

Do You Believe the True Gospel?

by Roderick C. Meredith

What did Jesus *really* preach?
Do you know? ***Do not*** be too sure!
Just what did Jesus mean by
“the Kingdom of God?”
Here is the exciting Good News:
there *is* a new world coming!

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Chapter 1

A MESSAGE ABOUT THE MESSENGER?

Your eternity depends on your willingness to *understand* and *believe* the true Gospel! Yet the Apostle Paul warned the Christians of his day, “For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a **different gospel** which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Frankly, millions of sincere men and women have put up with a *false gospel*. They have been deceived all right—far *too easily* deceived. Why? Because too many have failed to obey God’s command to “prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, *KJV*). Jesus Christ said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and *believe* in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Have you believed the same Gospel, which Jesus preached? You need to be sure! There are many, many “gospels” being preached in the world today! Have you ever heard something like this?

“Just give your heart to the Lord. Jesus was born in the manger as the Christ, the Son of God, to save as many souls in this age as would accept Him into their hearts. When He grew up, He went around performing miracles and forgiving people. He kept God’s harsh law for all of us before finally being nailed to the cross along *with* that old law. He rose from the dead on the third day and appeared to many witnesses. Then He returned to heaven and began to set up His Kingdom in the hearts of men. He’ll forgive your sins and come into your heart—just as you are—if you’ll only accept Him. Jesus saves!

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Just believe on Him, and you'll be saved—born again. And, when you die, you'll go to be with Him in heaven—forever!”

But is that *really* the Gospel Jesus taught? If you have accepted, without question, the almost unanimous voice of mainstream Christianity in this regard, you probably think that it is. Yet consider what Mark Twain wrote:

“In religion and politics, people’s beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing” (*Mark Twain’s Autobiography*, 1959).

Do you really *know* what constitutes the genuine Gospel that Jesus and His Apostles preached? Or have you made a careless assumption, following the crowd as Mark Twain noted, taking your beliefs from second-hand suppositions?

Probably you were taught the mainstream understanding of “the Gospel” while growing up. Or maybe you learned it from the barrage of religious publications and broadcasts that exist in our modern world. In any case, you have, more than likely, not seen the need to question your beliefs. After all, most professing Christian authorities are in agreement here. Surely, they *must* be right. Or are they?

In His famous Olivet Prophecy, Jesus Christ warned, “**Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many**” (Matthew 24:4–5, *KJV*). Many modern versions place quotations around “I am Christ,” assuming that Christ was talking about individuals who would claim to actually be Christ themselves. However, there have not been “**many**” such people over the centuries that have been taken seriously, much less those who have deceived the “**many**.” Another interpretation some have offered is that Jesus was referring to false “Savior” figures like Hitler and Mussolini. But this is really taking liberties with the text. Remember, Christ said, “Many shall come **in My name**.” A clearer rendering of what Jesus meant would be: “Take care that no one leads you astray.

Indeed, many will appear, making use of My name, saying that I am Christ, yet deceiving many.”

What an astounding warning! Christ was foretelling that **many** false preachers would talk *about* Him and that they would proclaim that He *is* the Christ, the expected Messiah. Yet even after acknowledging Jesus’ Messiahship, the deceivers are prophesied to seduce the unwary from a correct understanding of Jesus’ genuine Gospel! How about you? Might they have deceived you too? Do not make careless assumptions! Find out—*prove*—what is true. Then you will really *know* and nobody will be able to fool you!

False Assumptions and False Hopes

Jesus said this about certain false religious teachers of His day: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:8–9). Jesus is plainly saying that one can worship Him *to no purpose, uselessly*—if the doctrines on which that worship is based have their source in men’s erroneous ideas about how to interpret Scripture, rather than on the plain, intended teaching of the word of God!

What, then, is the actual Gospel that Jesus preached? Did He simply tell people to believe on Him—or was it far more than that? This is a vital question. For if you believe a lie rather than the Truth, you will eventually find yourself holding a bag of false hopes and unfulfilled expectations!

In Luke 13, Christ explained the plight of those holding false hopes. Many will “begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ then in reply he will say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ But he will say ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (vv. 25–28).

Does it really make a difference to God whether or not we adhere strictly to the exact same Gospel that Christ and His Apostles preached? **On the authority of Jesus Christ, I say it makes a great deal of difference!**

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After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He appeared to His Apostles and commissioned them to, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15–16). Christ later inspired the Apostle Paul to pronounce a double curse on *anyone* who would dare preach a different gospel. He told the Galatian Christians, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach **any other gospel** to you than what we have preached to you, let him be **accursed**. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be **accursed**" (Galatians 1:8–9).

The Apostle Paul took great pains to warn the Corinthian Christians about false ministers who would come preaching "another Jesus" and proclaiming a "different gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4). This is why I say—as a minister of Jesus Christ—that it is *critically* important for you and your salvation to recognize the true Jesus Christ of the Bible and to prove for yourself what is the **genuine** Gospel which He preached! And Jesus **Himself** made that clear!

It can easily be shown from the Bible that the Gospel does not revolve *solely* around the personality of Jesus, the Son of God. Of course, Jesus *is* our Messiah who shed His blood so that our sins might be forgiven. We need to deeply appreciate and proclaim this truth. But that in itself does not constitute the complete Gospel. Certainly, we need the understanding of Christ's sacrifice. The Bible says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Consequently, the name of Jesus Christ is absolutely vital. Yet it is absolutely *false* to say of Jesus, as many now do, "He *is* the Gospel. He *is* the Kingdom of God." There is *much more* to the true Gospel message preached by Jesus Christ.

Gospel "Of" Christ or "About" Christ?

At the end of the Old Testament, God inspired the following prophecy: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight" (Malachi 3:1). According to Mark 1:2–4, the first messenger mentioned here refers to John the Baptist who prepared the way before

Christ's First Coming. Christ is referred to next as "the Lord... even the *Messenger* of the covenant." So Jesus Christ was sent as a "Messenger." A messenger bears a *message* from someone else—and so Jesus did, as He made plain by stating, "the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:24).

God the Father *sent* Christ to announce a message from Him. What kind of message was it? The word "gospel" originates from the Old English word *godspell*, meaning "good news" or "announcement of glad tidings." The New Testament translators used "gospel" for the Greek noun *euaggelion*. The English word "evangelism"—preaching the Gospel—is derived from it. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have come to be known as "the four Gospels" because they relate four separate accounts of Christ delivering His announcement of Good News!

