

No Millennium? Really?

Bob Faulkner

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DEDICATION

To those who hold that every Word from God is pure and to be believed.

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INTRODUCTION

Help! They've stolen the Millennium!

In the spirit of “see something, say something,” it is my sad responsibility to inform my Christian peers that something sinister has been long perpetrated on a huge portion of Scriptures, and no one seems to care!

So how does one steal a full one thousand years from the Biblical story and get away with it?

Well... one doesn't. But that hasn't kept *many* from trying to do so over the centuries.

I want to take you on a tour of Bible history, and especially Biblical prophecy, to point out to you how often the Grand Old Book mentions a coming kingdom, its very length, and its specific contents. I think you are in for a surprising treat! We'll also take a short visit to church history and a look at hermeneutics, the study of interpretation principles.

(For the record, I'll be using the NKJV.)

Oh my, what a story! What a beautiful day is coming, and who knows? Maybe soon? But my heart is heavy as I proceed, for as in so many cases where Biblical truth is under attack, the one who makes Christians aware of it is left crying out with Isaiah, *Lord, who has believed our report?*

I send this report out with the prayer that someone, at least, will believe it.

1. Scissors Theology.

I well remember the days I spent at Kentucky's Heritage Academy, sitting at the after-school homework desk, supervising little ones for an hour or so. Not too exciting a task, and I had a lot of free time.

Somehow I had gotten hold, internally, of the *kingdom* message of the Bible. I was especially enamored with Isaiah 2:2-4,

*2Now 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.
3Many 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.
4He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
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 anymore.*

How wonderful that sounded then, and still sounds today! A high mountain in Jerusalem. A House of the Lord sitting up there. Everyone in the world visiting it to learn the ways of the Lord. King Jesus putting the nations in order. No more war.

I had been taught to take the Bible literally whenever possible. Why not here, I thought.

I skimmed through the Bible and found tons of other passages that said the same, and more. A real kingdom with King Jesus in charge. Details. Promises. What was not to like?

I found an old beat-up Bible, brought my scissors to work, and started cutting out every passage I could find on this wonderful subject. I pasted all the pages into a notebook that soon bulged with information on this kingdom.

Much later I wrote a book about it all, called *The Kingdom Handbook*, still available at Amazon.

But that's not the scissors theology I'm talking about. That was an innocent heart magnifying the kingdom of God and enjoying every minute of it.

But there have been since the days of the church fathers, shortly after the apostles lived and died, a class of men who have taken their virtual scissors to their virtual Bibles, and *cut out* these same passages, interpreted them any way they saw fit, and tried to paste them back into the Book, hoping no one would notice or even care that much.

And do you know what? Most people *didn't* care. They say, as they do with the rapture question, "I'm not worried about details. Just give me Jesus now and I'm happy. Now when's the next ball game on TV?"

It sounds good to try to avoid controversy, to be all-inclusive in one's beliefs. Harmonic. Unified. Jesus prayed for unity, right? But you see these same people tremendously concerned about their baseball scores, recipes, homes, gardens. They will give hours and hours to projects that involve this world, but will not investigate the preachers and teachers who stand before them with whatever doctrine. As long as their sports life can continue, their home is secure and comfortable, their bellies are full...

No Millennium? Really?

The Lord wants us to love His Word. Jesus said of the words He gave the disciples in Matthew 24, *Let him that reads understand...*

A special blessing is also given to those who read and comprehend the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:3). Why are we too busy to dig deeper?

Scissors theology is not new, nor is it related only to the Millennial Kingdom teaching. Consider those [I speak only of Christians] who have trouble with Genesis 1-11:

How many *Christians* believe the world was created in six twenty-four-hour days? How many believe in a worldwide flood that killed all but one family? How many believe the story of the fall of man? A real Adam? A real Eve? The Tower of Babel story?

More critical, there are those who have cut out the resurrection of Jesus along with all of His miracles, and reduced Him to a nice man who said nice things... most of the time.

We should not then be surprised to see how kingdom passages, such as Revelation's final chapters, along with huge portions of the Old Testament prophecies, have been watered down, cut out, spiritualized, and forgotten.

My view of all this revisionism is that the underlying problem with those who eliminate and/or rewrite and/or re-interpret whole passages of Scripture, is *unbelief*.

Now, to be fair, it *is* difficult to believe that a man could rise from the dead. It *is* difficult to comprehend a God who would destroy nearly all His created beings. It is difficult to see why there needs to be a *transitional* kingdom on earth before the new heavens and new earth appear.

“I don’t get it! It doesn’t fit my way of thinking! Therefore it doesn’t exist. Let me explain...,” is the approach.

Well, personally, I can’t handle such treatment of God’s Word. I still believe the Bible is literally true in every place except where it says it is not literally true, as in the parables. And even the parables have a literal meaning behind them, and only one, to be sought by erstwhile students of the Word.

In this little book I wish to visit Millennial passages with the idea that they are *actually true*! Now isn’t *that* a novel way to approach the Bible? Actually true! Oh my!

I enjoy the challenge of taking a prophecy as far as it will go, without changing a word, and believing it all the way! Would that more of God’s people would try this.

Handling the Word in this way will produce in our minds a risen Savior, an all-powerful Creator, a Judge of all the earth, and a **kingdom** that responds to the prayer many of us pray regularly when we ask, *Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*

2. Revelation 20.

I mentioned how Revelation's final chapters have become a victim of the revisionists, those who wish to make the Bible fit a certain theology and eschatology. Revelation 20 is especially troublesome to them.

It's probably best to visit the words of Jesus first. John 5:28-29 is in the middle of one of Jesus' messages to unbelieving Jews. A portion of this talk has to do with the coming resurrections, of which Jesus identifies clearly, two.

He says there is to be a *resurrection of life*, and following this resurrection, *one of condemnation*. These two events seem to follow one another immediately, giving fuel to the idea that a one-thousand-year period in between the two resurrections is probably not feasible.

Now, it is John who records this conversation. And it is that same John who saw the chronology of Revelation 20, about sixty years later on the island of Patmos, as a prisoner of Rome. Let's look at what he saw.

Revelation 19 tells of the bloodbath that will occur when the crowned King Jesus, accompanied by the hosts of heaven – for He is the Lord of hosts – returns. This story is told in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. *Jesus is back*.

Literal so far? Of course literal!

Then move on to the next chapter, 20, remembering there are no chapter divisions in the original. The story progresses without a stutter, without a stop.

The very next happening is the rendering powerless of our great enemy, Satan. And for how long will Satan be out of the reach of the people of God?

One thousand years! Literal? Of course literal!

I mean, is there a place anywhere in Scripture where “year” is used with a number, and that expression is figurative? Not to my knowledge. [An idea borrowed from John MacArthur].

Or is there a place in the New Testament where the word “thousand” is somehow figurative? There were three *thousand* souls added to the church on Pentecost. In Revelation I read of one hundred forty-four *thousand* Jews from the various tribes of Israel. There are one *thousand* two hundred and sixty days in Revelation’s tribulation description. None of those usages are figurative. Why in the six times in Revelation 20 that refer to the coming kingdom period, where the word is used, is *thousand* considered non-literal?

After *one thousand* years, the enemy is released for one more bout with the Son of God, one which he miserably loses again.

But then the text (verses 4-7) backs up to the beginning of the thousand years and describes the first resurrection of which Jesus spoke. Martyrs and holy saints are raised – raptured, we now say – as also in Matthew 24, and not only live, but *reign* with Christ during that one- thousand- year period.

A kingdom is coming. A millennial kingdom. A one-thousand-year kingdom. As I said, no less than *six times* the number *one thousand* is employed by the Spirit-filled apostle of Christ in that Revelation 20 passage, who was there in the future, saw and heard an angel, and wrote down what he saw and heard.

He had no reason to lie or spiritualize the text.

Then comes that other resurrection, at the end of the chapter. The rest of the dead are judged, and if their names are not recorded in the Book of life they are cast into a lake of fire. The resurrection of damnation.

All of this is in the same order as Jesus predicted in John's Gospel. John does not contradict himself. He merely inserts the later revelation given him by the Father through the angel, namely, that in between the first and second resurrections, is the reign of Jesus with His saints, a reign that will last *a full one thousand years!*

Of course, those who would take away the millennial reign of Christ must "interpret" this verse, rather than simply accept it. I continue to contend that the inability to take a text in its literal form and meaning is a possible sign of *unbelief*.

That said, it will be profitable for us to examine *hermeneutics*, defined as *the study of the methodological principles of interpretation*, in another chapter. I think we will find that the revisionists are quite selective in which of these principles they will apply, and when they will apply them.

But before we go there, why not go back to the beginning of kingdom history – I started here at the *end* – and see what was in God's heart thousands of years ago?

3. Kingdom in the books of Moses.

We shall never downplay the reign of Yahweh, the great I AM, over all His creation and all of Heaven. Israel acknowledged this early and often, as here after the deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15:18):

“The Lord shall reign forever and ever.”

When the Bible speaks of the reign and rule of God or Christ, it speaks of two things. First is His ultimate authority over all things, even that which He allows to displease Him for the time being. This is unquestioned, unchanging, unchangeable.

And second, it becomes clear from the beginning of time that the Father had in mind a human-based government for the planet, but still under His direct supervision. The very first chapter of the Bible has God telling Adam to fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over all God’s creation. Adam was in charge on earth. He was to bring glory to Heaven while enjoying dominance on earth.

The fall of man and the progressing of mankind to lower and lower depths of sin brought an end to this first government. Unfortunately the second one that was begun with a covenant with Noah, did not fare much better. Men are evil. Wherever they are unchecked, they will go downhill.

Human government is catalogued in Genesis 10, as men rise up against God again, and it seems that the rule of God is never going to be established in the earth. It seems that way to this day. But hidden under the doings of Adam’s and Noah’s descendants is the slow unfolding of a plan to bring the reign of God to our rebellious planet.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called specifically by God to head up a new nation. All families of the earth are to be in some way blessed by this people. Though at first a family, and then a national entity in

a new land, Israel does not initially seem headed toward kingdom status. In fact the transition seems to trouble the Lord. We'll talk about that later, but long before the days of kings in Israel, Moses spoke a startling word about their coming. It's in Deuteronomy 17:

14When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' 15you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' 17Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. 18Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. 19And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, 20that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Even before this (Exodus 19, before the giving of the Law!) God spoke through Moses a promise often overlooked:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant... you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests...

So an earthly kingdom is coming. It will come as a result of Israel's stubborn rejection of the rule of God. But it is coming. Moses even gives the rules for such a governor. Most of these rules were broken, like the prohibiting of the multiplication of wives and horses and riches.

But the ruler of God's people was to be a reader of and a keeper of the law of God, all his days, says Moses. Some of the kings of Judah were evidently of this caliber, but toward the end of the southern nation, there was nothing but disdain for God's law on the throne.

So God gave up on the kingdom idea altogether?

Not at all. Because of His particular fondness for King David, and especially because of His ultimate goal to be Lord over His own creation in a personal way, some promises were made which cannot be reversed. Let's look at that next.

4. The Davidic Kingdom.

Moses, then, not only recorded the early attempts of man to rule under the Creator, but he had predicted that the desire for a king would come into the hearts of the Jewish people. Though their desire was carnal, God was able to use that history, told of in 1 Samuel and following for His glory.

We fast forward from the time of the Patriarchs, through the time of the Egyptian wanderings, when the Lord ruled through Moses, to the time of the judges, when God reigned through prophets and special warriors who kept the young nation intact. There was correction when needed, and advancement when called for, but the general feeling was that God was in charge of the people.

Unfortunately, Israel was not satisfied with God being in charge. The record of the coming transition is in 1 Samuel 8:4-9.

4Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."6But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the Lord. 7And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. 8According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. 9Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."

