

# 11. THE KINGDOM IS OUR INHERITANCE

*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we're God's children. Now, if we're children, we're heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with the Messiah. If we share in his sufferings, we'll also share in his glory (Rom 8:16-17).*

## **Inheriting a kingdom**

According to the BAG Greek Lexicon, the verb 'inherit' means especially, to participate in Messianic salvation; also, to acquire, obtain, or come into possession of something. The consistent teaching of the NT is that believers are heirs of Messiah's monarchy, not just its blessings. This authority is given to believers; it is conferred upon them. Being an heir of the kingdom shouldn't be regarded as a vague expression of experiencing the kingdom. It means that we'll inherit Messiah's monarchy. We are joint heirs with the Messiah as per this chapter's text. The eternal glory we'll share with him begins with his reign on earth for a thousand years.

Salome, the mother of James and John, had insight into this when she came to Jesus and asked that her sons might sit at his right and left in his kingship. There is evidence that she was Jesus' aunt, the sister of Mary, which makes her request more understandable. If we compare the names of the women watching the crucifixion with Jesus' mother in Mt 27:56, Mk 15:40, and Jn 19:25, we find that in each case there are three women apart from Jesus' mother. Mary Magdalene is mentioned every time. A third Mary is the mother of James and Joseph, who in John is called the wife of Clopas. The third woman is Salome, the mother of James and John, who is identified in John as the sister of Jesus' mother. Note also that Jesus entrusted the care of his mother into John's hands, in preference to his brothers, and that John describes himself five times as 'the disciple that Jesus loved'. All of

this gives a high probability to the supposition that Salome was Jesus' aunt, wife of Zebedee, and mother of James and John.

An heir usually receives an inheritance after a testator's death, but heirs in the context of being God's children receive something from him as a possession. The Messiah is the heir of all things, and according to Hebrews 2:8-9, through him, so are believers. They are heirs of the kingdom of God and of the righteousness that comes by faith (Heb 11:7).

## **Entering glory**

The epistles often focus on the glory we'll experience when the Messiah returns. All mankind has sinned and falls short of the glory of God, his holiness and perfection. We lost the glory that God created us for, but we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2). Paul said that we have been predestined for glory (Rom 8:30).

This glory means nothing less than the glory of the Messianic monarchy (1 Thess 2:12). The Messiah will give us the right to share his throne. When the Messiah returns, he'll sit on his glorious throne, and he'll tell the righteous to take their inheritance, the kingdom/kingship/monarchy *prepared for them since the world's creation* (Mt 25:31, 34).

Our glorification is our adoption into God's royal family. The special kind of love that the Father has given us is that he's called us his children (1 Jn 3:1). As God's children, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17).

Our resurrection bodies will be raised in glory (1 Cor 15:43). When the Messiah appears, we also will appear with him in glory (Col 3:4). At the rapture, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they'll be like his glorious body (Phil 3:21). Our inheritance is a glorified state in which we'll reign with the Messiah over the earth for 1000 years. The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will come down out of heaven from God. The city's inhabitants are the saints, the bride of Christ, beautifully dressed for her husband. We'll shine with the glory of God. Our glory is compared to the brilliance of pure gold and precious stones (Rev 21:2, 9-11).

## **The saints will inherit the Messianic kingship**

The saints are God's children, co-heirs with Christ, and they'll share in his royal power and government. They'll constitute the ruling class in the kingdom, the monarchy under Jesus. This disagrees with George Eldon Ladd's statements that 'the church is the community of the kingdom but never the kingdom itself' (A Theology of the New Testament, p.111), and 'they are not the kingdom. The kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men'.

Whereas Jesus spoke mainly about entering the kingship, Paul and James often spoke of inheriting it. They are inheriting the Messiah's monarchy, and it's always spoken of in a future context. We haven't yet come into our inheritance. Following is my rewording of verses that speak of inheriting the kingdom. It can be more accurately translated as 'monarchy' or 'kingship'.