What was this Good News all about? Let Scripture answer! Open your Bible and turn to Mark 1:14–15. Read what God inspired Mark to write: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'**" This is **the Gospel**. There is only one—and it is about the Kingdom of God. Some will attempt to deny the prominence of "the kingdom of God" in the Gospel by pointing out that Mark 1:1 mentions the "gospel of Jesus Christ." It is also referred to as the "Gospel of God" because it was a message *from* God. But the New Testament overwhelmingly calls it "the Gospel of the Kingdom of God." That is what the Gospel is about! Look at what one scholarly work attests:

"There is clear agreement among the synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] that the kingdom of God was the **principal theme** within Jesus' message.... In aggregate, they present some fifty sayings and parables of Jesus concerning the kingdom.... It is, then, a matter of consensus within the canon that the kingdom constituted a **primary focus** of Jesus' theology" (*Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993, p. 408).

Do not blindly believe this booklet—or *any* commentary or Bible study aid. Believe your Bible—believe God! People have gone off track spiritually by relying solely on men. Scripture commands you to "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21, *KJV*). Check up on this and

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examine it for yourself. Suspend your prior opinions and just read what God says. It will soon be clear in your mind that the Gospel of Christ is His message, from the Father, *about* the Kingdom of God. Jesus affirmed this after teaching in the city of Capernaum by saying, **“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent”** (Luke 4:43). Matthew 9:35 testifies that this is exactly what He did: **“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom.”**

According to Jesus, what should life’s primary focus be? **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”** (Matthew 6:33). In what has come to be known as the “Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus said, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come” (vv. 9–10). The Gospel that Christ brought is indeed the Good News of this coming Kingdom. That is the message Jesus preached. He sent His disciples out preaching *that very same message*. And they *did* preach it—the rest of their lives!

It was not until false teachers began to subvert the early Church that Christ’s Gospel began to be perverted. Paul, writing more than 20 years after Christ’s death, was aware of one such distortion: “There are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7). Among a growing number of heresies, perhaps none was gaining as much momentum as the new gospel about the events of Christ’s life and of simply believing on His person to be saved. Gradually, then, the true Gospel *of* Christ was supplanted by a false gospel *about* Christ.

“In the mouth of Christ and those who, while He was on earth, He sent forth to proclaim it, it was the good tidings of the kingdom of God which He had come to establish.... After Christ’s death and resurrection it became the good tidings **about** Christ” [Emphasis ours] (James Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988, p. 233).

What About the Name of Jesus?

Christ sent out His disciples “to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.... So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere” (Luke 9:2, 6). When the Apostles returned, in verse 10, Christ took them to a deserted place.

“But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him; and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing” (v. 11).

According to Jesus’ example and instructions: *preaching the gospel is preaching about the Kingdom of God!*

Then, in verse 18 of the same chapter, when He was alone with His disciples, Christ asked: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again” (v. 19).

Matthew 16 contains a more complete passage paralleling this account: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, **for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven**’” (vv. 15–17).

Clearly, Christ had not even told His own disciples this yet. But Jesus had *already* sent them out preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Notice verse 20: “**Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.**” The reason He commanded this is that he did not want to be crucified prematurely. But what is absolutely certain from this verse is that **the Gospel of the Kingdom of God cannot be a simple proclamation stating that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.** For we have just seen in Luke 9:11 that they had *already* been preaching the Gospel—but obviously had **not** told the people that Jesus was the Christ!

Some might say, “Yes, but perhaps the Gospel preached by Christ and His Apostles was about the fact that the Messiah had to die for our sins and be resurrected, minus the actual identity of that Messiah.” To answer that, look at what happened after Peter recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, as recorded in Mark 8:

“Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him. And He *began* to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to *rebuke* Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind

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Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (vv. 30–33).

It was only *after* Peter’s recognition of Jesus as the Christ that Jesus *began* to teach His disciples about His coming crucifixion and resurrection. But Peter did not receive this teaching very well at this point. So it ought to be *plain as day* that a proclamation of Jesus, as Christ crucified, was not a part of the Gospel that Christ had previously sent Peter out preaching!

To further illustrate this, look at the same event as recorded in Luke 9:18–22. In verse 22, Christ instructed the Apostles that He would die and be resurrected. But, evidently much later, they *still* did not get it! Christ said to His disciples, “Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying” (vv. 44–45).

The Gospel that Jesus had sent the Apostles to preach was not centered on believing on Christ’s *person* or receiving forgiveness of sins through His sacrifice. **Just talking about Christ is not the Gospel!** Yes, Jesus Christ *is* the most important Person ever to have walked the earth. He was, indeed, God in the flesh, the Son of God, who came as the Christ to give His life to atone for the sins of mankind. And He has been resurrected to be the Savior of the world. All of this is true. And—although it is *extremely* necessary—none of this is the *sole focus* of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. It was only *after* Jesus was resurrected that He added this element to the message the Apostles were to preach: “And He [the risen Jesus] opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:45–48).

The name of Jesus Christ—that is, His *true* name—comprises who He is, what He has done for us and everything He has taught, commanded and stood for. This essential information *was added*—to be taught alongside the Gospel of the Kingdom of God—*after* the death and resurrection of Jesus. Is this an assumption? Not at all! Look at the

preserved biblical account of the preaching of the early evangelists and Apostles, years after Christ's death.

Notice what Philip preached in Samaria. "But when they believed Philip as he preached [1] **the things concerning the kingdom of God** and [2] **the name of Jesus Christ**, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

The true Church is to preach *both* elements: **first**, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and, **second**, the true name of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

We have seen that the true Gospel preached by Christ and His Apostles was about the Kingdom of God. Exactly what *is* that Kingdom? There have been many ideas. The Jews of Christ's day thought that a Messiah figure would lead their physical nation to militarily subdue other governments until they reigned supreme over all men. Later, the concept emerged that the *Church* made up the Kingdom. Others have believed that the Kingdom of God is an ethereal realm set up in the hearts of men. Others see it called "the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew's Gospel account and conclude that it must refer to eternal bliss in heaven. Some also maintain that the Kingdom is the person of Jesus Himself.

