gospel into the framework of the Kingdom.

-- The Gospel fulfills Kingdom _____

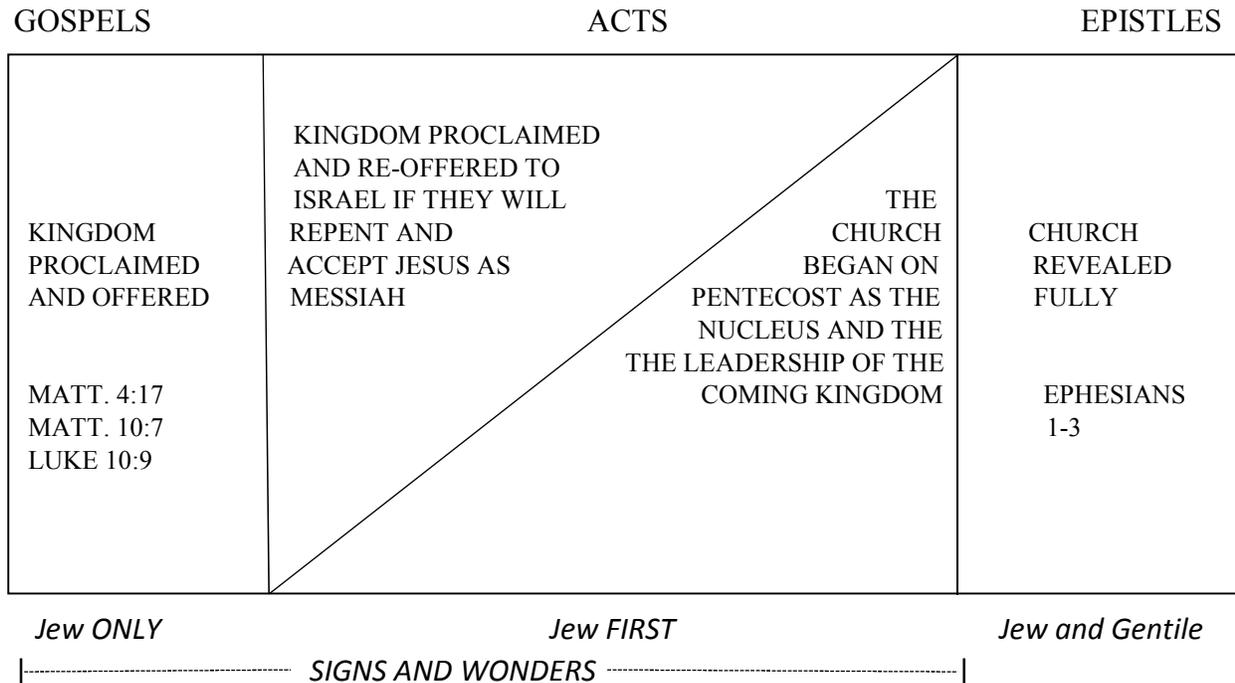
He pointed out that Joel had predicted an outpouring of the Holy Spirit just as the people witnessed on the Day of Pentecost. He didn't actually say that the Day of the Lord was about to happen. Maybe he thought it would. Probably he expected Jesus to return at any moment. He didn't have a lot of information at this point; he was just preaching what he knew. And all he knew so far was that everything connected with Jesus Christ was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

-- The Gospel is for _____

On the next page is a chart showing how the message changed in the 20 years between Peter's sermon and the writings of Paul. At first, the apostles had taken the Gospel exclusively to God's chosen people Israel. The Kingdom was supposed to be their Kingdom and the King was supposed to be their King (Matthew 2:2; John 1:11).

But then the message took on a different nuance. The Pentecost experience took place in Jerusalem, in the presence of thousands of Jewish witnesses. And

yet, since they had rejected the King whom God had sent to them (which, of course, God always knew would happen), the door was now opened to non-Jewish people to enter and to embrace the King. So Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 that “the Gospel is the power of salvation to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.”



-- The Gospel demands Kingdom _____

In Acts chapter two, the Gospel had a tremendous effect on those who believed it. Verse 37: It went right to their hearts. Verse 41: Thousands of them believed and were baptized. Verses 44-45: They were selling off their possessions and sharing with each other. Verse 46: They spent every spare minute with each other. Verse 47: Their behavior was so excellent that the whole city was impressed with them.

This is the sort of behavior that you will find in the future Mediatorial Kingdom, when Jesus is sitting on the throne controlling everything, and when the subjects of his Kingdom are pure and holy.

- Peter’s Temple sermon (Acts 3:11-26) is the third milestone which demonstrated that the Kingdom was in transition. Here are the unique features of that sermon:

-- Rejection isn't _____

Even though they had turned their backs on Jesus Christ before, they still had an opportunity to change their minds and hearts. Verse 17: "Brothers, I know you acted in ignorance when you killed Jesus."