**Mt 25:34** The Messiah will tell those on his right to come and inherit the monarchy prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

**1 Cor 6:9-10** Wicked people will not inherit the Messianic monarchy.

**1 Cor 15:50** Those with mortal bodies can't inherit the Messianic monarchy. Those with perishable bodies can't inherit what is imperishable.

**Gal 5:21** Those who practice immoral behavior won't inherit Messianic monarchy.

**Eph 5:5** No immoral or impure person, or any greedy person (an idolater), has any inheritance in the monarchy of the Messiah and God.

**Jas 2:5** God has chosen the world's poor to become rich in faith and to become heirs of the monarchy that he promised to those who love him.

## **The sons of the kingdom**

We've seen what it means to enter the kingdom and established that the kingdom is not a territory or its population but rather the monarchy.

Kingship is the dignity, rank and position of those who possess royal power. What is a believer's relationship to the kingship? A literal translation of Matthew 8:12 is 'but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness' (NASB). The sons of the kingdom are often mistakenly thought of as subjects or citizens, but according to the BAG Greek lexicon, sons of the kingdom are participants in the monarchy. These 'sons of the kingdom' who are cast out are the intended heirs, the Jewish nation, or more specifically, the Jewish royal family, who were so intent on destroying Jesus and his followers. The NIV translates them as 'subjects', NRSV 'heirs', ISV 'unfaithful heirs', KJV 'children'.

Another verse that mentions the sons of the kingdom is Matthew 13:38 in the parable of the weeds, where it says that the field is the world; and the good seed are the *sons of the kingdom* and the tares are the sons of the evil one (NASB). KJV and NRSV translate 'children of the kingdom', NIV 'people of the kingdom', and ISV 'those who belong to the kingdom'. All these translations are inadequate; they don't reveal that the 'sons of the kingdom' are sons of the king, who constitute the royal family. The parable finishes with words that emphasize the sonship, saying that the *righteous* will shine like the sun in *their Father's kingdom* (Mt 13:43). My justification for this interpretation is that kingdom means kingship, and son often means one who shares in something.

In Hebrew, a similar expression to sons of the kingdom is seed (offspring) of the kingdom. Here are some examples:

**2 Kings 11:1** As soon as Ahaziah's mother Athaliah learned that her son had died, she seized the throne and executed the entire *royal bloodline* (lit. seed of the kingdom).

**Jer 41:1** In the seventh month, Nethaniah's son Ishmael, the grandson of Elishama, a member of the *royal family* (lit. a seed of the kingdom) came.

**Ezek 17:13** Then he took one of the *royal descendants* (lit. a seed of the kingdom), made a covenant with him, and put him under an oath.

**Dan 1:3** The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief officer, to bring in some Israelis of *royal and noble descent* (lit. seed of the kingdom and of the nobles).

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the young Israelites of royal blood be trained to enter his service. Daniel and his three friends were among them. All versions are unanimous that the seed/offspring of the kingdom means the royal family, which supports my thesis that those who enter and inherit the kingdom of God are entering the monarchy as royal family and not as subjects who are being ruled over.

Believers are born from above to be heirs of the kingdom. They are relatives of the king; princes no less! In the parable of the tenants, the Jewish leaders forfeited their position, while those who believe in Jesus are consistently told that Messiah's monarchy is theirs, it is given to them, or conferred on them. They receive it and inherit it. To understand that the faithful are merely subjects or citizens of the kingdom does not do justice to the meaning of these verbs.

To enter the kingdom is not to enter a geographical area; it is to enter Jesus's rule and authority. It is becoming part of his royal family. This is made clear by the vocabulary used, which points to the exalted position we have in the kingdom.

Christians don't go around telling people, or even each other, that they are going to rule the world one day. Maybe that is because it is the meek who inherit the earth. But preachers don't talk about it either, and I believe the main reason is ignorance and general confusion about what happens at Jesus' return. The main reason is that Jesus' expression, 'the kingdom of God', has not been correctly understood. When understood, everything becomes clear. The following verses have 'kingdom' replaced by 'kingship'.