"The 'Kingdom of God/Heaven' is a subject of major importance in the Bible for two primary reasons: its frequency in the first three canonical (synoptic) gospels of the NT, and **the conviction that it stands at the very center of the message of the historical Jesus.** Its meaning which is derived from a world of oriental monarchs and monarchies that is very different from modern Western democracies, has been interpreted in various ways. Historically it has been associated with the future state of the resurrected, immortal blessed; the Church; monastic contemplation; mystical ecstasy; pious religious experience; the progressively redeemed society inspired by love; the future transformation of this world; apocalyptic hope for the next world; and an open-ended symbol possible of many interpretations" (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 49).

Scripture scholar George E. Ladd described how one particular theologian reduced the Kingdom of God to the “subjective realm and understood it in terms of the human spirit and its relationship to God. The Kingdom of God is an inward power which enters into the human soul and lays hold of it. It consists of a few basic religious truths of universal application.” A more recent interpretation, Ladd mentions, “conceives of the Kingdom as the absolute, the ‘wholly other’ which has entered into time and space in the person of Jesus of Nazareth” (*The Gospel of the Kingdom*, p. 15).

He continues:

“At the other *extreme* are those who, like Albert Schweitzer, define Jesus’ message of the Kingdom as an apocalyptic realm to be inaugurated by a supernatural act of God when history will be broken off and a new heavenly order of existence begun. The Kingdom of God in no sense of the word is a present or spiritual reality; it is altogether future and supernatural” (*ibid.*).

Ladd also points out the view or interpretation which “relates the Kingdom of God in one way or another to *the Church*.” Since the days of Augustine, “the Kingdom has been identified with the Church.” He explains:

“As the Church grows, the Kingdom grows and is extended in the world. Many Protestant theologians have taught a modified form of this interpretation, holding that the Kingdom of God may be identified with the true Church which is embodied in the visible professing Church. As the Church takes the Gospel into all the world, it extends the Kingdom of God. An *optimistic* version holds that it is the mission of the Church to win the entire world to Christ and thus transform the world into the Kingdom of God” (*ibid.*).

Do any of these interpretations have it right? What, in the midst of all this confusion, is the Truth? What *is* the Kingdom of God?

What Is a Kingdom?

To understand the Kingdom of God, we should begin by asking what *any* kingdom is. The primary dictionary definition of the word “kingdom” is, “a state or government having a king or queen as its

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head” (*Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, Portland House, 1989).

This is also the biblical definition of a kingdom. Four things are necessary to constitute a real *kingdom*: 1) a king or ruling agent; 2) land or territory; 3) subjects or citizens within that territorial jurisdiction; 4) laws and a form of government. If we leave out *any* of the above elements, we do not have a real kingdom. And if we believe in some *ethereal* sort of “kingdom,” we do **not** believe in the true Gospel!

The truth on the subject of the Kingdom is revealed in God’s word. What men *think* may be interesting and appealing to the intellect, but the truth is in the Holy Scripture. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Bible reveals that Jesus’ message concerned government and governance. He was born to be humanity’s King! The prophet Isaiah wrote of Him:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Shortly before Christ’s human conception, the archangel Gabriel told Mary, who would be His mother: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

During Jesus’ trial, Pontius Pilate asked Him if He was a king. “Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’” (John 18:37). Too many in this deceived world think of Christ as either “the little Lord Jesus, away in a manger” or as a frail weakling nailed to a cross. They do not contemplate His role as a coming, omnipotent Ruler and King.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

What is the nature of the government that is to rest on Christ's shoulders? Is it merely human devotion to "sweet Jesus"? Emphatically, no! God's message and plan for mankind is consistent. The prophet Daniel was inspired nearly 600 years before Christ's birth to write about the coming Kingdom of God.

During the Jews' captivity in the ancient Neo-Babylonian or Chaldean Empire, Daniel served his masters in the palace of the emperor Nebuchadnezzar. This world ruler had a vivid dream which so troubled him that he was losing sleep over it (Daniel 2:1). He just *had* to know its meaning! So Nebuchadnezzar ordered his court magicians, astrologers and sorcerers to reveal to him the dream's meaning. But this shrewd despot would not even tell his "trusted" advisors what He had dreamt! They were first required to tell *him* his dream—so that he could know their interpretations were trustworthy (vv. 2–9). They, of course, were unable to do so (vv. 10–11).

God, however, had given Daniel "understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17). When he was brought before Nebuchadnezzar (2:25), he explained: "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be *in the latter days*" (vv. 27–28).

So God's purpose here was to reveal to this pagan ruler that there is a real God who rules the vast universe, as well as to reveal what would happen "in the latter days." If you want to understand the exciting, advance news of future events—the culmination of which may occur in *your* lifetime—open your Bible and turn to this amazing chapter in Daniel and read it for yourself!

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed

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together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king” (vv. 31–36).

Did this dream mean something? Yes, because God had inspired it! It was prophetic. However, some people think that Bible prophecy is just melodic poetry—serving no guiding, foretelling purpose. Others believe prophecy does indeed have meaning, but that we cannot possibly decipher what that meaning is—at least until after its fulfillment and often not even then. There are still others who subscribe to the idea that prophetic meaning is subject to personal interpretation.

These views reject or distort a major aspect of Christ’s message. And since more than one-fourth of the Bible is prophecy, such opinions about prophecy would make a major portion of God’s word basically useless to us.

Yet God tells us that “*all* Scripture... is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16) and Revelation 19:10 teaches us that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The Apostle Peter wrote that “We have the prophetic word made more sure... knowing this first, that *no prophecy* of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy *never* came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19–21).

We must never try to interpret the Bible by reading our ideas into it! And we must *not* believe the *personal* interpretation of other human beings. We must deeply *study* the Bible—comparing scripture with scripture. We must let the Bible interpret itself.

A Succession of World-Ruling Kingdoms

Daniel gave God’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream: “You, O king, are a king of kings” (Daniel 2:37). Nebuchadnezzar subjugated other kingdoms under his own. He was the first to rule over a really world-dominating kingdom or empire. But it was not through his own might: “For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory” (v. 37). God was revealing His own supremacy in world events. “You,” God told Nebuchadnezzar, “are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth” (vv. 38–39).

