

16. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS STILL TO COME

May your kingdom come. May your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10).

The whole idea of a kingdom *coming* is a collocational clash in many languages. As the basic meaning of kingdom is kingship, an abstract noun, it is not natural to talk about it coming. You can't have a kingdom without a king, so it is more meaningful to talk about the coming of the king rather than the coming of his kingdom. As long as Jesus is in heaven, his rule on Earth cannot come or be inaugurated. In fact, there is no visible evidence of that, so the world carries on obliviously.

The inference of the words 'your kingdom come' in the Lord's prayer is that the kingdom is not yet here. It is clearly eschological, a prayer for Jesus' return, for his messianic kingdom to be established, and God's will to be done on Earth as it is in heaven. We can't pray for God's universal reign to come. God never stops reigning. This prayer only makes sense when we interpret it as referring to the kingdom from God, the kingdom that he is establishing on earth with his Son Jesus as regent. The verb 'come' is in the aorist tense, something that happens at a point in time, so it is not a prayer for the gradual growth of the Church. Let us look at other Scriptures where the kingdom is spoken of as coming.

The foreshadowing of the kingdom

Although the expression 'kingdom of God' does not occur in the OT, 'throne of the Lord' occurs regarding David's dynasty. King David said that out of all his sons, God had selected his son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord, ruling over Israel (1 Chron 28:5). In the same vein the Queen of Sheba told King Solomon that the Lord had set him on his throne to be king for the Lord his God (2 Chron 9:8). It was God's throne but also an earthly throne, so it was appropriate for a man to be the king. God established this throne here on earth for Israel's kings to rule as his regents over his people. God

spoke to David through the prophet Nathan about Solomon, saying that it was he who would build a house for God's name and that God would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. He would be a father to him, and he would be his son (2 Sam 7:13-14). Although the words were spoken about Solomon, the ultimate fulfillment is in Jesus and the kingdom that he proclaimed. As Isaiah prophesied: To us, a child is born, a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder (Isa 9:6). This is also reflected in Psalm 2:7-8, where the psalmist proclaims the decree of the Lord.

He said to me:

You are my Son, today I have become your Father.

Ask me, and I'll give you the nations as your inheritance,
the ends of the Earth as your possession.

Jesus and the apostles taught that the focus of the kingdom of God was not God's sovereign rule over the universe, rather, it was a kingdom established by God in contrast to man-made kingdoms. The prophet Daniel spoke about someone like a 'son of man', who was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His kingdom would never be destroyed (Dan 2:44, 7:13-14).

The kingdom of God has its roots in the kingdom of Israel and in this kingdom, the king is always a Jew, a descendant of David. In the NT, the focus is not on God as king; he rules on Earth through a man, his Son, whom he has appointed. Jesus didn't tell Pilate that his kingdom didn't belong to this world; he said that his kingdom was not from this world (Jn 18:36); it didn't have its origin here. The Greek preposition ἐκ indicates source. His kingdom will be in this world, but his authority to rule it is from outside.

Salvation includes so many blessings, including forgiveness of sins, a new compliant heart, eternal life, adoption as God's child, union with the Messiah, and being a joint heir with the Messiah. All of this culminates in our glorification when our bodies are resurrected and we inherit the monarchy in Messiah's kingdom. Some of these blessings are ours already, but our inheritance should not be regarded as 'realized eschatology'. We are still only heirs. We have many blessings as believers in Jesus under the new covenant, but not the blessings that belong to the Messiah's kingdom.

Realized eschatology was formulated by liberal theologians. It is the theory that NT prophecies don't refer to the future but to Jesus' ministry and the Church. Proponents say that all prophecy about the kingdom has been fulfilled; they don't expect a rapture, a second coming, or a worldwide judgment. But Jesus said that any one who has left home for the kingdom of God's sake will not fail to receive many times as much, both in this age and in the age to come (Lk 18:30).

The kingdom draws near

After Jesus' birth, the Magi came and asked where he who had been born king of the Jews was (Mt 2:2). Emmanuel wasn't far away. He was the Lord, the promised king, the son of David, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7. He was born *to be* king of the Jews one day, but to onlookers, he was just a baby boy lying in an animal feeding trough, born to poor parents, Joseph and Mary.

