

7. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'MESSIAH'

*But who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered:
You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!
(Mt 16:15-16).*

What does the word 'Messiah' mean? What is the significance of the title? The background of the Gospels is very Jewish. When Christians read the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they often read them from a Christian perspective, which does not give them an accurate picture of what is going on. It may come as a surprise to some people to know that there were no Christians or churches in the time of Jesus. You must wait for the book of the Acts of the Apostles for that. Jesus did say that he would build his church, meaning an organized community of his people, those who believe in him, but that was to be done through the apostles and others in the future. Jesus is presented to us in the Gospels as the Messiah of the Jewish religion, eagerly awaited by the faithful. He is the fulfillment of the good news that was prophesied in the OT.

It is good to look for Jesus everywhere in the Bible, but there are dangers in reading the OT and even the Gospels from a narrow Christian perspective. You can misinterpret what the writers were communicating and may result in spiritualizing and allegorizing passages according to preconceived ideas, instead of taking texts at their face value. So, let us put on our Messianic glasses and see what was said about Jesus. That will help us understand why he talked so much about the kingdom of God and what he was talking about.

Older versions of the Bible rarely mention the 'Messiah'. The King James Version (KJV) mentions Messiah only twice, and the Revised Standard Version (RSV) seven times. The earlier New International Version (NIV) version only mentioned Messiah twice, but the 2011 edition uses 'Messiah' 74 times. Recent translations tend to translate Messiah more frequently. The ISV translates Messiah 546 times, and never uses the word 'Christ'. Their reason is 'in order to emphasize the unique claim made by the NT writers,

that the things about which they wrote pertained to Jesus as the claimed fulfillment of the hope of Israel's Messiah.'

Jesus' Messianic consciousness

From the age of twelve, maybe younger, Jesus was aware of his unique relationship with the Father. At the very beginning of his ministry, at around thirty years of age, he was acutely aware of his Messiahship. He quoted a Messianic prophecy while preaching in the synagogue of his hometown, Nazareth, saying:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He anointed me to tell the good news to the poor, he sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the downtrodden (Lk 4:18).

But knowing that he was the Messiah, the awaited Jewish king, how was he to teach people about his own identity and mission without being arrested as a political activist? After all, Judeah in those days was ruled by the Romans, who would not take lightly news of the arrival of a Jewish savior and king. Jesus' strategy was to talk in parables and to use cryptic language.

One day, Jesus asked his disciples who people thought he was (Mk 8:27). Many Jews seemed to think he was a reincarnation of one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked his disciples who *they* thought he was. Peter answered: You are the Messiah (Mk 8:29). Then Jesus warned them not to tell anyone. Immediately after that, he began to teach them that the Son of Man would have to suffer. The elders, the chief priests, and the scribes would reject him and he would be killed, but after three days he would rise again (Mk 8:31). This was not quite what they expected of their awaited Messiah, so Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Their Messiah, according to the Jewish prophets, was a king!

The Messiah and his kingdom

The message of John the Baptist, the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus' ministry, was that people should repent because the kingdom of heaven was near! (Mt 3:2). The kingdom of God was also central to Jesus' teaching from beginning to end. As soon as he was baptized, he started preaching that the kingdom of God was near (Mk 1:15).

At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke says that Jesus had shown himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to the apostles during 40 days and telling them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). At the end of the book of Acts we find Paul imprisoned in Rome where he continued *to*

preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus the Messiah (Acts 28:31).

If we feel that this concept is irrelevant today, we have not understood Jesus properly. He came to his people, Israel, and they didn't receive him. So, he sent his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations throughout the world saying that this gospel of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end would come (Mt 24:14). His gospel was not only about the cross and forgiveness of sins; it was the gospel of the *kingdom: the Messianic reign*.

Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born again, or born from above, he would not see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3). Then he rephrased it and said that unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). Nicodemus expressed incredulity about the expression 'born again', but he didn't have a problem with the expression 'kingdom of God'. What can we assume about his understanding of seeing the kingdom of God, and entering the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is not to be interpreted geographically as a location like the United Kingdom, but rather a 'reign'. To see the kingdom of God may mean to see it in action, or to *experience* it. Cf. Acts 2:7, which says that God would not let his Holy One *see* decay. It requires a spiritual transformation, a spiritual birth. Entering it is an interesting concept. What can it mean? There are various possibilities. We might think of the kingdom of God as the church, heaven, or paradise, and one indeed needs to be born again to enter any of these. But Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a man like Simeon who was devout and eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. In my study of the use of the 'kingdom of God' expression, as reflected in this book, I found that in a future context, it normally refers to a future Messianic reign. But it doesn't always mean that, as we have already seen in chapters 3 - 5.

