

What Is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God?



What Is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God?

“. . . When the edifice of the church was almost completed, the . . . doctrine of Christ's reign upon the earth was . . . rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism” (Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, abridged edition, 1967, p. 234*).

The ruins of the ancient Roman Forum lie silent, a scene of crumbling decay where emperors once ruled a mighty empire. The pagan temples to Jupiter and Venus are relics of past glory. Visitors gaze at the ruins and marvel at what they must have been like in their splendor.

Over this scene fall the shadows of crosses from atop

the many churches that surround the city. To some they are a fitting symbol of the triumph of the church over the empire that officially persecuted believers and attempted to eradicate Christianity.

Is the work of organized religion the Kingdom of God on earth today? This is the central idea that shapes the view of the religious world. But is this the same Kingdom of God the Bible describes?

Has Christianity brought the lasting peace to the world and its inhabitants foretold by the Bible prophets? Is the

Kingdom of God in place through one organized church or through hundreds of smaller, divided denominations? Or, as some believe, is the Kingdom of God simply the inward dwelling of God's Spirit in one's heart?

Such beliefs have dramatically shaped the religious world's view of what is the gospel taught by Jesus Christ.

When Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God, what did He mean? Was He referring to the Church He built through His disciples? Or was He talking about something entirely different?

These are important questions. Many have reinterpreted the clear and unmistakable language Jesus used

when He taught His disciples about the coming Kingdom of God. But, down through the centuries in the Christian world, Jesus Himself has become not the messenger but *the entirety of the message*. If you are to understand the message Jesus Christ brought—“the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14)—you need to discover the biblical answers to these questions.

WHERE DOES THE STORY BEGIN?

How does the Bible describe the Kingdom of God, and when did God begin revealing information about His Kingdom to mankind?

Many assume the gospel of the Kingdom of God originated with the preaching of Christ and His apostles.

The four New Testament accounts of Christ's life and teachings are commonly referred to as the four Gospels. Few, however, realize that the essentials of the gospel were revealed to servants of God long before Jesus was born. (Actually, these four books were not originally called “the Gospels”; that term was not applied to them until the middle of the second century.)

Our English word *gospel* is derived from the Old English expression “good spell,” meaning good tale or good news. In the Bible, the Greek word *evangelion*, translated “gospel,” refers to a message from a king or a favorable report about a significant event. So *gospel* simply refers to good news from God. It is God's message announcing His plan and purpose for humankind. It is His good news to us. Jesus Christ came to proclaim the wonderful news about God's plan and purpose. The focus of that plan is the Kingdom of God.

God has always revealed His purpose to mankind. Even in the beginning He explained why we were born and the purpose of human life. Implicit in that explanation is the beginning of the gospel.

The apostle Paul says the gospel was preached, many hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, to a man named Abraham. “And the Scripture . . . preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8, emphasis added throughout).

Notice the gospel is about God blessing *all nations*. It is about *good things to come*. In one passage it is called “the everlasting gospel” (Revelation 14:6). It is God's plan for blessing all of humanity for eternity.

Jesus Christ is the central figure in that plan. But the gospel is not limited to information about the person of



Visitors gaze at Rome's ruins and marvel at what they must have been like in their full splendor. Is the triumph of Christianity evidence that the Kingdom of God is here?

Christ. It encompasses the entire purpose of God as revealed in all Scripture. It is the good news about how the Messiah—Jesus of Nazareth—will bring that plan to an unimaginably wonderful climax.

Let's trace the thread of God's revelation of this good news as it unfolds from the Scriptures.

When did God first express His purpose for creating mankind?

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Genesis 1:26).

This verse begins the announcement, the good news, of the Kingdom of God. Here God expresses His intent to fashion human beings in His image and give them dominion over His creation. Being created in the image of God imparts a special purpose to human life. (Lesson 3 of this Bible Study Course covers in more detail how and why God creates humans in His image and likeness.)

God offered the first human family a way of life—symbolized by the tree of life—that involves all human beings enjoying a personal relationship with their Creator.

What spiritual ingredient is essential for man's relationship with God to succeed?

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

God makes His blessings and rewards available to those who willingly serve Him in active, living faith (James 2:17-23). This faith is possible only as a gift from God and is crucial to our salvation (Ephesians 2:8). No one who refuses to believe and trust God can please Him.

God expected Adam and Eve to trust Him and demonstrate their trust by obeying what He said. Throughout the Bible trusting obedience is referred to as faith. Regrettably, Adam and Eve greatly underestimated the importance of trusting God and faithfully following His instructions.

THE CHOICE: WHICH WAY OF LIFE?

Trust in God is the result of a choice. God's way of life was not the only choice our first parents faced. The serpent presented Eve with an alternative, convincing her that his approach was the better way. He persuaded her that God had withheld important information from her, that God was misleading her (Genesis 3:1-6). Eve then persuaded Adam to join her in rebelling against God's instruction by partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17).