**Mt 5:10** Those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake are blessed for theirs is the Messianic kingship.

**Lk 12:32** Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingship.

**Lk 22:29-30** I confer on you kingship, just as my Father conferred kingship on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my monarchy and sit on thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel.

**1 Thess 2:12** We comforted and encouraged you, urging you to live in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his kingship and glory.

**Heb 12:28** Since we are receiving a kingship that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God in reverence and fear in a way that pleases him.

The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the Holy City and his servants will worship him, and *they will reign forever* and ever (Rev 22:3-5).

## **People of all nations are heirs of the kingdom**

There are not many verses that confirm that Gentiles will inherit the kingdom of God because Jesus was speaking mainly to Jews. But the following verses are sufficient to confirm that truth (Mt 8:11, 21:43, 2 Pet 1:11). People will come from East and West and North and South and take their places at the feast in the Messianic kingdom (Lk 13:29). References to the kingdom in the book of Acts confirm that it was proclaimed to Gentile Christians (14:22, 28:31), and there are further references in Paul's epistles (Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20, 15:50, Gal 5:21, Col 4:11, 2 Thess 1:5). In this book, the kingdom of God, in a future context, is always interpreted as the Messianic reign, which will endure on Earth for 1000 years, before the Messiah hands it over to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24).

Paul prays that the Colossian Christians might thank the Father, who enabled them *to share in the saints' inheritance* in the light. God rescued them from the power of darkness and brought them *into the kingship of his beloved Son* (Col 1:12-13). The Father has enabled us, made us fit, qualified us, because we are his sons, and he desires that we rule with his Son Jesus. Peter blesses the Father, because in his great mercy he has granted us a new birth, resulting in an immortal hope through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah to *an inheritance kept in heaven for us* that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed (1 Pet 1:3-4). He is talking about the Messianic kingship, as evidenced by many other verses that refer to us being heirs of God. In the following verse, Peter says that through faith we are being protected by God's power for a salvation that is *ready to be revealed at the end of this era*, when Jesus the Messiah is revealed (1 Pet 1:5, 7). When Jesus rules as king, the saints will constitute his monarchical

government. The apostle Paul said that by enduring, we will reign with him (2 Tim 2:12), and that the saints will rule the world and judge angels (1 Cor 6:2-3). The verb for 'rule' is often translated 'judge', but the BAG Greek Lexicon suggests that here it may have the broader sense of rule, especially when compared to Daniel 7:22. Kings run their own judiciary.

The kingdom of God is a pearl of great price and a hidden treasure because finding it is the greatest thing that could ever happen to a person. God has called us to his eternal glory in Christ (1 Pet 5:10). To him be power, rule, and sovereignty forever.

Unfortunately, shallow Christian teaching has an emphasis on 'going to heaven', which is not the Bible's emphasis on our destiny. In the Living Bible, 12 verses in the book of Hebrews suggest that heaven is our destination, whereas in the Greek, the word 'heaven' doesn't occur. Heaven is inserted to clarify the text according to current understanding. That is a problem with paraphrases of the Bible; they are in danger of confirming readers to the false ideas of the day. Paul did say that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). As Philippi was a Roman colony, he was thinking of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, which is our future colony. When Jesus comes, he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body, bodies that can exist on a redeemed earth as well as in the heavenly realm.

## **The reward of the saints**

The promised reward of the saints, in addition to salvation from sin, begins with the resurrection from the dead. The righteous dead will be raised when Jesus returns at the last trumpet and becomes king of the world. Those who are resurrected from mortal life to immortality will enter his monarchy and assist him in his reign over the Earth.

The saints are not judged in a criminal court, but many verses speak of the Messiah rewarding the righteous for their faithful service (Lk 18:29-30, 1 Cor 3:8, 14, 4:5, 2 Cor 5:10, Rev 22:12).