The next question is, what does it mean to experience or enter this future kingdom? The biblical word kingdom means reign or kingship, not a territory like the United Kingdom. As a Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus quite likely had the hope of participating in the government of the Messiah's kingdom if he arrived in his lifetime. He would not enter it as a subject because 'kingdom' in Hebrew means kingship, government, reign, or monarchy.

Most references to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven in the NT are in the Gospels and on the lips of John the Baptist and Jesus. Most scholars regard these terms as synonymous, but the 'kingdom of heaven' (translated 'kingdom from heaven' by ISV) emphasizes the heavenly origin and nature of the kingdom. 'The kingdom of heaven' is only used by Matthew; parallel

passages in the other Gospels use 'kingdom of God.' Jesus doesn't have a kingdom in heaven; that is the Father's domain. As the promised descendant of David, his kingdom is earthly. That is why the NT does not teach that Jesus is reigning now. True, he is presently sitting at the right hand of the Father. However, that is not the kingdom of God, the Messianic reign implied when the Magi inquired: Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

Why are the epistles relatively silent on the subject? Kingdom terminology concerns the Messiah, his future reign on Earth, and his monarchy; those who will rule with him. The epistles are mainly concerned with evangelism and church growth. People talk of building or extending the kingdom, but that is not biblical terminology; they are confusing the kingdom and the Church. The Bible doesn't talk about building the kingdom of God; the Greek word for kingdom means kingship, which cannot be built. But Jesus did say he would build his *Church* (Mt 16:18), and there is a close connection between the Church and the monarchy that would reign with him. The monarchy consists of the elect, also called the righteous, the servants of God, or the children of God. Those who call themselves Christians today make up 30% of the world's population, but Jesus said that only a few would be saved, more like 5% - only the Lord knows those who are his. Jesus told Nicodemus that only those born again would enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus told Peter he would give him the keys of the kingdom. He and the other disciples, and Jesus' disciples down through the ages, have the authority and ability to bring others into the kingdom. Something is going on right now, secretly, which is vital for each one of us. During the past 2000 years, God is executing his plan for every people and nation. According to Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God, the Sower is continually sowing the seed and reaping a harvest, while the enemy is busy sowing weeds. The yeast is continually permeating the dough, and the mustard seed is growing into a large tree. People from every corner of the Earth are discovering the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure. The treasure and the pearl of great price refer both to Jesus and the kingship that believers in Jesus are going to inherit. The kingdom net is catching all kinds of fish; people of different tribes and cultures, colors and languages, from every corner of the Earth.

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom of God. He is our Savior and he taught about the future of those who would be saved. He could have taught about paradise, eternal life (as John does in his Gospel), or heaven, but he chose to teach about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a phrase that contrasts with the kingdoms of this Earth, which are corrupt kingdoms and empires established by men motivated by their pride and greed. Messiah's rule has its source in God and will illustrate how kingship should be handled.

The kingdom of God comes from heaven but is also closely connected to the Earth. Jesus and his monarchy will rule the world from a heavenly city in the sky; New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God.

The kingdom of God is described as a 1000-year reign when Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, will reign over Israel from his earthly throne until he puts all enemies under his feet (Ps 110:1, Mt 19:28, Rev 20:4). We don't know all the details. What we do know is that at his return to this Earth, the dead saints will be resurrected and the living saints will be changed, and they will rule the Earth with the Messiah. This is the beginning of eternal life because after resurrection, we can't die again; mortal bodies become immortal. Glorification begins when the immortal resurrected saints begin reigning with Christ. Their bodies will be like Christ's resurrected body, which could move effortlessly in both the physical and spiritual realms, in both the earthly and heavenly regions.

The Messiah in the Gospels

Matthew calls his Gospel a record of the life of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt 1:1). He emphasizes the fact that Jesus is the awaited Jewish Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός, Christ, is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Mashiach*, Messiah, who was generally believed to be the descendant of both David and Abraham. The first verse of Ps 110 is a command from the Lord to David's Lord (the Messiah) to sit at his right hand until he subdues his enemies. The Father will subdue the Messiah's enemies, culminating in the defeat of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet at Armageddon. Only then will the Son sit on his throne in Zion and rule the world. While ruling, the Son will bring into submission every rule, authority, and power, and then, after 1000 years, he'll hand the kingship back to God the Father (1 Cor 15:25-26). Ps 110:1 is quoted four times in the NT (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk 20:42, Acts 2:34) and it is alluded to in the Pauline and Petrine epistles and in Hebrews. Jesus quoted it and then asked the Jewish scholars why David called the Messiah his Lord, when he is actually his descendant? They had no answer, because they couldn't agree to his divinity. In his Pentecost address, Peter quoted the verse and then declared that all the people of Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made this Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:34-36). In adding the title 'Lord,' Peter put Jesus on a par with God. The full title, the Lord Jesus Christ, was clearly an affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord (Yahweh) and Messiah.

