The Gospel of The Kingdom

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Introduction - The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

". . . When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:31).

Our world desperately needs some good news.

Today's headlines are filled with bad news—wars raging around the globe; famines devastating entire countries; environmental catastrophes and natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and floods killing multiple thousands of people; grinding poverty holding entire nations in its brutal grip; violent crime increasing in spite of man's best efforts to deal with it-the litany of tragedies and bad news is relentless.

Accidents and diseases kill thousands every day. Tragically, accidents, suicides and murder are leading causes of death among teenagers and young adults in economically and technologically advanced nations. Drug and alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity are rampant, bringing epidemics of broken marriages, broken homes and broken lives.

Baffling new diseases spring up around the world, defying the best attempts of scientists to contain or cure them. Other diseases, long thought to have been conquered by medical science, resurface with deadly vengeance, having grown resistant to the medications that easily cured them only a few decades ago.

Even religion, to which many look for solutions, is often a part of the problem. At any given time, wars and armed conflicts flare and burn, fanned by the fires of religious fervor. Wars are fought not only between major religions, but between sects of the same religion, supposedly out of devotion and service to the same God.

Human existence threatened

In this century, more than 150 million people have been killed in war alone. Well over 100 million more have died from diseases and natural disasters. Terrifying nuclear, chemical and biological weapons have the capability to annihilate armies—even entire nations—in seconds. Government leaders grow increasingly worried about such frightening weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists who stop at nothing to achieve their ends.

Why do we see so much sadness, sorrow and suffering around us? Where is it all headed? Why is the world in such a precarious condition? With all this bad news, is there really any hope for the future of humanity?

Almost 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, came to earth prophesying a wonderful future for humanity after an intense period of earthshaking calamities. His message, called "the gospel," means "good news"—the very good news the world so desperately needs.

But what exactly is this good news—this gospel—Jesus Christ preached? Is it only a wonderful story about Jesus Christ's birth, life, activities, death and resurrection? Certainly these are an integral part of the good news of God's plan for humanity (Mark 1:1). But there is so much more to His message.

Message of salvation

We will see that the good news Jesus Christ brought is not just a message about His life and death leading to our salvation; His message also concerns the meaning of salvation and how He intends to save the human race from its present problems. The gospel reveals the glorious destiny of mankind!

Sadly, humankind has reduced the gospel to the story about the person of Jesus Christ while neglecting and overlooking the deeper and vastly more encompassing message He brought. He most certainly brought good news—the most wonderful news this tired, troubled world can hear! An entire section of the New Testament is devoted to the historical record of the message Jesus Christ taught while on earth. This portion of the Bible, appropriately called "the Gospels," comprises the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The writers of these accounts all tell us that Jesus' primary message was the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Mark tells us: "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'" (Mark 1:14, 15, emphasis ours throughout). "The gospel of the Kingdom of God" is the message Jesus Christ instructs His followers to believe. This booklet will help you understand and believe this wonderful good news Jesus Christ announced to humanity!

The Good News of the Kingdom of God

"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'" (Mark 1:14, 15).

The theme of Jesus Christ's message was the good news of the Kingdom of God. This is made clear by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Luke records Christ in His own words describing His purpose: "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent" (Luke 4:43).

Mark relates that, at the beginning of His ministry, "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14).

Matthew tells us, ". . . Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' . . . And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom . . ." (Matthew 4:17, 23).

Luke 8:1 confirms that Jesus Christ did exactly what He said He would: "Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings [the gospel, or good news] of the kingdom of God . . ."This message of the Kingdom was the heart and core of Christ's teaching from the very beginning. Together, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John use the term "kingdom of God" in 53 verses. The gospel Jesus Christ brought is clearly about this Kingdom.

Others told to spread this message

What about His disciples? What did He command them to preach? "Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1, 2).

Later He instructed others to proclaim this same message. "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go." He instructed the seventy to proclaim, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:1, 9).

The Kingdom of God was clearly the theme of Christ's ministry. In the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most familiar examples of His message, He pointed His followers toward the Kingdom. He began His message with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven ... Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, 10).

Christ told His followers of the importance of obedience to God's law in entering this Kingdom: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds

the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19, 20).

He also warned that we must be submissive to God's will to enter the Kingdom: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

He taught His followers to pray "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10). And notice this! He commanded them to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Seeking to enter the Kingdom of God should be our top priority.

Time and time again He used parables to illustrate aspects of the Kingdom (Matthew 13, 20, 22, 25; Luke 13, 19). In some of His last words before His crucifixion, He remarked to His disciples that He would not partake of the Passover symbols until He would once again do so "with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29).

Over a 40-day period immediately after His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ was seen by His followers. Notice that even then He continued "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

What message did Christ's followers preach?

Jesus Christ was not the only one to proclaim this message. Before Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist commanded people to repent, announcing that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2).

As we have seen, Jesus' ministry centered on the Kingdom. In keeping with Christ's direction, His disciples continued to proclaim the Kingdom after His crucifixion.

The importance of Jesus Christ's life, sacrifice and resurrection was a vital part of the message taught by the apostles. The apostle Peter made this clear in his first public preaching on the very day the Church began with the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:22-24, 36).

Peter also spoke of the broader concepts of the Kingdom of God in his ministry. In 2 Peter 1:10, 11 we read, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling 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."

Notice, too, that people requested baptism as a result of Philip's message about the Kingdom. "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

Paul proclaimed the Kingdom

What about the apostle Paul? The book of Acts records that early in his ministry, as he raised up congregations in various cities, he "strengthen[ed] the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of

God'" (Acts 14:22). Later, in Ephesus, "he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

Paul described his own preaching in Corinth as relating to "the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 4:20). He referred to himself and his companions as "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" (Colossians 4:11).When under house arrest in Rome near the end of his ministry, Paul received a number of visitors, "to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23). Notice that Paul used the Old Testament scriptures—"the Law of Moses and the Prophets"-to preach about both the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

Paul is misrepresented as preaching a gospel about only the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The reality, however, is that Paul preached a message about both Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. The last verse of the book of Acts describes Paul "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (Acts 28:31).