As a result, another "ruler" (John 12:31), the one who exercises influence over "all the kingdoms of the world"

(Matthew 4:7-9), could introduce humanity to a different way of life. This ruler is "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). Over time he has even introduced a counterfeit religious message—a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6-8)—that is opposed to God's plan and His purpose for us.

We must understand the significance of Satan introducing to humanity a different way of life, a way opposed to God. Satan's message is cloaked in acceptable-sounding language that seems right to our natural way of thinking (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). He has even convinced most people that God's ways are foolish (1 Corinthians 2:14). In so doing, Satan has become not only the ruler but the "god" of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). Paul refers to him as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

What prophetic words did God say to "that serpent of old"?

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this . . . I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel'" (Genesis 3:14-15).

Here, early in human history, God promised hope for humanity. He promised that the appointed Seed (the Messiah) would deliver mankind from the rule of Satan. As we will see, this early prophecy also shows God's commitment to carry to completion His plan to mold humanity into His own spiritual image—to establish a kingdom that will produce the fruit of the tree of life instead of the fruit of Satan's deceptions.

The prophecy of a promised Seed starts a thread that runs throughout the Bible. It is God's firm promise of a Savior, a King who will rule with righteousness and bring peace and salvation to all.

How long has God planned His Kingdom?

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matthew 25:34).

God planned from before the creation of man to establish His Kingdom. Nothing will prevent Him from bringing it to pass. From the opening pages of the Bible God explains why He created us and how He will establish His Kingdom.



God planned from before the creation of man to establish His Kingdom. Nothing will prevent Him from bringing it to pass.

THE NEED FOR A REDEEMER

What was the result of Adam's and Eve's sin?

"So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24).

God banished Adam and Eve and their descendants from the Garden of Eden. But something else happened to them that was even more far reaching. God denied access to the tree of life to Adam and Eve and their descendants until the promised Seed, the Messiah, would appear and redeem them (1 Peter 1:18-21) and permanently reconcile them to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Their choice to listen to Satan started man down a path of ignoring God's instruction and way of life. They chose instead "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." They chose to determine for themselves right and wrong. They embraced "a way that seems right to a man" but in the end will always produce an abundance of tragic consequences (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). It is the pathway of sin, which leads to misery, violence and death (Romans 3:15-16; 6:23).

What happened in the lives of Adam's and Eve's descendants?

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12).



The "way that seems right to a man" leads to tragic consequences. It is the way of sin that leads to violence, misery and death.

choosing their own way of life quickly became apparent. Beginning with Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8), violence multiplied.

By the time of Noah, the world had become so corrupt that "the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart" (Genesis 6:6). Except for Noah and his immediate family, everyone lost his life in the great flood that followed (Genesis 7:23).

How do God's words to Noah after the flood compare to His original instruction to Adam?

". . . In the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it" (Genesis 9:6-7)

In reminding Noah that God created human beings in His image, He reemphasized the key to right relationships. God wants people's behavior to reflect His character and way of life. That is the only way a civilization can develop peacefully and productively. It is the only way to avoid the evils that caused the flood.

The lessons of the violence and destruction before and during the flood were soon lost on the descendants of Noah. Genesis 11 describes humanity, after the flood, again openly opposing God's rule. At a place that came to be called Babel, or Babylon, men built a tower that stood as a lasting symbol of their renewed determination to build their civilization apart from God's instruction.

The very name *Babylon* (*Babel* in Hebrew) became a biblical epithet for the kingdom of Satan. In the last book of the Bible we find that Satan's kingdom at the end of our age is symbolically referred to as Babylon (Revelation 14:8).

THE BEGINNING OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE

Out of the civilization originating at the Tower of Babel, God called a man named Abram. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5). Abraham's new name carries great significance.

Why did God call Abraham?

"Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Genesis 12:1-3).

God began a process that would bring blessings to every inhabitant of earth. Through Abraham and his descendants, God would begin a temporary physical kingdom, the nation of Israel.

Did God intend to have a personal relationship with Abraham as He had wanted with the first humans, Adam and Eve?

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless'" (Genesis 17:1).

Through the experiences of his life in a new land, Abraham learned the essential lesson of trusting God by having faith in His promises and acting on it. As a result, Abraham is "the father of all those who believe" (Romans 4:11).

Were kings and a kingdom associated with Abraham's calling?

"I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Genesis 17:6).

Through this man's descendants God promised to raise up a great nation. Later prophecies show it would be the forerunner of God's eternal spiritual Kingdom. God's promises to Abraham play an important role in His master plan for mankind.

The promises God made to Abraham are the foundation of the Kingdom of God. Abraham and the prophets are also the foundation of the gospel. Paul tells us that the Church itself is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

We cannot fully grasp the significance of the gospel without comparing God's revelation to Abraham and the succeeding prophets with the teaching of Jesus Christ. This was the approach Christ's apostles used in preaching the gospel to the world. Any other approach will lead to an incomplete, distorted understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

ISRAEL: GOD'S TEMPORAL KINGDOM

The tribes of Israel, descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob, became a literal kingdom under the rule of King David.