Did you catch that? God is speaking here of *literal* kingdoms—a succession of world-ruling governments. This is clearly not talking about syrupy, sentimental concepts. God is making the Truth plain! Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean Empire was represented by the head of gold. Following that would come another empire to be succeeded by still another. If you check your history books, you will see that the Persian Empire came next, followed by Alexander the Great's Greco-Macedonian Empire.

Yet another, represented by the two legs of iron, would immediately follow that one, "and the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (v. 40). The Roman Empire did just that. We can see that it was divided into two "legs," West and East, with capitals in Rome and Constantinople respectively.

If we compare this account with Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 and 17, we can understand that the Roman Empire *system* would have ten revivals or resurrections in later centuries. The last seven of these revivals would be controlled by a false religious authority. The last of the ten revivals equates to the feet and toes of this great image in Daniel 2. Its ten toes of "iron mixed with ceramic clay" (v. 43)—a strong, but brittle mixture (v. 42)—symbolize ten contemporaneous political leaders who will give power to a charismatic, powerful ruler (Revelation 17:12–13). Together, these "kings" will make up the final resurrection of the fourth world-ruling empire. That final European superstate will rise before our very eyes! Remember that Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar that this vision was to reveal events "in the latter days."

Now we come to verses 44–45: the meaning of the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" that smashes the image representing the succession of human world-ruling empires and then grows to fill the whole earth. This is the revelation we have been seeking!

Here, in the plain words of God Almighty, is the explanation of what the kingdom of God really is: **"And in the days of these kings [the last revival of the Roman Empire] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever!"**

No more will there be any *human* "king of kings" like Nebuchadnezzar! Jesus Christ will then reign over the whole earth as

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“King of kings and Lord of lords” (cf. Revelation 19:11–16). Revelation 11:15 affirms Daniel’s prophecy. At the time of Christ’s Second Coming, loud voices in heaven will proclaim: **“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”** Thus will Tomorrow’s World finally be inaugurated!

Daniel’s prophecy, when studied with the book of Revelation, should make it abundantly clear that the future Kingdom of God will be a *literal government*, just as were the previously mentioned world-ruling empires. As Daniel concluded, “The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Daniel 2:45). This is gloriously wonderful good news!

Other Prophecies of Tomorrow’s World

Other Old Testament prophets also clearly show that Christ’s Kingdom will be a future divine government having global, administrative authority over this earth. Has God’s Kingdom already been established? The answer is obvious from a few straightforward prophecies from Scripture about the coming Kingdom:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke 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 they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2–4; cf. Micah 4:1–3).

Micah adds this additional information: “But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (v. 4). Would anyone today argue that this prophecy has already been fulfilled?

A statue depicting a man beating his sword into a plowshare stands outside the United Nations’ headquarters in New York City—but a quick look at the television or newspapers will show you that the

United Nations has not fulfilled this wonderful prophecy of nations not learning war anymore!

Another famous prophecy of Isaiah should help us make a reality check on the arguments of those who maintain that the Kingdom is already present:

“But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. 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 waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:4–10).

The picture of world peace—even in the realm of nature—portrayed by this prophecy has inspired many to sacrifice and labor for God’s Work. Jesus did not fulfill this prophecy of the Kingdom at His First Coming. After all, do bears graze or lions eat straw? Its fulfillment is yet future, awaiting Christ’s Second Coming. There is no confusion here.

Another prophecy about the coming Kingdom of God is found in the book of Zechariah:

“It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD; neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward

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the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And **the LORD shall be King over all the earth**. In that day it shall be; ‘The LORD is one,’ and His name one.... And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem **shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles**” (14:6–9, 16).

Regrettably, many do not have faith that God Almighty means what He says and says what He means! God clearly states in these prophecies that He is going to completely transform civilization. God has repeatedly foretold His end-time **rule** over the nations of this earth: “He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth” (Psalm 96:13). Again, for emphasis, God repeated this prophecy: “For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity” (Psalm 98:9)

Why do we not hear that kind of Gospel in today’s world? You probably know why. This message is extremely unpopular with most of the religious, political and social leaders in today’s power structures. They do not want to lose their power! This was one of the reasons the chief priests and the Pharisees sought to kill Jesus (John 11:47–53). Nevertheless, there **will** be a real “new world order” established under Jesus Christ’s leadership, totally changing this world’s political and religious institutions. Will you believe what God says, or will you swallow the “philosophical concoctions” brewed up by disobedient, sinful men who have been **deceived** by Satan the Devil, the “god” of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4)?

Did Christ Say the Kingdom Is “At Hand”?

When Jesus began His ministry in the late 20s AD, He “began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is at hand**’” (Matthew 4:17). What did Jesus mean? Certainly He was not implying that it was then the Millennium, when swords would be beaten into plowshares! In fact, about 40 years after Jesus made this statement, terrible massacres befell His kindred people when the Romans slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Jews during their brutal suppression of the Jewish revolt in the late 60s and early 70s AD (cf. Luke 23:28–31)! And this bloody, oppressive rule by avaricious human

kingdoms would continue for centuries. How could the Kingdom of God have then been “at hand”?

Yet when Jesus was accused by His jealous adversaries of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus responded, “If I cast out demons.... surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:27–28). How could the Kingdom of God have then come upon them?

Answer: **by the presence of the King—the Son of God—who was proclaiming the Gospel of that Kingdom! The Messiah Himself stood before them!**

The Bible sometimes uses the terms “king” and “kingdom” interchangeably (cf. Daniel 7:7–18, 23). By the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ exercised, while on earth, many of the functions typical of His position as the King of the Kingdom.

A striking characteristic of the Kingdom of God is miraculous, divine intervention. Jesus healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead and commanded the physical environment to behave as He wished! Like refreshing morning dew, the reality of the Kingdom of God settled—for an instant during Christ’s sojourn on earth—upon a physical world grappling to comprehend the spiritual reality of God Almighty.

When Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God coming upon them, **He spoke of His actions and their impact.** He was *neither* transporting His hearers into the Kingdom *nor* implying that His Kingdom has already been “set up.” **Jesus was simply proclaiming that the King of God’s future Kingdom had arrived!** This fact alone was to have profound repercussions. The Kingdom was “at hand” because, at Jesus Christ’s First Coming, His presence and actions would have an immediate impact on some people’s lives in advance of the Kingdom’s literal establishment on earth.