Those who followed in Jesus Christ's footsteps taught the same message He taught. The book of Acts and the apostles' letters to the early church make it clear that they taught about the Kingdom of God.

The gospel before Jesus Christ

Some have assumed the gospel was first introduced by Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry. The gospel, however, is much older than that. It is called "the everlasting gospel" (Revelation 14:6).

The last four verses of Hebrews 3 speak of ancient Israel's unbelief and the sad fate of those who died in the wilderness, not entering the promised land. Hebrews 4:2 continues the story: "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them . . ." Israel had heard the gospel but failed to respond because of lack of faith.

Hundreds of years before that, the patriarch Abraham also heard the gospel (Galatians 3:8). Both of these passages confirm that the gospel was being proclaimed before Christ's ministry on earth.

In describing how, at His return, He will reward those who have been faithful to His way of life, Jesus Christ revealed that the Kingdom of God has been prepared for us far longer than we can imagine. "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

This good news about the glorious future of humanity has been God's plan from the very beginning! Christ's part in that plan, including His sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity, was also established from the very beginning (Revelation 13:8; 1 Peter 1:18-20). This was the good news given to Abraham—that through his descendant, Jesus Christ, all nations would be blessed (Galatians 3:8, 16).

Few understood before Jesus Christ

The Kingdom of God was proclaimed by God's servants before Jesus Christ's ministry on earth. King David, in some of his psalms, looked prophetically to God's Kingdom. As he wrote in Psalm 145:10-13: "All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations."

The prophet Daniel also knew of the coming Kingdom of God. He, too, was inspired to write of the future reality of the Kingdom: "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (Daniel 7:27, New International Version).

However, even though the gospel originated at the foundation of the world and was proclaimed through the ages, few understood it until Jesus Christ and the apostles declared it to the world.

But why? Ancient Israel, as noted earlier, lacked the belief and faith to understand and act on it (Hebrews 3:19; 4:2). In addition, the Old Testament scriptures did not connect all the pieces of the puzzle. They provided tantalizing glimpses of the Kingdom, but greater understanding had to wait until the coming of Jesus Christ, the revealer of "the mysteries of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:11).

When Jesus Christ came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, He built on the foundation already planned by God the Father from the beginning and revealed by the earlier prophets. As the messenger of the Kingdom, He revealed vital truths that were not understood from the Old Testament prophecies.

One of the great misunderstandings about the Kingdom, not made clear until revealed by Jesus Christ, was that thousands of years would separate His first coming as the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29) from His return as the conquering King of the Kingdom (Revelation 19:11-16). His first coming fulfilled a vital part of the gospel of the Kingdom—His sacrifice to make possible our forgiveness, justification and ultimate entry into the Kingdom. His second coming will bring the establishment of that incredible Kingdom.The Bible proclaims a consistent message from beginning to end concerning the Kingdom of God, a message delivered throughout the ages by God's servants. But, paradoxically, the part of the revelation about the Kingdom of God that was most fully and clearly described in prophecy after prophecy in the Old Testament—a literal kingdom ruled over by a prophesied Messiah—seems to be the least understood aspect of the gospel today.

Many believe that the fantastic truth that followers of Jesus Christ will enjoy eternal life in an eternal Kingdom renders any need of a literal earthly reign over physical human beings totally unnecessary.

But what does the Bible say? Let's put aside all preconceived ideas and believe the plain teachings of God's Word.

Other Names For the Kingdom

Although most often called the "Kingdom of God," occasionally other terms are used in describing the Kingdom. Three of the writers of the Gospels—Mark, Luke and John—use the term "Kingdom of God" to refer to the Kingdom by name.

"Kingdom of heaven" is a term used exclusively by Matthew, with 32 references in his account of Jesus Christ. However, he uses the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably. In Matthew 19:23, 24, he uses the terms in consecutive verses, clearly implying that they were synonymous. Often he calls it simply "the Kingdom."

Why did Matthew call it "the kingdom of heaven"? Because heaven is where God is, as Jesus Christ made plain (Matthew 5:34, 45, 48). Matthew makes it clear that the Kingdom was not, at that time, an earthly monarchy like the kingdoms around them. However, he understood that it was a kingdom to come, for which Christ's followers are to pray (Matthew 6:10).

The apostle Paul usually refers to it as "the kingdom of God." However, acknowledging the role of Jesus Christ as the Ruler of that Kingdom and the way by which we enter that Kingdom, he also calls it "the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). He also expresses the deep, loving relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ by calling it "the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13).

The apostle Peter, also acknowledging the centrality of Christ's role in the Kingdom, refers to it as "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11). Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master now, and He will reign supreme in the coming Kingdom (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). As Savior of mankind, He is "the door" and "the way" by which we have access to God the Father and salvation in God's Kingdom (John 10:9; 14:6).

Are There Different Gospels?

Scripture occasionally calls the gospel by names other than "the gospel of the kingdom of God." For instance, the Bible speaks of "the gospel of Christ" and "the gospel of God" (Romans 1:1, 16).

The term "gospel of God" simply shows it originated with God. God delivered the message to earth through His servants. Peter tells us the gospel was sent from God through Jesus Christ. Notice Acts 10:36, 37: "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ-He is Lord of all-that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached ..."