David, a physical ancestor of Jesus Christ, considered the eternal question of man's purpose as he contemplated the glory of the heavens. "What is man that You are mindful of him," he asked, "and the son of man that You visit him?" (Psalm 8:4). This is an eternal question of mankind. We continue to ask, "Is this life all there is?"

Through David, God revealed He would intervene dramatically in human affairs, He would make "wars cease to the end of the earth," and He would "be exalted among the nations" (Psalm 46:1-11).

Through David, God established a dynasty of kings over Israel. Christ Himself, as "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1), was born to inherit David's throne (Luke 1:32). We learn of a direct relationship between the dynasty of kings God promised would descend from Abraham and David and the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus Christ.

How long will David's dynasty rule over Israel?

"Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons . . . ?" (2 Chronicles 13:5).

David's dominion is to last forever. David is the king who will rule over Israel after its restoration under the Messiah after His return to earth (Ezekiel 37:21-24). David's rule, of course, can occur only after God resurrects David with all the other saints at the return of Christ.

The kingdom God established through David was a forerunner of a much more important Kingdom Jesus

Christ will establish in the future. Notice God pointing out the significance of David's dynasty: "He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chronicles 17:12-14).

God claimed David's kingdom as "My kingdom"—a type, an example or forerunner, of the coming Kingdom of God. Comprehending the relationship between David's temporal kingdom and the eternal Kingdom of God is crucial to understanding the gospel Christ and His apostles preached.

Did Paul see a relationship between the gospel and God's promises to David?

"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:1-4).

While teaching on a Sabbath day in Antioch, Paul explained this concept: "And afterward [Israel] asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.' From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus" (Acts 13:21-23; compare 2 Timothy 2:8; Revelation 22:16).

When Solomon, David's son, became king, on whose throne did he sit?

"Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father . . ." (1 Chronicles 29:23).

Not only did God regard Israel as His temporal kingdom, He regarded the throne of Israel as His throne—the throne Jesus Christ will inherit (Luke 1:32).



As man developed his own civilization apart from God, the consequences of choosing his own way of life quickly became apparent. Beginning with the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, violence began to multiply.

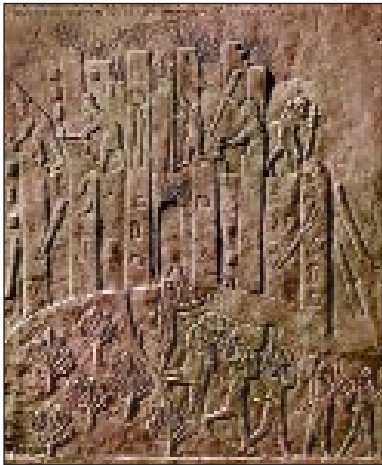
The kings of David's dynasty were supposed to answer directly to God. But Israel and her kings were not faithful to their covenant with God, and the kingdom of Israel did not endure. Thus their direct contact with God ended.

After Solomon's reign the nation of Israel split in two. The 10 northern tribes continued to be called Israel. The southern kingdom, known as Judah, remained loyal to David's dynasty of kings. But neither nation thereafter wholeheartedly followed the examples of Abraham and David.

Eventually Israel and Judah both fell prey to their powerful neighbors. After a series of invasions, Israel collapsed and was taken captive by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. The kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. With their downfall, the temporal kingdom of Israel was crushed out of existence.

Only a remnant of its people remained as captives and slaves.

Among Judah's captives who were removed to Babylon was a young man of noble birth named Daniel. God gave him the ability to interpret certain dreams and visions. Through Daniel's interpretations God revealed an astoundingly hopeful future for Israel.



Both Israel and Judah fell prey to their more powerful neighbors. After a series of invasions, Israel collapsed and was taken captive by the Assyrians.

God put it into Nebuchadnezzar's mind to demand of them something that is humanly impossible—to require them to tell him what he had dreamed.

Daniel was not only able to describe the king's dream but to explain its prophetic meaning.

What did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream?

“You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay” (Daniel 2:31-33, New International Version).

What did the statue's parts, composed of various materials, symbolize?

“This was the dream, and now we will interpret it

to the king. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory . . . You are that head of gold. After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others” (verses 36-40, NIV).

Students of prophecy and history generally agree that the parts of the statue refer to the four empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (Persia and Greece are even identified by name in Daniel 8:20-21). Daniel, in another vision in chapter 7, saw these kingdoms as wild beasts that devour other nations.

The four kingdoms dominated the course of events in the Near East during their rule. The Roman Empire ultimately grew to encompass most of the territory from the Near East through the westernmost parts of Europe. Rome grew infamous for its intense persecution of Jews and Christians.

Although none of these kingdoms controlled every part of the world, their ideas have greatly influenced civilization ever since. This is particularly true of Greece and Rome, whose cultures and ideas have shaped much of the governmental, educational, social and religious thinking and practices of the Western world.

What will happen to the kingdoms represented by the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

“While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (verses 34-35, NIV).