Did the Kingdom Appear Immediately in Apostolic Times?

In Luke’s Gospel account, because His disciples “thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (19:11), Jesus gave them the famous parable of the pounds or minas:

“A certain nobleman went into a far country **to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.** So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, “Do

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business till I come.” But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” And so it was that **when he returned, having received the kingdom**, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading” (vv. 12–15).

Christ was the nobleman in this parable. He went to a “far country”—the heaven of God’s throne—to receive the Kingdom of God. Then He would return with it. This has not yet happened; Christ is still in heaven. His Second Coming is yet future. At His *Second Coming* He will return with the Kingdom. In the rest of the parable, Christ showed how those who zealously and diligently used their talents and abilities—represented by the minas—to serve God would be given **rulership** over cities! To the one whose mina had increased ten minas, Jesus said, “*Well done*, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, **have authority over ten cities.**” And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ Likewise he said to him, ‘**You also be over five cities**’” (vv. 17–19). *Wow!* Those who overcome in their Christian lives will be given authority and rulership in the Kingdom of God. How exciting to have an opportunity to serve others and teach them God’s ways!

This amazing Good News is related in numerous other scriptures. It is certainly not talking about “rolling around heaven all day.” The book of Matthew does not call God’s Kingdom the “kingdom *in* heaven.” It is the “kingdom *of* heaven”—it comes down from heaven. The Apostle Peter assures us that our inheritance (the Kingdom) is currently “reserved in heaven” for us (1 Peter 1:4)—to be brought to earth by Jesus Christ at His return—not before! Those in whom Christ resides by His Spirit are ambassadors for that Kingdom which now waits in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:20). As Paul wrote, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20). But we will not go to live there (cf. John 3:13; Acts 2:29, 34). The Kingdom will *come down to us* at Christ’s return.

Jesus taught His disciples that there will be a time of judgment when He will come to “sit on the throne of His glory” (Matthew 25:31). “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you

blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (v. 34). This clearly speaks of a future time when the righteous will *inherit* the Kingdom when Christ comes in His glory. **We are now heirs of the Kingdom** that He will bring *with Him, not yet inheritors.*

The Kingdom of God is **not** the Church. “Brethren” in the Church must *enter* the Kingdom in the future: “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to *make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an **entrance** will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:10–11).

The Saints’ Rulership in the Kingdom

At the end of His ministry, Jesus addressed His disciples, saying:

“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me” (Luke 22:25–29)

The *King James Version* reads more clearly: “**And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me**” (v. 29). Jesus then provided His disciples with a view of their future rewards and responsibilities in that Kingdom to which He was appointing them: “That you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and **sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel**” (v. 30). What is Jesus saying? He is pointing to a *future time* when they would **judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus was not referring to their immediate ministry.**

If Jesus intended His disciples to understand that His kingdom was on earth right at that moment, why did He give this response to Pilate:

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“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’” (John 18:36).

Even after Jesus’ death and resurrection, He continued “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Jesus chose His words deliberately, knowing that His disciples were familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah. These prophets had clearly foretold a literal, divine government to be set up on this earth under the Messiah. The Apostles asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He responded, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:6–7). Jesus **never** contradicted their scriptural understanding that a genuine Kingdom was to be set up on earth—ruling over the nations. He merely told them that it was not yet time.

In the seventh chapter of his prophecy, Daniel had foretold what would happen at the Kingdom’s inauguration:

“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man [Christ], coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days [God the Father], and they brought Him [Christ] near before Him [the Father]. Then to Him [Christ] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14).

Where will that Kingdom be? Notice that it is a Kingdom “that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve.” As so many verses show, that Kingdom will be here on earth!

In Daniel 7, the exiled Jewish prophet dreamed about four wild beasts that symbolized the same four world-ruling kingdoms outlined previously by Nebuchadnezzar’s dream recorded in chapter two. Notice this: **“Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever”** (vv. 17–18). Verse 22 reveals: **“Judgment was given to the saints of the**

most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (KJV). The saints of God will possess the Kingdom **at that time**—as glorified, immortal, divine beings!

An awesome future awaits God’s saints! They will be empowered to help bring genuine peace and joy to this suffering, bloody world. No more temporary, and often worthless, “Band-Aid” solutions! The immortal saints will assist Christ in enacting effective solutions and reforms for all humanity. Yes, they will join with Christ in **ruling** this world and straightening out the problems *where the problems are*—right here on earth. As Jesus said, **“The meek... shall inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5).

The Apostle John wrote in the book of Revelation that Christ will have “made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign *on the earth*” (Revelation 5:10). The same book records Christ saying: “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron’... as I also have received from My Father” (Revelation 2:26–27). “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). The Father’s throne is in heaven, and Christ is now there at His right hand. However, the throne of Christ, from which the saints will rule with Him, will be the throne of David in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32).

We can *be there* after the prophesied last trumpet sounds and Christ returns as King of kings. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). As that final trumpet blast pierces the air and a world-rocking earthquake shakes the earth to its foundation (Revelation 11:13–15; 16:18), the faithful saints in Christ will no doubt experience a special thrill of joy as they rise to meet Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Then they will descend with Him to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:11–12; Zechariah 14:3–4) to begin the job of bringing **peace** to a rebellious world.

Under Jesus Christ’s authority, many of us may assist King David of Israel, the man after God’s own heart, who will be resurrected and given back his former job of leading the 12 tribes or the nations of Israel (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24). We will get to know Moses, Abraham,

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Isaac, Jacob and all the other faithful saints and servants of God from all generations. For then we will truly be “born of God”—born of the resurrection into God’s Family Kingdom.

God’s saints—the “overcomers”—will be given the opportunity, under Christ’s leadership, to deal with the tyrants who will bring humanity to the brink of annihilation: “Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment; this honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 149:5–9).

In the New Testament, the Apostle John was inspired to write: **“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years”** (Revelation 20:6). The Spirit-filled Apostles and early Church of God clearly understood and taught that the Kingdom of God would be set up at the end of this age as a *literal government* on this earth under Christ and the resurrected saints. This wonderful future time is often called “the Millennium,” meaning, simply, a 1,000-year period.