The gospel of God is God's good news about the Kingdom of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news Jesus brought as God's messenger. All are the same gospel; all are part of the wonderful news of what God has in store for humanity. In a similar manner, Paul sometimes used the term "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; 2 Timothy 2:8). This does not mean the message originated with Paul, nor was it a gospel about Paul. It was a message he received directly from Jesus Christ. "... The gospel which was preached by me ... came through the revelation of Jesus Christ," he said (Galatians 1:11, 12). Paul's use of the term "my gospel" is proper because he was the one who proclaimed it.

The good news is also called "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). From the beginning we are called by grace, justified by grace and saved by grace (Galatians 1:6, 15; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8). The "gospel of grace" is another appropriate term that focuses on a different aspect of the same gospel Jesus preached: God's enormous love for us, expressed by His grace toward mankind. This message is also called "the gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). Since our entrance into the Kingdom of God is synonymous with our salvation, there is no conflict in these terms for the gospel. Each complements and strengthens the other.

"The gospel of peace" is also used to describe the good news (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15). The Kingdom of God will bring peace to the earth—an important result of our believing in and acting on the gospel of the Kingdom. Prophesying of God's Kingdom, Isaiah said, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7).

All these terms describe the same gospel. They simply emphasize different aspects of the same wonderful message. Jesus Christ came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15), taught His disciples to preach the same message (Matthew 10:7) and continued to preach it when He appeared to the disciples after His crucifixion (Acts 1:3). After Jesus rose from the dead, the apostles preached the same gospel, but with the added understanding of the meaning of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. Although the terms that describe it may vary, the message is always the same.

The glorious truth is that this whole magnificent message is one seamless gospel, and "it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes ..." (Romans 1:16).

The Promise of a Coming Kingdom

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

We have seen that Jesus Christ and the apostles preached the gospel—the good news—of the Kingdom of God. But exactly what is that Kingdom?

There are many ideas about the Kingdom of God. Some think it is the church. Others believe it is an ethereal concept that resides in the hearts of Christians. Some think it is the collective good of humanity.

What does the Bible say? What is the Kingdom of God?

The word translated "kingdom" throughout the New Testament is the Greek word basileia, which denotes "sovereignty, royal power, [and] dominion" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, "Kingdom"). A careful examination of the Bible reveals that the next phase of the Kingdom of God is nothing short of a world-ruling monarchy that God will establish on this earth through Jesus Christ!

An overview of world governments

This amazing truth is made clear in many Bible verses. The prophet Daniel was inspired to record a description of world governments spanning a period of thousands of years. His prophecy, recorded in Daniel 2:28-45, describes King Nebuchadnezzar's vision of five world-ruling empires. When we read these verses, we see that the fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God, is a literal kingdom that has not yet come to earth.

In this passage, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, dreamed of a huge image of a man consisting of a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet composed of a mixture of iron and clay.

God gave Daniel, a prophet in Nebuchadnezzar's court, the ability to interpret dreams (Daniel 1:17; 2:28). Through God's inspiration, Daniel revealed that the four divisions of this image were actually four successive world empires. God, through Daniel, identified the first of the kingdoms, the head of gold, as the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 2:38).The next two kingdoms are identified in Daniel 8:1-21. This chapter records a subsequent vision that foretold and gives more detail about the second and third empires. These two kingdoms are identified as "the kings of Media and Persia" and "the kingdom of Greece." History confirms that the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire (recorded in Daniel 5:30, 31), which was in turn toppled by the Grecian Empire of Alexander the Great.

In chapter seven these four kingdoms are pictured again, this time as four beasts. This vision characterizes the empires as wild animals, predicting their harsh and oppressive domination of their subjects.

The fourth kingdom is characterized as especially cruel. History records that Alexander's Grecian kingdom was succeeded by the Roman Empire. This kingdom is shown here as challenging the very authority of God and persecuting His saints (Daniel 7:25). It has 10 horns (verse 7), which are 10 extensions or resurrections of the fourth great world-ruling empire (verse 24). These resurrections of this fourth kingdom continue through history to our day, and the final resurrection of this empire is depicted as existing at Jesus Christ's return (verses 8-14).

Human governments replaced by God

It is in the days of this fourth kingdom that God will replace these earthly kingdoms with His Kingdom. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). We see that the fourth kingdom continues to rule until Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on earth.

God's Kingdom—foretold repeatedly in Daniel—is the same Kingdom about which Jesus Christ preached. There can be no mistake about the nature of this Kingdom. The four kingdoms described in Daniel 2, 7 and 8 ruled over people and lands. They were great world empires with dominion and power to rule, warring against and conquering other nations. They had kings, governments, laws and subjects. They were literal kingdoms, whose ruins are visible to this day.

So, too, will the Kingdom of God be a literal kingdom ruling over the whole earth. Daniel 7:27, speaking of the establishment of this Kingdom, adds: "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (NIV).

Major powers will fall

The wonderful news of the coming Kingdom of God is the heart and core of Jesus Christ's message for humanity. Jesus will return to earth and establish this Kingdom. He will be the Ruler of the Kingdom of God. Notice this prophecy of Jesus Christ's return: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15). Jesus Christ will assume rulership over literal kingdoms on earth.

The governments of mankind, with their inherent inability to solve human problems that are rooted in humanity's inability to choose the right way to live (Proverbs 16:25), will be replaced by a form of government that can at last solve those problems. Jesus Christ Himself will rule the nations of the earth!

This is the gospel—the good news—that Jesus Christ taught. The focus of Jesus Christ's message was the announcement of a coming world government (Luke 21:31). This government will not be ruled by selfishly motivated humans but by Jesus Christ Himself, under the direction of Almighty God!

Daniel was not the only prophet to speak of this time. Micah 4:1-3 also describes this time of unprecedented peace: "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 peoples shall flow to it.

"Many nations 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 the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; 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 any more."