Jesus' exaltation

After his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father on his throne in heaven. In other words, Jesus resumed his position as sovereign over the universe, together with the Father. There is no talk of a coronation; Jesus has always been king on the heavenly throne. He is always seated in glory, the glory the Father gave him before the world's creation. In John 17:24, Jesus expressed a desire for his followers to see his glory and be with him where he *is*. As God the Son, this has eternally been his rightful place, and we get some appreciation of this by reading John's vision of the heavenly throne (Rev 4 - 5). But this is not the kingdom of God; it's a vision of God's sovereignty. The reign of Jesus the Messiah on Earth is a future event.

In the NT, we are often told that Jesus has been exalted to that place of honor at the Father's side. When Jesus was ascending to heaven, two angels stood beside the disciples and told them that this same Jesus, who had been taken up from them into heaven, would return in the same way they had seen him ascend into heaven (Acts 1:10-11). In Ps 110:1-2, the Lord tells his regent, the Messiah, to sit at his right hand until that time when he'll subdue his enemies and extend his mighty scepter from Zion. The Davidic king will crush kings on the

day of his wrath, he'll judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole Earth (Ps 110:5-6).

Ps 110:1 is quoted four times in the NT (Mt 22:44, Mk 12:36, Lk 20:42, Heb 1:13), and there are another eleven references to Jesus being seated at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19, Acts 2:33, 5:31, Rom 8:34, Eph 1:20, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Pet 3:22). From the throne in heaven he holds all things together (Col 1:17), but we are never told that he is ruling the Earth from there. The Father told the Son to sit at his right hand *until* he made his enemies a footstool for his feet. Jesus has been waiting since that time and he's still waiting (Heb 10:13). He'll continue to wait until the Day of the Lord, when the Antichrist is defeated and the kingdom of the world becomes the Messiah's kingdom (Rev 11:15). That is when his enemies will be defeated. That is the great day of judgment, and once judgment starts, salvation ends, so the Lord is being patient. He desires everyone to be saved (1 Tim 2:4), not wanting any to perish (2 Pet 3:9).

Jesus spoke to the Sanhedrin about his coming exaltation, saying that they would see him seated at the right hand of the mighty God (Lk 22:69). After his resurrection and his ascension, the apostles preached boldly about Jesus to the crowds saying that he had been *exalted* to the right hand of God, so Israel should understand beyond a doubt that God had made the man Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:33, 36). His earthly judges had rejected him as Lord and Messiah. His messiahship, which had been announced at his baptism when God said: You are my Son, was now confirmed by his resurrection. By the resurrection, he was shown to be the powerful Son of God, the Messiah (Rom 1:4). The apostle Peter added his testimony before the Sanhedrin, saying that God had exalted Jesus to his right hand as Prince and Savior, that he might extend repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (Acts 5:31).

The apostles had earlier asked Jesus when he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus didn't deny that he would do that, but he commanded them to go and be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The fulfillment of this command was a requirement before the end would come and the new age inaugurated (Mt 24:14). The Lord is building his church community; he is calling out a people from every nation and culture, a people who will be united to him, and who will rule with him during his messianic reign.

The Holy Spirit takes a major role in everything. Whatever one member of the Trinity does, the other members are always involved. But we never read in Scripture about the Spirit sitting on the throne with the Father and the Son. Rather he's before the throne (Rev 1:4, 5:4). The Holy Spirit has a major role in empowering Christ's servants throughout the church age, whether evangelists, missionaries, or teachers, and in regenerating those who respond to the gospel with faith. In this way, people from every tribe, language, people group, and nation are being brought into the monarchy, and they'll reign over the Earth. The Messiah pours his Spirit into our hearts, enlightening us, teaching us, empowering us, and guiding us as the Good Shepherd. However, the Bible doesn't teach that the Messiah rules the Church or individual Christians. I'm not denying that Jesus has all authority over heaven and earth, that he's head of the church, or that he's our Lord and God. The NT emphasis is not on Jesus presently ruling, but on his future rule when he comes as king. In his present ministry, he's rather our comforter, our friend, our brother, our helper, our mediator, and our savior. At the same time, we acknowledge him as our Lord and our God.

When Paul taught about Jesus' exaltation, saying that God had raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm, where he is above every ruler, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Eph 1:20-21), he saw Messiah's kingdom as a future event that follows his second coming and the resurrection of those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:24-25, 2 Tim 4:1). He'll reign until he puts all enemies under his feet, including death.