Edward Gibbon, the noted historian, chronicled the belief in the Millennium in his renowned history, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Concerning the history of early Christianity, Gibbon wrote:

“The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition which was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years [cf. Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8]. By the same analogy it was inferred that this long period of labour and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years [cf. Heb. 3–4; Rev. 20:6]; and that 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 till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection” (p. 403).

Man has been given 6,000 years to learn the lesson that, without God, he is totally unable to govern himself. The prophet Jeremiah points out that “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

George Washington, the first President of the United States, conveyed the same sentiment in a letter dated October 31, 1786: “Mankind, when left to themselves, are unfit for their own government” (*Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*, 1993). The terrible crises at the end of this age will finally bring humanity to the brink of total self-annihilation. Only then will people see the absolute futility of self-rule and be humbled enough to seek God’s absolute governance over their lives. Then God **will** intervene!

Born into God’s Kingdom

The Kingdom of God will rule the earth’s peoples. But these subject mortals will not be **in** the Kingdom—only ruled *by* it. **Who** then, will be in the Kingdom? Can **you** become part of it?

When Christ met with the Pharisee Nicodemus, who had come secretly at night, Jesus went right to the heart of the matter: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). He then explained: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (v. 6)—that is, *composed of* spirit. Unless we have been changed into immortal spirit beings, as 1 Corinthians 15 describes our future resurrection, we have not yet been “born again.” Verse 50 of the same chapter assures us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” But, do “flesh and blood” humans enter the Church? Yes! So the Church *cannot* be God’s Kingdom! To be in that Kingdom, we must first be born of God as literal children in God’s Family.

In all God’s physical creation, humanity alone has a conscience and can come to know the difference between good and evil. This is through what the Bible calls “the human spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:11, *NRSV*).

It energizes the human physical brain with intellect—creating our wonderful minds, which are so incredibly superior to that of any other physical creature. God’s Holy Spirit joins with this human spirit at conversion (Romans 8:16).

The mainstream Christian world confuses “born again” with “conversion.” There is not space enough in this publication to prove in detail what God’s word reveals about being “born again.” However, we

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must mention it briefly here since it directly bears on the understanding of **what** God's Kingdom actually is.

Initial conversion is merely the *beginning* of spiritual life—just as conception is the beginning of physical life. But that is not “birth.” Birth occurs after a period of gestation within the mother's womb. Spiritual “birth” occurs after a period of *spiritual* gestation in this physical life. It is an amazing process. At conversion—our spiritual conception—due to the presence of the Holy Spirit, we become “partakers of the *divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4), the very nature of God. As we grow and overcome spiritually, God puts more and more of His godly nature within us. Finally, we are ready to be fully “born” of God at the resurrection.

Jesus is to be the “firstborn among **many** brethren” (Romans 8:29) or, as the *NRSV* translates it, the “firstborn within a large family.” As our Savior, Elder Brother and High Priest, He is “bringing **many** sons to **glory**” (Hebrews 2:10). At the resurrection, those who have truly accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will certainly **share** in God's **glory**. They will become “sons of the resurrection” like Jesus (Luke 20:36). For Jesus Himself was born of the resurrection and is twice called the “*firstborn* from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). Of course we, as younger members of God's Family, will always be in submission to the Father and Christ in total love and obedience, as we have *demonstrated* to God through a lifetime of obedience, service and overcoming.

Authentic Christianity—*biblical Christianity*—teaches that the Kingdom of God will, at the end of this age, be set up as a *literal government* on this earth, in which today's true Christians will serve under Jesus Christ, bringing genuine **world peace** at last. That, indeed, is tremendous Good News! The Kingdom of God is the ruling Family of God, which we can enter at the future resurrection from the dead. The true Gospel is astounding!

Chapter 3

THE ONLY NAME THAT CAN TAKE US THERE

To *truly* succeed, a person must first have a goal or objective. God has given Christians the most remarkable goal there is—eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The next step is to be educated about how to reach this goal. How can God’s human saints enter His Kingdom? What does the Bible tell us about the “way” to go? Jesus said:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.’ Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*’” (John 14:1–6).

The Apostle Peter later stated: “**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**” (Acts 4:12). The name of Jesus Christ is absolutely vital. Remember that the early Apostles and evangelists preached it, right along with the message about the coming Kingdom of God. We must have the same focus. However, we must be sure it is the *true* Christ we are talking about.

Many today worship a *false* Jesus who supposedly did away with the Father’s commandments. He is often portrayed as an effeminate weakling with long hair and a haunting, far-off look in his eyes. People just praise his name and feel nice sentiments about him.

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Is that what it means to preach the **name** of Jesus? No! We read in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*:

“NAME. In biblical thought a name is not a mere label of identification; it is an expression of the essential nature of its bearer. A man's name reveals his character.... This was a concept shared by the peoples of the ancient world. Hence to know the name of God is to know God as he has revealed himself (Ps. 9:10). The full disclosure of his nature and character is given in Jesus Christ, who has manifested his name (Jn. 17:6, 26).”

The name of Jesus includes not only who He was and everything He did, but also all that He taught and stood for. What *did* Jesus stand for? What is the way of life He came to reveal?

The Law of the Kingdom

Remember that one of the requirements of any kingdom is a code of **laws** by which to govern. In the Kingdom of God, the supreme law of the land will be the Ten Commandments—the great spiritual law of Almighty God. Christ told the Pharisees, “The law and the prophets [the Old Testament] were until John [the Baptist]. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it” (Luke 16:16).

But this does not mean that the message of the Kingdom of God has totally **displaced** the “law and the prophets”—it has, rather, given full expression to it! At the beginning of Christ's ministry, Matthew recorded: “Now Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Jesus, we know, preached “the gospel of the kingdom.”

As we are “pressing into” the Kingdom of God, *what* must we be pressing and striving to do? In the following three chapters, Matthew 5–7, Jesus expounded an *entire way of life* in what is called the “Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus' exhortation to His followers to zealously obey the whole, godly intent of Scripture is shocking to many who have a mainstream Christian background. He said: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

The word “fulfill” does not mean “do away with”—contrary to what you may have been falsely taught! Jesus *magnified* (enlarged) God's law.

He showed how we are to keep it in the spirit, or *intent*, as well as the letter, making the requirements of the law something you must obey in your thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5), as well as by your actions. For instance, Jesus taught that not only must a true Christian refrain from murder, but also that he must not even harbor the *attitude* of hatred or violence (Matthew 5:21–22).