As described in this passage, when Jesus Christ establishes His government, humanity will begin to recognize the blessings that come from obedience to God's ways and laws and will stream to Him to learn that way of life. Christ will settle disputes between peoples and will have to "rebuke strong nations" that reject His direction and authority.

Prophecies of Jesus Christ's rulership

Isaiah, speaking of the future reign of Jesus Christ, describes what kind of ruler He will be: "... 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 . . ." (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

"Judgment and justice" will be hallmarks of Christ's coming rulership, in contrast to the injustice, short-sightedness and oppression that all too often characterize the governments of the world. Peace will break out throughout the world-in marriages, families, communities and nations. As prophesied, "there will be no end" to peace under Jesus Christ's reign. The Prince of Peace will bring calm and goodwill to a world that has never known true peace.

Under Jesus Christ's righteous rulership, mankind will at last learn God's ways and experience this wonderful peace. Educational institutions will teach people how to live, not just how to make a living. Biblical principles for healthy and lasting relationships will be thoroughly explained. "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" (Isaiah 11:9). The multiple millions of people who have never known God's laws or ways will at last have access to that wonderful, saving knowledge.

Causes of humanity's problems

Humankind has had thousands of years to experiment with governments, administrations and lifestyles, so why have we been unable to solve our problems?

Human government has not succeeded because, in the final analysis, humanity simply does not know how to live. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God warns that "it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Solomon, king of ancient Israel, put it bluntly: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Sadly, mankind has proved the truth of those words for generations. Under human rule, the world has never seen a time that was free of war, strife, turmoil and suffering. Conditions today are so grave that mankind has the ability to erase human life from earth many times over!

Why should this be?

Our world is threatened by overwhelming problems because we have rejected God. God Himself has made this clear over the centuries through His prophets. Under God's inspiration, King David wrote of mankind: "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Psalm 14:1-3).

The prophet Jeremiah also noted that humans are largely blinded by the deceit of their own evil motives and intents. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Humanity separated from God

The prophet Isaiah added: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; they conceive evil and bring forth iniquity ...

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace" (Isaiah 59:1-4, 7, 8).

God's ways are different from man's. "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

The apostle Paul described the inevitable results of rejecting God and His way of life: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32).

Jesus Christ will intervene to save humanity

Left to itself, mankind would annihilate all life from earth. Does this sound shocking? It is. But Jesus Christ Himself said it is so! Describing the time immediately before His return to earth, He said: "It will be a time of great distress; there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21, 22, New English Bible).

Jesus Christ tells us that He must intervene to save us from ourselves. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:29, 30).

This glorious event is described in greater detail in Revelation 19:11-16: "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

The millennial Kingdom and beyond

Jesus Christ will usher in a literal kingdom, the Kingdom of God, on earth. But this is not the end of the story. Notice Revelation 11:15: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'"

We have seen that Jesus Christ will establish His reign over the nations in a literal kingdom. This kingdom is depicted in Revelation 20:3-7 as lasting 1,000 years. Yet, in the verse quoted just above, we are told that "He shall reign forever and ever." In other words, the thousand-year reign (commonly called the Millennium, Latin for "thousand years") is just the beginning of Jesus Christ's eternal reign in the Kingdom of God.

Indeed, the millennial reign that Jesus Christ shares with the resurrected saints-to whom the Kingdom will be given-will take place for the very purpose of offering entry into the eternal Kingdom of God to all mankind. Millions of physical human beings alive at the return of Jesus Christ will live into the Millennium, and in turn many generations of humans will be born and live during that time. They will all be given an opportunity to be changed from this physical life and body to spirit, to be granted eternal life and to enter into the eternal Kingdom of God.

The truth that the Kingdom of God is ultimately an eternal kingdom, not just a thousand-year

period, is made plain by Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:16, we read of a wealthy young man who asked Jesus the fundamental question: "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Jesus went on to explain what the young man must do. When it became clear that he was not willing to do what Jesus commanded, Jesus Christ went on to say in verse 24 that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Here, entry into the Kingdom of God is equated with eternal life.

Yes, the millennial reign of Jesus Christ will open the door for millions of human beings, then already being ruled by the Kingdom of God, to be saved and actually enter into the eternal Kingdom of God. The Millennium, a time of unparalleled peace, happiness and prosperity, will be just a foretaste of the even greater eternal Kingdom!

Transformed heaven and earth

After the thousand years are ended, yet another incredible sequence of events is prophesied, as we read in Revelation 21:1-7: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.'"

Access to the tree of life—eternal life, from which humanity has been cut off since the time of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:22-24)—will be given to those who obediently keep God's commandments (Revelation 22:14).

Eternal life as children of God awaits those who enter His Kingdom.

Is the Kingdom Here Now?

Shortly before His arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus Christ prophesied of a worldwide period of upheaval and unrest unparalleled in human history. This time would be characterized by religious deception, warfare, earthquakes, famines and disease epidemics, along with other great catastrophic events (Luke 21:7-28). In this discourse, Christ made it plain that the Kingdom of God was not here yet.

He told His disciples that, after these events, people "will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory ... When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (verses 27, 31). Christ clearly said that the Kingdom of God will not be established on earth until after His triumphant return in power and great glory. Christ also made this plain on other occasions. How many of us have recited the Lord's Prayer without recognizing the plain meaning of the words as we said them? These familiar words were given by Jesus Christ in response to the disciples' request of Him to teach them how to pray. "In this manner, therefore, pray," Jesus Christ told them. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:9, 10). The most common prayer in Christendom acknowledges that God's Kingdom is not here yet and that Christians are to fervently pray for its arrival!