Samuel was broken over this matter. The Lord too was angered, yet in His wisdom He allowed His plan to work out through this rejection by Israel.

The following chapters of 1 Samuel relate the formation of the kingdom under a less than desirable man. The people were getting the opposite of what Moses had prescribed in Deuteronomy. King Saul was definitely not a man of the Word. And the prophet Samuel had given them repeated warnings about what a king could do were he given the power. So it came to pass.

After repeated disobediences, the Lord intervened and allowed Samuel to anoint another king. From this point in the story, the future of Israel and even the world starts to be manifest. King David will prefigure the One Who is to be King over all the earth one day.

David's rise and reign are recorded in the next book of the Bible. And 2 Samuel contains a promise that all of us need to drink in. It is in 7:16, speaking to David:

Your throne shall be established forever.

Even a cursory understanding of the later years of David's life lets us know that the man David is not the ultimate subject of this promise. Like all of us, though his *heart* was after God, his *flesh* was after David quite often.

But God had spoken. First, there is to be a "forever" throne. Second, that throne is to be somehow related to the man David.

Isaiah picks up the *David* theme about three hundred years later, speaking of a Child Who is to be born, a Child Who will bear on His shoulders "the government" (Isaiah 9:6-7):

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom...

And Jeremiah: (23:5)

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper...

And Zechariah: (12:1-8)

In that day [at the end of history] ... the house of David shall be like God.

Even a crowd that surrounded Jesus one day, got it (John 7:42):

Others said... Has not the Scripture said that the Christ [Messiah, King] comes from the seed of David...

And John, in the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22:16), quotes Jesus as referring to Himself in this manner:

I am the Root and the Offspring of David...

We have struck a Biblical nerve here in mentioning David. With David comes the earthly kingdom, but the Kingdom of God, nevertheless. With David historically comes expansion and victory and the wiping out of God's enemies.

So the kingdom was then. Is now. And is yet to come. A kingdom that shall be around forever.

We have covered 3,000 years of earth's history so far. In every age there is the King in Heaven attempting to establish His reign on earth. And now we have found the key person of the Old Testament whose Descendant will make it all happen in a permanent way. Glorious things are ahead of us.

5. Decline of the Kingdom.

The best of times and the worst of times come to Israel in one person.

Yes, Solomon, you disappoint us, even more than your father David with his Bathsheba. For you had many Bathshebas, and each of them had a foreign god that you eventually made peace with in the kingdom of your father David, in the kingdom that was to be an everlasting kingdom of righteousness. Something isn't right here.

Solomon's idolatry eventually drives God to tear the kingdom in two, with a special note that it is because of David, and the promises made to David, and the city of Jerusalem which God has chosen, that the southern part of that kingdom will be where God's favor rests.

From that point on it looks on the outside that there are two kingdoms with two sets of kings. But the kings of the north [called Israel] never measure up to God's standards; they all worship in the wrong place, continue on in idol-worship, until they are taken away altogether from the land given to them centuries before.

So Judah, in the south, excels and lives happily ever after. No. Not at all. Judah saw what happened to her sister Israel, but eventually followed her into the same abyss.

End of kingdom. Still, no. Just when the Biblical text seems the harshest on Israel, a dim light keeps hope, and the kingdom, alive.

As Judah, the southern kingdom, is about to pass into oblivion because of its wretched evil ways, Jeremiah, who lives during this time, prophesies a seemingly fatal blow to the whole kingdom idea (Jeremiah 22:29-30):

29 earth, earth, earth, Hear the word of the LORD!
30 Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless,
a man who shall not prosper in his days;
for none of his descendants shall prosper,
sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.'

Who is "this man" of the prophecy? That would be *Coniah* or *Jeconiah*. And who is *Jeconiah*? He is the son of *Jehoiakim*, who is one of the sons of *Josiah*, the last righteous king of Judah. And *Josiah*, as all the kings of Judah, is descended directly from King *David*. Therefore *Jeconiah* is in that line, too.

If you are not a little confused by now, you ought to be. I quoted earlier God's promise to *David* (2 Samuel 7:16) that *David's* house and kingdom would be established *forever*. Yet now *Jeremiah's* talk of the end of the line brings it to a screeching halt?

No. All we are told here is that the line from *David* to *Jeconiah* via *Solomon* is cut off. But there are other lines that come from *David*. For this bit of information we must go for a moment into the New Testament and look at one of those long lists of names that the apostles gave us. Let's check out *Luke 3*. And *Matthew 1*.

It is commonly held that while *Matthew* traced the genealogy of *Joseph*, *Luke* followed that of *Mary*.

In *Matthew* (v. 16) one *Jacob* is called the father of *Joseph* (*Jesus's* foster-father). And then, instead of following the pattern of the entire chapter (he begat him and then he begat him etc.) *Matthew* says simply that *Joseph* was the husband of *Mary of whom* the Christ was born, implying that *Joseph* had no hand in this matter. *Jesus*, humanly speaking, was *of Mary*.

Note carefully, back in verses six and following, that the lineage of *David* follows *Solomon* and all those kings mentioned in first and second Kings, including *Jeconiah*.

Perfect fit. Jeconiah's line will not produce another ruler in Israel. And Joseph did not produce the one who would rule.

Now look at Luke 3. Verse 23 says that Jesus *was supposed, or thought*, to be the son of Joseph. But He wasn't really. Now look at Joseph's father. It is not Jacob any longer, but one called *Heli*. Tracing this man, who was probably *Mary's* father, all the way back to David, we see that son *Solomon is not mentioned*, but rather, Nathan, a son born to David in Jerusalem before Solomon, per 2 Samuel 5:14. [Not to be confused with David's personal prophet Nathan.]

The blood line is therefore intact. Jesus is the son – descendant – of David and therefore in line for all the kingdom promises, not because of great and wise king Solomon, and in spite of the wicked men who ended Judah's reign, but because of the promise of God, who cannot lie, fulfilled by the unknown Nathan.

The kingdom is a real entity in the heart of God. History declares it. Soon we move to the prophets who also saw it in their, and our, future. But first a look at the Psalms, written mainly by that king whose name is so prominent in Kingdom theology, David.

And let's not forget that David is called by Peter, a *prophet*. His insights are critical.

6. Sweet Psalmists of the Kingdom.

Well over half of the Psalms were penned by this King David, even some that do not have his name on them but are quoted in the New Testament as Davidic.

I will refer to the Psalms that clearly describe a time when Christ shall rule and reign on earth. Some of the Psalms could be taken also as speaking of His Heavenly sovereignty at all times. I will not quote them. My purpose in writing is to speak of the kingdom that has been *on the earth* already, is presently *on the earth*, and will be *on the earth* in its fullness one day in our future.

Please recall, while God was indeed sovereign over all the Universe, David was His chosen king on earth, ruling over Israel, the chosen people. There is no conflict between an earthly and a heavenly kingdom, both God's, ruling simultaneously.

Psalm 2 begins the parade of quotations regarding the coming kingdom in the Bible's songbook.

2:8-10 speaks of a time when the nations of the earth will be given to the Son of God. His rule will be firm, as with a rod of iron. This will be necessary, for the saints, ruling with Him, will be ruling over the people of the Gentile nations referenced in Matthew 25, containing citizens who were helpful to the Lord, but who have not yet received of His Spirit.

22 is a Messianic Psalm and speaks much of the suffering of Messiah. But at the end is made mention (27-31) that eventually this despised One will rule the nations, and be worshiped by them.

45 is yet another Messianic song, this one from the sons of Korah. They are not speaking of David here, but of the Son of David, as the Spirit gives them utterance. This King to come is beautiful, mighty, ruling with a sword, having an eternal throne. The "sons" of this

King will be made princes *in all the earth*. His name will be remembered *in all generations*. So the pattern is visible again: a real man ruling over a real people in an earthly setting from generation to generation.

In 47, He is the King of all the earth, reigning over the nations.

In 48, He is seen in His special city, the city of the great King, and His holy mountain.

50, from Asaph, depicts God coming forth out of Zion, gathering His saints together, and threatening to tear in pieces the forgetters of God.

67 says simply that God shall judge the people righteously and govern the nations on earth.

72 is written by the great King Solomon, but he was not shy to acknowledge that One greater than Solomon will reign. There is no way that the following description is about anyone but Messiah:

*2He will judge Your people with righteousness,
And Your poor with justice. 3The mountains will bring
peace to the people, And the little hills, by righteousness.
4He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save
the children of the needy, And will break in pieces the
oppressor.
5They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure,
Throughout all generations. 6He shall come down like rain
upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water
the earth. 7In His days the righteous shall flourish,
And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more.
8He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from
the River to the ends of the earth. 9Those who dwell in the
wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick
the dust.*

10The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. 11Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.

12For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. 13He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. 14He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight.

15And He shall live; And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; Prayer also will be made for Him continually, And daily He shall be praised.

16There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; and those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

17His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed.

Mention of gifts being given to Messiah is confirmed by the prophets that we will examine. Geographical locations combined with effulgent praises tell us this is the Lord Jesus, come to earth to reign!

Psalm 86 tells us that *all nations shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name...* A theme picked up by prophets.

89 reminds us that it is to *David* that the promises were made originally. His Seed will be established forever. His throne will be built up to all generations. As long as seed and thrones and generations are mentioned, we are speaking of something of this earth, though saturated with Heaven.

96: *Say among the nations, the Lord reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved...*

Before the new heavens and the new earth, a reign of Messiah.

99 speaks of an exalted Lord, to be sure, but also that He is great *in Zion, high above all the peoples*, to be worshiped at his *holy hill*, the very imagery of Isaiah 2.

102 has Messiah having mercy on Zion, so that *the nations shall fear the name of the Lord*. Here, *a people yet to be created* will praise the Lord. His name will be praised in Jerusalem.

110 is called in the title, *the announcement of the Messiah's reign*. Messiah is told to rule in the midst of enemies, which would be the former Gentile nations. Kings will be executed in the day of His wrath, that is, at His return when He sets up His rule.

132 foresees Zion as the dwelling place of God *forever*. Priests and saints and the throne of David are all there.

As I said, much I have left out. Zion, a code name for Jerusalem, is everywhere in the Psalms. The rule and reign of God is obvious throughout the book. What I have given above is the clear message of a reign on earth. We could stop here in documenting what is coming. Nothing could be clearer. The Jews fully expected a king to come, deliver them from their enemies once and for all, and reign over all the earth from Jerusalem.

Let's see now if the prophets are in agreement.

7. Isaiah: the House on the Mountain.

As clear a picture as you will see anywhere:
Isaiah 2:2-4.

*2Now 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.
3Many 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.
4He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning [a]hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

Here we are given the location of the coming kingdom, the nature of the traffic that will flow there, the nature of the King's policies, the effect on the planet. Nothing figurative here. A splendid caricature of our future. The Jews believed it was coming. So do I.

Just before this is all set up, says Isaiah (2:19) in accord with John the revelator:

*19They shall go into the holes of the rocks,
And into the caves of the earth,
From the terror of the Lord
And the glory of His majesty,*

When He arises to shake the earth mightily.

Isaiah's prophecies go in and out of the kingdom and the life of Christ. No solid chronological order here. But the context of each passage becomes clear after a bit of thought, and comparison with other similar prophecies.

4:2-6 is yet another snapshot of the kingdom.

2In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing For those of Israel who have escaped.3And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy— everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. 4When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, 5then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. 6And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain.

The escape mentioned here is also mentioned in Matthew and Revelation. Little pieces here and there, when sought for diligently, can be found, placed together, and delighted in.

The kingdom that comes is transitional. That is, it is not the full-blown *new heavens and earth* of the last chapters of Revelation. Neither is it the situation of today or at any other time of Israel's history we have known. Consider this one passage for example:

- An escaped people.
- Jews considered holy by the world.
- Cloud and smoke by day, fire by night.
- A place of refuge.