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the whole statue crumbled when the “rock [that] was cut out, but not by human hands” struck and shattered its feet. Its tiny fragments blew away like dust “so that no trace of them was found.” The kingdoms of man operating under the influence and guidance of Satan will come to the same end. They are destined to be utterly destroyed and forgotten.

What will follow the destruction of this Satan-influenced civilization?

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

The kingdom God will establish will transcend all human efforts. God will establish on earth His civilization, rejected by mankind from the beginning. The Interpreter's Bible, speaking of this kingdom, says:

“Its standing ‘for ever’ is the universality of the kingdom in time ([Daniel] 7:14) just as the mountain filling the earth was its universality in space. The term ‘for ever’ lifts the kingdom out of time into eternity. The world periods have ended and the timeless kingdom which has no ending is to be introduced. Each of those world periods was succeeded by another, but this kingdom will have no successors.”

Jesus Christ will replace the kingdoms of this world with the Kingdom His Father will give Him at His return—the Kingdom of God. This is the good news of Daniel’s prophecy and the same good news Jesus preached. This is what His gospel is about. This is the message He commanded His disciples to preach to the world.

How certain is the prophecy?

“. . . The great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (verse 45).

Daniel’s prophecies about the Kingdom came at a critical time in the history of ancient Israel. The Israelites had lost their sovereignty through captivity. Yet in the midst of their calamity and ruin God revealed to them, through His prophets, that a restoration of the people and nation of Israel would occur under the rule of the Messiah (Jeremiah 23:5-8).

THE KING OF THE COMING KINGDOM

Was the birth of a messianic King revealed through the prophets?

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The writings of the Hebrew prophets contain many references to the coming of this divinely anointed King, specifically identified in Daniel 9:25-26 as the Messiah. The Hebrew word for Messiah means “Anointed One.” In ancient Israel kings and high priests were anointed with oil when they were selected for office. The Messiah is the divinely anointed King of kings (Revelation 17:14).

Will Jesus, the Messiah, rule over a literal, physical kingdom?

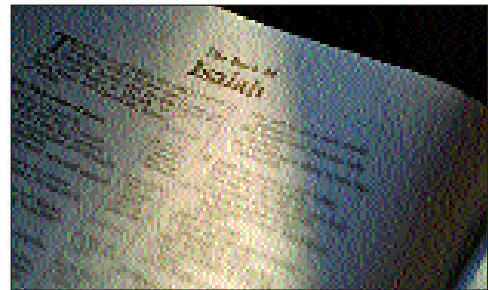
“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all

peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

According to this prophecy, God will give Jesus Christ an eternal Kingdom in which He will rule over “peoples, nations, and languages”—physical human beings on earth.

Did Jesus acknowledge He was born to be a king?

“‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world . . .’” (John 18:37, NIV).



The writings of the Hebrew prophets contain many references to the coming of this divinely anointed King.

THE GOSPEL JESUS TAUGHT

What was the main theme of Christ’s message?

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14).

“Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him” (Luke 8:1).

From the beginning of Christ’s earthly ministry, He focused on the Kingdom of God. He was continuing the message proclaimed by Daniel and the other prophets. Throughout His ministry He repeatedly used the words *king* and *kingdom* to explain the good news He preached (see “The Kingdom in the Gospels,” page 8).

What other theme was prominent in Christ preaching?

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15; compare Matthew 9:13).

Jesus taught that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he repents: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23; compare Matthew 19:16-17; 1 John 2:4).

Obedying Jesus Christ is different from simply believing in Him. Submitting to God’s will requires a change of heart. It means we come to trust God and willingly

repent of sin, which is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), the breaking of God's law. Here is where many sincere people misunderstand not only the gospel but what one must do to enter God's Kingdom and receive His gift of eternal life.

Our faith in God and in the reliability of His promises must lead to a life of active obedience. Otherwise our faith is dead and useless (James 2:26).

What did Jesus say is necessary for someone to enter God's Kingdom and receive eternal life?

"... One came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments'" (Matthew 19:16-17).

What message was uppermost on Jesus Christ's mind after His resurrection?

"To [the apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering . . . being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

After explaining more details of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus sent His apostles out into the

The Kingdom in the Gospels

The *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* says this about the Kingdom of God: "The word 'kingdom' is found fifty-five times in Matthew; twenty times in Mark, forty-six times in Luke and five times in John. When allowance is made for the use of the word to refer to secular kingdoms and for parallel verses of the same sayings of Jesus, the phrase 'the Kingdom of God' and equivalent expressions (e.g., 'Kingdom of heaven,' 'his kingdom') occur about eighty times . . . These statistics show the great importance of the concept in the teachings of Jesus . . . There can, therefore, be little doubt that the phrase 'the Kingdom of God' expresses the main theme of His teaching" (Vol. III, Zondervan, 1976, p. 804).

Jesus equated receiving salvation with entering the Kingdom (Matthew 19:16, 23-24), and He explained the loss of salvation in terms of banishment from the Kingdom (Luke 13:28). The message of salvation is called "the word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19). The hope and comfort of a Christian are said to be in entering the Kingdom (Mark 10:15).

