

# REVELATION 1:5-7

## WORKS OF THE MESSIAH

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## **Introduction**

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Behold He is coming with clouds, and every will see Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. (Rev. 1:4-7)

The opening chapter of Revelation has much to say about the Lord Jesus, and it is an introduction and preparation for the rest of the book. It is as if God is saying to us, “Look carefully at My Son, see Him as He truly is, know Him and honour Him; He is the Alpha and Omega and all things are in His hands. Before you try to understand the things that are written here, be sure you know Him in truth, and be sure that He is truly Lord of your life.” The implication is here, in Revelation chapter 1, that true and deep understanding and insight into all that is written in Revelation depends on knowing Jesus, and in knowing Him, living in submissive trust and obedience to Him. Such deep, spiritual insight cannot be entrusted to the intellectually wise but cold mind, but only to those whose hearts are filled with genuine, loyal, deep and pure love for the One who loved them and gave Himself for them. It should be no surprise then, to see that God committed such precious revelation to the Apostle John, the man who, of all the apostles, had the deepest love for Jesus, who leant on the breast of Jesus, whose own heart was filled with an almost inexpressible wonder that he had known Jesus in the flesh, and who now knowing fellowship with Him in the spirit, longed for others to enter into, and enjoy, as he did, wonderful, divine fellowship with the Father and Son (see 1Jn. 1:1-4).

So we are given a glorious sight of our Saviour, aspects of His work (vv. 5-7), and of His character (vv. 12-16) are presented for us to meditate upon, we are drawn deeper in our knowledge and understanding of Him, and therefore, as so wonderfully expressed in Wesley’s hymn Love Divine, we also ought to be “lost in wonder, love and praise” for Him who first loved us. It is from that place of love and wonder, that the Holy Spirit will lead the sincere

student of the Scriptures to greater depths of knowledge and understanding of the workings of the kingdom of God.

Much of the symbolism of Revelation is taken from the Old Testament, and we find that Jesus is presented as the Messiah,<sup>1</sup> the One who fulfils the Messianic prophecies. We see Him as the eternally existent Son of God, the Alpha and Omega who rules over history, we see Him as the Lamb slain, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star; and as the all conquering Messiah who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, and ultimately dwell among His people in the new heaven and earth. All these images are rooted in Old Testament, Messianic prophecy.

The content of the following studies is based on Rev. 1:5-7, each of seven chapters presenting a study and discussion on one of seven aspects of the Messiah's work, and showing how such works fulfil Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah.

With the Lord's help, may we be led to a deeper understanding of the Messiah, and of the work He accomplished on behalf of the lost souls of our world; and so like the Apostle John, may we too, learn to love Him with deep and indescribable love.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout, the Hebrew, "Messiah" and the Greek, "Christ" are used interchangeably, both words having the same meaning, i.e. anointed.

## Chapter 1

### The Faithful Witness

Incline your ear to Me, and come to Me. Hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. (Isa. 55:3,4)<sup>2</sup>

In his gospel John wrote that while no one has seen God at any time, Jesus would declare Him (Jn. 1:18); the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person (Heb. 1:3); in Revelation John tells us that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness; Jesus talking to Pilate said, "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:37). It is an essential aspect of Jesus' Messianic ministry that He was sent to the earth to bear witness to the truth about God and His kingdom, and to explain the implications of such truth for the people of this world.

#### **Witness**

What is a witness? Simply put, it is someone who provides evidence, or gives testimony to settle a matter that may be deemed contestable. In human terms, we can easily understand the use of witnesses in a court of law. A man is accused of a crime, but protests his innocence, the court must decide if the man is innocent or guilty, witnesses are called by the lawyers to support their case for his acquittal or punishment. The witnesses are cross-examined on the basis of the evidence they present, and the jury and the judge make their decisions based on that evidence.

In the patriarchal period of the Old Testament, witnesses were often called to provide testimony to agreements made between men, sometimes those witnesses were inanimate

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<sup>2</sup> Mentions of David in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament often carry a Messianic theme. These verses of Isaiah show that the Messiah is to be a witness to the people on behalf of God.

objects such as a heap of stones, or animals, sometimes God was called upon to be a witness (cf. Gen. 21:22ff; 31:43ff). It was important then, as it is now, that where there remained the possibility of doubt or subsequent controversy over a crucial matter, irrefutable evidence could be provided to settle any disagreement.

