

A REVELATION OF.....

THE ETERNAL

KINGDOM OF GOD

KINGDOM LIVING TODAY

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

3. A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND (Serious Students Only)

4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

PART 2: A REVELATION OF.....

THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD

17. A MATTER OF TIME

21. KINGDOM PAST

24. KINGDOM FUTURE

26. KINGDOM PRESENT

INTRODUCTION

27. HEARING FROM GOD

28. OBEDIENCE TO GOD

30. WHERE IS THE KINGDOM NOW?

33. WHAT IS A 'BELIEVER'?

34. VICTORY OVER SATAN

38. BELIEVE IT!

40. HOW DO WE ENTER THE KINGDOM NOW?

43. LIVING THE KINGDOM LIFE

A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

In the church, when we think of ‘eternity’, our mind is automatically programmed to think of the future.

This has come about because we have been taught that ‘heaven’, which we consider to be the kingdom, is somewhere we will go when we die, or be zapped up to when persecution comes, and live forevermore in magnificent mansions, sited on streets paved with glistening gold, attended to by fluffy white angels, where we will live with Jesus in perfect peace and joyous harmony, forevermore! An eternal 5 star hotel in the sky!

Alright, I may be exaggerating a little, but you get the idea, I am sure. The kingdom is a place of eternal rest that we aspire to enter at some time in the future.

But is this traditional teaching of the church correct?

I trust that as we proceed through this teaching, our current paradigms will be challenged and embark on a voyage of discovery together to learn of some of the immense dimensions of the kingdom that encompass the past, present and future, all bound into one.

To commence our study we need to obtain an understanding of what, for many of us, is the curse of our existence, and that is, time, or rather, the shortage of it! For the boundaries time places on us are at the very heart of our current perceptions and misunderstandings about the kingdom of God.

His servant and yours,
David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND



Included specifically for theological students and teachers. General readers may prefer to proceed directly to PART 2: A REVELATION OF..

DEFINITION OF TERMS

KINGDOM OF GOD — (Matt. 6:33; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43) = “kingdom of Christ” (Matt. 13:41; 20:21) = “kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph. 5:5) = “kingdom of David” (Mark 11:10) = “the kingdom” (Matt. 8:12; 13:19) = “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 13:41), all denote the same thing under different aspects, viz.: (1) Christ’s mediatorial authority, or his rule on the earth; (2) the blessings and advantages of all kinds that flow from this rule; (3) the subjects of this kingdom taken collectively, or the Church. 1

KINGDOM OF GOD, KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ preaching, according to the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, who addresses himself to the Jews, speaks for the most part of the ‘kingdom of heaven’, Mark and Luke speak of the ‘kingdom of God’, which has the same meaning as the ‘kingdom of heaven’, but was more intelligible to non-Jews. The use of ‘kingdom of heaven’ in Matthew is certainly due to the tendency in Judaism to avoid the direct use of the name of God. In any case no distinction in sense is to be assumed between the two expressions (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Mt. 5:3 with Lk. 6:20).

I. In John the Baptist

John the Baptist first comes forward with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt. 3:2) and Jesus takes this message over from him (Mt. 4:17). The expression ‘kingdom of heaven’ (Heb.  ♦ × ) originates with the late-Jewish expectation of the future in which it denoted the decisive intervention of God, ardently expected by Israel, to restore his people’s fortunes and liberate them from the power of their enemies. The coming of

the kingdom is the great perspective of the future, prepared by the coming of the *Messiah, which paves the way for the kingdom of God.

By the time of Jesus the development of this eschatological hope in Judaism had taken a great variety of forms, in which now the national element and now the cosmic and apocalyptic element is prominent. This hope goes back to the proclamation in OT prophecy concerning both the restoration of David's throne and the coming of God to renew the world. Although the OT has nothing to say of the eschatological kingdom of heaven in so many words, yet in the Psalms and prophets the future manifestation of God's royal sovereignty belongs to the most central concepts of OT faith and hope. Here too various elements achieve prominence, as may be clearly seen from a comparison of the earlier prophets with the prophecies regarding universal world-sovereignty and the emergence of the Son of man in the book of *Daniel.

When John the Baptist and, after him, Jesus himself proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand, this proclamation involved an awakening cry of sensational and universal significance. The long-expected divine turning-point in history, the great restoration, however it was conceived at the time, is proclaimed as being at hand. It is therefore of all the greater importance to survey the content of the NT preaching with regard to the coming of the kingdom.

In the preaching of John the Baptist prominence is given to the announcement of divine judgment as a reality which is immediately at hand. The axe is already laid to the root of the trees. God's coming as King is above all else a coming to purify, to sift, to judge. No-one can evade it. No privilege can buy exemption from it, not even the ability to claim Abraham as one's father. At the same time John the Baptist points to the coming One who is to follow him, whose forerunner he himself is. The coming One comes with the winnowing-fan in his hand. In view of his coming the people must repent and submit to baptism for the washing away of sins, so as to escape the coming wrath and participate in the salvation of the kingdom and the baptism with the Holy Spirit which will be poured out when it comes (Mt. 3:1-12).

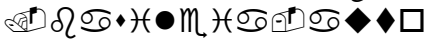
II. In the teaching of Jesus

a. Present aspect

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom follows word for word on John's, yet it bears a much more comprehensive character. After John the Baptist had watched Jesus' appearance for a considerable time, he began to be in doubt whether Jesus was, after all, the coming One whom he had announced (Mt. 11:2f.). Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom differs in two respects from that of the Baptist. In the first place, while it retains without qualification the announcement of judgment and the call to repentance, it is the saving significance of the kingdom that stands in the foreground. In the second place—and here is the pith and core of the matter—he announced the kingdom not just as a reality which was at hand, something which would appear in the immediate future, but as a reality which was already present, manifested in his own person and ministry. Although the places where Jesus speaks explicitly of the kingdom as being present are not numerous (see especially Mt. 12:28 and parallels), his whole preaching and ministry are marked by this dominant reality. In him the great future has already become 'present time'.