Mark begins his Gospel by saying that his book was the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. He immediately introduces Jesus as 'Messiah' and 'Son of God,' Messianic titles.

Luke quotes the angel's words to the priest Zechariah about the son who would be born to him, John the Baptist, saying that he will go before the Lord with the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord (Lk 1:17). This alludes to Mal 3:1 and 4:5-6, which contain the words of the last Messianic prophecies in the OT. On the night of Jesus' birth, angels announced to shepherds that their Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born that night in the city of David (Lk 2:11). So, the early emphasis in the Gospels is that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he preached, saying people should repent, because the kingdom of heaven was near (Mt 3:2). When Jesus began his ministry, he went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the *kingdom*, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Mt 4:23). Whose kingdom is that? Religious Jews understood that this was none other than the kingdom of their awaited Messiah.

John began his Gospel by concentrating on Jesus' deity. In the first chapter, Andrew found his brother Peter and told him that they had found the Messiah (Jn 1:41). Likewise, Philip went and found Nathanael telling him that they had found the man about whom Moses and the Prophets wrote (Jn 1:45). When Nathanael met Jesus, he exclaimed: Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! (Jn 1:49). And what was John's declared purpose for writing his Gospel? He tells us near the end of his book that he had recorded the miracles so that people might believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him they might have life (Jn 20:31).

Did you get the message? Not only that we might believe in Jesus and have life, but that we might also believe that Jesus is the Messiah. That is the purpose of all the Gospels, and we should build our theology from there. Jesus is the Messiah, and he is returning to set up his kingdom here on Earth as promised by the OT prophets. Each Gospel makes it clear very early that the subject of their biographies is none other than the awaited Messiah. The Greek word Χριστός is mentioned over 50 times in the Gospels and over 500 times in the NT. To the Jews ὁ Χριστός was a title meaning 'the Anointed One,' or following the Hebrew, 'the Messiah.' The anointing was made by pouring oil on the head, and the person anointed was thereby consecrated for religious service as a prophet, priest, or king; in Jesus' case, all three. But

many Christians today understand Christ as a personal name rather than a title.

The teaching concerning our future reign with the Messiah in his kingdom should not be confused with that of our present status of being 'in Christ,' who is now seated at the right hand of God. Paul said, God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6), and that if we have been raised with the Messiah, we should keep focusing on the things that are above, where the Messiah is seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:1). Being raised with Christ and being seated in the heavenly realms is our present spiritual position 'in Christ', but sitting with Christ on his earthly throne at the renewal of all things, and reigning with him there, is a different matter. That is our future glorification.

The Synoptic Gospels were written to give us a summary of Jesus' life and teaching, and to answer the question: Who was this person? The Gospel writers quote the Hebrew Bible extensively and identify Jesus as the Messiah, a mysterious person who is the subject of many prophecies; mysterious in the sense of his divine titles. He was generally regarded by the Jews of that era as a savior who would rescue Israel from their enemies and rule over them as their king with righteousness, justice, and peace. He would also have a profound influence over the nations of the world, the Gentiles.

Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, giving evidence that he was a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, and a descendant of David, the most revered king of Israel, and one to whom God had made the following promise:

When your life is complete, and you go to join your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one who will come forth from your body, and I will fortify his kingdom. He'll build a temple (house) dedicated to my Name, and I'll establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:12-13).

Although the promise was fulfilled in part by his son Solomon, who built the temple in Jerusalem, it is also regarded as a Messianic prophecy. It is David's greater Son who would build his church and rule forever. God will appoint him to be his first-born Son, the most exalted of the kings of the Earth. He'll establish David's line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure (Ps 89:27-29). The 'house' that the Messiah builds is the Messianic community, the Church that Jesus said he would build, which ultimately becomes the royal household in the Messianic kingdom. God's household is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). We are presently being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus the Messiah (1 Pet 2:5).

As God's children, we are heirs of all things including the government of the world.

When Jesus was born (Mt 2:10), astrologers from the East came to Jerusalem to look for the newborn *king of the Jews*. When the Jewish King Herod heard about it, he killed all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and surrounds, fearing a rival, but Jesus was taken to Egypt and he escaped. An angel appeared to Mary (Lk 1:32-33) and told her she would bear a son and call him Jesus. The angel said that her son would rule over Israel forever. In other words, he would be the Messiah! He would be great and be called the Son of the Most High, and *God would give him the throne of his ancestor David*, and his kingdom would never end.