The goal of a Christian is to "seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). Righteous people are called "sons of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:38). The theme of many of Christ's parables is God's Kingdom (verses 44-45, 47).

Some of the many biblical terms for and references to the Kingdom of God are explained in our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Be sure to request your free copy.

world to teach the nations those truths (verse 8; compare Matthew 28:19-20).

THE APOSTLES TEACH THE SAME GOSPEL

What message did Jesus command His followers to preach?

Then He called His twelve disciples together and . . . sent them to preach the kingdom of God . . ." (Luke 9:1-2).

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Did they do as He commanded?

"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mark 16:20).

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

Was the Kingdom of God the goal of the early Christians?

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

What reason did Peter give for God calling people into His Church?

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Did James, half brother of Jesus, also teach that the Kingdom of God is the goal of a Christian's life?

"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

What did Jesus Himself say should be the goal of any Christian?

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . ." (Matthew 6:33).

To enter into and share in the Kingdom of God is consistently given as the ultimate goal of believers in Christ. It is the very purpose for their lives. Throughout the four Gospels and the other writings of the apostles, the reality of the Kingdom of God is treated as a foregone conclusion.

Was the Kingdom of God a major theme in Paul's teaching?

"And [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

"So when they had appointed him a day, many came to [Paul] at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23).

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (verses 30-31).

Paul emphasized the theme of the Kingdom of God, continuing the teaching of Jesus Christ and the other apostles.

For what reasons were Paul and his companions persecuted?

"But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus. And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city

when they heard these things'" (Acts 17:6-8).

Paul taught that Jesus would return as King to establish the Kingdom of God. Because of this teaching, he was falsely accused of inciting his followers to overthrow the Roman government. Although this was untrue, it put Paul and his associates in serious trouble. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Acts says: "The apostles proclaimed the kingdom of God, a very different kingdom from any secular empire, and no doubt they gave Jesus the Greek title *basileus* ('king'), by which the Roman Emperor was described by his Greek-speaking subjects" (F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 1984, pp. 344-345).

Since the gospel spoke of a literal Kingdom with Christ as its king, it inspired charges of treason against Paul. The citizens feared the Roman authorities would step in and deal harshly with them if talk of the Kingdom of God continued openly. This incident shows the powerful impact the message of the Kingdom had in the Roman world.

Paul taught that people should turn from false gods and idols and immediately begin to obey the teachings of the living God. He challenged their pagan superstitions. Paul's preaching that God plans to send Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God often brought persecution on him and his companions (Acts 16:19-24; 19:25-29).

Why was Paul often accused in court of doing evil?

"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God

Christ's Parables and the Kingdom

Did Jesus expect everyone to understand His parables about the Kingdom of God? In His teaching, Jesus often compared the coming Kingdom to common situations in people's lives. These messages are known as parables.

Most people assume Christ used this method of teaching to make the truth more easily understood. Jesus Himself said the *opposite* is true. "And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given . . . Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand'" (Matthew 13:10-13).

Jesus did not expect everyone to understand His parables about the Kingdom, either in His days on earth or now. "And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,

so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it . . ." (verses 14-17).

Jesus then explained the parable of the sower. The sown seed was "the word of the kingdom" (verse 19). Next He gave the three most common reasons most people don't understand what He called "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (verse 11).

He first gave the example of a person who is so deceived by Satan that he lacks the spiritual depth even to grasp the meaning of the message (verse 19). Next He gave the example of one who "stumbles" at the word when "tribulation or persecution arises" (verses 20-21). Then comes the example of one "who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (verse 22).

Last is the positive example of one who hears and understands Christ's teachings concerning the Kingdom of God (verse 23), the person who hears and believes the message, then acts on that information to produce abundant spiritual fruit.

night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:6-8).

Paul based his teachings on the promises made to his forefathers. He preached that people everywhere could be blessed forever through the Seed of Abraham as promised. He preached the promise that a Ruler would come from David who would sit on his throne



It wasn't long until a counterfeit Christianity, teaching a corrupted gospel different from that of Christ and His apostles, became a major religious movement.

forever. Both promises referred to the role of Christ in God's plan. Even in that day, many Jews anticipated the appearance of this Ruler because of the same promise and the words of the prophets.

Paul's teachings included the promise that humankind would be reconciled to

God through the forgiveness of sin (Jeremiah 31:34; Colossians 1:18-23). Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection provided for that. Paul taught that Christ was a sacrifice for sin as promised in the Scriptures (Isaiah 53:3-6; Romans 3:23-25). Paul believed and taught that God would resurrect the dead (Daniel 12:2-3; Acts 23:6).

Paul's message included all of these promises as well as God's wonderful teaching that Christians will have a part in His Kingdom, which will replace the disobedient kingdoms of this world. Paul summarizes by saying, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

A COUNTERFEIT GOSPEL ARISES

We have seen that Satan is the present ruler and god of this world. As the deceiver of humanity, Satan became deeply involved in religion early in human history. He deceives mankind by counterfeiting and corrupting the teachings of God.