This present aspect of the kingdom manifests itself in all sorts of ways in the person and deeds of Christ. It appears palpably and visibly in the casting out of demons (*cf.* Lk. 11:20) and generally in Jesus' miraculous power. In the healing of those who are demon-possessed it becomes evident that Jesus has invaded the house of 'the strong man', has bound him fast and so is in a position to plunder his goods (Mt. 12:29). The kingdom of heaven breaks into the domain of the evil one. The power of Satan is broken. Jesus sees him fall like lightning from heaven. He possesses and bestows power to trample on the dominion of the enemy. Nothing can be impossible for those who go forth into the world, invested with Jesus' power, as witnesses of the kingdom (Lk. 10:18f.). The whole of Jesus' miraculous activity is the proof of the coming of the kingdom. What many prophets and righteous men desired in vain to see—the breaking in of the great epoch of salvation—the disciples can now see and hear (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?' they were shown the wonderful works done by Jesus, in which, according to the promise of prophecy, the kingdom was already being manifested: the blind were enabled to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear; lepers were being cleansed and dead people raised to life, and the gospel was being

proclaimed to the poor (Mt. 11:2ff.; Lk. 7:18ff.). Also in the last of these—the proclamation of the gospel—the breaking through of the kingdom is seen. Since salvation is announced and offered as a gift already available to the poor in spirit, the hungry and the mourners, the kingdom is theirs. So too the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, not merely as a future reality to be accomplished in heaven, nor merely as a present possibility, but as a dispensation offered today, on earth, through Jesus himself; ‘Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven; for the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins’ (see Mk. 2:1-12, *et passim*).

As appears clearly from this last-quoted word of power, all this is founded on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The kingdom has come in him and with him; he is the  Jesus’ self-revelation as the Messiah, the Son of man and Servant of the Lord, constitutes both the mystery and the unfolding of the whole gospel.

It is impossible to explain these sayings of Jesus about himself in a future sense, as some have wished to do, as though he referred to himself only as the future *Messiah, the Son of man who was to be expected on a coming day on the clouds of heaven. For however much this future revelation of the kingdom remains an essential element in the content of the gospel, we cannot mistake the fact that in the Gospels Jesus’ Messiahship is present here and now. Not only is he proclaimed as such at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration—as the beloved and elect One of God (plain Messianic designations)—but he is also endowed with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16) and invested with full divine authority (Mt. 21:27); the Gospel is full of his declarations of absolute authority, he is presented as the One sent by the Father, the One who has come to fulfil what the prophets foretold. In his coming and teaching the Scripture is fulfilled in the ears of those who listen to him (Lk. 4:21). He came not to destroy but to fulfil (Mt. 5:17ff.), to announce the kingdom (Mk. 1:38), to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19:10), to serve others, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). The secret of belonging to the kingdom lies in belonging to him (Mt. 7:23; 25:41). In brief, the person of Jesus as the Messiah is the centre of all that is announced in the gospel concerning the kingdom. The kingdom is concentrated in him in its present and future aspects alike.

b. Future aspect

There is a future aspect as well. For although it is clearly stated that the kingdom is manifested here and now in the gospel, so also is it shown that as yet it is manifested in this world only in a provisional manner. That is why the proclamation of its present activity in the words, 'The blind receive their sight; the dead are raised; the poor have good news preached to them', is followed by the warning: 'Blessed is he who takes no offence at me' (Mt. 11:6; Lk. 7:23). The 'offence' lies in the hidden character of the kingdom in this epoch. The miracles are still tokens of another order of reality than the present one; it is not yet the time when the demons will be delivered to eternal darkness (Mt. 8:29). The gospel of the kingdom is still revealed only as a seed which is being sown. In the parables of the sower, the seed growing secretly, the tares among the wheat, the mustard seed, the leaven, it is about this hidden aspect of the kingdom that Jesus instructs his disciples. The Son of man himself, invested with all power by God, the One who is to come on the clouds of heaven, is the Sower who sows the Word of God. He is depicted as a man dependent upon others: the birds, the thorns, human beings, can partially frustrate his work. He has to wait and see what will come of his seed. Indeed, the hiddenness of the kingdom is deeper still: the King himself comes in the form of a slave. The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man (Dn. 7:13) has no place to lay his head. In order to receive everything, he must first of all give up everything. He must give his life as a ransom; as the suffering Servant of the Lord of Is. 53, he must be numbered with the transgressors. The kingdom has come; the kingdom will come. But it comes by the way of the cross, and before the Son of man exercises his authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Mt. 4:8; 28:18) he must tread the path of obedience to his Father in order thus to fulfil all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). The manifestation of the kingdom has therefore a history in this world. It must be proclaimed to every creature. Like the wonderful seed, it must sprout and grow, no man knows how (Mk. 4:27). It has an inward power by which it makes its way through all sorts of obstacles and advances over all; for the field in which the seed is sown is the world (Mt. 13:38). The gospel of the kingdom goes forth to all nations (Mt. 28:19), for the King of the kingdom is also Lord of the Spirit. His resurrection brings in a new aeon; the preaching of the

kingdom *and* the King reaches out to the ends of the earth. The decision has already come to pass; but the fulfilment still recedes into the future. What at first appears to be one and the same coming of the kingdom, what is announced as one indivisible reality, at hand and at close quarters, extends itself to cover new periods of time and far distances. For the frontiers of this kingdom are not co-terminous with Israel's boundaries or history: the kingdom embraces all nations and fills all ages until the end of the world comes.

III. Kingdom and church

The kingdom is thus related to the history of the church and of the world alike. A connection exists between kingdom and church, but they are not identical, even in the present age. The kingdom is the whole of God's redeeming activity in Christ in this world; the church is the assembly of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Perhaps one could speak in terms of two concentric circles, of which the church is the smaller and the kingdom the larger, while Christ is the centre of both. This relation of the church to the kingdom can be formulated in all kinds of ways. The church is the assembly of those who have accepted the gospel of the kingdom in faith, who participate in the salvation of the kingdom, which includes the forgiveness of sins, adoption by God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the possession of eternal life. They are also those in whose life the kingdom takes visible form, the light of the world, the salt of the earth; those who have taken on themselves the yoke of the kingdom, who live by their King's commandments and learn from him (Mt. 11:28-30). The church, as the organ of the kingdom, is called to confess Jesus as the Christ, to the missionary task of preaching the gospel in the world; she is also the community of those who wait for the coming of the kingdom in glory, the servants who have received their Lord's talents in prospect of his return. The church receives her whole constitution from the kingdom, on all sides she is beset and directed by the revelation, the progress, the future coming of the kingdom of God, without at any time being the kingdom herself or even being identified with it.