Jesus' enthronement on Mount Zion

When Jesus was born, he was born king of the Jews, because that was his dignity and his destiny, but up until now, he has not received his earthly messianic kingdom. The Messiah's kingdom is from God; it is not a worldly kingdom like the Roman Empire. When he returns, he will rule from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the Earth (Zech 9:10). It is at that time that the Lord will enthrone him in Zion (Ps 2:6-8). The Lord in this context is the Father, and Jesus is the son, his regent, his representative on Earth. Vassal kings and regents were often spoken of as having a father-son relationship. A regent is someone appointed to administer a country because the

monarch is a minor, incapacitated, or absent. In addition, the world was created for mankind to rule (Gen 1:28).

God becomes Jesus' Father in this respect when Jesus begins his reign (Ps 2:7). Psalm 2 has always been regarded as Messianic, and it's evidence for the enthronement of Jesus on Mount Zion. The apostle Peter included Herod and Pilate among the kings that conspired against the Messiah (Acts 4:25-28), but the main fulfillment is in the future when the kings of the Earth band together against him on the Day of the Lord.

Daniel saw the Messiah's enthronement in a vision 530 years before the Messiah was born. Dominion was given to the Son of Man, along with glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion would be an everlasting dominion that would never pass away and his kingship would never be destroyed (Dan 7:14). Daniel's vision is about the Antichrist, the small horn that had eyes like those of a human being and a mouth that boasted with audacious claims (Dan 7:8) and has a close correlation with Revelation 13 where the beast (the Antichrist) and the False Prophet are permitted to wage war against God's holy people for 42 months during the Great Tribulation, conquering them, before being slain by the rider on the white horse, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-21).

Jesus was not in the dark about his identity, nor his destiny, but there was one thing that he, as the human Messiah, was not to know and share; the date of his return (Mk 13:32), the time of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6-7). He hinted at his future in a parable, when he said that a prince went to a distant country to be appointed king and then to return (Lk 19:11-12). His time in that 'distant country' is now 1992 years! When the prince returns, he'll reward his servants according to their faithfulness, and as for his enemies who didn't want him to be their king, they'll be executed (Lk 19:27). These are not the Jews who didn't want Jesus to be king over them (verse 14). Jesus does not kill Jews at his return. This punishment will apply to all who reject his rule, especially those armies who oppose him at the battle of Armageddon. They will be slaughtered in his presence (Rev 19:19, 21).

The establishment of the kingdom of God is the central theme of the final book of the NT. It is the unveiling of the future events that will occur during the last seven years of this age, otherwise known as the Great Tribulation, and the glorious return of the Messiah. He'll come

in the clouds, and every eye will see him, especially those who pierced him (the Jews), when all the tribes of the land mourn because of him (Zech 14:10-12, Rev 1:7).

Two passages in Revelation signal the arrival of the kingdom. After the seventh angel blows his trumpet, loud voices in heaven declare that the world's kingdom has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah (Rev 11:15). In another vision, John sees heaven standing open and a white horse whose rider is named Faithful and True. On his head are many royal crowns, and the armies of heaven follow him on white horses. A sharp sword comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations, which he rules with an iron rod. On his robe and thigh, he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-16).

Satan currently rules the world

Even though the risen Jesus told his disciples he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, he's not currently ruling this world as God's regent. It's not yet time for him to intervene. There is another power in charge down here, whom Paul calls Satan, the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who is now active in the disobedient (Eph 2:2). Paul warned Christians that their struggle is not against human opponents, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of the domain of darkness, and evil spiritual forces in the domain of the air (Eph 6:12). The apostle John adds that the whole world lies under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). His influence is widespread.

From his throne in heaven, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and he intercedes with the Father for the saints. All powers in heaven are in submission to him (1 Pet 3:22). Jesus is superior to them all, but he's waiting for the day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet (Heb 10:13). God will subdue the enemies at the climax of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns. The major defeat is at the battle of Armageddon when God destroys the Antichrist and his evil empire. It's only after that battle that the Messiah begins his messianic rule, and he'll reign until he puts all remaining enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25).