Jesus told the parable of the coins because the people thought that the Messianic kingdom was going to appear at once. It begins with a prince (Jesus) who was going to a distant country to be appointed king and then return (Lk 19:12). At his return, he settles accounts with his

servants and rewards one by giving him charge over ten cities, and another over five cities. These are appropriate rewards for servants ruling with a king as members of his monarchy. When are these rewards received? They are not received during this life or at death, but when Jesus returns to Earth. The Messiah will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and *then* he'll repay everyone according to what he's done (Mt 16:27, Rev 22:12). The parable of the sheep and the goats has a similar scenario. After the Messiah comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he separates the righteous from the wicked, and then he tells them to come and inherit the kingship prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Mt 25:31-34). The fact that God prepared their kingship for them since the foundation of the world indicates that it will take place in this world and not in heaven.

## **The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan**

Satan gained authority over humanity and the earth in the Garden of Eden when Eve chose to listen to him rather than God. However, God immediately pronounced his doom, when he declared that one day, the offspring of the woman would crush his head (Gen 3:15). His existence, and that of demons and evil spirits throughout the world is very real. People may doubt this in the Western world, but in many countries, the existence of evil, supernatural forces is not in doubt. It is evidenced by the prevalence of demon possession, sacrifices to spirits, and black magic practices.

The Bible blames Satan for the origin of sin and suffering in the world. He tempted Adam and Eve and they disobeyed God and were driven out of the Garden of Eden. In the book of Job, we see why Satan is called the 'accuser of the brethren'. In the Gospels, a large part of Jesus' ministry consisted of exorcisms and healings of people afflicted by the devil. The apostle John said that we know that we are from God and that *the whole world lies under the control of the evil one* (1 Jn 5:19). The apostle Paul said we used to be dead because of our offenses and sins, that we once practiced as we lived according to the ways of this present world and according to *the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient* (Eph 2:1-2).

If the devil has this enormous power and authority, how does that relate to the kingdom of God? When Jesus was tempted by the devil before he began his ministry, it was concerning kingdom authority. The devil took him to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. He told Jesus he would give him all that authority, along with their glory, because it had been given to him, and he could give it to whoever he wanted. If Jesus would only worship him, all this would become his (Lk 4:5-7). Jesus rejected the offer because the Father had his plan and way of giving Jesus the kingdom.

During the last week before the crucifixion, Jesus told the crowd that the world was about to be judged, and *the ruler of this world would be expelled* (Jn 12:31).

Satan and his cohorts were judicially defeated at the cross, but they are still very active in the world, trying to thwart God's purposes. That is something to remember when we, as God's children, are being tempted or persecuted, for our struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in the darkness around us, and evil forces in the heavenly realm (Eph 6:12). There is no evidence that the activities of these evil forces have changed since the crucifixion. Satan is still as active as ever, he is not yet bound. The NT makes it clear that he is presently active (Rom 16:20, 2 Cor 4:4, Eph 2:2, 6:12, 1 Pi 5:8).

A significant battle in this saga will occur in the final years of this present age, resulting in the manifestation of the Messianic kingdom on earth, as described in Revelation 12. A war will break out in heaven. Michael and his angels will fight Satan, and Satan and his angels will fight back, but he won't prevail, and they'll lose their place in heaven. That ancient serpent, the deceiver of the whole world, will be hurled down to earth, along with his angels. The outcome of Satan's defeat is that salvation is accomplished, and the Messianic rule is established as the Messiah arrives with power and authority. Christians will conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They will embrace martyrdom and not cling to their lives, even in the face of death (Rev 12:7-11). The blood of the Lamb symbolizes Jesus' death on the cross, where he ransomed people for God and established their right to reign. Believers will share in the conquest over Satan through their confession of faith in the face of martyrdom. His

expulsion from the Earth (Rev 20:2-3) and his demise (Rev 20:10) is still future.

G. Eldon Ladd (A Commentary on the Revelation of John p. 173) says that the saints' martyrdom was their victory over Satan. It proved that his accusations against them were empty. This spiritual victory over Satan is won in the terrible experience of martyrdom. Since God's children are human, Jesus also became human, so that by his death he might destroy the devil who has the power of death, and that he might free those who are held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15).