Therefore the kingdom is not confined within the frontiers of the church. Christ's Kingship is supreme above all. Where it prevails and is acknowledged, not only is the individual human being set free, but the

whole pattern of life is changed: the curse of the demons and fear of hostile powers disappears. The change which Christianity brings about among peoples dominated by nature-religions is a proof of the comprehensive, all-embracing significance of the kingdom. It works not only outwardly like a mustard seed but inwardly like leaven. It makes its way into the world with its redeeming power. The last book of the Bible, which portrays Christ's Kingship in the history of the world and its advancing momentum right to the end, especially illuminates the antithesis between the triumphant Christ-King (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Rev. 5:1ff.) and the power of Satan and anti-christ, which still survives on earth and contends against Christ and his church. However much the kingdom invades world-history with its blessing and deliverance, however much it presents itself as a saving power against the tyranny of gods and forces inimical to mankind, it is only through a final and universal crisis that the kingdom, as a visible and all-conquering reign of peace and salvation, will bring to full fruition the new heaven and the new earth.

IV. In the rest of the New Testament

The expression 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God' does not appear so frequently in the NT outside the Synoptic Gospels. This is, however, simply a matter of terminology. As the indication of the great revolution in the history of salvation which has already been inaugurated by Christ's coming, and as the expected consummation of all the acts of God, it is the central theme of the whole NT revelation of God.

V. In theological thought

As regards the conception of the kingdom of heaven in theology, this has been powerfully subjected to all kinds of influences and viewpoints during the various periods and trends of theological thought. In Roman Catholic theology a distinctive feature is the identification of the kingdom of God and the church in the earthly dispensation, an identification which is principally due to Augustine's influence. Through the ecclesiastical hierarchy Christ is actualized as King of the kingdom of God. The area of the kingdom is coterminous with the frontiers of the church's power and authority. The kingdom of heaven is extended by the mission and advance of the church in the world.

In their resistance to the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the Reformers laid chief emphasis on the spiritual and invisible significance of the kingdom and readily (and wrongly) invoked Lk. 17:20f. in support of this. The kingdom of heaven, that is to say, is a spiritual sovereignty which Christ exercises through the preaching of his word and the operation of the Holy Spirit. While the Reformation in its earliest days did not lose sight of the kingdom's great dimensions of saving history, the kingdom of God, under the influence of the Enlightenment and pietism, came to be increasingly conceived in an individualistic sense; it is the sovereignty of grace and peace in the hearts of men. In later liberal theology this conception developed in a moralistic direction (especially under the influence of Kant): the kingdom of God is the kingdom of peace, love and righteousness. At first, even in pietism and sectarian circles, the expectation of the coming kingdom of God was maintained, without, however, making allowance for a positive significance of the kingdom for life in this world. Over against this more or less dualistic understanding of the kingdom we must distinguish the social conception of the kingdom which lays all the stress on its visible and communal significance. This conception is distinguished in some writers by a social radicalism (the 'Sermon on the Mount' Christianity of Tolstoy and others, or the 'religious-social' interpretation of, *e.g.*, Kutter and Ragaz in Switzerland), in others by the evolutionary belief in progress (the 'social gospel' in America). The coming of the kingdom consists in the forward march of social righteousness and communal development.

In contrast to these spiritualizing, moralistic and evolutionary interpretations of the kingdom, NT scholarship is rightly laying stress again on the original significance of the kingdom in Jesus' preaching—a significance bound up with the history of salvation and eschatology. While the founders of this newer eschatological direction gave an extreme interpretation to the idea of the kingdom of heaven, so that there was no room left for the kingdom's penetration of the present world-order (Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, the so-called 'thoroughgoing' eschatology), more attention has been paid latterly to the unmistakable present significance of the kingdom, while this significance has been brought within the perspective of the history of salvation, the perspective

of the progress of God's dynamic activity in history, which has the final consummation as its goal.

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HEAVEN — (1.) Definitions. The phrase “heaven and earth” is used to indicate the whole universe (Gen. 1:1; Jer. 23:24; Acts 17:24). According to the Jewish notion there were three heavens,

(a) The firmament, as “fowls of the heaven” (Gen. 2:19; 7:3, 23; Ps. 8:8, etc.), “the eagles of heaven” (Lam. 4:19), etc.

(b) The starry heavens (Deut. 17:3; Jer. 8:2; Matt. 24:29).

(c) “The heaven of heavens,” or “the third heaven” (Deut. 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps. 115:16; 148:4; 2 Cor. 12:2).

(2.) Meaning of words in the original,

(a) The usual Hebrew word for “heavens” is שָׁמַיִם , a plural form meaning “heights,” “elevations” (Gen. 1:1; 2:1).

(b) The Hebrew word רָמָה is also used (Ps. 68:18; 93:4; 102:19, etc.) as equivalent to שָׁמַיִם , “high places,” “heights.”

(c) Heb. galgal, literally a “wheel,” is rendered “heaven” in Ps. 77:18 (R.V., “whirlwind”).

(d) Heb. shahak, rendered “sky” (Deut. 33:26; Job 37:18; Ps. 18:11), plural “clouds” (Job 35:5; 36:28; Ps. 68:34, marg. “heavens”), means probably the firmament.

(e) Heb. rakia is closely connected with (d), and is rendered “firmamentum” in the Vulgate, whence our “firmament” (Gen. 1:6; Deut. 33:26, etc.), regarded as a solid expanse.

(3.) Metaphorical meaning of term. Isa. 14:13, 14; “doors of heaven” (Ps. 78:23); heaven “shut” (1 Kings 8:35); “opened” (Ezek. 1:1). (See 1 Chr. 21:16.)

(4.) Spiritual meaning. The place of the everlasting blessedness of the righteous; the abode of departed spirits.

(a) Christ calls it his “Father’s house” (John 14:2).

(b) It is called “paradise” (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7).

(c) “The heavenly Jerusalem” (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 3:12).

(d) The “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 25:1; James 2:5).



(e) The “eternal kingdom” (2 Pet. 1:11).

(f) The “eternal inheritance” (1 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 9:15).

(g) The “better country” (Heb. 11:14, 16).

(h) The blessed are said to “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and to be “in Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22; Matt. 8:11); to “reign with Christ” (2 Tim. 2:12); and to enjoy “rest” (Heb. 4:10, 11).