-- Repentance is _____

Verse 19: "Repent and return. If you do, then your sins will be wiped away. Refreshing times will come to you from the Lord. Jesus will come to live with you."

-- The Return is _____

The return of the King could have (and still could) take place at any moment. Today, from our vantage point with the additional information from the Epistles, we know that the Church must be taken out of the world and a seven-year period of world crisis will take place before Jesus ascends the throne of David.

But in the months following the Ascension, Peter did not have that revelation. He and the other Christ-followers were waiting expectantly for the reappearance of Christ. Potentially, Jesus could return at any time the nation of Israel would officially recognize him as their King.

-- Restoration _____

Verse 21: He speaks of Israel's restoration to her former glory as "queen of the nations."

The nation's reaction to this sermon, and to others like it, led to a moment in time when God said, "That is enough. You apostles don't have to concentrate on Israel any more. The Gentiles are eager for my Good News. Take the Gospel to them."

- The fourth milestone in the period of Kingdom transition was the stunning increase in signs and wonders (referred to as such in Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 8:13; and 14:3).
 - The outpouring of God's Spirit (2:1-4)
 - Physical wonders (4:31; 8:30; 16:26)
 - Judgment on sinners (5:1-11; 12:23; 13:11)
 - Visions (7:55; 9:3, 10; 11:5)
 - Appearance of angels (5:19; 10:3; 12:7)

The miracles performed by the apostles in the Book of Acts were just as powerful and spectacular as the miracles of Jesus. When Peter was able to raise the dead to life, it was a sign that the program of Jesus Christ was still in effect.

You will notice that, as time passed, fewer miracles were evident. Apparently the main purpose of the miracles was to authenticate the message of the Gospel. By the end of the first century (perhaps as early as 70 A.D.) the miracles had all but disappeared as an authenticating device. Another persuader – a more powerful one – had come to take the place of miracles: the New Testament Scriptures.

- The growth of Jewish opposition to the followers of Jesus
 - Sadducees (4:1-4)
 - Pharisees (5:33-39)
 - Persecution (7:51-8:1)
 - The turn to Gentiles at Antioch (13:43-48)
 - The turn to Gentiles at Corinth (18:5-6)
 - Jewish riot at Jerusalem (22:22-23)
 - Another riot before the Council (23:10-12)
 - Appeal to Caesar (25:10-12)
 - Jews increasingly “blinded” (28:17-34)

Notice the chart above. During the period of the Acts, the Kingdom is proclaimed less and less and the Church is developed more and more, until in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians there is a complete description of God’s focal point for this age.

2. The Kingdom in stasis: the Church Age

The Kingdom has not been abandoned, but it is not the subject of emphasis as in past ages. Jesus’ most visible function is not as King in this moment; instead, he is functioning as Head of the Church. How does the Church fit into the Kingdom? Here are four observations:

- Kingdom prophecy is _____

Acts 1:6 – “Lord, are you going to restore the Kingdom now?” His answer: “It is not for you to know.”

Revelation 12:10 – “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come!”

God has never failed to deliver on one of his promises. The Kingdom will happen, just as it has been so beautifully described in the Book of Isaiah and elsewhere. But for now, the attention of Jesus Christ is hovering over the Church.

- Even now, Kingdom truth must be _____

Acts 20:25 – “I have always gone around among you preaching the Kingdom.”

Colossians 1:13 – “For he delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

The Kingdom program may have been put on “hold,” but it’s still the underlying program of God. It is the goal toward which all human history is moving. The Church has not replaced the Kingdom.

- Kingdom royalty is _____

Ephesians 5:25-27 – “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself up for her; that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that he might present to himself the Church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.”

Revelation 3:21 – “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

Revelation 19:7-8 – “‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.’ And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”

The wedding metaphor explains why we ought to be preparing for that future day when Jesus will be sitting on the throne and the Kingdom of God becomes visible on earth. As everyone knows, if the Husband is a King, then the King’s Bride is royalty as well. At this moment, the ruling aristocracy of the Kingdom is being prepared for action before our very eyes.

- Kingdom mysteries are _____

The Church Age in which we live was never fully explained in the Old Testament. But when Jesus came, he began to teach his people that something new was about to

take place, something wonderful and unexpected and unpredicted – the Church, a body composed not only of Jewish people who embrace Jesus as their Messiah, but millions of Gentiles who come to the Lord without any connection to Jewish religion or Jewish rituals whatsoever.

In Matthew 13 and Mark 4, Jesus told a series of parables to prepare the people of Israel for this truth. He dropped these hints: The Kingdom is like the planting of seeds; but not all the seeds become fruit. There are weeds that grow up with the grain, and it’s difficult to tell the difference between the real and the false. Someday there will be a great harvest, and the Lord himself will separate the holy from the unholy.