No Millennium? Really?

- A *need* for a place of refuge, that is, there will still be storms. Much of our present world's conditions will still be in place, but King Jesus will provide for safety and governance as we have never known.

And how can we forget Isaiah 9 in this regard? See verses 6-7:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder... of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, 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...

That which began in Eden, continued in Israel, and reaches its earthly peak in the thousand-year reign, will eventually blossom into an everlasting communion with God.

Isaiah 11 is another classic prediction of a kingdom:

*1There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
2The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.
3His delight is in the fear of the Lord,
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
4But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
5Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.
6The 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.
7The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
9They 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.
10And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.
...12He will set up a banner for the nations,
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel...*

Except for the first verses of this sublime chapter, here is a prophecy of the coming King who strikes the earth with a rod, takes control of the government, and finally brings peace to this troubled planet.

Is it any wonder the Israelite nation fully expected a Deliverer to come, and that the apostles knew that this was the One? Only their timing was off...

Yes indeed the Lord reigns in Heaven forever, but also on earth, says Isaiah (24:23) with the Psalmists,

... the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.

Chapter 32 picks up on the theme:

*1Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
And princes will rule with justice.*

*2A man will be as a hiding place from the wind,
And a cover from the tempest,
As rivers of water in a dry place,
As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

*3The eyes of those who see will not be dim,
And the ears of those who hear will listen.*

*4Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge,
And the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly.*

*5The foolish person will no longer be called generous,
Nor the miser said to be bountiful;*

Notice that the wind and the tempest and the rash person and the foolish one, will all be here in the millennium. But there will be a hiding place and a Healer and a corrective element that is not present today. A world we have all longed for is coming!

35 seems to mingle promises that were somewhat fulfilled when Messiah was here earlier with ones that shall come to pass later.

*5Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*6Then 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.*

*7The 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.*

*8A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it shall be for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.*

*9No lion shall be there,
Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk there,
10And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Truly if it can be said that Jesus had a healing touch on all He met when He was here, the effect of His healing power will be multiplied infinitely when He comes again and sets up His rule. And yes, we can spiritualize the “Highway of Holiness,” without taking its literal fulfillment away. And who wants anything but the literal interpretation of that last section, that sees God’s people coming to Zion, a literal place everywhere it is mentioned, to my knowledge.

Speaking of spiritualizing, Isaiah 40 falls prey to much of it, but for no good reason. A literal kingdom is coming. With a literal king. In a literal location. Why cannot some of the following be literally true?

*3The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make straight [b]in the desert
A highway for our God.
4Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made [c]straight
And the rough places smooth;
5The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

John the Baptist? Oh yes. A leveling of authority under Messiah? All flesh shall see it?

And later in the chapter (10-11)...

*10Behold, the Lord God shall come [e]with a strong hand,
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His work before Him.*

*11He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.*

Did Jesus come with a strong hand the first time? Did He rule the first time? Did He feed His flock, when His flock had not been gathered together yet? *These are promises of a second coming to this earth.* The very term “second coming” demands an earth-centered mission.

Chapter 42 is another classic psalm. This one combines first and second comings.

*1“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
2He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
3A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not [c]quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
4He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”*

First coming: He did not cry out. He did not raise His voice. Gently He dealt with all the needy. He brought justice through His death on the cross, but – second coming – that justice has not yet been

established in the earth. Nor will it be by the preaching of the gospel. His righteousness will not be firmly entrenched here until He is enthroned as Lord of the Earth.

We skip to chapter 62, passing over many choice verses that could well refer to an earthly reign. Notice now the specifics of this chapter:

1For 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.

2The 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.

3You shall also be a crown of glory In the hand of the Lord, And a royal diadem In the hand of your God.

4You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the Lord delights in you, And your land shall be married.

5For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.

6I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent,

7And give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

We ought to have a little pity – only a little – for those who must find a way to take away the literal and make everything figurative. Zion. Jerusalem. Gentiles. A new name. A praise in the earth. Why change the meaning here? Why not just enjoy what God has said? The Jews were not wrong to expect what God had promised. They were wrong not to realize that the Fulfillment of the promise was

within their grasp, in their very face. Nor are we wrong to believe this way.

Isaiah 65 surely cannot be talking about a heavenly-forever kingdom, yet it is not about our time either. Note the transition.

*20No more shall an infant from there live but a few days,
Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days;
For the child shall die one hundred years old,
But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.
21They shall build houses and inhabit them;
They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
22They shall not build and another inhabit;
They shall not plant and another eat;
For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people,
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
23They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble;
For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord,
And their offspring with them.
24It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer;
And while they are still speaking, I will hear.
25The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent's
food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
Says the Lord.*

Later we will talk about the end of *death*. It does not end during the thousand-year reign. But life is certainly extended greatly. Then look at the houses, vineyards, trees, wolves, lambs, lions, oxen...all earthly things with heavenly characteristics in Emmanuel's land. Isaiah closes with one more look at the kingdom that should set us thinking for some time (66:18-24).

18For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. 19I will set a sign among them; and those among them who

escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. 20Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. 21And I will also take some of them for priests and Levites, says the Lord.

*22For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the Lord,
So shall your descendants and your name remain.*

*23And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord.*

*24And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die,
And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all
flesh.*

All nations gathered, as in Matthew 24, 25. Messengers sent to places on the planet who have not yet heard of the Lord's return and rule. Offerings brought to Jerusalem. Priests and Levites! All human beings made to worship the Lord! And unrepentant sinners' corpses will be visible to all as a reminder of the grace of God to the redeemed.

Spiritualize all of that, ye who would twist the Scriptures to your liking!

There is one item, however, that needs some understanding. The new heavens and the new earth are spoken of in John's Revelation, so it seems, as *following* the Millennial reign. Here, and in chapter 65, they seem to precede the kingdom days.

No Millennium? Really?

The last two chapters of Revelation do indeed seem to be of a different caliber. No death. No temple. Yet there are still nations. And a new Jerusalem. And all still on the earth, where the tabernacle of God has descended.

Has Isaiah slipped over into eternity, beyond the Millennium? One thing is certain: we do not abrogate one passage of Scripture to make way for another. That's how Islam's holy book works, not ours. Somehow Isaiah and John saw the same vision of the future.

John and so many of the prophecies make it plain that there is a "middle" kingdom between where we are now and where we are going. Isaiah blends them into one?

8. Jeremiah and the Branch.

Jeremiah's focus is the people in front of him, backsliding Judah. But even so, occasionally the weeping prophet is able to clear his eyes long enough to see well into our own future.

One fascinating prediction the prophet makes is regarding the line that will lead to the Messiah, Who will sit on the throne of David. In 22:29-30 he lets us know that no descendant of Jeconiah, who is in direct descent from David, will sit on the Davidic throne!

Is not Jesus a descendant of Jeconiah? Actually, no. The line of David through Solomon and Josiah and Jeconiah etc. ends in Joseph, the foster father of our Lord. But Jesus' blood line comes through another son of David, the relatively unknown Nathan (not the prophet of that name). Mary can trace her lineage all the way back to Nathan and thus to David. The promise to David of an earthly but Heaven-inspired and eternal rule, is intact. [We covered this in more detail in chapter 5 above.]

In the very next chapter, 23, is Jeremiah's famous prophecy of the *Branch*. The etymology of this word, some say, gives rise to the New Testament reference to Jesus being called a *Nazarene*.

I believe we should begin this prophecy with verse 3, as God promises a plurality of good shepherds to His people, ruled over by the King. Savor every word.

3But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

4I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking, says the Lord.

*5Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,
That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;*

*A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
6In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely;
Now this is His name by which He will be called:
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.
7Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that they
shall no longer say, As the Lord lives who brought up the children of
Israel from the land of Egypt,
8but, As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of
the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries
where I had driven them. And they shall dwell in their own land.*

The government will be on His shoulders, as Isaiah would have it. He will supervise a worldwide team of resurrected men who will carefully control every aspect of earth's life.

It should be obvious to all that such a day has not dawned upon us at this time in our history or any time in our past.

Many have been rejoicing since the return of the Jews in 1948. But so far there is no indication that these Jews or the present state of Israel, are the fulfillment of this prophecy. When Jesus returns, true Jews will be whisked back to their homeland, brought to repentance before their Lord, and with Him and the Gentiles who have been grafted into the Body, rule the world.

The contents of chapter 23 were deemed so important by the Spirit of God that he had them repeated in chapter 33!

Chapter 30 mixes a coming horror called *Jacob's trouble* (aka the "Tribulation") with promises of a restored Israel. Again, every word of prophecy is important. Read carefully.

3For behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah, says the Lord. And I

will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.

4Now these are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah.

5For thus says the Lord: We have heard a voice of trembling, Of fear, and not of peace.

6Ask now, and see, Whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins Like a woman in labor, And all faces turned pale?

7Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.

8For it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them.

9But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, Whom I will raise up for them.

10Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob, says the Lord, Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid.

11For I am with you, says the Lord, to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished.

A return. An ultimate punishment as seen in Daniel and the Gospels. David to be the ruler of a new kingdom. Some see this as a code name for Jesus, others see the real king David resurrected [as the text actually says] and placed under Jesus in the Millennial reign. These details fit perfectly with the other passages that predict a kingdom period.

See also 31:4-6,

*4Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!
You shall again be adorned with your tambourines,
And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.
5You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria;
The planters shall plant and eat them as ordinary food.
6For there shall be a day When the watchmen will cry on Mount
Ephraim, Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.*

Vines. Mountains. Worship centered in Zion. The pattern is real.

8-11,

*8Behold, I will bring them from the north country,
And gather them from the ends of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child
And the one who labors with child, together;
A great throng shall return there.
9They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead
them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters,
In a straight way in which they shall not stumble;
For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn.
10Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
And declare it in the isles afar off, and say,
He who scattered Israel will gather him,
And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.*

The gathering at the end of our present age. The rivers. The isles. A literal earth where literal Israel will prosper at last.

12-14,

*12Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion,
Streaming to the goodness of the Lord—*

*For wheat and new wine and oil,
For the young of the flock and the herd;
Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden,
And they shall sorrow no more at all.
13Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance,
And the young men and the old, together;
For I will turn their mourning to joy,
Will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow.
14I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance,
And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord.*

No more sorrow. Hasn't happened. Mourning turned to joy. Hasn't happened in Israel! Priests?! (See Ezekiel...) God's people totally satisfied. This is prophetic vision, the real deal. Why do we have to endure the "prophets" of our own day when we have such glorious promises in the Book?

31-37,

31Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— 32not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33But 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. 34No 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."

*35Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night,
Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar.
(The Lord of hosts is His name):*

*36 If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord,
Then the seed of Israel shall also cease
From being a nation before Me forever.”*
*37 Thus says the Lord: If heaven above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath,
I will also cast off all the seed of Israel
For all that they have done, says the Lord.*

A New Covenant will rule the new kingdom. Certainly this portion of the prophecy is visible among Kingdom people in our own day, but will make more sense when the final rule is established. In that day, everyone [left] in the world will know Jesus! Everyone will be called to worship Jesus! And notice the promise to the nation Israel and her seed. Though we Gentiles have been grafted in by the grace of God, we need to understand that Israel's God, Israel's ways, Israel's everything, will be the focus of that coming kingdom.

Specific details of a geographical nature are added to Jeremiah's 31st, once more letting us know that the kingdom coming is as literal as literal can be. Spiritualizing the Word of God, when it is *already spiritual*, is dangerous business.

9. Ezekiel and the memorial sacrifices.

With Ezekiel some think we hit a wall. Consistency demands that we continue the treatment of Scripture literally. If Isaiah and Jeremiah and the Psalms are literal, why not Ezekiel? But how can Ezekiel be literal?