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (vv. 27–28). In Jesus’ teaching, the Ten Commandments were the *foundation* for the entire way of life He proclaimed. It was not just a sentimental belief in Christ’s *person* that counted, but a *total surrender* to Him, and to the Father, as Lord and Master. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked, “But why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” Jesus **never** said, “Please accept Me; won’t you give Me your heart?” Rather, Christ continually taught us to be **God-centered** and said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

If everyone would live by God’s perfect law code, there would be absolutely no problems. We would have a perfect society. As it now stands, **all of man’s problems are the result of broken laws**. The Bible clearly defines sin: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, *KJV*).

Sadly, after almost 6,000 years of deciding for himself which way to go, mankind is still blind to this reality. “There is a way that *seems* right to a man, but its end is the *way of death*” (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Man has sought peace and harmony for ages, yet it has eluded his grasp. “The way of peace they have not known” (Isaiah 59:8). In all of man’s legislating, he has not yet designed a governmental system that works apart from God’s law.

James Madison, father of the U.S. Constitution and fourth president, realized this quandary all too well: “We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future... upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves, **according to the Ten Commandments of God**” (*America’s Christian Heritage: A Collection of Dates, Events, Decrees, Quotations and Proclamations*, Plymouth Rock Foundation).

The law of God is a major aspect of the Gospel, because it is truly Good News—giving an understanding of the way of life that leads to perfect, lasting happiness, abundance, peace and joy. The people of ancient Israel had that way of life explained to them through God’s law. However, it did them no lasting good because they did not have living

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faith to continue walking in God's way: "For indeed the gospel was preached to us [first-century Christians] *as well as to them* [the Israelites of Moses' day]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2). So they had the Good News delivered to them in part, but they did not have the understanding or the *faith* to receive it.

Today we know that the godly fulfillment of our human potential rests with Jesus Christ! He Himself pointed the way. When He introduced the subject of the Kingdom of God, He told listeners, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). We must repent and believe—have faith. Paul preached the same message: "I have gone preaching the kingdom of God" (Acts 20:25). In doing so, he was also "testifying to Jews and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21).

We must go to God seeking forgiveness. To be accepted by Him, our first action must be to **repent** of breaking His spiritual law—summarized by the Ten Commandments. "Repent" means to be *really* sorry—so sorry that we turn around and go the other way and *start obeying* God's law, forever altering our way of life. We must also have "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"—the King of the Kingdom of God. **This involves belief and acceptance of Jesus as our personal Savior, as our High Priest in heaven right now and as our coming King.**

At the beginning of the New Testament Church, on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter was inspired to announce the way to salvation for humanity, saying: "**Repent**, and let every one of you be baptized **in the name of Jesus Christ** for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38–39). So Peter says that we must repent and be baptized for the remission, or forgiveness, of our sins!

In John 3:16, Jesus said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Upon our sincere *faith* in Jesus Christ and His death *in our stead*, the death penalty for having transgressed God's law is removed from us. When truly converted, the Christian is "justified by His blood" (Romans 5:9). Being justified means to be declared guiltless—to receive unconditional pardon from the terrible penalty of everlasting death. This, too, is Good News!

Receiving the World's Most Precious Gift

We should be deeply thankful to God that, through the death of His Son, we can be forgiven of sin. But does our justification now free us to go back and continue violating God's spiritual law? **Nothing could be further from the truth!** The plain truth that many seem unwilling to understand is that a genuine Christian has—at conversion—*really repented* of breaking God's law. He is, at that point, effectively making a “covenant with his Creator” to stop sinning—to **stop** breaking God's Law, the Ten Commandments!

At baptism, having *faith* in the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, a new Christian is *covenanting* with God to *stop sinning* and to surrender his mind, his will and his life to God so that the living Christ may now empower him to live an obedient life—**obedient to the law and will of God**. As Paul explained: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but **Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *KJV*).

It is through Jesus Christ literally living *His* life within us that we are able to keep the Ten Commandments as a *way of life*. Do we keep the commandments perfectly? No. Nor do we do *anything else* perfectly! But we do surrender to Christ to let Him keep God's law in us through the power of the Holy Spirit—and, *to the extent* we yield to Christ, we are able to more fully obey God's law. Then we are told to continually “**grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). As we grow spiritually in our Christian lives, we *should be* keeping God's law with increasing zeal and faith.

How can you *really* obey God's spiritual law as you seek to imitate and follow your Savior? Jesus Christ has promised to give you the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the very nature and love of God. By giving us His Spirit, God is “begetting” us and putting His empowering nature with us. Through His divine nature, we are able to grow spiritually. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of “**power and of love and of a sound mind**” (2 Timothy 1:7).

The Apostle Paul wrote: “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). How does the love of God function? In what way does it lead us? “**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments**. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). So the Spirit-imparted love of God directly leads us to *obey*

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the Ten Commandments as a *way of life*. This also is Good News. It is a vital part of the Gospel.

By giving us His Spirit—His divine nature—God helps us to overcome sin and to grow spiritually. God Himself “qualifies” us for eternal life through this spiritual deliverance from sin and the sway of Satan the Devil. Through the Holy Spirit, He begets us into His Family. But we do not yet have it made. We must still earnestly “press toward the goal” before being finally *born* into God’s Kingdom at the resurrection of the dead (Philippians 3:13–14).

What wonderful Good News it is to be delivered from sin through Christ! “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, [which]... is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13–14). Yes, it is also Good News to truly know our Father and our Savior, and to receive God’s empowering Holy Spirit which enables us to live the life God wants us to live. What Good News to all humanity that we can experience the *real joy* of salvation—the love, the peace of mind and the deep sense of purpose that we had never before experienced.

The Kingdom of God would not be such a wonderful message if there were no way that we could be a part of it! But, thankfully, God, in His great love and mercy, has provided a way—the way—through the death and resurrected life of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. **What awesome and marvelous Good News that really is!**

What Jesus Christ Has Done, Is Doing and Will Do

The Gospel embraces God’s entire plan of salvation. It is a message centered on who and what God is and the purpose He is working out through humanity.

The fulfillment of this purpose for each of us, individually, rests on our willingness to trust in Jesus Christ. The Gospel reveals the perfect way of life He taught—that of living God’s law as outlined throughout the Old and New Testaments, both written through His inspiration.