John the Baptist's father Zechariah also prophesied about Jesus, emphasizing his Davidic ancestry. He said that God had raised up a mighty Savior for them *from the family of his servant David*, just as he had promised through his holy prophets (Lk 1:68-70). So, Jesus is identified very clearly in these early chapters of Matthew and Luke as the Messiah, the awaited king in the line of David. He is also called 'the Lord,' and what other man apart from the Messiah could be called Lord?

The main question discussed in this book concerns Matthew's expression 'the kingdom of heaven', or 'kingdom of God' as it is expressed by other NT writers. My aim is to show that this expression does not refer to God the Father's kingship or sovereignty, which is universal and eternal and cannot logically be regarded as 'being at hand' or 'near'. Neither can his kingship be inherited or entered. The phrase regularly refers to the Messiah himself, the kingship that comes from God, the kingship that has been established by God the Father, the kingship of his beloved Son. In contrast to God's sovereignty over all, this kingship is exercised on Earth when a human king rules for a limited but lengthy time. He will rule from Jerusalem and his kingship is to be identified with that promised to the 'Son of Man' and the saints in Daniel 7:13-14, 27 and in Revelation 20:4-6.

When Jesus performed his public ministry for three years while training his disciples, he had a challenging task. He was born Messiah and Lord, but he couldn't declare that publicly. When his disciples realized the truth about his identity, he told them not to tell anybody. He was the Messiah, the promised king of Israel, and his message was about his coming kingdom, but he could only communicate that in his teaching by using ambiguous language. He talked about himself in the third person as the Son of Man. And his coming kingdom he called the 'kingdom of God', which in Greek could mean God's kingdom (genitive), or the kingdom which has a divine origin, the kingdom from God (ablative).

With this understanding, let us look at what Jesus said when the Roman governor Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews (Jn 18:33). Jesus initially avoided the question but eventually gave him a clearer answer. He said his kingdom did not *belong* to this world. If it did, his servants would have fought to keep him from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. Then Jesus said: But *for now*, my kingdom is not from here. So, you're a king? Pilate said. Jesus answered: You say that I'm a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is committed to the truth listens to my voice (Jn 18:37). Jesus had his kingdom alright, but its origin was not from this world, just as he was not from this world. He is the man from heaven, and his kingdom was from heaven, granted to him by God. But his kingdom will be of this world because he will reign over the Earth. My point here is that Jesus born to be a king, but his authority is not from here, it is from God. The expression 'kingdom of God' refers to his reign on Earth and not to the sovereignty of the Father. Jesus had to talk in parables and use cryptic expressions, but we'll get a clearer picture if, each time we read about the kingdom of God in a future context, we interpret it as the coming Messianic kingdom.

Did people recognize Jesus to be the Messiah? They were divided, and there was doubt. The leaders initially didn't take Jesus seriously, but his miracles worried them. Even his disciples were confused. On the one hand, he was a miracle worker, a healer, and undoubtedly a prophet. The demons, who often called Jesus the Son of God also encouraged the belief that he was the Messiah. But on the other hand, there was evidence against it. Jesus was a poor itinerant preacher, nobody's concept of the Messianic king. Secondly, Jesus himself spoke of the Son of Man in the third person, which suggested that the Messiah might be another person. And added to that, he usually spoke of the kingdom of God as something in the future. Wanting to suggest to people that he was the Messiah, he said the kingdom was near, or among you. On other occasions, Jesus' speech made it clear that he was the Messiah. He told the crowds that they should believe in him and give themselves wholeheartedly to him. He said, for example, that whoever acknowledged him before people, he would acknowledge before God (Mt 10:32). That didn't have political implications.

The Messiah in Acts

The title Christ, meaning Messiah, occurs over 500 times in the book of Acts and the epistles. In addition, the kingdom of God is referred to about 28 times in the NT books following the Gospels. Luke declares in the last verse of the book of Acts that Paul continued to preach about the kingdom of God and to teach boldly and freely about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). Yet in

Paul's 13 epistles he only refers to the kingdom 15 times, including related expressions, for example, 'the kingdom of the Son whom he loves.' Only once (1 Cor 15:24-25) does he talk about Christ's reign on Earth, but six times he refers to people inheriting the kingship from God. Otherwise, his major concern was the present condition of Christians and churches.