Not long ago I put together a commentary on this incredible book. I remember struggling a little when I came to those chapters that seem to indicate something very Jewish in our future. The thought came to me as it does to all who approach Ezekiel: *I've seen this before.*

Yes, indeed. We have seen it before. In the Torah. In Moses. What in the world is Ezekiel talking about?

The anti-Millennialist will fairly shout at us, Do not resurrect Moses! The sacrificial system is done, for goodness' sake! Read Hebrews. Read the entire New Testament. Everyone knows that bulls and birds and all the rest cannot take away sin! *It is finished!*

Granted. No millennial person would disagree with those shoutings. We are even a bit humiliated that someone would think that of us.

But then, Ezekiel? Does he not speak of a temple whose specifications in no way match the rebuilt – then refurbished – temple of Ezra and Nehemiah, and Herod? What temple is he talking about?

And does Ezekiel not speak of a priesthood (as do Isaiah and Jeremiah by the way!) And an altar? And sin offerings?

Some of course write it off as Ezekiel's bad guess. These are men whose scissors we mentioned earlier. Anything they cannot accept, they write off and cut out.

Others say it's all true, but only figuratively. This means this, and that means that, and on and on. You must learn to *interpret* correctly [meaning, as we do].

My approach in my Ezekiel commentary, and now, is to take the challenge of following a prophecy wherever it leads. And I believe I can do that without denying "It is finished!"

And a news flash to our "It is finished" crowd: the blood of bulls and goats *never did take away sin!* Not one sin of one sinner of any era was ever removed by animal blood. Jesus not only *finished* true blood sacrifice, He *began* it. The entire work was done on a Roman cross, 30 some A.D.

The Mosaic sacrificial system was *always* just a picture, nothing more. It looked ahead to Jesus. Why cannot that picture return and do the same thing it always did: point to Christ!

Do we not, in these days, partake of a supper that is a picture of what Jesus did? Why? "In remembrance of Me," Jesus said. We look back to the cross in this way, the very center of our existence. There is nothing salvific in that remembrance, though Rome and others might try to make us believe so.

The only way I can explain the words of Ezekiel is in this literal way. Evidently, God has decided to continue making the sacrifice of Jesus real to the peoples of earth. Every piece of the celebrations that will occur in the Holy Land will cause people to love King Jesus more and more.

When we arrive at the prophecy of Zechariah, we'll see how people will be dealt with who decide they don't need to participate in the Mosaic offerings.

So buckle up. Let's take a trip through the work of perhaps the most unusual prophet of all. He is in agreement with the other prophets

and the apostles when he speaks of what is coming. God gave him a couple of extra revelations too...

11:17-20

17Therefore say, Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. 18And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. 19Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

The gathering we have seen before. Notice the new covenant details we saw in Jeremiah 31. Obviously, the return of the Jews that we saw in 1948 is not the return talked about here.

20:33-44 speaks more of the restoration coming, a description that matches as yet nothing we have seen in Israel's history.

33As I live, says the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. 34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. 35And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. 36Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you, says the Lord God.

These verses seem to match Revelation 12's description of Israel being led into the wilderness during the Great Tribulation.

40For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel, says the Lord God, there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. 41I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. 42Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. 43And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. 44Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel, says the Lord God.

The final repentance of Israel is mentioned here, along with previews of the sacrificial system. The mountain reference brings us back to Isaiah 2. Perfect harmony.

The gathering continues in chapter 36:24-36.

24For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Repetition. God wants us to know this. Jews will come in from everywhere. When they come in, they will be born again, as individuals and collectively. The *remnant* of Israel will be saved.

28Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.

Once more the material earthly promises, letting us know that the scene is earth, not Heaven.

31Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32Not for your sake do I do this, says the Lord God, let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"

33Thus says the Lord God: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. 34The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. 35So they will say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited. 36Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.

The ruins of the Tribulation. There has been awful desolation. Time to rebuild and restore. This is not new heavens and new earth, just a renewal time. And why fortified? Because even though the earth will be ruled by a perfect Lord, its subjects will not be perfect.

Then the dry bones of 37 retells this story yet another time. Notice in the following that people are not being saved and whisked away to heaven. They are resurrected and brought right back to their land.

37:11-14

11Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off! 12Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. 14I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it, says the Lord.

Next in the book is the story of Gog and Magog. Revelation seems to put this incident after the one thousand years, perhaps that final attack on Jerusalem by the recently freed Satan.

Important for our purposes are the last nine chapters in Ezekiel, where the prophet seems to have gone off the deep end. But as we have not doubted his words until now, let's follow and see what he has to say.

40:2 says that Ezekiel is brought to a high mountain, where stood a temple. Well, that is nothing more than Isaiah 2.

An angel begins measuring the temple. That fits with Revelation 11. Nothing unusual here. There are gateways and courts. And then those sacrifices... (40:38-43). I've commented on these above.

In chapters to come there is a priesthood, Levites, an altar of sacrifice. Much of this is reminiscent of the specifications found in Moses.

A "prince" becomes prominent in 44 and 45. Though some want to identify him with Jesus, the fact that he is offering sin offerings for his family lets us know that it is someone else. And that someone is

identified as the resurrected David in Jeremiah 30:9, and here in Ezekiel: 34:23-24, 37:24-25.

Also, in Hosea 3:5, David is said to be ruler next to the Lord God. In other words, *David is not Jesus*, for Jesus is the Lord God.

With that many references to David, what else can we believe but that he indeed will be serving under Jesus in the City on the Hill of Zion?

Chapter 45 tells us that the Passover is to be observed in that kingdom to come. Worship is outlined in chapter 46.

47. Literally healing waters will bring back to full life that which has caused death in the previous age. Ezekiel, like Isaiah, may have slipped into eternity here as he begins painting a picture of trees on either side of a river that actually bear fruit every month. That fruit will be used for food and medicine.

Revelation 22:2 reads,

2In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The book closes out with geographical borders, divisions, and the naming of the city from Millennial Days and/or beyond as: *The Lord Is There*.

I say to all of this, Why not? Why can't we believe exactly what God has said? A new world is coming. In stages, yes, but definitely not like anything we have now. Something to look forward to. Something to delight in when the days here grow dark.

A challenge:

I challenge anyone to take the words of the prophets I have quoted thus far and make them fit into the history of our present or past world. People who attempt this are the Kingdom now/Millennium now folks. A sad and difficult task is theirs, and there is no need for their efforts.

Or to those who take all these words and make them into some figurative meaning that fits with our everyday life. Good luck with that too!

So much easier just to read and believe and rejoice. Join me.

More prophecies ahead. Will they match what we have already found? You bet!

10. Daniel's visions of the Kingdom.

The first vision in the book of Daniel is actually not Daniel's, but the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar's. The interpretation of the great image he sees is, amazingly, a list of the great powers of the earth from his own day to ours.

The fourth kingdom he and Daniel see is considered to be the Roman Empire that morphs in the last days into a ten-nation confederation. It is that empire that is believed to be the antichrist's domain.

But of concern to us is what follows. See Daniel 2:44-45.

44And in the days of these [ten] kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—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 35 lets us know that the coming kingdom is a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Here again we are drawn back to Isaiah who saw such a mountain, and a House upon it from which the entire world was governed.

The prophecies are still a unity. Following the merely human governments of this world comes a government from God, but still on the planet. No new heaven and earth yet. Simply a take-over of earth by a power from outside it.

And Jesus shall reign.

Chapter 7 tells the same story but with a different vision. Here a series of animals tell the succession of nations, nations that come to the same end as before, a final challenge from above. Read carefully the vision and interpretation of that final kingdom again (7:9-10, 26-27):

13'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.

14Then 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.

26'But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever.

27Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.'

The animals that portray the nations have their dominion taken away, but not their lives (verse 12). That is, Jesus does not return to destroy the entire earth, and every nation in it, only to take control of certain nations. Same picture as in chapter 2.

Notice that the kingdom is the Lord's but that it is shared with His people, who rule and reign with Him. Again we say, this is not the new heavens and the new earth, but that transitional kingdom that shall have earthly dominion until all enemies are destroyed and eternity proper can begin. We will hear Paul speak of this later.

11. Minor prophets, major prophecies.

The “minor” prophets are called so because of their size, not their importance. Every one of them except Jonah and Habakkuk has something to say of the coming kingdom.

Hosea is full of promises of Israel’s restoration.
See for example 3:4-5:

*4For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim.
5Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.*

We live now in the “many days” of no king or sacrifice in Israel. But it shall not ever be so. The Lord and David are scheduled for a return appearance!

And at the end of the book, 14:4-7,

*4“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from him.
5I will be like the dew to Israel; He shall grow like the lily,
And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.
6His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree,
And his fragrance like Lebanon.
7Those who dwell under his shadow shall return;
They shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine.
Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*

King Jesus makes all things new.

Among the end-time promises of **Joel** are the ones found in 3:17-21,

So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again... a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord [as pictured in Ezekiel]... Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation... for the Lord dwells in Zion.

Familiar names and images to those who have been tracking with me through the Scriptures. Such harmony from the Spirit of God!

After nearly nine chapters of doom and gloom for Israel, **Amos** is led by the Spirit to join the restoration chorus (9:11-15):

*11On that day I will raise up
The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,
And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it as in the days of old;
12That they may possess the remnant of Edom,
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the Lord who does this thing...
14I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them;
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.
15I will plant them in their land, And no longer shall they be pulled
up from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God.*

Note the prominence once more of David. See the chosen people ruling over Gentile nations. Wasted ruins are rebuilt. And their stay is permanent. Nothing like this in history past or present, again! Something is coming!

Even in one-chapter **Obadiah** which is a judgment on Edom, the Spirit finds a place to tell of the coming worldwide kingdom:

*17But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
18The house of Jacob shall be a fire, And the house of Joseph a
flame...
20And the captives of this host of the children of Israel
Shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath.
The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Shall possess the cities of the South.
21Then saviors [deliverers] shall come to Mount Zion
To judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the
Lord's.*

The planet is taken over by the rule of Christ and His people. The long-awaited *manifest sons of God* appear and bring holiness and total control.

Jonah says nothing of a coming golden age, but is himself a picture of the crucified and resurrected king.

Micah picks up the strain again.

2:12-13,

*12I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;
I will put them together like sheep of the fold,
Like a flock in the midst of their pasture;
They shall make a loud noise because of so many people.
13The one who breaks open will come up before them;
They will break out, Pass through the gate,
And go out by it; Their king will pass before them,
With the Lord at their head.*

The imagery of a sheepfold and a Good Shepherd certainly is not strange to us. Then the mention of someone coming through a gate brings us to Ezekiel's description of the temple grounds, and the *prince* who serves under the Lord in that day.

The first verses of Micah 4 are a quotation from Isaiah 2, word for word. But Micah has more of his own words to add in that chapter, 4:6-8,

*6In that day, says the Lord,
I will assemble the lame,
I will gather the outcast
And those whom I have afflicted;
7I will make the lame a remnant,
And the outcast a strong nation;
So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion
From now on, even forever.*

We will talk about the transition from millennial days to eternal days later. The use of the word *forever* here can include both. Notice the "gathering" theme and the constant use of Mt. Zion as a geographical marker pinning us to one place on the earth.

Nahum speaks of restoring the *excellence of Israel* (2:2).

I found no direct allusion to a coming kingdom in **Habakkuk**. But clearly a message of hope shines through the prophet's words.

Much more than a mere allusion is visible in the latter portions of **Zephaniah**.

3:10-20,

*10From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones,*

Shall bring My offering.

Worldwide worship of the King is a subject we will see again in Zechariah...

And you shall no longer be haughty In My holy mountain.