We have reached a point in history when it is easy to expect that the Age of the Church will soon be brought to a close. One morning soon we will hear the sound of the trumpet. We’ll look up and see Jesus, beckoning us to come away with him to our new home. When we get there, we’ll try on our new, white robes. We will accompany the King on his glorious return trip to the earth. We will watch as he takes possession of his Kingdom, and we will join him in overseeing the greatest transformation this world has ever seen, as the Creator single-handedly puts the curse in reverse and returns the universe to the condition in which he originally made.

God’s Kingdom Tomorrow

The Kingdom of God is the grand them of the Bible. It is the blueprint for everything that God has been doing since the beginning of time. The nation of Israel figures heavily into the Kingdom, because God chose that family as the vessel for his Kingdom and his King. But Israel is not the Kingdom of God, it merely plays a part in the royal story.

<i>Christ Preparing His Bride</i>	<i>Christ Judging the Wicked</i>	<i>Christ Ruling the Nations</i>	<i>Christ Submitting the Kingdom</i>
CHURCH AGE	TRIBULATION	MILLENNIUM	ETERNITY
2,000+ years	7 years	1,000 years	
<i>Pentecost</i>	<i>Rapture</i>	<i>Glorious Return</i>	<i>Re-Creation</i>

The chart on the preceding page illustrates the chain of events as they are unfolding in these days of anticipation for the Lord's return.

Recently I stood outside my home one evening and enjoyed a cloudless sky, a warm breeze, and a beautiful sunset. It occurred to me to wonder how heaven could be any more wonderful than this. But then my aches and pains reminded me that we haven't arrived in heaven yet! Romans 8:23 says, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." The universe is waiting anxiously for the day when the poison of sin will be removed and everything in God's Kingdom will be the way it was always meant to be.

God knows how eager we are for things to get better. He knows how hopeless we feel sometimes. So he gave us, in the Bible, a beautiful, richly detailed picture of God's Kingdom as it will be tomorrow. Much of that description is found in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, as in Isaiah 65. But it is the last four chapters of the Book of Revelation that explain how there will really be two phases of God's Kingdom tomorrow, blended so closely together that the Old Testament prophets couldn't tell them apart.

1. Phase One: The Millennial Kingdom

Revelation 19-20 gives us a sketch of how the Millennium will begin, proceed, and end.

- It begins with Jesus returning as Conqueror (Revelation 19:11-20:3). He will have two items on his agenda.

-- Item #1 – He destroys every _____

In Revelation 17, the armies of the Antichrist will gather at the place called Armageddon, to meet Jesus in battle as he descends from heaven. But see 19:15 and 19:21. Jesus will need no help in fighting his enemies. He will merely open his mouth and every enemy soldier will be slain.

-- Item #2 – He imprisons every _____

Revelation 13 foretells a time when a triumvirate of evil will work together against God in a time of Great Tribulation: the devil, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet. Revelation 19:20 says that Christ will dispose of them quickly, casting the Antichrist and the False Prophet into the eternal Lake of Fire, and confining Satan to a bottomless pit for the duration of the Millennium.

So the Millennium will begin with only one kind of people alive on the earth – righteous people, people who acknowledge the deity and the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of the wicked will be dead or imprisoned. The Kingdom of God on earth will be inaugurated in an environment of purity and holiness.

- The Millennium proceeds with Jesus reigning as King (Revelation 20:4-6). There are two sides to this King.

-- He rules the nations with _____

The “rod of iron” in Revelation 19:15 is a reference to Psalm 2:9. The day will come when absolute world peace will be established and maintained for 1,000 years, because Jesus will walk softly and carry a very big stick.

-- He shares authority with _____

Verse 4 – “I saw thrones. People sat on them. Judgment was given to them. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” We know that the Church will share Christ’s royal authority. This verse adds that the Tribulation martyrs will also share that authority.

Of all the glories of the future Kingdom, the two most prominent features are the rod of iron and the coregency of the saints.

- The Millennium ends with Jesus ruling as Judge (Revelation 20:7-15).

-- The final destruction of _____ (verse 10)

The New Testament describes Satan as our oldest enemy, an evil spirit who is bent on our destruction, someone who tempts us to sin and then points the finger of accusation at us when we fail. It will be a great day of justice when at last he is cast into the eternal place of torment which God built just for him!

-- The final doom of _____ (verses 11-15)

These are among the saddest verses in the Bible, because every person cast into the Lake of Fire will be someone whom God loved, and for whom Christ gave his life. One of my children used to own a T-shirt that read, “It’s not that life is so short; it’s just that you’re dead for so long.” In the context of Revelation 20, one wonders why anyone would neglect to get his/her name written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

2. The Eternal Kingdom

1st Corinthians 15 explains what will happen at the end of the Millennium. After Jesus abolishes every sinful ruler and puts all enemies under his feet; after he has conquered the last enemy, death; after he has reigned over a perfect Kingdom for a thousand years and has proven that God's way is always best and that God always keeps his promises – then Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to his Father. This act of submission will show the universe, that in the end, all things finally must submit to the authority of God the Father.