How did Jesus destroy the devil? He did so by being born as a man, living a sinless life, and then dying as an innocent victim, our substitute. The world is condemned because of what they did to Jesus, and their prince is condemned with them. With his crucifixion approaching, Jesus said the ruler of this world would be expelled, and the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:11). The devil met his match in Jesus. When Jesus disarmed the rulers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in the cross (Col 2:15). But the victory didn't come all at once. He conquered death when he rose from the dead, but death will still be the last enemy to be eliminated at the end of the world.

The Messiah's death on the cross has far-reaching benefits. Through the Son, God reconciled all things to himself, whether on Earth or in heaven, by making peace by the blood of his cross (Col 1:20). Jesus' redemptive work on the cross has made possible a reconciliation between God and creation. Creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, it will one day become a paradise, 'very good', just as God created it. When will this happen, if not during the millennium, when the Messiah and the saints reign?

The redeemed are empowered by the Holy Spirit and can overcome sin and evil forces. On the mission field, I personally witnessed that Christians were far less likely to be possessed by evil spirits or affected by black magic, as unbelievers were. Many Muslims sought refuge from these evil powers in the church community. The devil has been bound to some degree as far as the righteous are concerned, but he is still the prince of this world, and he will continue to do evil, and sow

tares, and hinder Christian workers, and deceive the nations, until the Messiah comes. Then he will be put out of action for 1000 years.

With three and a half years to go before the end of the age (Rev 12:12-14), Satan is expelled from heaven, and his last strategy is to empower the Antichrist, the dictator of a worldwide empire. He'll give the Antichrist his power, his throne, and complete authority (Rev 13:2b). This final world dictator will be the most powerful and evil dictator that the world has known. The ensuing persecution of the saints will be the final suffering the Church will endure before Christ's return, and it will be extensive. The Antichrist will be allowed to wage war against the saints and conquer them (Dan 7:21). He will have authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation (Rev 13:7), and no country will be exempted. There will be many martyrs from all over the world in the last days. We are called to suffer for Christ.

## **Our heritage - the order of events in Revelation 19 - 21**

Nine times in the passage commencing with Rev 19:11 and finishing with 21:2 John said, '*and I saw*'. What did he see?

- 19:11** A white horse! Its rider is named Faithful and True - the second coming of Jesus, as he returns to Earth to rule the nations.
- 19:17** An angel standing in the sun - an invitation to birds to feast on the carcasses of the defeated armies.
- 19:19** The beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army - Armageddon.
- 20:1** An angel descending from heaven, holding the key to the bottomless pit - the binding of Satan.
- 20:4** Thrones and those who sat on them were given authority to judge - the saints reigning with the Messiah for 1000 years.
- 20:11** God sitting on a large, white throne while the Earth and sky flee from his presence – the last judgment and the end of the physical creation.
- 19:12** The dead, both unimportant and important - the judgment of the unbelieving dead according to their works.

**21:1** A renewed sky and earth – a one-verse description of the restored world during the millennium.

**21:2** The Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband – a description of the glorified church in her eternal home.

It is logical to interpret all these events as following the return of the Messiah (Rev 19:11-21). Revelation 21:1-2 describes the renewed Earth and the Holy City, which appear at the second coming and are concurrent with the millennium.

Jesus will return with power and glory and defeat his political enemies, who will at that time be at war against God's chosen people, Israel, and oppressing Christian believers from all nations. When the Messiah returns, his coming will be visible for all the world to see, and the kingdom will be consummated. After Antichrist is defeated and Satan is imprisoned, Jesus and the saints will rule over all nations as prophesied (Dan 7:18, 12:3) and promised by Jesus (Mt 5:5, 19:28, 24:47, 25:21). This is the inheritance God promised them, as Paul mentioned (Eph 1:14, 18), and which is stated in Revelation 20:4, 6, where the martyrs come back to life and rule with the Messiah for 1000 years as priests of God.