The first and second comings of Jesus

Before Jesus' birth, the kingdom was promised and predicted in many prophecies, for example, Psalm 2:6-8, where God said he had set his king on Zion, his holy mountain, and he would give him the nations as

his heritage, the ends of the earth as his possession. The Lord has appointed the dominion of the world to his Son. The oldest proclamation of this decree is found as early as 2 Samuel 7:13-14, written over 3000 years ago, but this worldwide kingdom has never been established. There was a foreshadowing of it in the kingdom of Israel with David and Solomon, but that kingdom was cut down, and it now remains for a shoot (the Messiah) to come up from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1).

With the birth of Jesus, we are told that the Messiah has arrived. Angels spoke to Zechariah, Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds about the baby Jesus, and they left them in no doubt that this was the birth of the Messiah. Devout Simeon and prophetess Anna also announced that he was the Messiah, and he was called the king of the Jews by the Magi (Mt 2:2). After his arrest, Jesus answered in the affirmative when asked by Pilate if he was a king (Mt 27:11). But the kingdom was not established at that time; the long-awaited Messiah was crucified.

In the apostle John's visions, Jesus said three times that he would come soon! (Rev 22:7, 12, 20). This 'soon' seems like a long time, but Jesus encourages his followers of all ages to hope in his return. For Jesus, his second coming is the next great visitation.

When being judged by the Jewish Sanhedrin, the high priest stood up and put Jesus under oath before the living God to tell them if he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus replied curtly: You said it! Then he added that they would see him seated at the right hand of God and 'coming on the clouds of heaven' (Mt 26:62-64), a clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14, from where Jesus took the title Son of Man. But this prophecy is set in the last days, in the time of the Antichrist, and it is not until that time that Jesus will return. Jesus told Caiaphas that from that time on, he would be seated at the right hand of God (Lk 22:69). This is where Jesus is now, from the time of his ascension until the day he returns.

When answering the disciples' question about the sign of his coming and the end of the age, Jesus referred them to Daniel 7 again, saying that immediately after the Great Tribulation and the darkening of the sun and moon, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, his sign would appear in the sky. All the tribes of the land (Israel) would mourn when they see him coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt 24:29-30). Luke says there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and distress on Earth among the nations, who will be

confused by the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint from fear and apprehension because of what is happening to the world (Lk 21:25-27). Whatever the cause of these cosmic disturbances, they are sure to produce tsunamis.

OT prophecies about the Day of the Lord portray graphically the situation at that time (Joel 2:2,10, 30-31). There will be a large and mighty army, and blood, fire, and billows of smoke. It'll be a day of darkness and gloom, clouds and blackness. The sun, moon, and stars will be blotted out, without a ray of brightness (Am 5:20). The whole world will be consumed (Zeph 1:18). Ezekiel saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the East. He heard a sound like the sound of many waters, and the Earth shone with his glory (Ezek 43:2). The Messiah will return with his saints to Jerusalem before roaring forth to defeat his enemies at Armageddon. Then suddenly the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem, and the Earth and the heavens will tremble (Joel 3:16).

Everyone will see Jesus' return, and not on mobile phones or TV, because communications will be down with all the destruction of the Great Tribulation. He'll return amidst warfare, earthquakes, cosmic changes, and the wrath of God being poured out on the earth.

The theme of the Book of Revelation is announced in the first chapter:

Look, he is coming in the clouds. Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn because of him. So let it be! Amen! (Rev 1:7).

The phrase 'he is coming with the clouds' is from a Messianic prophecy (Dan 7:13-14), the same passage from which Jesus took the title Son of Man. He'll come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mk 8:38) to establish his eternal kingdom, and all nations will serve him. Every eye will see him, *even* those who pierced him, or possibly, 'namely, those who pierced him', where it has explicative force, alluding to Zechariah's prophecy where the Lord says: I'll pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem my spirit and they'll recognize my grace and pray to me. They'll look on me, the one they pierced, and they'll mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child (Zech 12:10). The Jews in Jerusalem will be the focus of Jesus' return; they are the ones whom he is coming to save. It's the Jews who pierced him (Jn 19:37), and it's they who will mourn for him.

The phrase ‘all the tribes of the land will mourn’ (ISV) occurs in Matthew 24:30 and refers to Israel’s mourning at the Messiah’s coming. This translation is superior because it fulfills the prophecy (Zech 12:10-12). By contrast, the world’s nations can only curse God (Rev 16:9, 11, 21) rather than mourn in sorrow and repentance.