Near the end of His life, while being questioned by Pilate before His crucifixion, Jesus clearly stated: "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). Pilate then demanded to know if Christ were a king. Christ replied: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world ..." (verse 37). Hebrews 11 describes the faith of God's servants through the millennia. Summing up their history and experiences, verses 13-16 tell us: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

Even Abraham, the father of the faithful, "waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Although God's people today experience a foretaste of God's coming Kingdom in their lives (see "How Are We 'Translated Into the Kingdom'?"), many scriptures make it clear that the Kingdom of God has not arrived, but will be established on earth in the future.

Is the Kingdom Within You?

Many people believe Jesus Christ taught that the Kingdom of God is something that exists only in the hearts and minds of believers. They base this on Luke 17:20, 21, which says: "Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.'"

Such assumptions are incorrect for several reasons. The Greek word entos, translated "within," is better translated "in the midst of" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, "Within"). Several translations, including the Revised Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible and New English Bible, make this clear. Jesus Christ could not have been telling the Pharisees here that God's Kingdom was something that existed within their hearts or minds—after all, they wanted to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14, Mark 3:6).

Instead, in this passage Christ was pointing out the paradox that the Pharisees did not have the spiritual discernment to recognize that the message of the Kingdom of God was at hand or being offered to them (Matthew 23:15-17). To punctuate this point, Jesus, referring to Himself, said "the kingdom of God is among you" or "in your midst." The spiritually blind Pharisees did not recognize Jesus as the divine Representative of that Kingdom.

Rather than telling the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was something in their hearts, Jesus Christ warned them that they were so spiritually blind they couldn't recognize the very personification of that Kingdom in Him. There is no basis in this passage for believing the Kingdom of God resides in one's heart.

Is the Church the Kingdom?

Some think the Church is the Kingdom of God. Although there is a connection between the two, they are not identical. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22), which is the body of believers called by God to proclaim the coming Kingdom.

Christ rules His Church, thus it is under His sovereignty and royal power. We might say the Church is the precursor of the coming Kingdom of God. Or, to put it in terms that Jesus Christ used, we can say that the Kingdom of God is similar to the proverbial mustard seed, waiting for its germination and rapid growth at Jesus' return (Matthew 13:31-32).

The Bible, however, never uses the term "kingdom" to apply directly to the Church. Instead, it refers to God's prophesied world-ruling government.

How Are We 'Translated Into the Kingdom'?

Colossians 1:13 describes physical saints as already having been "translated" into the Kingdom. As such, this passage seems to imply that Christians are now in the Kingdom of God. However, this clearly isn't the case, since 1 Corinthians 15:50 tells us that "flesh and blood [physical bodies] cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Part of the confusion here comes from the meaning of the word kingdom. In addition to meaning a literal kingdom, the Greek word basileia, translated "kingdom," denotes sovereignty and royal power (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, "Kingdom").

This passage in Colossians shows that God's sovereignty and power begin in the life of the Christian at conversion. The New International Version Study Bible explains that in this verse the word kingdom "does not here refer to a territory but to the authority, rule or sovereign power of a king. Here it means that the Christian is no longer under the dominion of evil (darkness) but under the benevolent rule of God's Son."

Virtually all other occurrences of basileia, when referring to the Kingdom of God, point to the literal dominion that Christ will establish at His return (Matthew 6:33; Revelation 11:15). As "heirs of God" in training to inherit that future Kingdom (Romans 8:15-17; Matthew 25:34; Revelation 20:4, 6), Christians are thus already subject to the sovereignty and authority of that Kingdom, although not yet residents of it.

Jesus Christ, ruler of the coming Kingdom, is the Lord and Master of Christians now (Philippians 2:9-11). God rules the lives of converted Christians who voluntarily obey Him and His laws. They submit themselves to God's basileia—His royal sovereignty and power. They individually are part of the Church, the Body of Christ, which God also rules. But the Church collectively looks to God's coming world rule when the basileia will be fully established.

The context leading up to Colossians 1:13 also helps clarify the meaning. Verse 9 begins a description of points Paul and Timothy regularly included in their prayers. One of the blessings they were thankful for was that God had qualified them and the other members to receive the inheritance of the saints (verse 12). That inheritance, eternal life, does not come until Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; Romans 8:17). This is why the Bible refers to the saints as heirs of the Kingdom (James 2:5).

Verse 13 of Colossians 1 continues this theme, adding that those qualified as heirs, those whose status had changed from nonheirs to heirs, were also "translated," or transferred, from the power of darkness to the Kingdom of God.

We, as modern-day saints, also exchange systems of government when we are converted. We now give our allegiance and obedience to the Kingdom of God, even though that Kingdom has not yet fully come.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul uses a different comparison to help us understand this, calling us "ambassadors." An ambassador is one who represents a kingdom or other government, but resides in a different land. Christians are thus ambassadors for God's Kingdom, representing

His way of life in our current earthly situation and age in which we reside. We are not yet in the Kingdom of God.

How is the Kingdom At Hand?

When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, he said it was "at hand" and commanded us to repent and believe the good news about the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 4:17). The Greek word translated "at hand" is engizo. It means to draw near to something. It does not imply that something has actually come, rather that it is close.

The Bible in Basic English, the New International Version and Today's English Version recognize this distinction, translating the phrase in Mark 1:15 as "the kingdom of God is near."

Other translations, including the New Revised Standard Version, Modern King James Version and Green's Literal Translation, state that this Kingdom "draws near" or "has come near." They make it clear that the Kingdom of God has not arrived, but that it is near.

What Jesus was saying had to do with the message of the Kingdom, as well as the availability of Himself as the King of that Kingdom. The Kingdom in that sense was very near to them, even though it would not arrive in the literal way God had revealed it to Daniel for quite some time.