The saints John saw in his vision are described as those who were beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus. They must represent all of God's elect, because they are those who have part in the first resurrection, otherwise called the resurrection of the righteous (Lk 14:14), those who belong to the Messiah and are resurrected when he comes (1 Cor 15:23). All people from all ages who died in union with Christ will rise with their resurrection bodies at his coming, and they will reign over the earth for 1000 years as resurrected people. United to the Messiah, all that he is, they are, and all that he does, they do. They are heirs of the kingdom of God. See what kind of love the Father has given us. We are called God's children, and that is what we are! For this reason, the world doesn't recognize us, because it didn't recognize him either. We are already God's children, but what we will be like has not yet been revealed. We know that when the Messiah is revealed, we will be like him, because we will see him as he is (1 Jn 3:1-2).

## Reigning in the millennium

In Revelation 20:2-7, John speaks of 1000 years six times. This is the millennium, which means 1000 years, from the Latin words *mille* and *annus*. Some people don't want to take the 1000 years literally, and some suggest that it won't take place on Earth, but we should remind ourselves that a year is the time occupied by the Earth in one revolution around the sun. There are no years elsewhere! When Satan is bound and thrown into the Abyss (20:2) so that he can't deceive the nations, it reminds one of Jesus' words: How can someone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions without first tying up the strong man? (Mt 12:29). Satan being out of action, the Messiah will begin his 1000-year reign of justice, righteousness, and peace without hindrance. Non-premillennialists who think that Satan is already bound must have many problems explaining Satan's current activities. Peter warns us that our opponent, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8).

Born-again Christians gain immunity from the evil one. John says they have overcome the evil one and evil spirits (1 Jn 2:12, 4:4) because the Holy Spirit who is in them is greater than the one who is in the world. Faith protects them, and the evil one cannot harm them (1 Jn 5:18). This victory over Satan and sin is due to the Holy Spirit, not to an inaugurated kingdom.

Premillennialism is the most widely held view of how this world will end. In a 2011 poll conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals in US, 65% of evangelical leaders affirmed their belief in premillennialism, 13% in amillennialism, and 4% in postmillennialism. It is an article of faith for AOG ministers, and most Pentecostals and charismatics are premillennial. Postmillennialists believe that the kingdom of God is primarily the reign of God spiritually in people's hearts. There is no scriptural support for that. Jesus is Lord, and we willingly surrender to him, but that is not what Jesus taught about the kingdom. They see the kingdom as present in this age and visible in the church, wherever there are believers who commit themselves to Jesus as Lord. They think that the kingdom grows through the spread and influence of the gospel and that the preaching of the gospel will bring in lasting peace and righteousness. Many of them believe that most of the world will be converted by this

means. Postmillennialism is sometimes described as optimistic amillennialism. Neither of them believes that Jesus is coming to rule the Earth. Postmillennialism tends to see the world and man as basically good, and that society can be converted, whereas the Scriptures teach that Satan is the god of this world, and that suffering and persecution are the norm for the Christian life and it is only going to get worse before the Day of God, when God intervenes to judge the wicked. We have been given the privilege for the Messiah's sake not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him (Php 1:29).

Premillennialists believe that immediately after Jesus' return, there will be a Messianic reign on this present earth as stated in Revelation 20. What will this reign be like? God has not revealed too much about it, but there are clues found in the Old Testament as well as the New. How are the resurrected saints going to live in their resurrected bodies during this time? And who else will be around? The vast army that fights at the battle of Armageddon will be struck down and killed at the coming of the Lord (Rev 19:21), but millions of people, maybe hundreds of millions, will survive the Great Tribulation, and they will continue to live on Earth during the millennium. God said that on the Day of the Lord, he will make man scarcer than pure gold (Isa 13:12), so we should think of the world's population as a small fraction of what it is today. After the greatest cosmic disturbance the world has ever known, every island will disappear, and the mountains won't be recognized (Rev 6:14, 16:20).