12I will leave in your midst a meek and humble people,

And they shall trust in the name of the Lord.

13The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness

And speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;

...reminding us of the kingdom people Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount.

14Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

15The Lord has taken away your judgments,

He has cast out your enemy.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;

You shall see disaster no more.

Jesus will literally be in the midst of His people in that day.

16In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak.

17The Lord your God in your midst,

The Mighty One, will save;

He will rejoice over you with gladness,

He will quiet you with His love,

He will rejoice over you with singing.

Perhaps Jesus sings over us now? We hear such talk these days. But this cannot be proved by the passage before us. The song is a

victory song as Christ Jesus has just been given rule, with His people, over the whole earth.

19Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, and gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame in every land where they were put to shame.

Wrongs will be made right in that day.

20At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; For I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, When I return your captives before your eyes, says the Lord.

I'm sure no one can argue that any of this has ever happened on planet earth to date. But one day it shall.

Haggai has a bit to add to the growing mound of evidence for a coming literal kingdom on earth.

2:6-9,

6For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the Lord of hosts. 8The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says the Lord of hosts. 9The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts.

Haggai is lifted in the Spirit to see the temple before him as though it were that temple which shall exist in the Millennial days. This is the temple that shall be present when all men come to worship the *Desire of All Nations*, a title that can only refer to the coming Messiah of Israel.

Zechariah begins early on (1:17) predicting that the Lord will once more choose Jerusalem and comfort Zion.

2:10-11,

10Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord. 11Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.

By now, these verses need no explanation, yes? I quote them merely to indicate the super-abundance of texts pointing to a literal kingdom.

And Zechariah goes on...

8:3-4,

*3Thus 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.
4Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit
in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand
because of great age.
5The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its
streets*

Typical human life, but guarded by the King and His people. Old people. Young people. Laughter. And there is that Mountain again!

14:8-11,

*8And in that day it shall be
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,*

*Half of them toward the eastern sea
And half of them toward the western sea;
In both summer and winter it shall occur.
9And the Lord shall be King over all the earth.
In that day it shall be—
The Lord is one, and His name one.*

There it is. *King over all the earth.* He is here. With us.

10All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. 11The people shall dwell in it; And no longer shall there be utter destruction, But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

Specific names and places let us know that a literal kingdom is in view. But I may have said that already... Then there is the climactic ending of Zechariah's prophecy:

14:16-19,

16And 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. 17And 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. 18If 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. 19This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Clear enough? The feast of "tents" is in our future. Not just for Jews. All people on earth will be invited. And worship of the King

will be required in that day. Punishment is in store for the still-rebellious of the earth who do not want to cooperate.

Malachi has the final Old Covenant word in this long parade of predictions of the last days.

Chapter 3 tells of a messenger that is coming to prepare the way for the Lord. We have seen this as referring to John the Baptist, and so it does. But careful reading of the outcome of the Messenger's ministry points to a second fulfillment of this passage (3:1), as well as the Elijah prediction at the end of the book (4:5).

The book of Revelation tells us of two prophets whose ministries sound very much like this "Elijah" and messenger. They are unnamed, and never died in historic time, evidenced by the fact that they do indeed die in that Revelation story. Elijah fits the description of one of them for sure. The Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and was certainly a type of Elijah, as the Lord brings out in his explanation to the apostles.

But Malachi wants us to think of the man Elijah himself, sent into the earth just before closing time to attempt one more time to bring a fallen world to repentance.

The upshot of his ministry in verse 3 is that he will purify *the sons of Levi*, a group of men who according to Ezekiel, will soon be serving in Jerusalem, *offering to the Lord an offering in righteousness*. It does not seem to me that the Baptist did anything quite like this. You and I and most of the Jews are not *sons of Levi*.

Malachi leaves us with the promise that after the great destruction *The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings*.

So be it. Even so come Lord Jesus! Rise among us and reign! Your Kingdom come! Your will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven!

12. The Kingdom between the Testaments.

Are we to believe that everything the prophets predicted was forgotten as centuries passed from the last of these voices to the voice of one crying in the wilderness? More to the point, should we downplay all that the men of God said because so many years passed from Old Covenant days to the time of Jesus? Is the chain of thought broken? Has literal truly become figurative?

In our own time, the long wait for Jesus' return has had that effect on liberal scholarship. I have heard that Jesus' return is nothing more than an awareness among His people that He is somehow "here" in the Spirit. They confuse Olivet with Pentecost...

No, the prophets and their prophecies are still intact. Jesus is still coming literally for us, and the literal kingdom of God is still to come to the people of Israel, as well as to those grafted into Israel. Nothing changed from Malachi to Matthew. Nothing.

True, the faith of the people must have waivered. The last prophet who spoke, prophesied under the reign of Persian kings. Persians gave way to Greek control and Greek to Roman; all of them held sway over tiny Israel, a nation it seemed that was forsaken by God forever.

A coming kingdom? A Messiah? Crazy talk! But some believed. Some waited. May their example inspire us, for we await the same mighty Messiah ourselves, and with Him, the same Golden Age the prophets predicted.

Luke 23:50-51 tells us of one Joseph from the city of Arimathea. Yes, he was the man who loaned his tomb to Jesus for a few days and nights. It is said of him that he was *waiting for the kingdom of God*. As are we. He will not be disappointed, nor shall we.

Yes, a Messiah was expected by some. We know not how many. And we know not how many variations there were on the theme. The woman at the well, in John 4, seemed to understand, in spite of her Samaritan tradition that honored only the books of Moses, that a Messiah would come one day and *tell us all things*. Gamaliel, Acts 5, gives advice to those who want to hurt the Christians. He reminds them that local men were always rising up, perhaps as potential deliverers, but that they came to nothing.

Israel, at least part of her, was looking for someone to come and set them free. A new Moses. Their exalted prince, David. An anointed one who would beat down the Romans and restore them to their prominence. There were Messianic movements that even tried to take things into their own hands. More than one of Jesus' disciples was recruited from that number.

So it was a happy time for Israel when a messenger appeared in the desert announcing a kingdom that was very near! He called it *the kingdom of heaven*, and he insisted that to be a part of this kingdom the people would have to turn their lives around. As a seal of their repentance, he symbolically washed them in the waters of baptism. Matthew records (3:5) that *Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the regions around the Jordan went out to him*. They repented, confessed, and were baptized.

So where was the promised kingdom? Where was the anointed king? Was this just another attempt by another charlatan? Show us! Jesus was to answer those questions by His appearance. Oh but please know that nothing He said, though difficult to understand, changed one jot or one tittle of the words of the prophets. Jesus expanded the definition of *kingdom*, to be sure. But He never canceled what His servants of old had said.

When One is God, He can define and fulfill, all at the same time. It is we who must have it one way or the other. Our minds don't grasp, and therefore our hearts don't believe.

13. Jesus: The King is among us!

Were the residents of first-century Israel a bit confused regarding this kingdom being called heavenly? Not only John the Baptist used this term, but following His temptation in the wilderness and His arrival in Galilee, Jesus began His preaching ministry with the same announcement:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand [Matthew 4:17].

Those who sat at His feet for several years, and His close disciples of all the ages, have been able to piece together, little by little, what He meant. It was to be a true kingdom, and He was to be a true king, and nothing in the prophets was to be denied, but the citizens of this kingdom would not be like citizens of any kingdom they had known.

Actually, if the people of God had listened before, they would have realized that it was these heavenly principles that God always wanted for His people. David the king was chosen over King Saul because he, David, was a man after God's own heart. That simple lesson could have gone a long way to educate Israel and let them know that God always honors heart-felt love for Himself. Jesus would make all of this crystal-clear in His three years of teaching. Then He will send His disciples out to look for more citizens like themselves. Only then can the kingdom long-prophesied, come to earth. The search is still on.

Still following Matthew (4:23), Jesus begins to spread this good news about a kingdom that is coming. His apostles will later be told to preach the same message. We read of a man who wanted to wait for his father to die and be buried before he would follow Jesus was told by the Master to go and preach *the kingdom of God*. That was Jesus' message then, and must be now.

The gospel of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. There is only one gospel, though some today want to divide it into two. The one gospel is the news of the Messiah who will lay down His life so that He can gather a people together and raise them to eternal honor with Himself.

He shall reign, and His people shall reign with Him. All because of Calvary. That's the good news. We should preach it all.

The sermon on the mount, Matthew 5-7. Kingdom people.

Look at the promises for those who have the right heart, the right spirit.

- *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *They will inherit the earth.*
- *They will be called sons of God.*

Christ's kingdom, we hear from many quarters, is a spiritual kingdom. True. A spiritual kingdom that will one day be gloriously physical, as God's sons and daughters inherit it on the earth, under King Jesus.

Jesus lets us know that there will be divisions in that kingdom, classes of people who were more faithful in their obedience than others (5:17-20). And that there are many who will not enter it at all.

Twice in the model prayer (6:9-13) the kingdom is invoked. In the first mention, we are taught to pray for the kingdom to come so that God's will will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven.

But wait, we are told that the kingdom is now, it is here. Why are we praying for it to come later unless there is a greater manifestation of that kingdom on the way?

I ask you, is God's will done on earth as in heaven today, after twenty-one centuries of praying this prayer? You say, yes, some. I believe that more than "some" is intended here! When Jesus comes there will be no abortion clinics, liquor stores, foolish music and drama, rape, murder. God's will will be done when the government is on Jesus' shoulders (Isaiah 9), and our prayers will be answered.

At the end of Matthew 6 is an admonition to seek first the kingdom. This is repeated in Luke 12 with the added promise that the Lord wants to give His kingdom to His people. Here are seemingly two uses of the word in one passage. Unless we know what that kingdom is, how can we seek it? Surely it involves the work of the Spirit in our lives now, but just as surely it includes our blessed hope, the good news (gospel) of the coming kingdom and the coming King.

The final usage of the term kingdom in this sermon is found in 7:21, a passage that we all know has to do with the future, not the present. Those who do the will of the Father will be allowed into the kingdom on that day. Oh yes, they were kingdom people. Oh yes, they had King Jesus ruling their lives, but now the government is set up, the King is on His throne, and these kingdom people receive a kingdom that has suddenly turned from being faith to being sight.

Those who have only had the external trappings of Christendom will be told to depart, with no allowance into the kingdom.

Some citizens of the kingdom.

Matthew 8:11-12. Here once and for all Jesus equates the promises of the prophets of an earthly reign under a Messiah, with the kingdom of heaven, letting us know that heaven was involved in the whole kingdom idea from the beginning!

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and some unnamed Gentiles are all gathered together in this kingdom. But *sons of the kingdom*, that is, natural-born Jews who fell away from the God of Israel and never had a heart for Him to begin with, are cast out.

11:11-12. Was John the Baptist a part of the kingdom? Based on what I just shared, we would of course have to say yes. Jesus was not comparing John – outside the kingdom – to the future church. Far be it. He calls him the *Elijah that was to come*, one that, greater than whom, there is none among men.

Jesus taught his disciples humility and hidden service. In the true kingdom of God, the one who is least among us is the one that God honors the most. Look at Jesus Himself. Humbled to a beating and a crucifixion. Seemingly weak and helpless. What could such a dying man do for the sins of the world? But the kingdom centers around this One, not John. Think of the martyrs and the hidden saints of all times. The least is the greatest in Emmanuel's Land.

Matthew 18:1-5. Jesus had to reorganize their thinking altogether by letting them know that simple ones who are as humble and innocent as a young child are the truly great ones in the kingdom! Conversion to Christ is by definition a humbling of one's self before God, an admission of one's nothingness before Him.

Matthew 19:23. Here, the rich are told that it will be difficult for them to enter the kingdom. The kingdom of God will be made up mostly of the poor and needy, those who can easily see their need of a Savior. Paul seconds this later when he looks around the church and declares that not many mighty, or noble or powerful have been called alongside Jesus in the church.