Jesus Christ was the personification of the message of the Kingdom. He was the Ruler, the King of the Kingdom. He was its representative, the One through whom humanity would be able to enter the Kingdom.

His message was that people should repent, believe the good news that He brought and put that message into action, changing their lives to reflect their belief and commitment.

The Ruler of a Kingdom of Spiritual Darkness

The sad fact remains that this is not God's world. God's Kingdom is still not of this world, as Jesus Christ made clear in John 18:36. It is even more tragic that another being is ruler of this world, right here and right now—Satan the devil.

The apostle Paul described the spiritual blindness that envelops the world and pointed out the source of that blindness. "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4).

Who is the god of this age? He is none other than Satan, the great fallen superangel (Ezekiel 28:14-17). He is truly this world's ruler. Jesus Christ recognized that, saying that in the judgment "the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31).

Although we cannot see Satan, his influence on the world is pervasive. Paul understood this, telling the members in Ephesus, "And you He [God] made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1, 2).

The result of the devil's influence is that, before conversion, "we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (verse 3).

Satan spiritually influences humanity to reject God and God's law. Under Satan's influence, "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can [it] be" (Romans 8:7).

Separated from God, man chooses to go his own way, with devastating and tragic results. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Satan's influence is so great that he "deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). The entire world "lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Under Satan's influence, humanity has rejected God's revelation and guidance and built societies and civilizations on a wrong foundation.

When Jesus Christ returns, "the kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15). Satan's world, built on a foundation of lies and deception, will come crashing down, replaced by the Kingdom of truth and light.

Prophecies of the Coming Kingdom of God

What kind of future does God have in store for planet earth? Through His prophets God reveals many specific details of how this world will be transformed in the Kingdom of God. Notice a few prophecies about the marvelous world God has planned for us:

A world of unparalleled peace

". . . 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 any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid . . ." (Micah 4:3-4).

"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" (Isaiah 11:9).

Wild animals' nature transformed

"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 . . ." (Isaiah 11:6).

A world of agricultural abundance

"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it . . . They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them'" (Amos 9:13-14).

". . . I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase" (Ezekiel 34:26-27).

Wastelands transformed

". . . Waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water . . ." (Isaiah 35:6-7).

Sickness and disease healed

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Mankind given a new heart and spirit

"Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them . . . that they may walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

Nations will learn God's ways

"Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD . . . He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth . . .'" (Micah 4:2).

Jesus Christ will rule the world

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder . . . Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end . . ." (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Salvation in the Kingdom

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes . . ." (Romans 1:16).

We have seen that Jesus Christ preached "the gospel of the Kingdom" and that He sent His disciples out to proclaim His message before His crucifixion. However, after Christ's death and resurrection, another emphasis appeared in the message preached by the apostles, one that had not been possible before Christ's death—Jesus Christ had paid the penalty for human sins! In doing so, He had become the Savior of all who would accept His sacrifice and live the Christian life.

After the Day of Pentecost, the apostles continued to proclaim the Kingdom of God just as they had done when Christ walked the earth, but now they understood and spoke another dimension: Eternal life in that Kingdom was now possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as Savior of humanity and through His continuing role as our High Priest.

Today, some view the biblical terms "gospel of the Kingdom" and "gospel of Christ" as though they were different messages. In reality, however, they are one and the same. The gospel of the Kingdom is the message Jesus Christ brought and proclaimed. The gospel of Christ is also the message Jesus Christ preached, along with the message regarding His life, death and sacrifice on our behalf, which makes possible eternal life in that Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is attained only through Jesus Christ's central role as the personal Savior of all who would enter that Kingdom.

The apostles' enhanced understanding becomes more evident in their epistles and other messages after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The people of Christ's day expected a conquering Messiah who would throw off the yoke of the Roman rulers of Judea and establish a new kingdom. Christ's disciples recognized Him as that Messiah and called Him "Christ" (Matthew 16:16), which in Greek means anointed—the same as the Hebrew word "Messiah" (John 1:41; 4:25). The term anointed signified the one who had been chosen to be King of that Messianic Kingdom.

New understanding of the Messiah

Jewish believers of the early Church would have understood the phrase "the gospel of Christ" as a message encompassing far more than just the person of Jesus Christ. Since the word Christ means "Messiah," they understood the apostles' message as "the gospel of the Messiah"—the good news of the King of the coming Kingdom of God. To them, the good news was not just that Christ had died for the sins of humanity, but that the Messiah had come and would return, establishing His Kingdom and fulfilling the many prophecies of His glorious reign.

The concept of a Kingdom established by the Messiah was not new to Jesus Christ's followers. Scripture records that "they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately" (Luke

19:11). When Christ appeared to them again after His resurrection, the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

What the disciples failed to grasp during Christ's lifetime was that the Messiah, whom they expected would arrive as a conquering king, would first have to die to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. Even when Jesus Christ revealed this truth to the disciples, they refused to accept it. Not long before His death, "Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'" (Matthew 16:21, 22). Not only did they not understand this aspect of Christ's mission, but they flatly refused to believe it.It is understandable, then, that the disciples were shocked when their Leader, whom they expected to overthrow the ruling Roman occupational government, was arrested. "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). Confused and devastated by this unexpected turn of events, they scattered as Jesus was tried, condemned and executed as a criminal.

Later, after they received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the disciples came to understand that, as the Scriptures had prophesied, the Messiah would have to die and be resurrected. The apostle Peter, in his first inspired sermon to the Jews gathered at Jerusalem, proclaimed that David, in one of his psalms, "spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay" (Acts 2:31, NIV).

Personal rescuer, or Savior, needed

Peter had to focus the minds of the Jews of his day on Christ's atoning sacrifice and role as a personal rescuer, or Savior, rather than only as a national leader: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact . . . Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:32, 36, NIV). When those who were convicted asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37, 38, NIV). Thousands responded to this call to repentance—a changed life—and were baptized.