So, what do the references to the kingdom of God in Acts and the epistles relate to? Do they teach a future Messianic kingdom, or do they somehow equate it with the church? Paul told the Colossian believers that God had qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He had rescued them from the power of darkness and brought them into the kingdom of his beloved Son, through whom they have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:12-13). This verse is often quoted to show that the kingdom has already begun, or been realized, and is a present reality. Yes, we are saved, our sins are forgiven, we have been adopted as God's children, we are members of the royal family, and we are a kingdom of priests to serve our God. But we're not yet reigning! We are justified, but not yet glorified. God has begun a good work in us, but it won't be perfected until the day Jesus Christ returns and we're resurrected. Flesh and blood can't inherit the kingship.

Being 'in Christ,' we are seated with him in the heavenly realm (Eph 2:6), but that statement is proleptic, spoken in anticipation of our certain future and told to us for our edification and encouragement. But the world can't and won't recognize it. Christians have already entered the monarchy and are waiting until Jesus comes to see how that will evolve. It is expressed in a past context because all our status blessings come to us when we are born from above. However, there is no reason to call this 'realized eschatology' as many do. 'Realized' means that something is present in reality. That is not true of the kingdom of God. In the spiritual realm, we have been delivered from the devil's power, we are new creatures in Christ, and we live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once a person is born again, he becomes God's child and immediately shares in the life of God that belongs to the future. But Messiah's kingdom is not our present spiritual experience. It hasn't yet arrived in the real world; the Messiah is not yet seated on his earthly throne. He presently has no throne, territory, or subjects. Paul speaks about the Messiah who is in us as our glorious hope (Col 1:27). We have a relationship with God, we experience new life, and we know that we are 'in Christ', but the glory is still to come

Luke said that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples over 40 days and spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). What did he talk to them about? Was he talking about the Church, which hadn't begun yet? Or Messiah's kingdom, which, as we now know, was still millennia away in the

future? The two are connected, of course, because the true Church consists of those who will inherit the kingship. Jesus' conversation on the road to Emmaus may give us an idea of what he was talking about. He told them that the Messiah had to suffer these things before he entered into his glory. Then, beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them all the passages of Scripture about himself (Lk 24:26-27). And later he told his disciples that everything written about him in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had to be fulfilled (Lk 24:44).

There we have it from the mouth of Jesus himself. All the OT Messianic prophecies had to be fulfilled. For example, Isa 11:10 which Paul quotes in the book of Romans, says that the Messiah would arise to rule over the Gentiles, and they would hope in him (Rom 15:12). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would raise a banner for the nations, assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the Earth (Isa 11:12).

Peter told a crowd at Jerusalem that the Messiah must remain in heaven until it was time for him, as Messiah, to restore everything to perfection. They should repent and turn to him to have their sins blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and so that he might send Jesus to them, whom he appointed long ago to be the Messiah. Peter said that Jesus had to remain in heaven until the time for restoring all things, which God had announced through his prophets (Acts 3:19-21). Paul said we are co-heirs with Christ. Neither he nor we has inherited the kingdom yet. Jesus is on his Father's throne in heaven, *waiting* for God to subdue his enemies (Heb 10:13), culminating in Armageddon. His reign on Earth has not yet begun, nor has ours.

Philip also preached the good news about the kingdom of God and about the name of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 8:12). In the Gospels, the teaching about the kingdom of God to a Jewish audience was one thing, while in Acts and the epistles the preaching of the gospel and salvation through the death of Jesus Christ was another. Perhaps in Philip's preaching to the Samaritans, we are seeing a blending of these messages.

Paul and Barnabas preached to Jews and Gentiles in Galatia, telling them that they must endure many hardships before they enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). What does Paul mean here by entering the kingdom of God? Is it a synonym for 'being saved'? Is his message now a blending of the Messiah's kingdom and the gospel message? Or is he focusing on the future? The kingdom of God probably refers to the Messiah's future reign. Christians normally experience suffering in this life before they are glorified in the next. F. F. Bruce's commentary on this verse is: 'No cross, no crown'.

The Messiah in Paul's Epistles

'Christ' has evolved into a personal name in the epistles, where Jesus is often referred to as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, and the Lord Jesus Christ. There are only scattered references to the kingdom in Paul's epistles, and the emphasis has sometimes moved from Christ's future reign to the implications of that reign on the present Christian life.