The law made the bearing of false witness a punishable sin (Deut. 5:20; 19:18,19), which shows God's deep disapproval of lies and dishonest testimony (those who love and practice lies are numbered among those who have no part in the heavenly city, Rev. 22:15).

In Scriptural and spiritual terms the contestable matters concern God and His kingdom; questions are raised by the human race as to whether God exists, and if so which of the many gods presented are true? Are there really such places as heaven and hell? Is it true that human beings have an eternal soul? etc., etc. The human race has wrestled with such questions since it lost its relationship with the true God through Adam's fall. God however, is very gracious, not desiring humankind to be lost forever in a sea of doubt and confusion, He has given true witnesses and provided the evidence we need to be assured of His existence.

### **Creation, God's Witness**

The first witness we are confronted with is creation: Psalm 19:1 tells us, "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament shows His handiwork," and Paul contending with the idolators at Lystra stated that God, "did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). The creation itself testifies to the existence of God, it is His witness, and it is tragic how men have attempted to suppress that witness and deny it's evidence, trying to explain it away with the lie of evolution.

Romans 1:20 tells us that the invisible God is so clearly seen in His creation that people are without excuse. Paul goes on to show that when that revelation of God's being is intentionally denied, thoughts become futile and hearts are darkened; there follows a sure slide down into ever deeper and fouler sin and immorality, men and women given over to vile passions, commit every form of wickedness, and eventually become unloving, unforgiving and unmerciful (Rom. 1:20-32). Where there is no acknowledgement of the Creator God, there is no accountability for actions, no corresponding boundaries on behaviour, no understanding of right and wrong, and no sense of self-worth or respect for others. There is a sad loss of human dignity as the understanding of the high place of humanity in God's creation is lost, and instead of believing life to be a precious gift from God, life becomes a throw-away commodity of little value, the consequences of which are very plain to be seen in the world today.

## **Israel, God's Witness**

Another witness God has given is the nation of Israel, Isaiah records God's words to Israel:

“You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no saviour. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “that I am God.” (Isa. 43:10-12).

Israel was called by God to be His covenant people, and as they lived their lives under the terms of the covenant they would present His case, and give the evidence that the LORD was the true and only God. The terms of the covenant ensured that Israel would be God's witnesses, either by blessing them when they were obedient, or by cursing them when they were disobedient. Moses, on completing the Book of the Law, placed it besides the ark of the covenant, “that it may be a witness against you” (Deut. 31:29), the words contained within it being proof of the covenant that God made with Israel. The subsequent periods of blessing and cursing that came upon Israel are proof of the reality, power and infallible word of their God. Israel today maintains its position as God's witness, after nearly 2,000 years absent from their land, the Jews have returned, and today are an established nation in the land promised to them by their God, thereby testifying to the truth of God's ancient promises.

In the wilderness Israel built the Tabernacle of Testimony which contained the Ark of Testimony (Ex. 25:10ff), and in the ark were placed the Tablets of Testimony (Ex. 31:18), these things being signs and evidence that God had met with His chosen people, and that He was present among them. When the work of building the tabernacle was finished according to the pattern, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:30); God manifested His presence and made known the reality of His being.

Throughout the history of the Old Testament we see God revealing Himself to Israel through His acts: delivering them from Egypt and bringing them into the land of Canaan; miraculously defeating their enemies when they were walking with Him in righteousness; giving them over to their enemies when they were in rebellion; taking them away to Babylon in His wrath and restoring them to the land of Israel at the appointed time. All these things give evidence that He is truly God.

Through the written and spoken prophetic word God gave promises, some of which were fulfilled before their eyes during their lifetimes, some which are still yet to be fulfilled. Some of the most important prophecies concern the Messiah, many were fulfilled by Jesus'

arrival on earth and in His ministry which followed. Jesus often referred to such prophetic Scriptures, citing them as evidence (Jn. 5:39,46), they are proof of the existence of the God of Israel - for who else could declare such things with such accuracy long before they came to pass (Isa. 48:3-8).

The LORD gave comprehensive evidence through the nation of Israel that He is truly God and there is no other. But Israel is not His best witness, that position would, in the fullness of time, be taken by Jesus the Messiah.