In heaven the blessedness of the righteous consists in the possession of “life everlasting,” “an eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17), an exemption from all sufferings for ever, a deliverance from all evils (2 Cor. 5:1, 2) and from the society of the wicked (2 Tim. 4:18), bliss without termination, the “fulness of joy” for ever (Luke 20:36; 2 Cor. 4:16, 18; 1 Pet. 1:4; 5:10; 1 John 3:2). The believer’s heaven is not only a state of everlasting blessedness, but also a “place”, a place “prepared” for them (John 14:2). 1

HEAVEN. Several words are translated ‘heaven’, but the only important ones are the Heb.  and the Gk. . The former is plural, and the latter often occurs in the plural. But, just as in Eng., there does not seem to be any great difference between ‘heaven’ and ‘the heavens’. The term is used of the physical heaven, especially in the expression ‘heaven and earth’ (Gn. 14:19; Mt. 5:18). Some suggest that the Bible writers thought of heaven in this aspect as solid, and rather like an inverted bowl (the ‘firmament’, Gn. 1:8). The sun makes his daily pilgrimage across it (Ps. 19:4-6), and there are windows through which the rain might descend (Gn. 7:11). Some Hebrews may well have held this idea, but it must not be forgotten that the men of the OT were capable of vivid imagery. It will never do to treat them as wooden literalists. The theological meaning of their language about heaven can be understood without recourse to such hypotheses.

Heaven is the abode of God, and of those closely associated with him. The Israelite is to pray, ‘Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven’ (Dt. 26:15). God is ‘the God of heaven’ (Jon. 1:9), or ‘the Lord, the God of heaven’ (Ezr. 1:2), or the ‘Father who is in heaven’ (Mt. 5:45; 7:21, *etc.*). God is not alone there, for we read of ‘the host of heaven’ which worships him (Ne. 9:6), and of ‘the angels in heaven’ (Mk. 13:32). Believers also may look forward to ‘an inheritance kept in heaven’ for them (1 Pet. 1:4). Heaven is thus the present abode of God and his angels, and the ultimate destination of his saints on earth.

Among many ancient peoples there was the thought of a multiplicity of heavens. It has been suggested that the NT bears witness to the rabbinic idea of seven heavens, for there are references to Paradise (Lk. 23:43), and to ‘the third heaven’ (2 Cor. 12:2; this was called Paradise on the rabbinic reckoning, *cf.* 2 Cor. 12:3). Jesus also is said to have passed ‘through the

heavens' (Heb. 4:14). These, however, are slender bases on which to erect such a structure. All the NT language is perfectly capable of being understood along the lines of heaven as the place of perfection.

Heaven comes to be used as a reverent periphrasis for God. Thus when the prodigal says 'I have sinned against heaven' (Lk. 15:18, 21), he means 'I have sinned against God'. So with Jn. 3:27, 'what is given him from heaven'. The most important example of this is Matthew's use of the expression 'the kingdom of heaven', which seems to be identical with 'the kingdom of God'.

Finally, we must notice an eschatological use of the term. In both OT and NT it is recognized that the present physical universe is not eternal, but will vanish away and be replaced by 'new heavens and a new earth' (Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). We should understand such passages as indicating that the final condition of things will be such as fully expresses the will of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. *TDNT* 5, pp. 497-543; *NIDNTT* 2, pp. 184-196; *ZPEB*, 3, pp. 60-64. 2

EARTH — (1.) In the sense of soil or ground, the translation of the word אֶרֶץ . In Gen. 9:20 "husbandman" is literally "man of the ground or earth." Altars were to be built of earth (Ex. 20:24). Naaman asked for two mules' burden of earth (2 Kings 5:17), under the superstitious notion that Jehovah, like the gods of the heathen, could be acceptably worshipped only on his own soil.

(2). As the rendering of אֶרֶץ , it means the whole world (Gen. 1:2); the land as opposed to the sea (1:10). אֶרֶץ also denotes a country (21:32); a plot of ground (23:15); the ground on which a man stands (33:3); the inhabitants of the earth (6:1; 11:1); all the world except Israel (2 Chr. 13:9). In the New Testament "the earth" denotes the land of Judea (Matt. 23:35); also things carnal in contrast with things heavenly (John 3:31; Col. 3:1, 2). 1

EARTH. 1. The physical *world in which man lives, as opposed to the heavens, e.g. Gn. 1:1; Dt. 31:28; Ps. 68:8; Dn. 6:27, etc. (Heb.

אֶרֶץ or Aram. אֶרֶץ). This word is ambiguous in so far as it sometimes expresses this wider meaning of 'earth' (i.e. so far as the

Hebrews knew it) and sometimes only ‘land’, a more restricted area. In the accounts of the Flood (Gn. 6-9) and of the division of speech (Gn. 11:1) each meaning has its advocates. This ambivalence is not peculiar to Hebrew; suffice it to mention the Egyptian word **𓂏𓏏𓏏**, which likewise means land (as in ‘conqueror of all lands’) and earth (‘you who are upon earth’, *i.e.* the living).

2. Dry land as opposed to the sea, Gn. 1:10, *etc.* (Heb. **אֶרֶץ יַבֵּשׁ**; also **אֶרֶץ חֲדָשׁ**, ‘dry land’ in Dn. 2:10). Phrases such as ‘pillars of the earth’, ‘foundation of the earth’ (1 Sa. 2:8; Jb. 9:6; Ps. 102:25; Is. 48:13) are simply poetic expressions from early Semitic which do not imply a doctrine of a table-like surface upon supports. The ‘water under the earth’ (Ex. 20:4) probably refers to subterranean springs and pools which, as the main source of water in Palestine, are referred to in poetic passages such as Pss. 24:2; 136:6; *cf.* Gn. 8:2.

3. The ground-surface, the soil which supports vegetation and so all life, *e.g.* Gn. 1:11-12; Dt. 26:2 (both **אֶרֶץ** and **אֲדָמָה** are so used). Soil served for temporary altars (Ex. 20:24); the Aramaean Naaman took Israelite soil on which to worship Israel’s God (2 Ki. 5:17). Torn clothes and the placing of earth on the head were tokens of mourning (2 Sa. 1:2; 15:32).