Paul declares that the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy produced by the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17), and that the kingdom of God isn't just talk, but power (1 Cor 4:20). However, neither of these statements prove that the kingdom has been realized; they teach timeless truths about the kingdom. If that is what the Messianic kingdom of God is going to be like, then it should be reflected in our present relationships. Paul usually refers to the kingdom as future, especially regarding inheriting it. He said the wicked won't inherit it with emphasis on sexual sins (1 Cor 6:9). His clearest Messianic kingdom statement comes in his chapter on the resurrection. He says that resurrection occurs in the proper order: first the Messiah, then those who belong to the Messiah at his coming. John says this is the first resurrection and that the rest of the dead don't come to life until 1000 years later (Rev 20:5). Then comes the end, when after Jesus has done away with every ruler, authority, and power, he hands the kingship back to God the Father. He must reign as God's regent from Zion until he puts all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:23-25).

He then makes the significant statement that mortal bodies made of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and what decays cannot inherit what does not decay (1 Cor 15:50). Paul is here declaring the necessity of *resurrection* before entering the Messianic kingship. The resurrection occurs at Jesus' return when believers inherit the kingship. This is taught by Revelation 20, which makes it very clear that the resurrection of the righteous occurs before the millennial reign of Christ on Earth begins, evidence that the kingdom of God is not present now. The rest of the dead come to life when the thousand years end with the final judgment.

Paul calls his evangelistic team members fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Col 4:11). Messiah's reign is the goal, the climax towards which all Christian work is heading. Souls won for the Lord will enter their glory at that time and receive their rewards there. Paul urges the Thessalonian Christians to live in a manner worthy of God who calls them into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12). This verse does not mention the kingdom of God specifically, but 'his kingdom' is the same thing, and as argued throughout this book, it does not refer to God's universal reign, but Messiah's earthly

reign that originates from God. The tense here is present (calls), or rather habitual; it is what God habitually does; he calls people to enter his Son's kingship and glory. This is their ultimate destination.

In making a solemn charge to Timothy, Paul bases it on future realities; the coming of Jesus to establish his Messianic kingdom when he will judge the living and the dead. He says:

I charge you in the presence of God and the Messiah Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and because of his coming and his reign (2 Tim 4:1).

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).

Verse one refers to the future events described in Revelation 19-20, the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and future judgments. In verse eighteen, Paul said the Lord would rescue him and take him safely to his heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18). What does he mean by 'heavenly kingdom'? The NIV commentary suggests heaven itself. He could be referring to New Jerusalem, a city in the heavenly realm, which comes down to the Earth, because this is the future home of the royal household after the resurrection (Rev 21:2). The BAG Greek lexicon states that the Greek word 'heavenly' can mean something that is there, or that belongs there by nature, or that comes from there. Messiah's kingdom has its source in God, so it is said to be heavenly or from heaven without meaning that it is in heaven. The Messiah was prophesied to reign on Earth, and the saints will reign with him on Earth (Dan 7:27, Rev 5:10).

The Messiah in the remaining epistles

There are only four references to Messiah's kingdom in these epistles, but significantly, these authors interpret it as a future earthly kingdom. Quoting Ps 45:6, the writer of Hebrews says about the Son: Your throne, O God, is forever, and the scepter of your kingship is a righteous scepter (Heb 1:8). He interprets the king to be the Messiah, the Son of God, whom he appointed heir of all things and whose kingdom was always regarded as being on Earth. Then he tells the Christians that since they are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful (Heb 12:28). Receiving the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting it, ruling as co-heirs with the Messiah during his millennial reign.

James says that God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him (James 2:5). See also James 1:12 where he says that it is the man who has

stood the test who will receive the crown of life; the victor's crown that endures for eternal life.

Peter says that Christians should confirm their calling and election, for in this way they will be generously granted entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Messiah (2 Pet 1:11). Peter is probably alluding to Daniel 7, where it says that the kingdom, authority and magnificence of all nations of the Earth would be given to the saints of the high places. Their kingdom *will be an everlasting kingdom*, and all authorities will serve and obey them. The singular pronoun relates to the Hebrew phrase 'the people of the saints of the high places.' As people in Hebrew is singular, so is the pronoun that relates to it. In English, it should be plural. It relates to the saints, not the Messiah, who hasn't been mentioned since Daniel 7:13.

The Messiah in Revelation

Christ/the Messiah is mentioned seven times in Revelation, translated only twice by NIV. The term 'kingdom of God' does not occur at all. Nevertheless, the book is entitled 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ (the Messiah)' and he is referred to under many titles and names, including 'Jesus' fourteen times. The following four verses refer to the Messiah's kingdom:

Rev 1:5b-6a Jesus, who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, has made us a *kingdom*, priests for his God and Father. The New English Bible translates 'kingdom' in a more meaningful fashion as a 'royal house'. The primary meaning is 'kingship', but here it is not abstract; it refers to those who are reigning, the monarchy or royal household, those who are sometimes called the 'sons of the kingdom'.