What will the Father do with the Kingdom presented to him by his Son? Revelation 21 begins, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away...." See 2nd Peter 3:10-13 for a fuller picture of the re-making of the universe. When the smoke dissipates and we open our eyes on the eternal Kingdom, it will seem as though every good thing we've experienced up to that moment – even a thousand years with Jesus himself sitting on the throne – was only a shadow, only a foretaste of the real thing. It will include:

- A new _____ (Revelation 21:1-9)

-- No more _____

Junkyards, landfills, cemeteries – all these things exist today because our world is filled with death and decay. But not in eternity!

-- No more _____

We won't have to cry anymore because all the reasons that used to make us cry will have been abolished: death, pain, sorrow, disappointment, frustration.

-- No more _____

Nothing evil or sinful will be allowed to set foot in the eternal kingdom of God. You won't be tempted anymore. There won't be anybody around who would want to tempt you, and even if there were, you wouldn't consider it!

- A new home (Revelation 21:10-27)

-- A place of _____

All the commodities that we have always considered to be most beautiful and most rare and most precious – these will be the construction materials in our eternal hometown! As children of the King who owns all things, we will never again lack for anything.

-- A place of _____

There will be no lamps, because it will never get dark. There will be no locks, because there won't be any thieves. Nobody will ever lie again. Nobody will cheat or act phony or try to take advantage of his neighbor. And even better, all of the dark, sinful tendencies that have been part of *your* personality will have been removed also. You'll never fall into sin again.

-- A place of _____

No phones! No rush hour traffic! No job-related tensions or corporate uncertainties. No more domestic squabbles! No more hurtful relationships!

It will be home, our real home at last. Whatever you consider to be the most important and most ideal thing that you would appreciate about your own home or your own neighborhood or your own community, all those best things you will discover waiting for you in eternity.

• A new _____ (Revelation 22:1-5)

-- Perpetual _____

God once exiled a man and woman from the Garden of Eden, barring their access to the Tree of Life, so they wouldn't live forever in their sinful state. In eternity, when the sin problem has been removed, God will bring back the Tree of Life. No more death! Won't it be wonderful when we never have to say good-bye to our loved ones again!

-- Perpetual _____

No more aches or pains or surgery. No more ambulances or hospitals. No more prescriptions. No more diseases. No more aging.

I used to go for an early morning run in my neighborhood. Often I would meet a certainly elderly couple, out for their morning walk. It always seemed a bit odd that I was moving faster than they were, but they seemed to be enjoying

themselves more than I was. In eternity, they'll be able to run, and I won't have to!

-- Perpetual _____

Verse 4 – “And they shall see his face.” I was saved at age nine, and ever since then I've been carrying on conversations with the Lord. But in all these years, no matter how important the prayer request or how fervently I prayed, God has never spoken to me in an audible voice, and God has never shown me his face. I have waited a lifetime to meet my God, to look into his eyes, to hear the sound of his voice speaking my name.

Oh, I have fellowship with him. I sense his presence. I see the evidence of his work in my life. I know he's there. But aren't we energized in our faith by the blessed hope that one day we won't have to walk by faith anymore; that we'll see him just as he is; that we'll hear him and touch him and walk beside him at last? That will be glory. That will be ultimate reality. That will be the real thing.

I have met people who don't believe in heaven or eternal life. But I've always appreciated C. S. Lewis' perspective on this:

Most of us find it very difficult to want 'Heaven' at all.... One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained; our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world. Another reason is that when the real want for heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise.⁵

We have waited a lifetime to see or to hear or to feel something that is perfect. The thing we have longed for is the Kingdom of God. The entire universe has been waiting. May God grant that we won't have to wait much longer!

⁵ Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*, cited in *The Quotable Lewis*, edited by Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), p. 286.

Resources

Martindale, Wayne; and Root, Jerry. *The Quotable Lewis: An Encyclopedic Selection of Quotes from the Complete Published Works of C. S. Lewis*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989.

McClain, Alva J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968.

McClain, Alva J.; with revisions by Whitcomb, John C. "Christian Theology: The Kingdom and the Church." Unpublished lecture notes. Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1974.

Assignments for Next Segment ("The Doctrine of the Church, Part One")

1. Read Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, chapters 44-48.
2. Answer one or more of the "Questions for Personal Application" at the end of each chapter, and be prepared to share and discuss your answers in class. Or compose a question of your own (which relates to the subject matter in those chapters), research the topic, and be prepared to share your answer with the class.