4. In passages such as Gn. 11:1; Ps. 98:9; La. 2:15, the word comes to mean, by transference, the inhabitants of the earth or part of it. In the NT Gk. **γῆ** is variously translated, generally ‘earth’, and appears with all these four meanings. For 1 see, *e.g.*, Mt. 6:10 and note the restricted use in Jn. 3:22, ‘land of Judea’; for 2 see Acts 4:24 and *cf.* Mk. 4:1; for 3 see Mt. 25:18, 25 and *cf.* Mt. 10:29; for 4 see Rev. 13:3 (AV ‘world’). 2

1. Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

2. *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

PART 2: A REVELATION OF..... THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD

A MATTER OF TIME

One thing I have discovered in God over the years is that He is not bound by time. Time is a curse of sin! Before Adam and Eve crunched on their delicious (New Zealand - yes, we now have a crunchy variety here called Eve!) apple, there was no need for the concept of a beginning and an end - the foundation of time. They would never grow old, living for eternity in the perfect paradise that was the Garden of Eden, communing with God.....

in the garden in the cool of the day. (Genesis 3:8)

Time, as we understand it, was totally irrelevant.

Was there any pressure then, to get things done today? Or was it the perfect situation for the procrastinators amongst us!

Seriously though, with sin came death, and suddenly, our days were, and remain, numbered. Time, because it is a limited quantity, assumes vital importance to us. Particularly so, as very few of us know how much of it we actually have left!

So our human thought patterns are shaped and limited by time. For us, everything has a beginning and an end, with varying lengths of time between the two. Therefore we cannot truly fathom eternity.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: ² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, ⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, ⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, ⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a

time to keep and a time to throw away, ⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, ⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. ⁹ What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on men. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11)

We can only understand eternity through the limited concept of time, following time, infinitely. But actually, eternity is timeless. It is without time. No watchmakers there!

We have the concept, influenced much by the wonderful descriptions of Revelation, that we will float on clouds with angel wings, worshipping God for ever and ever. That is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (how about Leap year?), year in and year out, forever. Yet, although I cannot understand it, I do not believe that this will be the case. Our thinking here is limited by our ingrained limitation of time. In eternity, time does not exist. Eternity then, will be completely different to what we expect.

Take, as a limited, human example, air. We give no thought to the air we breathe, the first essential of life, until we are placed, say in an airtight room, where we know the air will run out! Then it becomes hugely important to us! What was previously unimportant becomes life limiting!

In eternity, time won't simply be abundant, by definition, it won't exist.

So what is the point of all this?

While we look at life through the colored spectacles of time, of a past, present and future, God doesn't. For us time is a line, with a beginning and an end. For God time is more like an eternity symbol. And He can be at any and every place on it, all at the same time! For God there is no past present and future, as there is for us. This understanding can, for example, help us better understand the concept of predestination, for in God all time

is as one. While this may all sound theoretical, it is of huge importance in understanding the things of God. For in God, past, present and future are all one.

Take, for example, 'salvation'. We look to our salvation as having taken place at a specific time on a certain day. Once saved, always saved, is the logical but incorrect theology that arises from this. For, in God, the day of our first salvation is but the first day. From then on we are being saved as we live our life and we will continue to be saved, if we remain in obedience to Him, for the remainder of our life on earth and throughout eternity. Incidentally, we will not avoid persecution either, in end times, as Jesus says here. Again, we must hold firm to our salvation to be saved.

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:5-13)

Another interesting example is prophecy. We, in our Western mindset, look at prophecy as having a single fulfillment. Yet the Jewish viewpoint is different. For the Jews, prophecy has ongoing fulfillment. It can be fulfilled in different ways, generation after generation. Imagine if we viewed the Book of Revelation in that way. All our 'pre-s' and 'post-s' could be true! Now, that is something to muse upon!

However, getting back to the 'kingdom of God', the same situation applies. In God's eyes and way His kingdom is not past, is not present, is not future. It is all of these at the same time!

KINGDOM PAST

One of the basic differences between the Old and New Testaments is the perceived change from 'physicality' to 'spirituality'.

For example, the physical presence of God was found in the Tabernacle and the Temple, in the Old, while our bodies have become the spiritual temple of the Holy Spirit, in the New.

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

Further on, we will look at the correctness of our understanding.

However, for today, as we discuss the 'kingdom past', we need to place ourselves in the position of the Jews at the time of Jesus.

Their history was of the glory of the Jewish nation under David and then Solomon, at which time Israel became an important regional power in the Middle East.

God inhabited the Tabernacles of Moses and David, His presence being found between the cherubim on the Ark in the Holy of Holies. (To find out more, check out <http://www.wwj.org.nz/pdf/wwj36p11.pdf>) A REVELATION OF..... THE AMAZING TABERNACLE OF MOSES

Of course, through disobedience, this 'kingdom' split into two, disintegrated and finally disappeared as the people were conquered. The ten tribes of Israel disappeared forever while the remaining 2 tribes of Judah, plus many of the priests, were taken into captivity in Babylon. Eventually a small group returned to the Jerusalem area, led by Nehemiah and Hezekiah, to rebuild the city and the temple.

However the city remained under foreign control of various conquering empires until, at the time of Jesus, it was the Roman's turn to rule the Palestine area. The people, of course, longed for the glory days of their former 'kingdom'. Many thought Jesus would be the 'savior' to restore their land to them.

9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10)

The Romans, quite naturally, pursued Him, particularly during the last year of His ministry, as a perceived enemy of the state and threat to their rule. They were supported by most Jewish religious leaders who desired the status quo, as religious leaders generally do. When, after Palm Sunday, Jesus did not lead an insurrection, the people too, turned against Him, and demanded that He be put to death.

22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" (Matthew 27:22)

For the 'kingdom past', in the eyes of the Jews, both then and now, was a physical, territorial kingdom of Jewish people, with Jerusalem as its capital.

There are many similarities, as I am sure you will realise, with what is perceived to be the kingdom of the future, when Jesus returns to rule and reign upon the earth.

The 'kingdom past' then, is very much a physical entity, one based on ethnicity, located in the Middle East, comprising all the lands God promised to the Patriarchs, including those which were not fully conquered, even at the height of Solomon's reign during Israel's glory days.

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole

land—from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the LORD said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.” (Deuteronomy 34:1-4)

Jesus both changed and extended the concept of 'kingdom' in a way the people did not understand.

KINGDOM FUTURE

Man will undoubtedly continue to hypothesize about the future kingdom of God, until it arrives. Of course, there are as many views as there are Christians!

Basically however, there are 2 alternatives. One, that the kingdom will only ever be spiritual, and the other, that a physical kingdom will, some day in the future, come into being, either on earth or as a new creation. It is not my purpose to get into detail here.

Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, looks forward to a day when Jesus will rule and reign with His faithful saints.