The Gospel points to Jesus’ role as the sacrificial Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of those who accept Him as their personal Savior. The Gospel also directs us to Christ’s current role as our heavenly High Priest who continually intervenes with the Father on our behalf. It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus **lives His very life in**

us, as we yield to Him. *That is what empowers us to obey God's spiritual law, the Ten Commandments!*

Finally, the Gospel's *main* focus is on Christ's *future* return in power and glory, as the Almighty King of kings, to rule this world and the entire universe under the authority of God the Father. And ruling *with Jesus Christ* for all eternity will be His resurrected, immortal saints. What a magnificent and stupendous plan is revealed in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!

Salvation through eternal life in the Kingdom of God is our goal. And the *true* Jesus Christ is the only way to get there: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Christ taught us the Way. Through acceptance of Him and obedience to Him as Lord and Master—which means we must keep His holy law, the Ten Commandments—we can enter into God's Kingdom. **What Good News that God has provided such a way!**

"He Who Has the Son Has Life..."

The Apostle John stated that his Gospel account was "written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). And, in his first canonized epistle, he wrote, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:12–13).

Christ tells us all to "believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15, *KJV*)—that is, believe His message. The message of God's word is consistent. How, then, can one verse say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:31), while another verse says, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments!" (Matthew 19:17)? John was *also* clear about the need for keeping God's Ten Commandments. In 1 John 3:10, he wrote, "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice *righteousness* [law-keeping—cf. Psalm 119:172] is not of God..." John continues, "Now he who **keeps His commandments** abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." (1 John 3:24).

What is the answer? Does salvation come by belief or by commandment keeping—by "faith" or by "works"? Let the Apostle James

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answer: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead..... You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and **tremble!**” (James 2:14, 17, 19). In the same way, even demons know that Jesus is the Messiah who came to deliver humanity. But that does not save them. We must use the knowledge God gives us. “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is **dead?**... do you see that faith was working together with his [Abraham’s] works, and by works faith was made perfect?... **You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only**” (vv. 20, 22, 24).

So we see that salvation is not a matter of faith **or** works—but faith **and** works! A dynamic, **living** faith is always accompanied by **active obedience** to the law of God. How does belief in Jesus and His message fit into this? The answer is simple: if we truly **believe** what Jesus stands for and tells us, we will **obey** Him. This is accomplished by our accepting Him and **all that He taught**. After repentance and baptism, we receive God’s Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), by which the love of God is “poured out in our hearts” (Romans 5:5). And, as John wrote, “this **is** the love of God, that we **keep His commandments**” (1 John 5:3).

As 1 John 3:24 showed above, our commandment-keeping is evidence of Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit. If we truly accept Jesus Christ into our lives, He will live His obedient way of life in us to the degree that we put to death our old nature and yield to Him. Paul explained: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but **Christ liveth in me**: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, *KJV*).

Notice the phrase: “the faith **of** the Son of God.” Revelation 14:12 shows that God’s true Church has the “faith **of** Jesus.” Initially, we must demonstrate “faith toward God” (Hebrews 6:1). But that is not the faith that saves us. We must have *His* very faith—by which He performed His miracles—acting in us. This faith is a fruit of God’s Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22, *KJV*). As we exercise this faith through law-keeping, it will grow, along with our trust in, and reliance on, Jesus Christ. Acting in faith brings faith to life!

There is no contradiction here. *Living faith* is *active obedience*—which is *spiritual love*. How do we know if we have the Son? “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we **keep His commandments**. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and

the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:3–5).

A Calling to Glory!

Yes, Christ died to reconcile us to God. But that was not the end of it! And neither is what Christ does through us in this life. Jesus Christ is going “to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard” (Colossians 1:22–23). As Christian overcomers, we should always hold fast to the hope of the true Gospel, the tremendous understanding of our ultimate destiny.

When the last trumpet sounds, those who have overcome and daily learned to “*press* toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God” (Philippians 3:14) will feel themselves ascending in the air to meet Christ. Can you imagine the surge of exhilaration and ecstasy the saints will then have, knowing that they are now members of God’s Family? At long last, they will have finally overcome all obstacles to achieve their **ultimate destiny**—a destiny for which all of us were created! To learn more about this vital topic, please write for our **free** booklet, *Your Ultimate Destiny*.

As we hurtle skyward to join Christ in the air, we will realize that we are forevermore part of the divine level of existence—members of God’s Family. This dramatic climax to our human lives inspired the Apostle Paul to write: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with *the glory* which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the *sons of God*” (Romans 8:18–19).

When Will the Kingdom Come?

Christ told His disciples in Matthew 24:36: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” He was referring here to His Second Coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. However, even though we do not know the exact day or hour that God’s Kingdom will be set up, we do know that it is near. Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 give some “signs of the times” to watch. Jesus said:

“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” Then

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He spoke to them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away’ (Luke 21:28–33).

Terrible events are sharply increasing in the world today. In one way, even that is Good News because it means that God’s Kingdom is drawing nearer. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus said: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and **then the end will come.**” You are now in touch with those who preach this Gospel, even as you read this booklet! Also, the fact that Christ said “**this** gospel” in the middle of Matthew 24 proves that the Gospel does indeed include the prophetic events preceding the arrival of His Kingdom. It is Good News because God will be administering the only kind of medicine that will work on stubborn, carnal humanity: a *forcible takeover* of the planet—a divine coup d’état!

Many world leaders, leading scientists and other brilliant men believe that a one-world government is the *only way* to prevent humanity from destroying itself. Yet everyone knows that humanity will never do this in a cooperative and right way. Only God can do it correctly. And, make no mistake, God **will do it**. Then world peace and joy will finally be ours. What fantastic Good News that is!

So when you hear people preaching about the wonderful “Gospel,” you had better make sure they are not just talking about the *first phase* of the Christian life—our forgiveness from past sins through Jesus’ blood. The *true* Gospel goes *far beyond that!* It goes far beyond what most people understand or comprehend. For the ultimate Good News is absolutely transcendent in its implications. It challenges you toward a glorious life of active service in the Kingdom of God throughout Christ’s soon-coming reign on this earth, and further serving and ruling over the vast universe for eternity! This is the *full good news*. This is the *real* Gospel of Jesus Christ!

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