Rev 5:10 The Lamb (Messiah) has redeemed people to become a *kingdom* (royal house or monarchy) and priests for our God, and they will reign on/over the Earth. This repeats what was said in the previous reference with the additional information that the saints will rule the Earth. The kingdom of God (Messianic kingship) originates from heaven, but the reign is on Earth. The Messiah, Jesus, will rule *over* the whole world with his royal household, the saints, who are redeemed by his blood. I prefer the translation *over the Earth* because there is no scriptural evidence that the Messiah or the saints will be living on the Earth. It is more likely that the resurrected redeemed will live and rule over the Earth from New Jerusalem, which descends from heaven at the resurrection.

Rev 11:15 The blowing of the seventh trumpet signals the climax of the book, when *the world's kingdom becomes the kingdom of the Lord* and of his

regent, the Messiah, who will rule the world until it ends. This is a central verse and reflects the climax of the book. This kingdom belongs to planet Earth and is most certainly an allusion to Daniel 2:44 and 7:14. The world's kingdom is in the singular because dominion and rule over the whole world will pass from the tyrants to the Messiah. All earthly kingdoms suddenly come to an end. Verse 17 says: You have taken your great power and begun to reign. The verb is in the aorist tense or aspect, which conveys the meaning of a single, discrete action in the past. Here, it means the moment the Messiah became king or began his rule.

Rev 12:10 A loud voice in heaven declares that the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah have now arrived. This is the climax. There was war in heaven, and Satan, who had led the whole world astray, was hurled down to Earth together with his demons. The time has arrived for God's kingdom to be manifested, and for the authority of his regent, the Messiah, to be enforced. The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book about the end of the present age, climaxing with the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, his victory over his enemies, and the beginning of his reign over the Earth.

Jesus' titles in Revelation

We will now check the terminology used in Revelation to describe Jesus' person and his victory as the Messiah.

Rev 1:5 Jesus the Messiah, the witness, the faithful one, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the Earth.

1:8 The Alpha and the Omega, who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty.

1:17-18 The first and the last (cf. Isa 44:6, 48:12), the living one.

2:18 The Son of God.

3:7 The one who is holy and true, who has the key of David.

The key to the house of David is mentioned in Isaiah 22:22. Keys are symbols of authority, and in this context, keys to the Messianic kingship, the Davidic throne. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus said he would give the keys of the kingdom to Peter.

3:14 The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation.

5:5 The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David.

The Lion imagery originated from an early Messianic prophecy in Gen 49:9-10. Jacob blessed Judah, saying he was a lion's cub. The scepter would not depart from him, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until the one comes who owns them both, and to him would belong the allegiance of nations. 'Root of David' is better translated as 'Shoot or Scion of David'. A scion grows out of the root of a tree or plant, even when thought to be dead, and symbolically it refers to the Messiah who came from the royal line of David, son of Jesse, 1000 years after David, and 400+ years after the last Judean king. Another prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2 says that a shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

5:12 The Lamb who was slain (cf. Isa 53:7)

11:15 His Messiah.

Father and Son share the throne, but the pronoun remains singular because members of the Trinity are one. The Lord is sovereign over all, the Messiah, his regent on Earth. C.f. Ps 2:6, where the Lord installs his regent on Mount Zion.

14:14 The Son of Man.

The one 'like the Son of Man' is Jesus, an allusion to Daniel 7:13. This is the title that Jesus frequently used for himself in the Gospels.

17:14 Lord of lords and King of kings.

19:11 Faithful and True.

19:13 The Word of God.

19:16 King of kings and Lord of lords.

22:13 The Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

22:16 The root (scion) and descendant of David, the bright morning star.

This final name comes from a Messianic prophecy given by Balaam son of Beor (Num 24:17):

I can see him, but not right now,
I observe him, but from a distance.
A star streams forth from Jacob;
a scepter arises from Israel.

While the immediate reference is to King David, here in Revelation it relates to David's greater son. F. F. Bruce, in "The Revelation to John" (p. 666),

writes that “in the Qumran texts Numbers 24:17 is a recurring testimonium of the Messianic warrior of the end time”. The star was a familiar symbol in Jewish writings for the expected Davidic king. The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn. The Star of David, known in Hebrew as the Shield of David or Magen David, is a recognized symbol of modern Jewish identity and Judaism.