In the Old.....

44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (Daniel 2:44)

And in the New.....

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

Overwhelmingly, the people of Old Testament times looked forward to a future, perfect physical kingdom, and this too was assumed and confirmed, in the New.

Once we leave the first chapters of Revelation, dealing with the state of the churches, the remaining section that talks in clear, unambiguous, nearly all non-symbolic, terms to me is the start of chapter 20, describing the 1000 year reign.

The Thousand Years

20 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:1-6)

Most Christians do believe in the existence of a future physical kingdom.

We therefore have a past physical kingdom, as described in the Old Testament, and a generally accepted future physical kingdom, promised in the New.

KINGDOM PRESENT

INTRODUCTION

Earlier on, we saw that God's view of time is completely different to our own. We separate the past, present and future, while to God they are all one. We gave the examples of salvation and prophecy as having past, present and future fulfillment.

So it is with the kingdom of God. It is not His way to have a kingdom past and a kingdom future, while leaving a void in the present age. Logically, there must be a kingdom present, also.

So what implications does this pattern of God have for your life and mine?

We cannot find the answer in most church teachings, as they teach kingdom future only.

So we need to look to the Bible (always the best way!) for direction as to what the present day kingdom is to be and our place within it.

First and foremost, the kingdom is not just a salvation experience or even the exercise of spiritual gifts, but is founded upon and furthered by, ongoing obedience to God's will.

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-3)

Obedience is at the heart of the kingdom and of kingdom living.

Obedience to whom, though?

Does it say obedience to the pastor, teacher or elders? No, it doesn't. Does it say to follow the tele-evangelist or the latest book on how to build a bigger church? No, it doesn't. Does it say to follow prophet or apostle who may bring a word over you or preach the kingdom? No, it doesn't. While all these ministries are important to us in assisting with our spiritual growth, ultimately, if we wish to live a kingdom life, direction can only come from the one place, and that is God.

HEARING FROM GOD

How do we hear from God? First, and foremost, through a personal relationship with Him.

Lots of committed believers tell me they don't hear from God. Of course they do, for our primary Godly guidance for day to day living is found in the Word, the Bible, which they read regularly.

However, what they are really talking about is the lack of a personal 'rhema' word, one directly from the Lord.

That can be, and is, a problem at times, for all of us!

Interestingly, even too for prophets, who so easily have a word for others, but often lack direction for themselves.

So how do we 'overcome' this problem of hearing, before we can obey, on our journey to become 'overcomers'?

Most serious Christians read their Bible and pray daily, or on most days. They will know the Word and be able to quote it freely. They also have lists of prayer needs for themselves and others which they diligently petition God about. Does this sound like you?

Yet you don't hear from God personally? Why? Can I suggest it could be that we are so busy learning from the Word and praying our petitions, that we don't give Him an opportunity to talk to us!

May I be so bold to suggest that it would be a good experiment to put aside your Bible reading and petitioning for 1 week and instead, spend the time listening to Jesus. Let your God speak to you. Listen to Him as you would to a friend. Ask Him what sort of day He is having! This can be incredibly difficult to do at first, for we are so used to our religious ritual. But if you stick at it, it could revolutionize your life! For our walk with Jesus is all about relationship - a two way relationship that is.

Worth a try?

OBEDIENCE TO GOD

To hear from God is amazing! Wonderful! An experience available to every Christian, provided we are prepared to wait on Him and listen, listen, listen, rather than talk, talk, talk!

We need to really hear and understand what God is saying to us. This lack of the art of listening and understanding is not a new problem. Jesus said, quoting Isaiah;

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: " 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' (Matthew 13:10-15)

Following on from this, once we have heard from God it is vital that we obey what He says to us! Irrespective of the personal cost!

Walking with Jesus Ministries is based upon Revelation 12:11, a verse that stresses the cost of obedience.

*11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; **they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.** (Revelation 12:11)*

To enter the kingdom of God, to become an overcomer, we need to be prepared to put our lives on the line, spiritually, materially, and even, physically. Entering the kingdom costs us everything!

3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:3-6)

The Bible is very clear about this. Hearing, even believing, is not enough! It is our actions, our obedience to God that is the entry ticket to the kingdom. Nothing less than becoming like Jesus is good enough. Jesus was not self-oriented. He was dedicated to obeying His father, no matter the personal cost to Him.

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." (Matthew 26:42)

He then died on the cross for you and for me.

And we are required to die to self for Him, and for others, as He did for us. Sobering, isn't it?

Yet obedience to God's will was, remains, and always will be, the cost of entering the kingdom.

WHERE IS THE KINGDOM NOW?

If we accept that there is a 'kingdom present' then we must ask, "Where is this kingdom?"

The Bible contains the answer, straight from 'the horses mouth' so to speak, in the words of Jesus.

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

The kingdom is within because the Holy Spirit, ie. God, dwells within each believer.

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

This has huge implications for us, ones we all too often forget or choose to ignore.

The Spirit of God lived within Jesus:

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (John 2:19-21)

Today we have obtained our inheritance and have individually become temples of God:

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Firstly we must honour God with our body, with our thoughts and actions.

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Most of us know this, even if we don't always live it.

However, there is a second implication of the kingdom being within, the understanding of which will radically alter our lives and our understanding of how we 'do church'.

Under the present church system, in particular in 'Spirit filled' situations, we are encouraged to come forward for prayer, generally after the message, if we have any needs. Someone will then pray for us. This seems great. But is it right? In certain circumstances it may be helpful to receive this form of support, but in general, this is not the kingdom understanding and way. For the kingdom is within us and therefore our primary communication channel should be directly between ones self and God.

The Holy Spirit inside is our counselor and guide:

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13)

We are to approach God personally and confidently with our requests. No intermediary is required:

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. (1 John 5:14)

The primary teacher and guide in our life is to be the Holy Spirit, who inhabits the kingdom within you and within me. Not the minister, pastor, priest, teacher, prophet, evangelist or apostle, but the Holy Spirit who dwells within.

24 See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he promised us—even eternal life. 26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. (1 John 2:24-27)

The focus of our understanding is wrong. We are not to follow a leader, whatever the title or function, but are to develop and fine tune our spiritual faculties so that we both hear and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit who dwells inside of us. We must become God focused in all that we do.

This has huge implications for leadership. It is nice to pray for people. Our motivation may be wonderful, to help people in need. But all too often, we end up becoming a crutch upon whom our people rely, rather than seeking God's will for themselves.