Matthew 21:31. One other group of future citizens of the kingdom are catalogued here, namely the tax collectors and harlots. The kingdom here is pictured as an entity that one can *enter*. A material physical place.

Mark 11:10. We certainly cannot leave out David in this talk of citizens of the coming kingdom. That was the expectation of the Jews who surrounded Jesus at his final entry into Jerusalem. *Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!* they shouted.

The kingdom is near and here.

The apostles are now commissioned (Matthew 10:7) to announce the nearness of the kingdom, then to prove its nearness by extraordinary signs from that kingdom (Luke 10:9). Healings, resurrections, exorcisms are to become common in first-century apostolic Israel. The King is here. His kingdom is near. It was obvious.

A revival was taking place. An awakening was occurring. So enlivened were the Israelites that they are described as “violently” coming into the kingdom (Matthew 11:12, Luke 16:16). Pressing in. Pushing their way into the rule of Christ as He demonstrates the power of God, the authority He has over everything earthly.

As Jesus says in Matthew 12:28, *If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the **kingdom of God** has come upon you.*

None of this negates the future kingdom which the prophets saw and which we will see. We are simply seeing the King at work, given a preview of coming attractions. What we see in the Gospels will seem small when compared to the glory of the kingdom when all sicknesses and their causes will be gone, when demons are forever cast out.

Mark 12:34. When a certain scribe answered properly Jesus’ question about the first commandment, Jesus was impressed, and was inspired to tell the man he was not far from the kingdom. Indeed, the kingdom’s king stood before him. The kingdom’s principles were in his heart.

Luke 17:20, 21 seems to be in conflict with the plethora of verses that talk of a spiritual yet future kingdom. For those who continue to tell us that the “kingdom is spiritual” not physical, this is home ground.

Consider. Jesus is plainly asked, When is the kingdom coming? But the question is from the Pharisees, not the disciples. When the disciples asked about His coming and the end of the world, He gave them a clear description of the lead-up and the actual visitation of His coming, and the kingdom that will follow. All of this is in Matthew 24 and 25, which we will cover soon.

Jesus was trying to drive home to the blind Pharisees that before they could even think about entering the kingdom of God (as in John 3 to Nicodemus) they would have to meet the king, recognize Him as the Messiah, fall at His feet and worship Him. So He responds, No need looking for some sign, no need staying up nights waiting. The kingdom is already here among you. And you are talking to the King.

Immediately He turns to His disciples and begins talking about the future, where the bulk of the kingdom experience will take place. He tells them He is going to suffer. He tells them He is then going away. He tells them to expect His coming as the lightning.

So which is it? The kingdom is here? Or the kingdom comes when the King returns? The Pharisees heard one message, the disciples heard the whole truth.

The kingdom in parables. Matthew.

These are the *mysteries of the kingdom*. They describe the lifestyle of a true citizen of the kingdom of heaven, whether Jewish elect or saved Gentiles. Kingdom people act like this. The kingdom works like this. Learn these things and you will start looking like subjects of the King of Kings.

No Millennium? Really?

In 13:3-9 we learn about the *word* of the kingdom. Some will hear it and go on to glory. Some will not.

In 13:24-30 Jesus teaches of the *enemy* of the kingdom and the final victory over him. The *then* nature of the kingdom is brought out in the interpretation given in 37-43.

13:31-32 tells how the kingdom starts small but develops into something universal.

13:33 tells the same story as the mustard seed but in the picture of leaven that causes wheat to expand.

13:44-46 directs disciples to forsake all in this life to be ready for the next.

13:47-50 is the dragnet parable that instructs us to be ready for the end of the age, proving yet again that the kingdom is not just an unseen and temporary expression of God's care for us.

13:52 is about the new and old aspects of the kingdom's history.

18:22-35 is the story of the unforgiving servant. The clear command to forgive is a part of the kingdom of heaven teaching. This is how heaven operates. Do the same.

20:1-16. The kingdom of heaven is once more projected into the future. The workers in the vineyard are given various rewards by the lord of the vineyard. Last will be first and first last. Kingdom now? Yes, but so as to qualify for kingdom later.

22:2-14. The kingdom is like a king who invited everyone to a feast for his son's wedding. Many are called. Few are chosen. Again, clear reference to future events and entrance or non-entrance into the coming kingdom.

25:1-13 is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The story is familiar but how often have we likened it to a future kingdom with a real King Who has the power to bring into or cast out of a kingdom?

25:14, the talents. Unprofitable servants are cast out. Profitable ones brought in. The kingdom has entrance requirements.

Jesus talked much of a kingdom. Its people. Its operations. Its entrance requirements. Its future status. But above all, its reality.

Peter and the keys to the kingdom.

Matthew 16:18-19. Two things happen in this short episode. There is a promise of a new entity, the church, the called-out ones. And there is the handing over of some keys to an already-existing entity, the kingdom. These must not be confused, and neither should be denied.

The church began on Pentecost after Jesus had gone to heaven. The kingdom had been around since David and before. The church is to be a new extension of the kingdom, its promotional unit, a place for melting together of Jew and Gentile in Christ. But without erasing the promises to Israel.

We have seen in the Gospels that the Patriarchs are already considered kingdom people. David is a kingdom person. The kingdom then takes a new form in the person of Jesus. Not a new kingdom, just an announcement that this kingdom is from heaven. Always was, actually.

The kingdom is to continue and Peter and his associates are to allow people in on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. But these that come in now will also be members of the new thing on the earth, a called-out group of mainly Gentiles, eventually will round out the purposes of God on earth.

Possessing “keys” to this kingdom can only mean the preaching of Christ and His teachings to members of the new assembly that will be called to join. Today God’s people are called the church but we must never forget that we are also in some way kingdom people, who will rule and reign with Christ one day.

The kingdom in the transfiguration.

Matthew 16:28, ... *there are some standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*

Wherever this statement is made in the Gospels, the Gospel writer goes on to tell of the event known as the transfiguration. Here are Moses and Elijah and Jesus in one glorious moment, with Peter, James, and John looking on.

So it was impressed on their mind and should be impressed on ours, that the kingdom of God is a very real domain, a domain which will one day be quite visible and touchable and include the saints of old as well as Jesus and His saints of the New Covenant. What they will all have in common is their submission to the kingship of Jesus.

Here is yet another view of the kingdom, making it untenable to keep proclaiming that the kingdom of God is “spiritual”, inward, invisible. So many facets to the coming kingdom!

This very physical side to the kingdom in the transfiguration can be borne out also in Matthew 21:43, where Jesus says that the kingdom is going to be ripped from the Jewish leaders of that day and given to a nation that will bear the proper fruit. He does not say the kingdom is finished, only that the keys of it are to be taken from them and given to someone else. Hence the Matthew 16 presentation of those keys to Peter.

Matthew 23:13 follows up on this idea by reminding the Pharisees and scribes that they had kept people from entering the true

kingdom because they, the Pharisees had not entered it themselves, and were not allowing others to enter it because they did not know where the door was. Jesus was that door and as they embark on a mission to destroy Jesus and His people, they are more than ever going to be keeping people from entering that door. So the transfer of ownership will be necessary.

The future kingdom.

Many passages make it very plain that this kingdom, though not of this world, is not simply a frame of mind.

The expectation of the Jews resurfaces in Luke 14:15, where one who is sitting at a meal with Jesus blurts out, *Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!* Without knowing it, he spoke of the coming Marriage Supper at the return of Jesus. Jesus responds with a story of persons who refuse an invitation to a great supper. He has servants being told in the story to go and find anyone who will come. The man's observation was confirmed, not denied! Blessed is anyone who is invited to this *literal* supper and answers the invitation!

Luke 19:11 informs us that some expected the kingdom to appear immediately, in their lifetime. Interesting, don't you think, that Jesus, who had told some Pharisees that the kingdom was already here, among them, tells these Judean citizens a parable that indicates it could be a long time before the kingdom comes.

In fact, in Luke 21:31, a parallel passage to Matthew 24 and Mark 13, Jesus specifically tells his disciples, who want to know about His coming and the end of the world, that they will see specific things happening before the kingdom is near again.

Luke 22:29 continues the future kingdom thread. Jesus tells the ones who have borne His trials with Him that He appoints to them a kingdom, just as the Father bestowed one on Him. He goes on to

He speaks of that same Supper theme, and even tells the apostles they will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel! How physical is that kingdom! And how cruel if He is just saying some figurative language that they cannot figure out. No, the kingdom is not just a spiritual vision. It's as real as the planet earth, where Jesus will reign.

Even the thief on the cross, who could read the sign over Jesus' head, and who was given grace to believe it, knew there was a real kingdom ruled over by a real Man, and that Man was on the next cross over. The kingdom is now. But the kingdom is yet to come.

Matthew 25:34. The King will invite His favorite ones to come into a kingdom that was *prepared from the foundation of the world*.

Matthew 26:29. At the institution of the *literal* Lord's Supper, Jesus talks about a time when He will *literally* drink *literal* wine with them in His Father's Kingdom. Let's not rob the beauty of this passage. The Communion service is a truly spiritual remembrance of the cross of Christ. But in the kingdom that is coming, a feast will take place, called the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Revelation.

The kingdom and the apostle John.

John's account of Jesus has Him speak the word kingdom in only two passages.

In John 3, Nicodemus is told He cannot see or enter the kingdom unless he is born again. Yes, a spiritual kingdom.

In John 18:36, in response to Pilate's queries about His kingdom, he states plainly that his kingdom is not of this world. Then He says it is not *from* this world. But He never says it does not exist. Nor does He deny that this same kingdom which exists in heaven now, will come to earth when He comes to earth.

So it has been since that day, that we who are kingdom people realize we are a kingdom in exile. Our King is real, His principles work in us, and we seek citizens of that kingdom every day.

But one day the exiled, hidden, subjects of the kingdom of God will be made manifest openly to the world at His appearing. No Pilate will question King Jesus then. No Sadducees will deny the resurrection then. No one of His true people will be in shock that He reigns from Jerusalem as King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords. They will know in that day that this was not just a high and lofty title, but a full description of the thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth.

14. The Kingdom in the early church.

Did the early church believe in a coming kingdom that one could see and touch? Did they believe in a spiritual kingdom available in one's heart and life now? Or did they believe in both? Let's see.

Kingdom in the history of Acts.

Jesus.

Luke tells us in the very first verses of Acts (1:1-3) exactly what Jesus was talking to His disciples about between His resurrection and ascension. One of those items was *things pertaining to the kingdom of God*.

This discussion evidently raised the question in their mind that had perhaps been burning throughout His ministry (1:6): *Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*

Good question, yes? He was for sure the awaited Messiah. The prophets had spoken of a literal kingdom that would be in David's line. What was Jesus waiting for? Let's see the kingdom again!

Note that Jesus did not squash their hopes! He did not deny that a physical kingdom was coming. He simply let them know (1:7-8) that it wasn't time yet and it wasn't necessary for them even to know the time.

Odd. They had asked Him about the end of things before and His answer was specific. Signs. Directions. Everything but the day and hour. Now He says, hold off on that awhile. You go preach the good news of the kingdom all over the earth. Get some citizens of that kingdom gathered together.

And so the book of Acts begins.

Peter, with his keys to the kingdom, opens the door to the Jews in Acts 2, and the Gentiles in Acts 10.

Philip preached *the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ* in Acts 8.

Paul preaches the gospel in the province called then Asia, exhorting the brothers there and telling them that it is *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. See that though the church was in full swing, people were being admitted also to the kingdom. It was not that the kingdom was entering them, not in this verse anyway.

It was that same kingdom of God message that Paul preached in Ephesus as that church was being formed (19:8).