Did the apostles encounter a perverted gospel, corrupted versions of the teachings of Christ?

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a

different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7).

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed" (2 Peter 2:1-2).

What was Paul's response to anyone who taught a different gospel?

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

Paul condemned anyone who would preach a different gospel from the one taught by him, the other apostles and Jesus Christ. Though Paul does not give details of this distorted teaching, we see tell from later developments ways in which the message of Christ began to be corrupted.

Who was responsible for the false teachings?

"Now I am afraid that, as the serpent in his cunning seduced Eve, your thoughts may be corrupted and you may lose your single hearted devotion to Christ. For if some newcomer proclaims another Jesus . . . or a gospel different from the gospel you have already accepted, you put up with that well enough" (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Revised English Version).

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (verses 13-15).

Paul asked the elders from the church at Ephesus to meet with him (Acts 20:17) shortly before his arrest in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel. He warned the elders: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock . . . to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (verses 28-30).

A growing number of false teachers were causing people to desert the teaching of Paul and the other apostles. These people taught their own nonscriptural ideas. Paul wrote: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to

the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18).

Did Jesus Christ foresee this problem?

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:13-15).

Jesus knew false teachers would arise who would distort His teachings even as they claimed to represent Him. Such teachers steadily gained a larger following. They became the many, and, as Jesus had predicted, the faithful were, in comparison, the few.

It wasn’t long until a counterfeit Christianity, teaching a corrupted gospel radically different from that of Christ and His apostles, grew into a religious movement. Notice a modern historian’s description of the result of the doctrinal changes in early centuries: “Contemplate the Christian Church at the beginning of the fourth century, therefore, and some difficulty will be experienced in recognizing in her the community of Apostolic times, or rather, *we shall not be able to recognize it at all*” (Charles Guignebert, *The Early History of Christianity*, 1927, p.122, emphasis added).

In less than three centuries the visible church that called itself Christian was no longer recognizable as the church founded by Christ and the apostles. At times those who refused to accept false doctrines and a corrupted gospel could no longer openly reveal their identity without risking persecution and death.

To this day, erroneous notions about the gospel and doctrines of Christ abound under the banner of Christianity. Paul’s warning still applies: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

When will the satanic deception stop?

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:1-2).

Immediately after Christ returns, God will bind Satan. For the succeeding 1,000 years he will be restrained from influencing human affairs, ending his rule of confusion and deception as “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). The stage will then be set for a new Ruler over the earth, Jesus Christ.

THE REIGN OF A NEW KINGDOM

What happens after God removes the present “ruler of this world”? (John 12:31).

“... And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

Will a miraculous, unprecedented event accompany Christ’s return?

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Does the Bible provide other details about this resurrection?

“What I mean, my friends, is this: flesh and blood can never possess the kingdom of God, the perishable cannot possess the imperishable. Listen! I will unfold a mystery: we shall not all die, but we shall all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet-call. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise imperishable, and we shall be changed. This perishable body must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal with immortality. And when this perishable body has been clothed with the imperishable and our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of scripture will come true: ‘Death is swallowed up; victory is won!’” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54, Revised English Bible).



To this day, many false notions about the gospel and doctrines of Christ abound under the banner of Christianity.

imperishable, and we shall be changed. This perishable body must be clothed with the imperishable, and what is mortal with immortality. And when this perishable body has been clothed with the imperishable and our mortality has been clothed with immortality, then the saying of scripture will come true: ‘Death is swallowed up; victory is won!’” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54, Revised English Bible).

“The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another; and

one star differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing is raised imperishable. Sown in humiliation, it is raised in glory; sown in weakness, it is raised in power; sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (verses 41-44, REB).

Will people brought up in this resurrection rule with Christ in His Kingdom?

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first



resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

Jesus Christ will return to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem from the city’s east side.

The return of Jesus Christ

will mark not only the beginning of the Kingdom of God but the time when God will resurrect the dead in Christ and give them eternal life to reign with Jesus forever.

Who will be in this resurrection to eternal life in God’s Kingdom?

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

Will the 12 apostles play a special role during the millennial reign of Christ?

“But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30).

Will Jesus literally return to earth?

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south . . . Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You” (Zechariah 14:4-5; compare Revelation 5:10).

This prophecy describes Jesus Christ’s literal return to earth, where He will meet and be accompanied by the resurrected saints. He will return to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks Jerusalem from the city’s east side.

What will be the status of Jerusalem after Christ’s return?

“Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain’” (Zechariah 8:3).

Three Facets of the Gospel

From the beginning God has shown His desire to build an eternal relationship with the human race. The gospel includes three aspects of His plan to build this spiritual relationship. All center on Jesus Christ.

Simply put, our entrance into this eternal relationship is by (1) what God has done for us, (2) what God is doing for us and (3) what God will do for us. All three are accomplished through Jesus Christ.

The first facet of the gospel is the role of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in our salvation. Without this there would be no means to reconcile us to God and begin the process of salvation. This is where most theologians place the emphasis, but often to the exclusion of two other important aspects. Many interpret this part of God’s plan as the end of the salvation process. In reality it is only the starting point.