Next time you look to have an altar call, how about being really radical, and ask the people to pray to God personally, without intervention by others, and then to personally wait upon and listen for a response from Him.

Such is the way of the kingdom.

WHAT IS A 'BELIEVER'?

We have established that the kingdom is a spiritual condition within each believer.

It is important to understand that the meaning of 'believer' in English is not what was understood in Jewish culture at the time of Jesus. We separate thoughts from actions. Jewish culture did not do this. The word 'disciple', while not precisely the same, provides a better general understanding of the Jewish concept of what it means to be a believer. Our thoughts and words need to be backed up by actions, by how we live our life.

If then, the kingdom is within, surely it is logical that the kingdom must already be on earth as well as in heaven? The kingdom has come.

In the past we have been taught that we need to put up with living on the earth, in satan's domain, until we die or are 'zapped up' into the heavenly kingdom where we will live happily ever after, forevermore!

But how can that be right if the kingdom is within?

If indeed, the kingdom is within us, then surely we are to become the kingdom in the world.

I want you to stop and think about this, for it brings about a profound change in understanding our walk with Jesus.

Now we can start to truly comprehend, the first and primary petition of the Lord's prayer. After glorifying Jesus we petition;

*10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
(Matthew 6:10)*

Confirming our discussion above, we have previously understood this to be looking forward to the return of Jesus. But if indeed the 'kingdom is within', as Jesus said, this must have a present meaning too.

For you and I, as disciples of Jesus, are part of the kingdom now. In the Lord's Prayer then, we are praying about a present kingdom, about His will being done on earth today.

We are only just starting to touch on the implications of this profound truth.

Please stop here, think, contemplate, and pray, before going on further. May the Holy Spirit (not David!) reveal His truth for you.

VICTORY OVER SATAN

We discussed earlier how many things in the Bible have a past, present and future fulfillment. For example, 'we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.'

We have also looked at the kingdom, past and future, so it logically follows that there must be a kingdom present, also.

Much of the problem we have in understanding or recognizing this is the fact that the current kingdom is first invisible, being found within us. Thus we have difficulty in accepting that the kingdom of God is for today. Nor, because of what we have been taught about the kingdom being future, do we live in kingdom victory today.

We understand that satan was thrown out of heaven, when he desired God's throne, to inhabit the earth.

However, we fail to understand the victory of Jesus over him, as was promised way back in Genesis.....

he (ie. Jesus) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15b)

Jesus overcame satan on the cross;

15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:15)

In so doing Jesus established His 'kingdom present' upon the earth.

Satan has been defeated! Through kingdom understanding and living, we are now able to strike satan's heel:

20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. (Romans 16:20a)

We again need to understand that the victory over satan has already been won! We have no need to fear him! He threatens us and makes a big noise but his threats are hollow, for we have already attained victory through becoming as one with Jesus.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2;14b)

And again.....

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

Finally, for today, confirmation of the victory over satan through the verse upon which WWJ Ministries is based;

*11 They overcame him (satan)
by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus)
and by the word of their testimony; (through the Holy Spirit)
they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death. (by obedience to the Father) (Revelation 12:11)*

What Jesus did for us 'positionally' on the cross can be attained 'experientially' through the sacrifice of our lives to Him. Yes, we can have the victory over satan today through kingdom living. Hallelujah! PTL!

The reality of coming to maturity in Jesus is to out work the kingdom through our lives.

We then move from the 'kingdom within' to the 'kingdom without', that is the kingdom of God being established upon the earth through 'kingdom living' of fully mature 'sons' taking on the image of Christ in our (his and her) lives.

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:13-14)

Jesus was made perfect through suffering on the cross and we too are to be made perfect through suffering. Not very popular verses, these ones!

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:10-11)

As we are made holy, so the kingdom is outworked through us. In the past, we have not accepted that this is possible, but as we approach closer to the ultimate return of Jesus, the revelation of the power of kingdom living is becoming understood and applied by increasingly more people around the whole world.

There is an increasing understanding that His kingdom now will come through His people.

John the Baptist understood this.

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 3:1-2)

Jesus got His disciples to pray for it;

10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

Jesus will not return until 'the church' (of believers, not an organisation) has become righteous.

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:7-8)

Righteousness, holiness and overcoming, are for the present day. As you can see from the above Scripture, Jesus is not returning for a brow beaten people whose greatest hope is that they will be raptured in order to avoid the pain of God's judgment upon the earth! Rather, He is returning for a kingdom living, victorious church which has been through the pain and suffering required to move towards perfection, a people who are prepared to judge themselves now and change their lives in order to avoid future judgment.

31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:31-2)

In the letters to the 7 churches in Revelation, there are 7 promises of increasing reward made to the successive churches. The final and greatest promise, made to the wealthy, lukewarm church of Laodicea, widely perceived to be a 'type' of today's church, was a promise of victory to those who were prepared to change their ways!

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)

Check out the full teaching at <http://www.wwj.org.nz/pdf/6p24.pdf>

Such a promise could only be made to those who have outworked the kingdom in their lives, participating in seeing God's kingdom established upon the earth - now.

Is this you? Is this me?

BELIEVE IT!

The problem we have with living the kingdom lifestyle now, I would suggest, is that we don't believe that it is possible to do. Like the Pharisees of Jesus time who prevented the people from entering into the 'present truth' of Jesus.....

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matthew 23:13)

.....so the traditions of the church built up over the best part of 2 millennia have blinded us to the reality of establishing the kingdom now.

There is scripture in John 14 that we have been trained to understand as a future promise only.

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that

you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:1-4)

This understanding has been perpetuated through ongoing mistranslation of the contents of the Father's house. It started with the 'many mansions' of the King James Version. How can there be many mansions within a house?

The NIV, quoted above, realized this, but has only marginally improved the translation to make it more logical, but still wrong.

The true translation of 'mansions' or 'rooms' is '**abiding places**'. There is a spiritual principle of 'oneness' that we don't understand. We abide in God. How that works out physically, we don't understand.

There are numbers of references to us being in oneness with Christ and God - now. One is;

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:2-3)

This is a mystery to us, as is the Trinity - 3 in 1, 1 in 3. If we reach out, believe and grasp it, we have the opportunity to be one with Christ, in God, now! Heaven won't be a series of mansions, or a giant hotel with many rooms. Rather, accommodation aside, it will be a place of bonding, of unity of oneness, with a triune yet one God.