Peter helped them to see that God's promises regarding the Holy Spirit and salvation (verses 17, 18, 21, 33, 40) were possible only because of the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, the prophesied Messiah (verses 24, 30-33, 36). Those to whom Peter spoke had not understood the need for the Messiah's sacrifice for their personal sins, nor had they realized that the One they had just condemned to death was in fact the Messiah for whom they all longed. The apostles labored to correct these misunderstandings.

Peter's next public message made clear how Christ's atoning, saving work leads to the coming Kingdom of God: "But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:18-21).

This magnificent message, which moved thousands more to believe, illustrates the way the gospel had been preached since the beginning, how it involved Christ as the suffering Messiah and how it was a message of the "restoration of all things"—the wonderful hope of Christ's return as King of a yet future Kingdom.

Where Christ's sacrifice leads

The apostle Paul saw with great clarity the significance of Christ's sacrifice and where it ultimately leads. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, he described the message he taught: "... I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Jesus Christ's sacrificing of His life in our place is certainly good news. His paying the death penalty for us is wonderful news!

But Paul's description of the gospel he preached did not end there. After beginning with Christ's magnificent role in our personal salvation, he continued his explanation of the reason Jesus Christ's resurrection is so important to the salvation of all humanity: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:19-22).

All will be resurrected to life again

Notice that Paul says all will eventually be made alive. He continued by showing that this will occur in stages: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:23, 24).

Earlier we read of Christ's rule as King of that coming Kingdom. But notice that His assuming power as King is preceded by the resurrection of "those who are Christ's at His coming"!

Throughout this chapter, Paul explains this wonderful aspect of the gospel message he taught. In verses 50-53 he explained when and how we can enter the Kingdom of God: "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [in death], 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

This is the awe-inspiring purpose for Jesus Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection—the resurrection of many, many more to eternal life to "inherit the kingdom of God"! (verse 50). Christ's followers are to "inherit," or enter, the Kingdom "at the last trumpet" (verse 52), the

great blast that signals Christ's return to rule the earth forever (Matthew 24:30, 31; Revelation 11:15).

We see that immortal life in His kingdom is made possible by Jesus Christ, "who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

Was Jesus Christ the Messiah?

What was Jesus Christ's purpose? Why did He come to earth? Why will He come again? The answers to these questions become evident when we examine the concept of the Messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning "Anointed One." Anointing was used, among other things, to signify that kings had been chosen by God (1 Samuel 15:1; 16:12-13; 1 Kings 1:34). Christ means "Anointed One" in Greek, the language in which the New Testament has been preserved for us– the same as the Hebrew word Messiah. The two terms mean the same thing (John 1:41; 4:25).

A prophesied king and kingdom

The Hebrews understood that their Scriptures contained many prophecies of a divinely appointed ruler who would restore the glory and grandeur of the kingdom of Israel. For example, Isaiah 9:6-7 says: ". . . The government will be upon His shoulder . . . 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 . . ."

Jeremiah 23:5 adds: "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

After the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were taken into captivity by Assyria and Babylon, respectively, the Israelite people looked to these promises for a deliverer. In Christ's day, the descendants of the Jews who had returned to their homeland from Babylon several centuries earlier were dominated by the Roman Empire. In their oppression they prayed and hoped for the promised Messiah, a conquering king who would deliver them from their Roman overlords and restore Israel to greatness.

From many prophecies they deduced, correctly, that the Messiah was soon to appear. Hopes ran high. When John the Baptist came on the scene, some thought he might be the Messiah. Scripture tells us that "the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ [Messiah] or not" (Luke 3:15).

John said he was not the Messiah, but he did point people to Jesus of Nazareth. One of John's followers, a fisherman named Andrew, immediately believed in Jesus. "He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ)'" (John 1:40-41). Both Andrew and Simon (Peter) became disciples.

Jesus confirms He is the Messiah

Jesus acknowledged that He was the long-awaited Messiah in a conversation with a Samaritan woman. "The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When He comes, He will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He'" (John 4:25-

26, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus also acknowledged that He was the Messiah at His trial. ". . . The high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Blessed?' Jesus said, 'I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:61-62).

Jesus knew that He was born to be a king. When Pontius Pilate questioned Him before His crucifixion, he asked Jesus if He were indeed a king. Jesus responded: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world . . ." (John 18:36-37).

The disciples' misunderstanding

That Jesus' kingdom was not for that time was misunderstood by most of His followers. They had assumed that Jesus Christ would lead a popular uprising that would throw off the Romans and establish a new political entity. Among themselves, some of the disciples even argued at times as to who among them would hold the primary positions in the new government (Matthew 20:20-21; Luke 9:46; 22:24).

Their understanding was limited. They didn't realize that Christ must first come to suffer and die for the sins of mankind and only later would come as the conquering king they expected.

When Jesus was tried and executed, they were dismayed. Their hopes and dreams of power were dashed. Peter and some of the other disciples returned to their old occupations as fishermen (John 21:1-3).

Even after Jesus appeared to them again, they still didn't understand. They still hoped Christ would establish the Kingdom of God then. Notice Acts 1:6- 8: "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"

Jesus explained that the timing of that kingdom should not be their primary concern; indeed they would not know when it would be established. Their focus, Christ said, should be on the work He had assigned them. The Kingdom of God would be established in due time.

Finally they understood. Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, but first He had to suffer and die for their sins. Later He would come as a conquering king to establish the Kingdom of God.

The dozens of prophecies recorded by the prophets about a Messiah— prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ— are among the strongest proofs that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. The four Gospels recall the Old Testament prophecies and show how Jesus Christ fulfilled them .