### **Jesus, the Faithful Witness**

In John 18:37, Jesus stated that He came to earth to bear witness to the truth. That witness which He fulfilled faithfully and perfectly, provides evidence; the testimony of His life on earth, in both word and deed, giving proof: to the existence of God (Jn. 1:18; Heb. 1:3); to spiritual realities of the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:11,12; 31,32); and to the evil of the world (Jn. 7:7). That testimony given so that lost souls may believe and be saved, and enter into eternal life (Jn. 3:36). Like many a good witness Jesus found His testimony to truth was not well received by those who stood to be condemned by it, and so He was and is rejected by many, “the world hates Me,” He said, “because I testify of it that its works are evil” (Jn. 7:7).

Jesus said many things about Himself and the kingdom of God which are not easily accepted by the human mind, and cannot be ascertained by human intellect, and so the accusation was thrown at him by the Pharisees, “You bear witness of Yourself, Your witness is not true” (Jn. 8:11). The Pharisees made reference to an aspect of the law stated in Deuteronomy 19:15, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses a matter would be established. However, Jesus could provide ample evidence to back up His claims, and in John chapter 5, in acknowledgement of the validity of the law of witnesses, He presents 4 witnesses of his own:

1. John the Baptist (Jn. 5:33): He came to bear witness of the true Light (Jn. 1:7-9); he bore witness to seeing the Spirit descend on Jesus, which gave him confirmation of the things God had shown him previously. John could say with great confidence, “I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God” (Jn. 1:32-34).
2. His works (Jn. 5:36): Jesus did many miraculous works, the like of which if written in books the world could not contain (Jn. 21:25): healing the sick, deliverance from demons, calming the storms, etc. Of such great works Nicodemus could say, “no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn. 3:2); likewise, the healed blind man could say, “If this Man were not from God He could do nothing” (Jn. 9:33). Jesus faithfully did all that the Father asked of Him, miraculous works that ought to have convinced all who



saw or heard of them that He had been sent from heaven by the Father, and that He was indeed the Son of God. These works were done in the world that, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, people might believe and receive eternal life (Jn. 10:25; 35). It is a sad commentary on the human condition that many refused the evidence, and could not believe in Jesus, but heartening too to see there were believers, convinced by His signs, who did indeed believe because of them (Jn. 10:41,42).

3. The Father (Jn. 5:37): Jesus said the Father who sent Him, testified of Him, and we have the record of the Father's audible voice giving approval, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11). Peter, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, announced that Jesus was attested by God by miracles, wonders and signs (Acts 2:22); and Jesus had great assurance and awareness Himself of His unity with the Father, and of the Father's presence with Him as He went about doing those things that pleased the Father. Jesus, in faithfully doing all that the Father asked of Him; in faithfully declaring truths of His Father's kingdom; and in being the express image of His Father, could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:8-11). Jesus lived His life on earth in such faithful obedience to His Father's will, and in such close communion with His Father that they both bore witness to one another, and when Jesus died, the Father gave powerful testimony and evidence to the truth of all that Jesus had said by raising Him from the dead (Jn. 10:17,18; Acts 2:22-24).
4. Scripture (Jn. 5:39, 46): Many Old Testament Scriptures point prophetically to Jesus and His ministry on earth as the Messiah. Many of them were fulfilled by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and some still await fulfilment. Matthew in his gospel mentions ten of these Messianic prophecies and highlights Jesus' fulfilment of them.<sup>3</sup> There is a tremendous power in these scriptures, which in having been declared hundreds, even thousands of years before their fulfilment, testify to truth, to the fact of God's existence and as a guarantee of His word. Peter gives testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit inspired prophetic Scriptures, having been an eyewitness to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, he can say that, "the prophetic voice was confirmed," and that it is like a "light shining in a dark place" (2Pet. 1:16-21), with such compelling evidence before us he exhorts us to, "take heed." The Messianic prophecies are a wonderful tool for understanding the Messianic ministry of Jesus, and can be used evangelistically to prove that He is the Messiah - as Apollos was very adept at doing (Acts 18:28); Jesus pointed to them as a convincing witness to Himself.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For Matthew's use of Messianic prophecy in his gospel see his ten "formula quotations": 1:22-23; 2:5,6; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 21:4,5; 27:9,10

<sup>4</sup> See appendix for a list of Messianic prophecies.