The millennium is called a new age, or a new world, but it is not the end of this world. The world will increasingly become an ideal place as the Messiah restores it from its state of destruction. As a result of the upheaval during the Great Tribulation, there will be no more roads or bridges, and all the cities will be history. In John's vision of the renewed earth, there was no longer any sea. The word 'sea' has a figurative meaning in some contexts, referring to the turbulent, unruly nature of the nations (Isa 57:20, Dan 7:2-3), and that may be true of some verses in Revelation (13:1, 20:13, 21:1). It will be a completely renovated earth, and the sky will be somehow different too. But Isaiah says people will build houses and live in them. They'll plant vineyards and eat their fruit (Isa 65:21). At the end of the 1000 years, Satan will be released, and he'll again deceive the unregenerate nations, called Gog and Magog. He will round up a mighty army from all over the

world and march against the camp of the saints and the beloved city. The word 'saints' in Revelation usually refers to Christians, but fire coming from heaven and consuming evildoers is reminiscent of several events that happened when Israel camped in the wilderness, so it seems best to interpret 'saints' here as Israel, and the beloved city as Jerusalem. It is simply stated that fire came down from heaven and consumed the rebellious armies (Rev 20:9).

In Ezekiel 38 - 39, there is an extended prophecy about Gog and Magog. God says he'll judge them with disease and bloodshed, he'll shower him, his soldiers, and the vast army that accompanies him with a torrential flood, hailstones, fire, and sulfur (Ezek 38:22). But what Ezekiel sees in these chapters is not a postmillennial battle; it is the battle of Armageddon. He sees a great horde of many nations coming from the north against a newly regathered Israel (38:8). He sees the great earthquake that will occur in Israel (38:19) before Jesus' return. Gog's armies will be carrion for birds (39:4), compare Rev 19:17-21. He also speaks of the conversion of Israel as a nation (39:7, 22, 28-29). They will be burying the dead for seven months (39:12) and gathering their weapons for fuel for the next seven years (39:9). These details don't agree with the postmillennial destruction of Gog.

There are prophecies (Rom 8:18-23, Isa 65 - 66) that speak of a new creation which complement what Jesus said, when he told his disciples that when he sits on his glorious throne in the renewed creation, they would also sit on twelve thrones, governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The words of Romans 8 apply to the Messianic reign and should be read with that in mind. Our hope is in the return of the Messiah, the resurrection of the righteous, and the renewal of all things. The creation is waiting for the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Paul says that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation has become subject to futility. It is frustrated and not achieving its original purpose, but during the Messianic reign, it will be set free from its corrupting bondage, and it will share the glorious freedom of God's children, who eagerly await release from the limitations of their present bodies.

God has not revealed everything about the conditions on earth during the Messianic reign, but it will be glorious. The Messiah will rule from

Jerusalem over Israel and all the nations of the earth, and the saints will reign with him. Creation will be set free from the curse of Genesis 3, which means a return to its original state when God made all things very good. Few details are given about how the saints will rule with the Messiah, but Jesus' promise to the person who conquers is that he'll give him authority over the nations. He'll rule them with an iron scepter, shattering them like clay pots (Rev 2:26-27). This indicates the removal of corrupt governments and the firm implementation of righteous rule. It was a regular feature of Jewish eschatology that the Messiah's followers would share in his final rule. In Rabbinical teaching, the Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:26) would be let down to earth during the Messianic period. Abraham was looking forward to this city that had permanent foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10). Others were longing for a better country (11:16), one that was heavenly in origin.

## **Interpreting Revelation 21:1 – 22:5**

I have concluded that the vision of the new heaven and the new earth and that of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1 - 22:5) are not to be interpreted as following on chronologically after the millennium, the last judgment, and the dissolution of the planet. These visions make more sense when interpreted as the renewed world under the Messiah's rule, and the city of his bride, the church, who will rule with him during the 1000 years. It was Isaiah who prophesied that there would be new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17-20), and his prophecy is very clearly a description of a renewed Earth during the Messiah's reign. There is no prophecy about a newly created planet in the Bible. Isaiah speaks of death occurring, and of the wolf and the lamb feeding together. There are only two verses in Revelation 21 that mention the Earth. Verse one says that the first Earth had passed away, interpreted in verse 4 as the former things or the old order of things having passed away. Alluding to Isaiah 60:3, 5, 11, John says that the nations will walk in the Holy City's light, and the Earth's kings will bring their glory to it (Rev 21:24). Yes, the unregenerate nations are still part of the new age, but they are not part of New Jerusalem and they can't enter it. They are there in the Messianic kingdom, but they are not part of the kingship.