The apostle John saw a white cloud, and on the cloud sat someone like a son of man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. He swung his sickle on the Earth and the Earth was harvested (Rev 14:14-16). This is a metaphor for the resurrection and rapture of the righteous at Jesus’ return. Then another angel swung his sickle to gather the Earth’s grape harvest and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:17-20). This is a metaphor for the bloody destruction of the multitudes in the valley of judgment (Joel 3:12-14) which is executed at Jesus’ coming (Rev 19:15). This harvest of the righteous and the wicked can be compared with John the Baptist’s words (Mt 3:12), where Jesus is pictured with his winnowing fork in his hand, gathering his wheat into his barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Harmonizing Revelation 19-20 with other Scriptures

In Revelation 20:2-7, the Messianic reign is described with much repetition as being millennial. 1000 years is repeated six times! It follows Jesus’ return and defeat of the Antichrist at Armageddon, and now Satan is dealt with. It is clearly stated that an angel, having the key to the Abyss and a great chain, seizes Satan and binds him for 1000 years. He’s thrown into the Abyss, which is locked and sealed so that he can’t deceive the nations anymore, *after* which he is released for a short time to go out to deceive the nations again. It is also clearly stated that the righteous dead come to life and reign with Christ for that same 1000 years. The rest of the dead do not come to life until the 1000 years are over. It is implied that the angel comes down from heaven *to Earth*, and clearly stated that there are two resurrections, that of the righteous after the time of Antichrist, and that of unbelievers 1000 years later. Those who remove the Messianic age from the world’s future history are forced to interpret this passage unnaturally.

1. They say that Satan is already bound, at present, even though he is called the god of this world, and that our present struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

2. They say that Satan will be released before Christ comes again, whereas our passage clearly states that the devil will be captured and bound after Christ's return, then finally captured and thrown into hell after the 1000 years (20:10) where the Antichrist and the False Prophet are, having been thrown into hell at Christ's return, before the 1000-year's reign began (19:20). The Antichrist and the False Prophet are captured at the battle of Armageddon at Christ's coming and their armies are killed with the sword (19:21) and left for the birds to eat. The final army that Satan gathers for battle after the millennium are destroyed by fire that comes down from heaven (20:9). Granted that these battles both occur in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and both involve armies gathered from the nations, there are two battles 1000 years apart with different outcomes.
3. They say the first resurrection spoken of here is not a bodily resurrection of the righteous dead, but rather their regeneration, even though there are many verses scattered throughout the NT that speak of the resurrection of the righteous. In this passage, the resurrection occurs after their martyrdom at the hand of the Antichrist, and those who participate in it are said to be blessed because the second death has no power over them. They have immortal resurrection bodies and rule with Christ for 1000 years.
4. They say there will be no glorious kingdom on Earth with the Messiah sitting on the throne of David as many of the prophets predicted, no restoration of the creation as Paul predicted (Rom 8:21), and no restored nation of Israel (Rom 11:26-29). They say that Christ is ruling now. Granted that he is seated at the right hand of the Father and rules the universe, but that is not the Messianic reign where Christ rules from Jerusalem as the king of Israel.
5. No verse says that Christ is now ruling the world, or that the saints are presently ruling the world.

According to amillennialism, there is no kingdom for the saints to inherit, even though we are told that they will reign on the Earth (Rev 5:10). Jesus told the apostles they would sit on thrones and judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). He told the churches (Rev 2:26-27) that he would give the overcomers authority over the nations and that they would rule them with a rod of iron. There is no Scriptural teaching that the Christian church is the kingdom of God, or that there is a kingdom in heaven which redeemed mankind will rule over, or that there will

be another creation which the elect will rule over. This aspect of the saints' glorification is effectively negated.

Following is a natural interpretation of the teaching given in Rev 19-20.

1. The second coming (Rev 19:11-21)

A symbolic representation, to be sure, but the Messiah will descend from heaven, and with justice he'll judge and make war. The armies of heaven will follow him as conquerors (riding on white horses) and righteous (dressed in fine linen, white and clean). As verse 8 says, the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. This army must consist of the recently resurrected and raptured saints as they come marching in. The kings of the earth have come to wage war against the Messiah. He'll conquer them because he is Lord of Lords and King of kings, *and those who are called, chosen, and faithful, are with him* (Rev 17:14). The Antichrist and his False Prophet are captured and are consigned directly into hell, while the complete army that dared to gather against the Lord and his Anointed one is killed in warfare and left for the birds to eat. This is the battle of Armageddon. This is judgment day for the world's nations that dared rebel against God in their unbelief.