It was Jesus' faithful service to His Father while here on earth that gave His testimony and that of His witnesses their compelling power. If Jesus had failed to do His Father's will, He would have lost the Father's seal of approval, and His works would not have been possible. Failure to live in such a way as to fulfil the Messianic prophecies would have invalidated the prophetic word of God, and brought disrepute to the Scriptures. Anything less than complete obedience to His Father's will, and eternal life would not be offered in Jesus' name to the sinners of this world. Without the obedience which took Him to the cross, there would not be the greatest evidence of all that Jesus is the Son of God who came to save us from our sins - His resurrection from the dead (Acts 3:33).

### **Believers' Witness**

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. (Lk. 24:46-48)

After His resurrection Jesus told His disciples that he was sending them in the same way as His Father sent Him (Jn. 20:21), and as Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, so His disciples are called to testify to truth. Their testimony is to Jesus, to the facts and significance of His death and resurrection, and to the realities of the kingdom of God. The disciple's task is not an easy one, the world doubts and throws mockery on his testimony, where is the proof they ask, what evidence can you show that the things you believe are true?

The scriptural principle of a matter being established by two or three witnesses remains valid (cf. 2Cor. 13:1), and the disciple has at his disposal certain items of evidence to present to an unbelieving world:

- The assurance of eternal life gives freedom from the fear of death, the believer living life with the peace and quiet assurance that this brings, testifies to the world of the reality of such belief (1Jn. 5:11).
- The disciple's acts of faith in obeying all that the Lord calls him to do testify to his belief in God. Great examples are supplied in Hebrews chapter 11 of those who disdained worldly wisdom and reasoning, preferring to trust and obey the voice of God, and do what He asked of them; in relation to which we are told that being "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" we too should "run the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).
- The help and power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:10,11), who along with the gifts

and fruit He imparts, enables the disciple to live a supernatural and holy life very unlike that of worldly people. Believers, being “renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:10), have in their hearts the light of the glory of God (2Cor. 4:6), and with the Holy Spirit helping them to live a new, holy life, they are effective witnesses to the truth and transforming power of the gospel.

- The disciple overcomes the Devil by the word of his testimony, and because he loves not life unto death (Rev. 12:11). For some that means physical death at the hand of persecutors, but for every believer there ought to be a dying to all that the world deems valuable and precious in order to show that he lives for Christ, and deems that life which is heavenly in its outlook a far greater treasure than anything this world has to offer. Every believer, of course, should be able to give testimony to others of salvation in Jesus, and of the things God has done for them in their lives, such testimonies speak to unbelievers and present them with evidence that God is real. The Greek words used in the New Testament for witness and testimony come from the word *martureo*, from which we have the English word martyr, and it impresses upon us something of the high value that God places on truthful witness to Him and His Word. For their faithful testimony to that truth many have indeed paid the ultimate price.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Faithful Witness, in obedience to His Father’s will, left heaven, becoming poor for our sakes, taking on the form of a bondservant and living His life on earth in faithful obedience to His Father’s will, that will took Him to the cross to pay the price for the sins of the world. The Father, being well pleased with Jesus, attested to Him with miracles, wonders and signs, thereby supplying the world with evidence of Jesus’ faithful witness to truth.

In the courtroom, the true and faithful testimony of a witness may well deliver an innocent from the consequences of a false verdict, saving him from a terrible punishment. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth so that guilty sinners may believe in Him, be saved from eternal punishment, and receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus’ faithful disciples, themselves called to be His witnesses, their lives giving testimony to their salvation, may themselves be used by God to lead lost souls to the Saviour and His cross, there the lost can find redemption, and escape the condemnation of their sin.

A true witness delivers souls. (Proverbs 14:15)



## Chapter 2

### The Firstborn From The Dead

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction. (Hosea 13:14)

Death is a terrible enemy of humanity, its ever present shadow hangs over life from the moment of conception. No one is immune to its influence or to its unpredictability. For many, living daily with war, famine and plague, it is an ever present reality. It is a constant reminder of the frailty of human life which the Bible depicts as grass that withers (1Pet. 1:24), and as, “vapour which appears for a time and then fades away” (Jms. 4:14).

For many of its enemies, the human race throws up a champion (real or imaginary) who faces up to the enemy, takes it on face to face and inflicts a notable defeat. For example: the mighty warrior who wins a great victory against a seemingly invincible foe; the pioneering scientist who finds the cure for a life threatening disease; the proficient lawyer who defeats the unjust oppressor in court, etc. But who has taken on death and won the victory? The human race is remarkably silent, where is its champion for this battle?