In fact the book ends with Paul, now a prisoner, preaching the *kingdom of God and the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ* at his lodging near Rome.

This kingdom message began with John in the wilderness and now has continued up to and including Paul under house arrest.

What exactly was this kingdom message by now? Had it changed? Were the prophets ignored? What expectations did the apostles place in the ears of their hearers now?

We now move to the epistles.

Kingdom in the epistles of Paul.

Romans 14:17. The kingdom of God was a given in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. So it should not be surprising that Paul suddenly brings up the subject when talking about something else, namely the law of love when dealing with eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul claims that kingdom citizens do not demand their way in

this matter, but rather show compassion on one with a weaker conscience. For, says he, the kingdom we are a part of is not about what we eat and drink, but rather it is about bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

This is one of those internal messages about the kingdom that many will point to, and try to claim that internal is all there is. Truly, without the internal, no one will be admitted into the physical realm of the kingdom, but don't destroy that visible too quickly. I Corinthians is coming...

1 Corinthians 4:20. Another negative. The kingdom is *not* just talk. It is power. It is action. Paul was endued with true power from the Spirit as opposed to some of the men challenging him, who only had words. Kingdom people have kingdom power from king Jesus. There's a clear difference between that and the challengers.

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 takes us that other direction. Here Paul speaks of *inheriting* the kingdom. That's future. That's substance. And Paul says that a long list of evils will be excluded from the kingdom, as well as those who commit those evils. The kingdom is something with a door. Something with walls and buildings and whatever else God has prepared for His people. You will be excluded from that kingdom if the kingdom power is not inside of you. Galatians 5:21 says the same thing, as does Ephesians 5:5.

The Rosetta Stone of kingdom matters.

We pause in the middle of Paul's kingdom writings to share the verses that I believe resolve the whole issue of timing of the coming kingdom, coupled with Revelation 20 and a host of Old Testament verses that we have already covered.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, is speaking of resurrection. Some uninformed folks in Corinth were actually denying same, and Paul was here setting them straight. But in the process of speaking of

resurrections, he outlines the events that shall surely come to pass before it is all over:

1. Christ rises from the dead.
2. Christ's people rise from the dead [and reign with Him.]
3. Then the Kingdom – that visible kingdom we have traced all through Scripture – is delivered from Christ to the Father. Jesus shall have put an end to all rule. He will reign until all enemies are destroyed.
4. Death itself is destroyed.
5. Then God is all in all as the Son fully submits to the Father.

I have found these things by a simple but intense reading of the Scriptures. But I am not alone. I find that Bible scholar John MacArthur says the same thing. From the ESV MacArthur Study Bible, p. 1709, commenting on 15:24, "then comes the end":

This third aspect of the resurrection involves the restoration of the earth to the rule of Christ, the rightful King... in the culmination of the world's history, after Christ has taken over the restored world for His Father and reigned for 1,000 years, all things will be returned to the way they were designed by God to be in the sinless glory of the new heavens and new earth... during the Millennium, under Christ's rule, rebelliousness will still exist and Christ will have to rule them with a rod of iron...

We will finish those thoughts when we come to John's Revelation. But Paul sets up the case for a transitional time. Yes, a "Golden Age" it will be, but sinful men will still try their tricks. They will be governed properly, justice will abound, but enemies will have to be dealt with during that time.

Then the end. Of the Millennium. New Heavens. New Earth.

In this same chapter, verse 50, Paul tells us that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. We knew that, yes? "You must be born again." And those who are born again will receive a new body with

which to inherit that kingdom. A body like we have now but wildly different also. Consider Jesus' glorified body. Our body is corruptible now but incorruptible then.

Now, lest we get carried away too quickly to that new body and future kingdom, Paul once more brings us back to the earth by the use of a particular tense in Colossians 1:13. He says there that God has conveyed us [already] into the kingdom of His dear Son. Yes, as I have said before, we are kingdom people now, but the fulness of that kingdom is still ahead.

2 Timothy 4:1, though, brings us quickly back to the future. Father and Son are going to judge the living and the dead *at His appearing and kingdom*. He appears. He sets up His kingdom.

Same chapter, verse 18: The Lord will preserve Paul *for His heavenly kingdom*. Clearly future. Clearly "material".

Kingdom in other epistles.

Hebrews 12:28. God shook the earth at the giving of the law. He will shake it again. But *we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken*.

I once visited a Sunday School class taught by one of the amillennial persuasion. He invited the class to research for homework the book of Hebrews, to see if they could find a future sacrificial system. The more energetic were invited to scour the entire New Testament for such a topic.

It would be difficult indeed to find such a thing in Hebrews, where the author is attempting to free people from dependence on the Old Covenant. What the teacher failed to do is direct his students to the prophets.

Now, the prophets are found in your “Old Testament.” But they are not Mosaic in character. They do not describe the old law, but simply tell of judgments and future glories of Messiah. They are so very valuable to the child of God and informative in this area of the kingdom. Why not look there?

It's like saying, this week, read the book of Jude and see if you can find anything there about a post-tribulation rapture. No, you won't find anything about any rapture in Jude.

James 2:5. God has promised a kingdom to those who love Him. A promise involves a future event. Yes, we have the kingdom now, but the fullness is later. Promise.

2 Peter 1:11. Be very sure of your salvation. Don't stumble. That's how you will be allowed to enter *the everlasting kingdom of our Lord*. Future. Full. Visible.

Chapter 3 verse 8 in Peter's second epistle is often used to muddy the waters regarding the thousand-year reign. Peter says that *with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years*. It's a quote from Psalm 90:4.

The key phrase is *with the Lord*. The key word is *as*. With humans like us, one day is one day and a thousand years is a thousand years. With the Lord, Who does not live in a limited time realm, a thousand earth-years are as easily passed through as one day.

Interesting to me is that Peter would use this Psalm at all, and quote this very number at all. In using the number one thousand, he lines up with his good friend John in the Revelation, who used the same year, in a literal way, six times, to define the period of the coming kingdom!

The kingdom in Revelation.

As in his gospel, one will not find the word “kingdom” referring to the kingdom of God, very often in the final book of the Bible. But the kingdom is there, for sure!

1:9 speaks of the kingdom and patience of Jesus.

12:10 tells us that when the dragon is cast out, the kingdom of our God comes.

11:15 is the grand announcement that all *the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. And He shall reign forever.*

Here is indeed Millennial thought. It is not that Jesus comes and destroys the world and starts over. It is that Jesus comes and takes over the government of the world and that government rests on His shoulder. Paul tells us how that transitions later into an eternal reign with the Father (1 Corinthians 15, above).

Judgments fall on the nations throughout Revelation, the Babylonian world system and/or church, falls, and then His coming, graphically portrayed in

Chapter 19.

Verses 11-13, a description of the coming King. Awesome. Powerful True. Not the meek Savior Who gave His life thousands of years before. He is ready now to make war.

Verse 14. He is accompanied by saints, made righteous by Him.

Verse 15. He strikes the nations. Defeats them quickly. Pours out the wrath of God on all His enemies. And they are many.

Verse 15. He begins His rule with them, as predicted in Daniel and so many other places.

Verse 16. He is as in chapter 11, King of Kings, Lord of Lords.

Verse 20. He makes short work of the antichrist and his assistant and throws them into the lake of fire.

Agreed? Now watch carefully. We are in that same chapter with which we began this study. Revelation 20. Keep up the chronology. No need to change gears here. The flow of history continues.

Chapter 20.

verses 1-3, Satan is going to be used later for God's purposes. For now, he is to be put out of commission for one thousand years.

Verse 4-6. Satan out of the way, Jesus in charge, those who rise in the first resurrection *live and reign with Christ* for that same thousand years.

Oh, and did you notice? Verse 6 says that the resurrected saints will be *priests of God and Christ*. Yes, there is a priesthood now. We understand a little of how that works. A priesthood of all believers. I wonder what a priesthood will do during the millennial reign?

That is the Millennium. Jesus one by one defeats His enemies, rules harshly, allows nothing evil on His planet.

Verses 7-10. But evil still lurks, and as one final push against it, Christ defeats a rebellion raised up by a suddenly freed Devil, and seals his fate in that same lake of fire for eternal torment.

20:11. *Then* the heaven and earth flee away! *Then* will come the new heavens and new earth. Not until then. This revelation was not given to Peter or even Jesus when He was here. This is the final

piece of the puzzle. An intermediate kingdom to deal with God's final enemies via God's chosen Man, the Man Christ Jesus.

20:13. Death itself is destroyed. Eternity begins without sin, death, anything evil at all. Chapter 20 is so critical to the final chronology and therefore is attacked the most by those who like rearranging things for their own purposes.

15. The Kingdom in the new earth.

Following the expanded description of the tribulation and a brief description of the coming kingdom, there are only two chapters left in the Bible. Of those two, the second one contains only five verses telling of the final state of God's kingdom.

We are faced with a puzzling question as we approach this state of things. Why, after a one-thousand-year rule with His saints, does God decide to destroy everything and start over? Now the earth is perfected, now death is defeated. Certainly now we can enjoy the planet.

Consider our own transformation though. Though we were to die in perfect health and perfect relationship with God, these old bodies have been tainted, corrupted. They need to be renewed. At the first resurrection this will happen.

During the millennial reign, as wonderful as it will be, there will still be sin and sinners. Death will be allowed until the last battle with Satan. Disobedience and defiance will be a part of even this new world under Jesus' control. The earth is tainted.

God will remove His people, give them over to the Father (per 1 Corinthians 15), and annihilate this planet once and for all. Some call it the "uncreation."

That final day of the Lord will involve the heavens passing away *with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat [2 Peter 3:10, 12].*

Peter, as Jesus in His incarnation, does not see the thousand years as does John, and seems to go directly to the final destruction from our present status. He is possibly using Psalm 102:25-26 as a

No Millennium? Really?

reference, and adding some words he is hearing from the Spirit at that time. It is a true revelation, but not timed as John times the same event, after the thousand years (Revelation 20:11).

Why does John see the Bride of Christ entering the new earth? Did they not enter one thousand years earlier?

Consider: First the reign with Christ. Then the earth is destroyed and the people of God are taken to heaven while the new earth is created. Then they come back again and inherit the new earth.

Are there differences between the millennial period and the post-millennial period? Some. And they are significant. For example,

- No more death. That was defeated during the reign.
- No more Temple. Ezekiel's millennial temple, the same house as seen by Isaiah, will no longer be needed. The Lord is now the temple.
- No more sun and moon. The Lamb is the light.
- The gates are not shut. No more enemies.
- No more curse. Absolutely no reminders of that last planet's corruptions.
- No sorrow, no crying, no tears. All things new.
- No night.

A description of the Bride, the new City, the nations that shall still be giving glory to God, the tree of life, and then the book ends with severe warnings, and an invitation for us to come to Jesus, and Jesus to come to us.

No more information? No more. We will have one thousand years to find everything we need to know about that eternal state. It has not entered into our minds, nor can it, the things God has prepared for those who love Him. Not yet.

16. History of millennial thought.

The Scriptures and the kingdom. Bright as day.

Thus do the Scriptures speak volumes about a coming kingdom. And John tells us exactly how that kingdom fits into the chronology. How could this be made clearer, I wonder? What was it that brought this teaching down, to be replaced by a no-kingdom or kingdom-now or eternal-only or spiritual-kingdom-only doctrine? Did everyone after the apostles abandon the literal Scriptures? Let's look at a little history.

But to whom should we appeal when looking for foundational truths? I believe the apostles and prophets, when taken literally, can only be called *Pre-Millennial*, that is, they believed in a one-thousand-year reign of Christ and His people on earth following the return of Christ to that earth.