But more than that, the kingdom of God (or heaven) is attainable now, for as the Scripture says, we are ***now hidden with Christ***. Now means now! It has been 'positionally' done for us when Jesus died for us. But we must reach out and 'experientially' grasp hold of this truth - now!

How do we do it?

We will look at this next.

I understand that this may seem really strange to you. For it is different to what we have always understood. But please, don't reject it out of hand. Seek the Lord about it. Study the Scriptures to find out for yourself.

There is a greater future available to us now than we could ever imagine!

HOW DO WE ENTER THE KINGDOM NOW?

So how do we enter the kingdom now?

How do we enter experientially, into the reality of the positional victory that Jesus attained for us on the cross?

This is the challenge of living the Christian life. Of holiness and righteousness. Of coming to maturity in Christ. Of becoming an overcomer. A part of the bride of Christ. Of living a kingdom lifestyle. Of being a participant in the building of the kingdom of God now. Yes, there are many expressions about, and many promises made in the Bible to, those who are prepared to go through the personal purification process necessary to live a Christ like life.

*21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,”** they said. (Acts 14:21-2)*

But how do we do it?

I don't have all the answers, for I have not reached this state yet (ask my wife Kathy!) but am learning some lessons as I pass down life's path.

My personality is one of an achiever. I give of myself pretty fully to what I am committed to, in many areas of my life.

When I finally became a follower of Jesus at age 42, I wanted to be the best I could be for Him. And I still do, even if my initial enthusiasm has been tempered by the ups and downs of my spiritual walk over the past 20 years.

Being a generally disciplined person, my first attempts to become more like Jesus were those of self improvement. While this was reasonably effective in many of the 'thou shalt not' areas of life, it did not take me long to realise that there was a lot more to becoming like Jesus than purely physical behaviors. Of course it is important that we live by the principles contained in the 10 Commandments etc., set out as a foundation for a righteous and holy life. However, as I soon discovered, these could easily and quickly become very legalistic and, as with the rules the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus time had devised, well away from the true truth that Jesus came to bring. A selection of verses follows;

13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to..... 23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former..... 27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:13,23,27-8)

It is obvious then from these words of Jesus, that simply keeping the outward law is insufficient to make us Christlike!

On a trip to Africa, I was asked to minister in a Holiness Church. This was a new experience for me. There were lots of rules and regulations, mainly as I soon found out, directed to the behaviour of the women in the congregation. eg. no makeup, no speaking in the service, etc. These people

had a longing for holiness and righteousness, yet they had been sidetracked into trying to find it through rules and regulations.

I was in a difficult situation. I could see that the people had a huge desire to do what was right in order to become beacons of light for Jesus in the world, but it was clear that, instead, they had become bound up in religious rules that were having the opposite effect.

So what could I do? Upset their earnestness by undermining their beliefs? Destroy without having the time to rebuild? A real predicament!

But then the Lord came to the rescue! I didn't have to say anything! His Holy Spirit fell in power and literally set the people free. Religious stiffness turned into holy joy! The people celebrated a freedom in the Holy Spirit that they had not known before. Here were a people who wanted to truly live for Jesus who, suddenly were enabled to through the Holy Spirit! It was wonderful!

I will never forget the night, for as we went to leave, our car was mobbed by the newly changed, enthusiastic crowd. The only time I have experienced such a thing.

You see, holiness and righteousness cannot be achieved through living a life dictated by rules and regulations, but only through the freedom and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

This morning in bed, I was reading my Bible. I was in Acts, at chapter 6, and didn't really want to move on, as it was nearly time for the news on the radio! What a priority! However I was prompted by the Holy Spirit to read on into chapter 7, Stephen's speech before he was stoned.

I knew why when I read these words...

*48 "However, the Most High **does not live in houses made by men.** As the prophet says: 49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. **What kind of house will you build for me?** says the Lord. Or where will*

*my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?' 51 “**You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers. You always resist the Holy Spirit!**” (Acts 7:48-51)*

A real kingdom message! The kingdom is within us, not in a church building. To enter the kingdom now, we need to embrace the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Not just the manifestations, as is the common practice today, but His instruction, His guidance, His leading, in every aspect of our lives.

The perfect 'bride of Christ', making herself ready for the return of Jesus, will be formed by a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit, promised for the last days.

The Day of the Lord

28 ‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-9)

A real personal relationship with Jesus, guidance through the Holy Spirit to do the will of the Father for us as individuals, forms the basis of entering the kingdom now. Without the Holy Spirit fullness and guidance, joys and testings, we cannot live in the fullness of the kingdom that is available to us.

Next we will see how Holy Spirit living reflects in our outward actions.

LIVING THE KINGDOM LIFE

How is Holy Spirit living to reflect in our outward actions?

The apostle John, Jesus' 'special friend', summed it up succinctly.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16b)

He goes on to explain this in a very practical fashion!

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Some people, in the natural, are better at loving than are others. My wife Kathy is one of those. A people person. I am not! Am a task orientated one!

But God is the God of the supernatural. He must be, to change me!

Have you noticed how much it is easier to fall out with a Christian than a person in the world? Particularly in 'Spirit-filled' circles.

Why is this?

It is simple. Satan knows that love is the key to building the kingdom of God on earth and he works hard to throw us off the path of love. I am not one for blaming satan for my foibles and weaknesses, but in the area of relationship, he does try to stick the boot in.

Jesus understood this principle well.

17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. (Luke 11:17)

In the same discourse, Jesus also proclaimed the need to take the person and instructions of the Holy Spirit very seriously.

31 And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks

against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:31-2)

The 'love chapter' in Corinthians reinforces the importance of love.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal..... 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:1,13)

We all know these things in theory, but the difficulty is putting them into practice!

We do require a revelation from the Holy Spirit to live the 'love life'

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 15:13)

We simply are not capable of 'agape' (of the determination of the will) loving without the Holy Spirit's intervention in our life. It is simply 'too hard' in the natural, in our own strength, all the time. Even for people like Kathy!

Godly love is supernatural. A revelation, a kingdom building lifestyle of obedience to the Father's will as guided by the Holy Spirit that Jesus sent to help us.

We have not succeeded in the past, but as we receive the Autumn and Spring rains of the Spirit promised in Joel for the final days, so we will be better able to love others in the way required to build God's kingdom on earth, now. It sounds impossible, but in God's will, all things are possible. For His ways are greater than ours.