History records only one who claimed during his life that he would take on death and defeat it; who told His followers that He would be killed and that He would be raised on the third day (Matt. 16:21); who claimed he had power to lay down His life and power to take it again (Jn. 10:18); whose followers gave testimony to seeing him alive after His death. That one is the Lord Jesus Christ, who rose triumphant from the grave, and showed Himself alive with many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3); no other religion dares to make such bold claims for its leader. For Christians, this belief that Jesus died and rose from the dead is a linchpin of their faith (cf. 1Cor. 15:1-19).

### Death

Death and decay was never in God’s intended purpose for the human race, or for His creation, just one commandment from the LORD God was given to Adam to keep him from

death,

Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. (Gen. 2:16,17)

As long as Adam kept that command his life was one of perfect pleasure, in unhindered communion with God, and without any of the unpleasant complaints of life with which we are so familiar now. However Adam fell, and in an act of blatant disobedience to God, took of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and so death, sickness, decay and associated toil entered the world (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12). The earth, instead of being a place of eternal blessing for humankind, came under the curse, and life on the earth became one of toil and hardship, terminated by physical death (Gen. 3:16-19).

Thankfully for the human race, God is gracious and merciful, and even there in the midst of sin and its condemnation, His lovingkindness shines through. In Gen. 3:15 the promise is given of a saviour, one who is to be of the seed of Eve, and who will bruise the serpent's head. This saviour became known to Israel as the Messiah. Through the many prophetic Messianic scriptures committed to Israel, it was recognised that the Messiah would be the one to rectify the effects of the curse, and restore creation to its intended glory as an eternal paradise, inhabited by eternal beings living in uninterrupted communion with Almighty God. The Messiah would be their 'champion', the one promised to them by God, accomplishing that which no man could by overcoming the Devil and death, and restoring harmony between Creator and created. This expectation is summed up in Daniel 9:24 where it says of the Messiah that "He will finish the transgression," "make an end of sins," "make reconciliation for every iniquity," and "bring in everlasting righteousness." The Messiah must of necessity, in order to accomplish His purpose, be the conquerer of death.

John's words that Jesus, is "the firstborn from the dead" are rooted in Old Testament teaching regarding firstborn sons, an understanding of this background will help understand John's insight into the Messianic fulfilment he sees in Jesus.

### **Firstborn of the Father**

Scripture presents the special case of the firstborn son. Early in Genesis we find that certain privileges were bestowed on a father's firstborn son. The main privilege was the right of inheritance (i.e. the birthright), and the father's firstborn sons were due a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17). This privileged position carried with it the responsibility to continue the father's prosperity; the firstborn son, considered to be the might and beginning

of his father's strength (Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17), would be expected to build upon his father's achievements in life. Such expectation continues today in many cultures, it is often assumed that the eldest son will continue the business of the father, develop it and uphold its good name and reputation; and it can be considered shameful when the son fails in that duty.

There are many such firstborn sons recorded in Scripture, some notably failed in their responsibilities and lost their rights:

- Cain, Adam's firstborn, the first of all firstborns murdered his brother and was replaced by Seth (Gen. 4:1ff; 4:25).
- Esau, Isaac's firstborn, who despised his birthright, and sold it to his brother Jacob for a pot of stew (Gen. 25:29).
- Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, had an immoral relationship with his father's maid, and lost the birthright to Joseph (Gen. 35:22; 49:2-4; 1Chron. 5:1,2).
- Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord killed him, Perez taking his place (Gen. 38:7; 30).
- Amnon, David's firstborn, who raped Tamar his half-sister, for which he was murdered by Tamar's brother Absalom (2Sam. 3:2; 2Sam. 13).

### ***Abraham***

Abraham's situation presents an exceptional case: the matter of his inheritance had been a cause of concern, the Lord had promised him descendants, yet into his old age he remained childless. He seems to have come to a point where he felt the time was past, that he would go to his grave without an heir to continue his name, and the inheritance would pass to his senior servant. Abraham complained to the Lord, "I go childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. Look, You have given me no offspring" (Gen. 15:2,3). In response the Lord promised, "one who will come from your own body shall be your heir" (Gen. 15:4). Some time later, Abraham being 86 years of age, and Sarah despairing of ever conceiving a child, Sarah persuaded Abraham to go in to Hagar her maid. Hagar conceived and brought forth a son, Ishmael. Later, when Abraham was 100 years old Sarah conceived and bore Isaac. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn, but the inheritance did not go to him because he was not the child of promise, and Ishmael was cast out (Gen. 21:12; Gal. 4:21ff) - the Lord not allowing His plans which had eternal purpose and significance to be thwarted by the fleshly schemes of men. The Lord always keeps His promises!