2. The resurrection of the righteous (Rev 20:4-6)

The first thing the returning Messiah does is to gather the resurrected and transformed saints to himself in the air (1 Thess 4:13-17). The resurrection and rapture of the saints, which precedes Jesus' descent to Earth, is not mentioned by John. In this vision, he sees some of them sitting on thrones. They had come to life and had begun to reign with the Messiah for a 1000 years, serving as priests of God and the Messiah. It is explicitly stated that the rest of the dead did not come to life until this 1000-year period was over.

3. The binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3)

After the defeat of the armies at the battle of Armageddon, Satan is bound and cast into the Abyss, otherwise known as the bottomless pit. Isaiah describes the judgment of the whole earth when the Lord will punish angelic powers in heaven, and the rulers of the earth on earth. They'll be herded together into the Pit and shut up in prison, and *after many days* they will be punished (Isa 24:21-23). Cf. 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6.

The angelic powers are demons and/or evil spirits. Isaiah says the moon will be embarrassed and the sun ashamed, for the Lord will reign on Mount Zion, and in the presence of its elders there will be glory. This prophecy is important because it informs us that all the evil powers in heaven and on earth will be imprisoned. The armies opposing the Lord at Armageddon will be defeated, whether spiritual or human, and these evil spirits and the souls of the human opponents are thrown together into the bottomless pit, to be punished after many days. Meanwhile, the Messiah rules the Earth from his glorious throne on Mount Zion in the presence of the ‘elders’ (Rev 4:4), representatives of the saints, who will rule with the Messiah from New Jerusalem. It’s the glory that emanates from New Jerusalem, hovering over Mount Zion, that causes the moon to be confounded and the sun to be ashamed. They are outshone by the Lord’s glory.

4. The millennium (Rev 21:1)

The millennial world is seen by John and described in one verse only. He saw a new/renewed heaven and Earth, for the first heaven and Earth had passed away, and the sea was gone. At the last judgment (20:11), the Earth and sky fled from God’s presence, and no place was found for them. What John sees in this verse is not a new creation, following the disappearance of the first one, it is the renewed earth that the Messiah rules over before the last judgment takes place. God’s original plan for his creation, that it would be ruled by humanity on his behalf (Gen 1:26), will be fulfilled by his Messiah and the redeemed. In the original promise of new heavens and Earth (Isa 65:17ff.), the context clearly shows that it is a promise of a renewed Earth, not a new one. There is no promise or description of a new planet in the Bible! Peter says the heavens will be set on fire and disintegrate and the elements will burn up and melt (2 Pet 3:10). That might be atomic warfare, but it is not a total destruction. Despite the graphic description, Peter was looking forward to new heavens and Earth in which righteousness dwells, according to God’s promise made by Isaiah.

In Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord refashions a new Earth. The former things are not remembered. He transforms Jerusalem into a delight and its people a joy. The sound of weeping and crying is no longer heard in it, nor an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years. People build houses and plant vineyards (Isa 65:17-21). The word ‘create’ here is better translated as

‘transform’ (BAG). This is not a prophecy about a brand-new creation, but about a rebirth or regeneration of the world, as Jesus called it (Mt 19:28). Preaching in Jerusalem after Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to *restore everything*, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21). And Paul said that the creation is eagerly awaiting the revelation of God’s children (at resurrection), when the creation itself will also be *set free from corrupting bondage* to share the glorious freedom of God’s children (Rom 8:19, 21).

After the near destruction of the world that occurs during the Great Tribulation, the Messiah will restore it, establish justice and righteousness, and eliminate the curse.

5. New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2 – 22:5)

The brief vision of the transformed Earth is followed by a detailed vision of New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is a city with its walls, gates, foundations, and streets described in otherworldly glory. It is described as a community; the inhabitants of the city being the bride of Christ. It is a symbolic description of her union with the Messiah and with God. The saints are in their glorified eternal state, which begins at the resurrection of the righteous, and this city will be their home during the millennium and on into eternity. The earthly Jerusalem is the capital city of both Israel and the Messianic kingdom. The New Jerusalem that John saw in a vision coming down from heaven is in a different realm but is closely identified with the earthly Jerusalem.