The Gospels also speak of His resurrection and ultimate return to earth as conquering King. That is the message of the Gospels—that Jesus Christ was the Messiah who is prophesied throughout the Old Testament.

How You Can Enter the Kingdom

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Salvation through Jesus' life, death and resurrection is central to the gospel message. Jesus Christ died, was buried and was resurrected for a reason: so we could inherit everlasting life in the Kingdom of God (John 3:16). This astounding part of the gospel—the entering into the Kingdom of God—is the aspect so few understand. It is synonymous with salvation. Without understanding this part of the gospel, one cannot understand what salvation is. Do you know how to enter this Kingdom, to attain the salvation of which the Bible speaks?

Entering the very family of God!

What will salvation—eternal life in the Kingdom of God—really mean to those who receive it? We have seen that salvation is the transformation from a fleshly, mortal human to an immortal son of God. Notice how the book of Hebrews expresses it: "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. Both the one who makes men holy [Christ] and those who are made holy [repentant and converted human beings] are of the same family" (Hebrews 2:10, 11, NIV).

Have you ever grasped this before? Those who enter the Kingdom of God are all "of the same family"—God's family! All are God's children, brought "to glory"—a glorified state of immortal spirit (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)-by Him. This is what salvation is all about. "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises' . . . 'And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me'" (Hebrews 2:11-13, NIV).

That Jesus is not ashamed to regard them as His own brothers (and sisters) shows just how personal this family relationship is. Those who enter the Kingdom of God will share even God's divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) for all eternity.

God will make those who enter His Kingdom fully like Jesus Christ! The apostle John is explicit: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-3).

Yes, human beings who enter the Kingdom of God will be given the glorious honor of being like the resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:16, 17, King James Version).

This is the awesome potential of all who receive eternal life as members of the family God is

creating!

The reward of the saints

The promised reward of the saints—or salvation, as it is often called—occurs at the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:50-52). This takes place when Jesus Christ returns at the last trumpet and the kingdoms of the world become "the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Revelation 11:15). Those who are resurrected from mortal life to immortality will enter His Kingdom and assist Christ in a 1,000-year reign on earth (Revelation 20:4-6).

The gospel of the Kingdom of God reveals that Jesus Christ will set up His Kingdom on earth with His resurrected saints to give everyone the opportunity for eternal life. God's desire is for everyone to inherit the Kingdom of God, each in his or her own time (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

The true gospel reveals that the saints—the faithful followers of Jesus Christ resurrected to eternal life at His return—will be actively involved in ruling with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God when it is established (Revelation 5:10). Prophecies in the book of Isaiah reveal that Christ will begin working with the human beings left alive after His return to teach them His ways. The resurrected saints will assist Christ in bringing about complete spiritual and physical healing of the nations (Isaiah 30:20, 21; 35:1, 5, 6).

Jesus Christ's faithful followers, now given eternal life, will assist Him as kings and priests in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 1:6). They will become spirit and live forever (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 50-54).

This is God's incredible promise to them: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7). What does this inheritance include? Hebrews 2:6-8 indicates that our ultimate destiny is to participate in rulership over the entire universe as glorified, immortal sons of God!

A call to action

When we hear and understand the gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus expects us to repent and believe the good news about this Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15). His Kingdom is something we must enter (Mark 10:23, 25).

Accepting Jesus' command to repent and believe this message, this good news, is the first step. We can turn to God for forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ and begin to live by the laws of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to live God's holy way of life will be refused entrance into the Kingdom of God and eternal life (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5).

Jesus warned of obstacles that can prevent our entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 5:20; 19:23-25; Mark 9:47; Luke 18:17; John 3:5). To enter the Kingdom, we must gain a proper outlook—a humble, teachable, childlike attitude—accompanied by real repentance, baptism and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit (Matthew 18:3; John 3:3, 5; Acts 2:38).

This knowledge is vital to your entering the Kingdom of God.

Seeking God's Kingdom must become our highest priority, no matter what the difficulties. Paul said, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Jesus encourages us to overcome these difficulties by keeping the Kingdom of God as our primary goal (Matthew 6:33). He urges us to pray for God's Kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10).

When our lives are devoted to seeking God's Kingdom, our outlook will be like that of the patriarchs as recorded in Hebrews 11. Notice these inspiring words about their orientation: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth ... Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (verses 13, 16). The patriarchs considered themselves "strangers and pilgrims" because they looked forward to the Kingdom of God. Their lives were centered on that Kingdom, not on their physical, material life.

Road map for the Kingdom

One way Christians can enhance their vision of the coming Kingdom of God is by understanding the meaning of God's seven annual Holy Days. Although most people think of them as only Jewish observances, God made it clear that they are, in reality, His festivals and Holy Days (Leviticus 23:2, 4). God gave these special observances to help us understand Christ's part in our salvation and how the Kingdom of God will be established on earth.

In Colossians 2:16, 17, Paul referred to these festivals as "a shadow of things to come." Paul and the early Church kept them as reminders of the coming Kingdom of God. Even though others criticized the Colossians for the way they observed these days, Paul and the saints at Colosse grasped the connection between the purpose of these days and the gospel.

Understanding the meaning of these annual sacred assemblies can help us understand the wonderful message Jesus Christ taught—God's plan for His coming Kingdom and eternal life.

God reveals His wonderful truth to those He is calling now (John 6:44). Jesus Christ said His message would be preached at the end time before His second coming. "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" (Matthew 24:14).

The message Jesus brought is called, appropriately, the good news—the gospel—of the Kingdom of God. And it really is good news, the most wonderful news imaginable to mankind. Jesus Christ is asking you to believe that good news and "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). If you do, says Jesus Christ in Luke 12:32, it will be God's pleasure to give you the Kingdom!