A summary of Jesus’ teaching about his messiahship

1. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought he was, Peter declared that he was the Messiah, and Jesus told them to keep it to themselves.
2. Immediately after that, at the transfiguration at Caesarea Philippi, Peter, James, and John saw Jesus in his Messianic glory, but they told no one at that time what they had seen.
3. At his trial before the high priest, Jesus declared himself to be the Messiah.
4. When the Samaritan woman spoke of the Messiah, Jesus told her that he who was speaking to her was the Messiah (Jn 4:26).
5. Jesus referred to God as his Father (Jn 5:17), and himself as the Son (Jn 5:19-23). ‘Son of God’ was a Messianic title found in Psalm 2:7-8 where the Lord said: You are my son, today I have become your father. Ask of me, and I’ll give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the Earth as your possession. The author of the book of Hebrews quotes these verses and relates them to Jesus (Heb 1:5).
6. Jesus said that the Father had given him authority to judge because he was the Messiah (Jn 5:27).
7. The ‘I AM’ pronouncements in John’s Gospel identify Jesus with the divine name Yahweh as do numerous verses which attribute deity to the Messiah in the OT.

I AM the bread of life (Jn 6:35).

I AM the bread that came down from heaven (Jn 6:41).

I AM the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life (Jn 8:12, cf. Isa 49:6).

Unless you believe that I AM, you’ll die in your sins (Jn 8:24).

Before Abraham was, I AM! (Jn 8:58). The Jewish leaders picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

8. Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was via the Mount of Olives, a significant Messianic landmark. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:12), and it is to this same mountain that the Messiah will descend when he returns (Zech 14:4). Jesus rode on a donkey to fulfill a Messianic prophecy (Zech 9:9, cf. Mt 21:4-5). The crowds shouted: Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David (Mk 11:9-10). The crowds recognized the significance of this Messianic event, but the Pharisees rejected Jesus as their Messiah (Lk 19:39). Jesus went to the temple, where children shouted: Hosanna to the Son of David (Mt 21:14). So, belief in him as the Messiah was growing.
9. Jesus questioned the Jews about why they accused him of blasphemy when he called himself the Son of God (Jn 10:36). God promised David that he would establish the throne of his descendant forever and that he would be his father and he would be God's son (2 Sam 7:12-14). Based on this promise, Son of God became a Messianic title.
10. The crowd told Jesus that they had learned from the OT that the *Messiah* remains forever. So why was he saying that the *Son of Man* must be lifted up? (Jn 12:34). Here, the crowd equates the Messiah with Jesus' expression 'Son of Man'.
11. Jesus' prayer to the Father (Jn 17) leaves no doubt as to who Jesus believed himself to be. He called God, Father, and referred to himself as Son. He said he had been granted authority over all people (Dan 7:14, Ps 2). The connection between Daniel 7:14 and Matthew 28:18-19 is significant. Daniel said, dominion, glory and a kingdom had been bestowed on the Messiah, so that all people, nations, and languages would serve him. In Matthew, Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on Earth had been given to him, so his disciples should go and disciple people in all nations.

This is the Great Commission, the church's marching orders. Jesus gives eternal life to all those whom the Father has given him. Inheriting eternal life is the Johannine equivalent of inheriting the kingdom of God. Having finished his work, Jesus is now returning to the glory he had with the Father before the world began. He said that those whom the Father gave him know for sure that he came from the Father and believe that he sent him. He states that all he has is the Father's, and all the Father has is his. Complete unity. The believers have the word, and Jesus asks for protection for them from the evil one. He doesn't mention his messiahship or the kingdom of God explicitly, but rather prays for his disciples and those who will believe in him through their message. He prays for their unity and says he has given

them the glory that the Father gave him. That glory is regal, and it is eternal. He has given them eternal life, and being co-heirs with Christ and ruling with him is their glory. Their ultimate glorification is expressed in Revelation 3:21, where Jesus said the conquerors will share a place with him on his throne, just as he conquered and shares a place with the Father on his throne.

12. In John 18:33 Pilate asked Jesus if he was king of the Jews. Jesus replied that his kingdom was not from this world. He didn't say that it didn't belong to this world. The Greek preposition ἐκ 'from, out of' indicates that his kingdom does not have its origin in this world, not that it won't be manifested in this world. He admitted that he was a king and that he was born for that reason.
13. John said his purpose for writing his book was so that people might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing in him they might have life (Jn 20:31).
14. After the Last Supper, Jesus promised his disciples a share in his rule in his future kingdom. He conferred kingship on them, just as his Father had conferred kingship on him, so that they might eat and drink at his table in his kingdom and sit on thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk 22:29-30).

The evidence given in this chapter is more than sufficient to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the coming king promised by the OT prophets. Jesus will return to this Earth, and this time he will reign as king over the Earth and fulfill all the promises that gave the Jews their hope and expectation.