The second aspect flows from Christ’s promise to send a “Helper,” God’s Spirit, to lead Christ’s disciples into understanding and living by the truth of God (John 14:16-17, 26). When one repents in faith and receives the gift of God’s Spirit (Acts 2:38), he begins a Spirit-led life. Through His

Spirit, as Paul explained, God “works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

To help us gain salvation, Christ, as our High Priest, makes intercession for us at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Many passages in the book of Hebrews amplify this point. We are encouraged, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

The third aspect of our relationship with God made possible through Jesus Christ is what will happen when Christ returns. At that time those “in Christ” (Romans 8:1), those with God’s Spirit, will inherit the Kingdom of God—becoming immortal spirit beings in God’s eternal family through the resurrection to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). As kings and priests they will assist Christ in reigning over the nations (Revelation 5:10; 11:15).

Not one of these three aspects of the gospel should be emphasized over the other. Nor can any of the three be neglected without distorting the gospel taught by Jesus and His apostles. All three are essential elements of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

“At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jeremiah 3:17).



Jerusalem, that ancient city over which so much blood has been shed over the centuries, will become the government and religious center of the entire world in the Kingdom of God.

“For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name . . . You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isaiah 62:1-2, 6-7).

Jerusalem, that ancient city over which so much blood has been shed throughout the centuries, will become the government and religious center of the world in the Kingdom of God.

Will the Messiah bring other nations under His rule?

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Notice that the Kingdom of God, established by Jesus the Messiah, will take control over the kingdoms the world. It will be a literal kingdom replacing the present systems of government, which have refused to accept

and enforce the laws of God. This godly Kingdom will become a reality at the return of Christ.

How will Jesus Christ deal with people who will not come to Jerusalem to worship Him as He commands?

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16-18).

Nations that lose their water supplies will soon realize their survival depends on the goodwill of the new King in Jerusalem. Eventually all the nations will respond to Christ’s summons and come to Jerusalem to learn the ways of God.

What will happen to the barren, dry areas around Jerusalem?

“For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody” (Isaiah 51:3).

“I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.



I will plant in the wilderness

the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it” (Isaiah 41:18-20).

“The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing.”

“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as

the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it . . . They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God . . . The



“I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.”

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, ‘when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it’” (Amos 9:13).

Along with the transformation of the land, what

parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; in the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (Isaiah 35:1-2, 7).

What affect will these changes have on agriculture?

change will take place among wild animals?

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den” (Isaiah 11:6-8).

What will happen to the state of people’s health during this time?

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Will Christ put an end to war and violence?

“He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:3-4).

Will the world at last experience peace?

“My people will build houses and live in them, plant vineyards and eat their fruit; they will not

The Essence of the ‘Everlasting Gospel’

The apostle John tells us that, in a vision, “I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting *gospel* to preach to those who dwell on the earth; to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people . . .” Notice the essence of that everlasting gospel: “Fear God and give glory to Him . . . and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Revelation 14:6-7).

God’s message to mankind is eternal and consistent. He has always emphasized the importance of our having a relationship with Him as our Creator. He said to Abraham, “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:7). God later repeated similar words to the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 29:13).

The term *Kingdom of God* implies much more than Jesus Christ’s administration of the righteous laws of God over the earth. It also encompasses the very children

of God—God’s family. He reveals that the members of that family, which He is in the process of building, are His own sons and daughters who will share with Christ the administration of the laws of God over the nations.

Jesus promised, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21). What will they then do? “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26).

A remarkable relationship exists between Jesus Christ and those who will share responsibilities with Him in the Kingdom of God. “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Hebrews 2:10-11, NIV).

Not only are they the brothers and sisters of Jesus

build for others to live in or plant for others to eat. They will be as long-lived as a tree, and my chosen ones will enjoy the fruit of their labour. They will not toil to no purpose or raise children for misfortune, because they and their issue [descendants] after them are a race blessed by the LORD” (Isaiah 65:21-23, REB).

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The Kingdom of God, under Jesus Christ’s supervision, will bring blessings of peace and prosperity to the world. God will restore what He removed when He expelled Adam and Eve from the garden in Eden: access to the knowledge of Him through the tree of life (Revelation 22:1-2). Universal peace will result. God will allow no one, man or beast, to harm any part of His creation.

What is the key to this wonderful change?

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Human beings, on their own, cannot achieve this incredible transformation of behavior and heart. It can

come only as the result of God’s Spirit working in their minds and hearts, enabling them to obey His commandments from the heart (Zechariah 4:6; Ezekiel 36:25-37). God will change the very nature of man.

Human beings can then begin to achieve their unlimited spiritual potential. God can then shape all people—every race and nation—into His spiritual image, which was His original intent.

SUMMARY

Our world is dominated by the great deceiver, Satan the devil. Jesus Christ came bearing the good news, the gospel, of the Kingdom of God. He is the “certain nobleman [who] went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return” about whom He spoke in one of His parables (Luke 19:12). He tells

us to pray: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).