Jesus only descends once, but his descent from heaven to Jerusalem is described differently in Paul’s prophecy (1 Thess 4:16-17), Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 43:1-5), and in Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech 14:3-4). The Messiah comes to be glorified in his saints (2 Thess 1:10). He’ll be glorified by his union with his redeemed, holy, and blameless people, who number in the hundreds of millions. The saints will be glorified in union with their Lord and Savior, who is now King of kings and Lord of lords. Their glorification is their resurrection, their union with Christ as symbolized by the wedding supper of the Lamb, and their status as the monarchy in the messianic kingdom, where they’ll rule with Christ forever.

The nations on Earth are survivors of the Great Tribulation and will have their local leaders. The role of the righteous who rule the Earth

with the Messiah is not specified, but in one parable, Jesus rewarded faithful servants by putting them in charge of five or ten cities (Lk 19:17). Paul clearly states that the saints will judge/rule the world (1 Cor 6:2).

John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Rev 21:2, 9-10). Although the city is described symbolically, its descent is a historical event, the return of Christ and his elect.

The description we are given in Revelation 21:2 - 22:5 symbolizes our glorification, especially our union with Christ as suggested by the word 'bride' (Rev 19:7, 21:9). The emphasis in Revelation 21:3 is on God himself. He's going to live with us; we'll be his people, and he'll be our God. God's throne will no longer be in heaven; the throne of God and the Lamb is in the city, and the city comes down out of heaven. New Jerusalem describes our eternal state, united to God.

How can maybe a billion people live in a huge cube like that? How can the saints serve God and rule the world if they are all concentrated in that one city? The answer is that New Jerusalem is a metaphor, and the details are not revealed. What we do know is that the saints will reign with the Messiah (Rev 3:21), and they'll reign over the Earth for 1000 years (5:10). The heavenly New Jerusalem overlaps the earthly Jerusalem, and the Messiah reigns from both. Earthly Jerusalem, the capital city of his worldwide empire, will be a glorious place and in need of the world's resources. All nations will go there to worship God and his anointed Messiah and to bring their glory and wealth to it.

The wedding ceremony, formally uniting the Messiah and his bride, takes place in the heavenly realm. The holy city which comes down out of heaven symbolizes the union of the church with a personally present Christ in glory and government (Rev 19:7-9). The descent of Christ constitutes the inauguration of the messianic kingdom (Isa 62:5, Zech 14:5c, 9) where the church will rest and feast and reign with her Lord.

New Jerusalem is first mentioned in Rev 3:12, where Jesus promises the overcomers that they'll be pillars in the temple of his God, and he'll write on them the name of his God, and the name of the city of his God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from his God, and his new name. The focus here is on belonging to God and Jesus and being a member of the Messiah's community and kingdom.

In chapter 19 the elders and living creatures worship God and cry 'Hallelujah' because the Lord their God reigns. Then they rejoice and praise God, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the lucky bride is the church community that Jesus said he would build (Mt 16:18), people who are chosen by God from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Paul alluded to this marriage in Ephesians 5, where he said that husbands should love their wives just as the Messiah loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:25). He goes on to speak of marriage as a union: a man leaving his parents and being united to his wife, an illustration of a profound mystery; the union between the Messiah and the Church (Eph 5:31-32). God will dwell with his people, who will be united with him in mind and soul. They'll be like him and will participate in his divine nature.

The world's population that survived the Great Tribulation and their descendants constitute the subjects of the kingdom. They are unredeemed but will walk by the light of the holy city (Rev 21:24), and their leaders will come to the brightness of her dawn. The glory of the Lord will rise on Jerusalem and his glory will appear over her (Isa 60:1-3). The Redeemer will come to Zion in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of Israel's God (Isa 52:8-10). During the millennium, the world's nations will flow to the temple in Jerusalem to worship the God of Jacob. They'll learn his ways and walk in his paths (Isa 2:2-4). The Messiah will judge between the nations and settle their disputes. They'll beat their swords into plowshares and won't learn war anymore. These unregenerate nations and their leaders will bring their wealth to Jerusalem, but they can't enter New Jerusalem. That privilege is only for those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 21:27).

Jerusalem's gates aren't shut at the end of the day, because there is no night there (Isa 60:3, 11, 19-20). The nations and their kings bring their wealth to the earthly Jerusalem which is bathed in the light of the New Jerusalem above it. The Zion of the millennium is the work of God's hands for the display of his splendor (Isa 60:21). The nations will be healed of their animosities through God's word that goes forth from Zion.