The angel said he would show John the bride, the wife of the Lamb, but what he shows him is the Holy City is, the home of the bride, who in union with God, reigns with the Messiah during the millennium. It is a symbolic description of the city where the bride lives, and not only the bride, but God and the Lamb and probably angels as well.

At the end of the Messianic reign, all remaining evil will be destroyed, including evil spiritual forces, Satan, and death itself. Unbelievers will be raised, judged, and consigned to hell. Then the Messiah will hand over his kingship to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24). God the Father is the ultimate ruler within the internal relationships of the Trinity.

Sam Storms (Kingdom Come, an Amillennial Alternative, pp. 136-137) states some problems he sees with the premillennialist position. For example, that

- the natural creation and physical death continue beyond the time of Christ's coming
- the new heavens and the new earth are introduced until 1000 years after Christ's return
- unbelievers still have the opportunity to come to saving faith in Christ during the millennium
- unbelievers are not resurrected, judged, and cast into eternal punishment until after the millennium.

He thinks these things are denied by other verses in the NT because, in his amillennial view, everything comes to an end at the second coming. Suddenly, out of nowhere, death is defeated and swallowed up in victory, eternal judgment occurs, creation is set free from its bondage to corruption, the new heavens and the new earth are introduced, and all opportunity to receive Christ as Savior terminates. That is a whole lot of things that must happen in one day! And add to that the battle of Armageddon, Jesus' dramatic return, the resurrection of the righteous, the rapture, the wedding feast of the Lamb, Israel's conversion ...

The Day of the Lord is mentioned many times in Scripture, and it is expressed in many ways: the day of God, the day of Christ, the great day, the last day, that day, the day. The general meaning is a decisive intervention of God in history; whether by judgment, blessing or redemption. The time is indeterminate.

The question of whether people will come to faith in Christ during the millennium is an interesting one. We live in the church age, the age of grace, where God is calling people from all nations to live with him throughout eternity. Before Pentecost, God concentrated on the nation of Israel, but there was opportunity for other peoples to trust in the Lord. Even before Abraham, people called on the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26). Not everything is revealed to us, but we do know that ultimately, salvation is through Christ alone.

There is no doubt that people will be saved during the millennium. The millennium is the climax of this world's history and the gracious and patient Lord we know is not going to reign over this glorious period without the inhabitants of the earth having a chance to be saved. To begin with, the whole nation of Israel will be saved after the Messiah's return, so that he will be reigning over a redeemed nation. The Messiah will rescue them from their enemies at his coming and he'll pour out his Spirit upon them at that time (Isa 44:3, Ezek 39:27-29, Joel 2:28-32, Rom 11:26-27)

The initial population of the world during the millennium will consist of people who chose Antichrist over Christ during the Great Tribulation. They took his mark on their bodies and worshiped the Antichrist and his image. Whether converted or not, these people will have to submit to the Lord because the Messiah and the saints will rule them with a rod of iron. The word of God will be central during the millennium. People will say: Let's go up to the temple of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and let's walk in his paths (Isa 2:3). The temple will be called God's house of prayer for all nations (Isa 56:7, Mk 11:17). The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9). At that time the Messiah will stand as a banner for the peoples and the nations will rally to him. His resting place will be glorious (Isa 11:10). However, the fact that after Satan's release from his prison, he's able to deceive the nations and gather them for battle against God's people, suggests that many people will remain unregenerate. Those who are regenerated will be resurrected and glorified at the last judgment.