Are there other teachers that have more authority, that are more trustworthy, that speak with one voice? No. The rest of the teaching on the millennium is garbled. Whether the church fathers that followed the apostles, *the* church father himself -Augustine, the Roman system that led into the Dark Ages, the reformers, or well-known teachers that have appeared sense: they all have their own take on the future kingdom. There is no one to build upon.

That's not to say there were no voices at all after the apostles that sounded a lot like the prophets and apostolic writers. Two stand out especially.

Justin Martyr is among the most well known of the early church fathers. He was born around 100 A.D., not long after the death of the last apostle, John. His life is legendary and exemplary, but I quickly go to the comments he has made on the subject at hand. This is from chapter 80 of his *Dialogue with Trypho*:

I and others who are right-minded Christians on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a

thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built... For Isaiah spoke in that manner concerning this period of a thousand years.

Even at this early time, many had departed from this belief, admits Justin...

and many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.

Irenaeus was born when Justin was about 30, and lived into the third century. He eventually became the bishop of Lyon, and was outspoken in his beliefs about the Millennium. His fifth book of *Against Heresies* contains this Millennial argument, based on God's promise to Abraham:

The promise remains steadfast... God promised him the inheritance of the land. Yet, Abraham did not receive it during all the time of his journey there. Accordingly, it must be that Abraham, together with his seed (that is, those who fear God and believe in Him), will receive it at the resurrection of the just.

In another place the reference is to Jacob:

[the blessing to Jacob] belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom when the righteous will bear rule, after their rising from the dead. It is also the time when the creation will bear fruit with an abundance of all kinds of food, having been renovated and set free... And all of the animals will feed on the vegetation of the earth... and they will be in perfect submission to man. And these things are borne witness to in the fourth book of the writings of Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp.

With Papias (60-130 A.D.) and Polycarp (69-155 A.D.) being added to believers in this doctrine, we have named some of the most influential of the early church leaders, pre-millennialists all.

There were others, in the early days, and even later. But the trend was changing.

A contemporary of Justin and Irenaeus (85-160 A.D.) was one **Marcion**. This man was opposed to using the entire Old Testament

(there go the prophecies!) and most of the New also. He was devoted to the apostle Paul, yet abandoned the teaching of the personal return of Christ. He did not believe in a real incarnation, so there could not be a second coming!

He obviously had no use for a Millennial reign. Marcion was the church's first great heretic, yet many followed him, and latched on to his system, which included the amillennial position.

Origen. The opposition to the premillennial kingdom rose in the third century, and among generally accepted men of the church, Origen was the first to come against the one thousand years. Origen's approach to the matter was allegorical, symbolic. Not only the millennium, but the whole idea of a physical second coming was done away with in Origen. In his *Commentary on Matthew* he taught that

Christ's return signifies His disclosure of Himself and His deity to all humanity in such a way that all might partake of His glory to the degree that each individual's actions warrant.

This belief in a non-literal millennium, or no millennium at all, gained wider acceptance after the days of Constantine, an age that coincides with the ever-growing influence of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.).

Augustine's most famous work was the *City of God*. He is quoted in Book XX, chapter 7, as saying:

Now the thousand years may be understood in two ways, so far as it occurs to me: either these things happen in the sixth thousand of years or sixth millennium (the latter part of which is now passing)...

This was his original view, in keeping with many Biblical literalists. There would be six thousand years of purely human history, followed by a golden age of one thousand years. But his faith in

such a future began to waiver, perhaps because of the influences of others. Later he is quoted in a different vein,

...the kingdom of God (was) already manifest in the Church...the age between Pentecost and the return of Christ was the very millennium itself, marked by the ever-increasing influence of the church in overturning evil...

Here is the blending of church and Israel, the present age with the Bible's future age. This formula has been tried by others, but somehow it doesn't fit...

Medieval Church and the Millennium.

Origen and Augustine and many of like mind had their way in the ever-evolving description of the kingdom, until that description, like many other church teachings, was buried in the vast wasteland we call the Dark Ages. Dark because the light of God's Word was hidden by priest and Pope and scholar. The church was entering its serious apostasy and the millennial question was put on hold. Most were not concerned about it anyway.

The Reformers and the Millennium.

I will not visit each of the godly men who dared come out of, or be put out of, the church of Rome. We love them all, we honor them all. Names like Wycliffe, Tyndale, Huss, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli... where would we be without them?

But the reformers share one very difficult circumstance: they all had the same mother. Mother Church was a cruel mom, and a false one, and a mother whose beliefs were seemingly set in stone. The heroes of the faith came as far from her as they dared. But they did not come far enough, in my opinion.

As with the church fathers, you will find a variety of competing beliefs among the reformers. They struggled over the communion service, the form and reason for baptism, and more. They were not in agreement with each other on a number of issues. Some practices and beliefs were simply taken from Rome as a given. To this day, “reformed” can mean any number of things, and the reformed churches will often admit that they themselves are in need of reforming.

One of the teachings that came out of Rome with those leaving her was the amillennial doctrine that went back to Augustine and earlier church fathers. It was not contested for some time. But eventually men arose who discovered something that hadn’t been noticed before: the number one thousand.

Eventually, in the 1700’s and 1800’s the light of a premillennial coming of Christ followed by the kingdom promised by all the prophets, began to shine more brightly in the church.

Modern thoughts about the millennium.

Though there are those who want to tell us that premillennialism *began* in these later centuries we can easily see now that actually it *re-surfaced*, after having been buried with other treasures for centuries inside a Bible that was largely ignored by the masses, and interpreted only by the elite of Rome.

So in short, premillennial beliefs flourished in the first century, and largely in the second. Their revival occurred in the nineteenth century, only to be challenged more recently by a growing revival of reformed thought. The pendulum is swinging away from the literal millennium in our day, as reformed churches continue to hang on to the teaching they inherited from Mother Rome, and pressure fellow believers in other communions to drop the argument altogether for the sake of unity.

No Millennium? Really?

One denomination I know of that used to be strictly premillennial, the Evangelical Free Church, has taken the very word *premillennial* out of its description of the coming King.

We don't want to offend, they say. This feeling of cooperation goes all the way back to Justin Martyr, who, as we quoted above, believed there were good people who believed amillennialism. Therefore let's be loving.

Truly there are good people. But is our faith in the literal Scripture so weak that we must keep making accommodations for those who simply can't believe it?

This ebb and flow of doctrinal positions is true about the events of Genesis 1-11, the gifts of the Spirit, the doctrines of grace, eternal judgment, probably every Biblical position there is. How far will we go to appease people among us who won't accept Scripture as it is written?

Perhaps a look at the "science" of hermeneutics will help. But then again...

17. About hermeneutics.

A quick look on the internet at this topic will reveal that here also is no abiding city for the one desiring to know the truth of Scripture. Many and varied are the approaches to this “science” of interpretation. And each list you will find pretends to be the inspired way of getting at God’s truth. I’ll quote a few of the items on the lists, and apply them to this present study.

But remember. Hermeneutics is a totally human science, if it can be called a science at all. It is clever men defining how we must interpret the Scriptures, based on their own conclusions about a host of doctrines. Some lists have four items, some five or six, others ten or more. And as one might expect, they do not all agree with one another.

Here are some hermeneutical principles. I should say, suggestions. Gathered from here and there...

1. Interpret the Bible literally. *Except* [watch out when you see this word!] when the text is obviously symbolic. [The key word here is *obviously* . Obviously to whom? People interpret *obviously* in different ways. So now we must *interpret our means of interpretation!*]

In this report I have given on the Kingdom of God, I have indeed interpreted the Bible literally. I was especially literal when quoting *numbers* , such as *one thousand*.

2. Never “spiritualize” the text or find “hidden” meanings.

Total agreement here. The amillennialist is forced to explain away all the specific prophecies about the coming kingdom. Stretching and mangling texts is the only way of avoiding the conclusion that a one-thousand-year reign is coming.

The charismatic strain of the church and the reformed are in surprising harmony here. When one spiritualizes a text, it can mean whatever one wants it to mean.

3. Context is king! Look at the verses before and after the ones you are examining.

Indeed! As in Revelation 20 where the thousand years are mentioned. The context here is the return of Christ, and a clear chronology of the events of that period is spelled out.

4. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.

Yes. There is a preponderance of evidence for a literal material kingdom that will be set up when Jesus returns. When there is a stray verse here and there that seems to say otherwise, let that bulk of evidence speak to the single verse.

5. Scripture does not contradict Scripture.

The fact that the coming kingdom is literal and physical does not contradict the fact that it is also spiritual and internal.

6. We may understand what a passage means only when we approach it from the author's perspective.

Here I suspect one of those man-made rules made to push a particular agenda. The human author may indeed have a particular perspective. But the Holy Spirit Who gave us the Scriptures through that author is the One Whose perspective we seek.

You see here how hermeneutical principles are only as reliable as the creator of the hermeneutical principle, and thus not a valid way to approach Scripture.

There are others. Like, read from the text, not into it. Trust the clarity of Scripture. Recognize literal and figurative. Our own personal interpretations may be wrong, etc. Study the history of a doctrine in the history of the church, and so on and on...

Interpretation of Scripture is not necessarily an easy thing. I do not mean to make light of how we approach the Bible. Learned men have found ways to obtain the most accurate views. But learned men are flawed and prejudiced just like the rest of us.

I believe that a person full of the Holy Ghost who desires to know the truth of Scripture will little by little know it. There are some Biblical principles of "hermeneutics" that can be trusted:

1. John 7:17. *If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. [Jesus]*

That is, You must desire to know and understand.

2. 1 John 2:27. *The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. [John]*

That is, The Holy Spirit will teach you.

3. Psalm 119:10, 15,18 and many other verses in this Psalm. The Psalmist asks God to teach him, to open his eyes, to make him walk in God's path, to give him understanding.

This combines 1 and 2. Desire first to know the truth. Call on God to guide you into that truth.

And why am I sure that men's principles are not the answer and God's principles are? In the very case of the writing of this book, I am aware of people, and so are you, that slavishly – they believe – follow the rules of hermeneutics, and promote those rules to others, but who come up with totally different interpretations of Scripture. Though I agree with most of their rules, I have found the premillennial position and they have not.

So much with men's guidance. I believe the words of Jesus and John and the Psalmist will suffice *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ. [Ephesians 4:13-15]*

This all takes practice. I am told that men at the FBI who are trained in sniffing out counterfeit money must above all study the *real* and *true* bills over and over. Then when they see a false bill they know immediately what they have found.

Desire to know. Then study the Word over and over and eventually you will know when you are hearing false teaching about any Biblical topic. It is such processing over many years that has given rise to the book you are now reading.

Conclusion: Your Kingdom come!

So there you have it. I have traced the concept of kingdom through Moses, the Psalms, Jewish history, the prophets, the words of Jesus, the teachings of the apostles. God's desire for and plan for a kingdom on earth where He will reign supreme, is everywhere. The very timing of it is set. The descriptions are clear. The need is real.

I have drawn a small sketch also of how men turned away from this view early in church history, due to their inability to believe the Scriptures as they are written, in my opinion.

I have shown, I believe, the weakness of trusting in church fathers, reformers, great preachers, hermeneutical principles. I have pointed us rather to the Spirit of God and a dedicated searching of Scripture for the answers to such issues.

May the love of the kingdom rise in your hearts as you continue your own quest for the truth of God's Word.

Lord, Your kingdom come! Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven! Not just among those You are presently governing, but in all the earth may Your Name be glorified. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

ABOUT the AUTHOR

Bob Faulkner is a long-time student of the Bible, ordained to the Christian ministry in 1967. He currently serves as a Bible teacher in his local church, and hosts a website known as *Hackberry House*, where you can find over 3,300 audios, a blog, and a series of PDF's that equal the books he has written. Those books are available as this one, at amazon.com. (6-14-22)

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