The land of Israel and its capital Jerusalem will be inhabited by the nation of Israel, who will be redeemed, but not resurrected. The people of Israel will be subjects in the kingdom, having forfeited their

right to rule. Rabbinical teaching held that the Jerusalem above was the heavenly archetype (Gal 4:25-26) and that in the Messianic period, it would be let down to earth. Hebrews also teaches that there is a heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). This is New Jerusalem, the holy city that comes down out of heaven from God (Rev 3:12, 21:2, 10). It corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem but is the eternal home of the resurrected and redeemed, and indeed of God himself. It's in a different dimension, its light being visible above earthly Jerusalem.

6. Satan's doom (Rev 20:7-10)

When the 1000 years are over, Satan is released from his prison and he again deceives the nations into rebelling against God and his people. They march from all over the earth to Jerusalem but are destroyed by *fire* from heaven. Satan and his evil forces are thrown into hell to be tormented forever. This spells the end of the forces of evil that have plagued mankind from the time when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden. This final judgment should not be confused with the battle of Armageddon, because it occurs 1000 years later.

19:20 Antichrist and his False Prophet are thrown into hell

20:2 Satan is bound for 1000 years and thrown into the Pit

20:7 After 1000 years, Satan is released from the Pit

20:10 Satan is thrown into hell where the Antichrist is

This final rebellion of the nations is called Gog and Magog, the same term that Ezekiel uses when prophesying about the armies fighting at Armageddon 1000 years earlier. In both battles the armies are gathered from all over the world.

7. The resurrection of the wicked (Rev 20:5)

In contrast to the righteous who are resurrected before the millennium, the rest of the dead don't come to life until the 1000 years have ended. The following verses are the only ones that speak of a resurrection of the wicked as well as that of the righteous. (Dan 12:2, Jn 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Rev 20:5). The Greek word *ἀνάστασις* means a 'rising' or a 'standing up'. When referring to the Christian dead it always means bodily resurrection (Isa 26:19, Rom 8:11, 1 Cor 15:35, 42-44, 50-53). Daniel says the dead will 'awake'. John says that all will come out of their graves, some to (eternal) life, others to judgment and condemnation.

When the wicked come to life at the last judgment, they are also resurrected bodily and they're tormented day and night forever and ever. Jesus warned people to be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and *body* in hell (Mt 10:28). He also said that it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one hand, foot or eye than to be thrown into hell with two hands, feet or eyes (Mk 9:43-47). However, the bodies of the resurrected wicked will not be the same as those of the resurrected righteous. Bodily resurrection is a reward for the righteous and part of their *glorification*. The righteous look forward to the *redemption* of their bodies, the freeing of their bodies from earthly limitations (Lk 21:28, Rom 8:23). This may include the limitation of time and space, as Jesus experienced after his resurrection.

8. The Last Judgment (Rev 20:11-15)

The judge is not named, but 'he who is seated on the throne' is consistently God in Revelation. However, Jesus said that the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22).

The context is the very end of this world. John said that the Earth and the heavens fled from his presence. No place was found for them, the universe disappears without leaving a trace. When the judgment is over, death and Hades and anyone whose name was not found in the Book of Life, are thrown into hell. The last judgment is mainly for the wicked but includes Israel and others who are saved after the Messiah's return. They'll be resurrected at the last judgment and will join the rest of the elect in New Jerusalem.

The Church was resurrected at the first resurrection and there is no evidence that they'll be judged here. Jesus said they've already passed from death to life, and Paul boldly stated that there is no condemnation for those who are in union with the Messiah Jesus (Rom 8:1). The judgment seat of Christ is for all believers and can be compared to passing through a fire. The true value of our attitudes and deeds will be made manifest, and individuals will be rewarded accordingly. There is no punishment for sins; that is covered by the blood of Christ. Rewards may be withheld, and some will suffer loss; it's a divine assessment of each person's worth. The wicked are judged according to works, according to what they've done.

The judgment of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-33), where the righteous and the wicked are judged at the same time, should not be confused with the last judgment.. The context is premillennial; Jesus

is seated on his glorious throne in Zion, and the righteous are invited to come and inherit the kingdom. This is the judgment of the nations at Jesus' return.