“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.”

Christ, but God the Father regards them as His own sons and daughters. “As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people . . . I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to “a mustard seed . . . which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Matthew 13:31-32).

The gospel is the story of God building His family by first calling out of the world a small number of people who, like a mustard seed, will increase in number and scope until the earth is filled with the children of God.

No wonder Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). The Kingdom of God will consist of the children of God who receive the gift of eternal life as spirit beings at the return of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul describes how this will occur: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption

inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

From the beginning, God has wanted to offer humanity the most priceless of gifts: the gift of eternal life as a member of His family in the Kingdom of God. Even as Adam and Eve were escorted out of the Garden of Eden because of their sins, God had already planned another opportunity for human beings to share in a loving, personal and eternal family relationship with Him.

Jesus Christ is even now preparing for the Kingdom and a future with us (John 14:1-3). God the Father offers us the opportunity to enter the Kingdom as His own immortal sons. As the apostle Paul said, “you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

It is vital that all who trust in God remember, as the apostle Paul reminds us: “. . . The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13).

In the meantime, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew



Faithful servants of God will continue to fulfill Christ's command to His followers: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

24:14). Faithful servants of God will continue to fulfill Christ's command to His followers: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

To better understand the points covered in this lesson, be sure to request the following free booklets:

- *The Gospel of the Kingdom.*
- *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy.*
- *Are We Living in the End Time?*
- *The Church Jesus Built.*
- *What Is Your Destiny?*
- *The Road to Eternal Life.*
- *You Can Have Living Faith.*

For your free copies, contact our office in your country, or the country nearest you, listed below.

Points to Ponder

These questions are intended as a study aid, to spur further thought on the concepts discussed in this lesson and to help you apply them on a personal level. We suggest you take the time to write out your answers to these questions and compare them to the scriptures given. Please feel free to write us with any comments or suggestions, including questions about the course or this lesson.

- Who is the God of the age in which we now live? Who convinces people that God's ways are foolish? (1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 11:13-15; Ephesians 2:2).
- The descendants of Abraham became the literal kingdom of Israel. A dynasty of kings was established over that kingdom. Who was born to inherit the throne to rule over this kingdom? (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32; Acts 13:21-23).
- What will happen to the kingdoms of this world, represented by the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream? (Daniel 2:34-35).
- What is the “good news” of Daniel's prophecy? Whose kingdom will replace the kingdoms of man? (Daniel 2:44).
- Who was born to be king over all kings, ruling a physical kingdom on earth? (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 17:14; Daniel 7:13-14).
- From the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, what was His primary focus? (Mark 1:14; Luke 8:1; Acts 1:3; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 9:1-2; Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15).
- Do we need to be diligent against false gospels that may distort the teachings of Christ? (Galatians 1:6; 2 Peter 2:1-2; Galatians 1:8-9).
- Did Christ warn of false teachers? (Matthew 7:13-15; Colossians 2:8).
- Who will rule with Christ in His Kingdom on earth? (Revelation 20:6; Revelation 3:21; Revelation 5:10).
- How will the earth be transformed under this new rulership? (Isaiah 51:3; 41:18-20; 35:1-2, 7; 11:6-8; 35:5-6; Micah 4:3-4; Isaiah 11:9; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

© 1999 United Church of God, an International Association. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Scriptures in this lesson are quoted from the New King James Version (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted. Other translations are sometimes quoted for clarity and accuracy.

Authors: Darris McNeely, Robin Webber Contributing writer: Roger Foster Editorial reviewers: Scott Ashley, John Bald, Peter Eddington, John Foster, Jim Franks, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Burk McNair, David Register, Richard Thompson, David Treybig, Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson Design: Shaun Venish

United Church of God offices

Australia:

United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535, Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 111
Free call: 1800 356 202
Fax: 07 55 202 122
Web site address:
<http://www.ucg-aus.org.au>
E-mail: ucg@b022.aone.net.au

Bahamas: United Church of God
P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: (242) 324-3169
Fax: (242) 364-5566

British Isles: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4052, Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK13 7ZF, England
Phone: 0181-386-8467 Fax: 01772-601750

Canada: United Church of God—Canada
Box 144, Station D, Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779
Fax: (416) 231-8238
Web site address: <http://www.ucg.ca>

Germany: Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
Postfach 30 15 09, D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636 Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy: La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita
Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy.
Phone: 0039-035583474 Fax: 0039-035582140
Web site address: <http://www.labuonanotizia.org>

New Zealand: United Church of God
P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1030, New Zealand

South Africa: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4345, 2125 Randburg, South Africa
Phone: 011 886-4650 Fax: 011 886-7610
Web site address: <http://www.ucg.org.za>

Spanish-speaking areas: United Church of God
P.O. Box 458, Big Sandy, TX 75755, U.S.A.
Phone: (903) 636-4928

United States: United Church of God,
an International Association
P.O. Box 541027
Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796
Fax: (513) 576-9795
Web site address: <http://www.ucg.org/>