### ***Israel***

The nation of Israel presents another exceptional case: the Lord through Moses told Pharaoh,

“Israel is My son, My firstborn, let My son go that He may serve Me” (Ex. 4:22). God chose the nation of Israel for a special purpose of which the firstborn son is a type. Israel was called to be a holy nation representing the Lord, the Lord’s purpose that they would be the head of all nations on earth (Deut. 7:6,7; 26:18,19). However, as prophesied, because of their disobedience the Jews were scattered from their land for a time (Deut.28:64-67); now in fulfilment of prophecy, the Jews, since 1948, have been returning to their land which is being restored to them (Deut. 30:3). God’s purpose for Israel as the firstborn of nations still being worked out, and that day surely to come soon when Israel receives its full inheritance, and will be recognised by all as the chief of nations (Gen. 17:8; Isa. 14:1,2; Isa. 60; Jer. 31:7-12; Zech. 14:16,17; note also scriptures which speak of God as the Father of Israel, Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Hos. 1:11).

### **Firstborn of the Mother**

Every father has his firstborn, it is equally true that every mother has her firstborn, and the word of God does make a distinction. From the time of Israel’s escape from Egypt, and because of the death of the Egyptian firstborn, the Lord announced,

“Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast it is Mine.” (Ex. 13:2)

the reason given for this,

“On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine, I am the LORD.” (Nu. 3:13)

There is a particular sense in which all males that opened the mothers’ wombs belonged to the Lord. For Israel this meant that all firstborn sons had to be redeemed and 5 shekels paid for their redemption (Nu. 3:40ff). Firstborn animals were sacrificed to the Lord, it was not acceptable to sacrifice children, and the Lord took the Levites to serve Him in their place (Nu. 3:12ff).

As with the firstborn of the fathers, there are several notable firstborns of the mother recorded in Scripture, interestingly, in comparison to the fathers’ firstborns, mostly seen in a good light:

- Isaac, Abraham’s second son, first and only son of Sarah, took the birthright over Ishmael because of God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah.
- Joseph, Jacob’s eleventh son, was the firstborn of his mother Rachel. Joseph, though



despised by his brothers, eventually became their saviour and leader (Gen. 49:22-26).

- Samuel, firstborn of his mother Hannah, but not of his father Elkanah who had previous children from his other wife. Hannah gave Samuel to the Lord, and he became a great prophet and a leader of Israel (1Sam. 1:11).
- Jesus, the firstborn of Mary, born to be Saviour and ruler of the human race (Mt. 1:25; Lk. 1:32,33; Lk. 2:7).

For the firstborn son we can see that there were certain expectations for his life: The father's firstborn was to represent his father, continue his father's work, be the head of the family, inherit the father's prosperity and receive special blessing; the mother's firstborn was born to serve God. All of which we see perfectly fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

### **Jesus, Unique Firstborn Son**

Several Scriptures mention Jesus as the firstborn:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom. 8:29).

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." (Heb. 1:6).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation . . . And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Col. 1:15-18).

Jesus had a birth unlike any other, no human father and a virgin mother, yet on two accounts he was the firstborn, as the only begotten of his heavenly Father and as the firstborn of His mother Mary.

As the firstborn, only begotten Son of His Father (Mk.1:11; Mt. 17:5), He came to do His Father's will on earth and to fulfil the work that the Father gave Him. In all things doing His Father's will perfectly, and being the perfect representative of His Father's glory (Jn. 17:4). Jesus, as the firstborn son of His Father, is heir of all things (Heb. 1:1).

As the firstborn male of His mother He belonged to God, and like every other Israelite male child who opened the womb, He was presented to the Lord according to the law (Lk. 2:22,23). His whole life, in a way unmatched by any other, would be given in total devotion, obedience and surrender to His Father's will (Heb. 10:9).

## **Joseph, Type of Jesus**

The life of Joseph is a wonderful type of the life of Jesus. Like Jesus, Joseph was his mother's firstborn, he was aware that he was born to be the leader of his family; he was despised by his brethren, and rejected by them, but in the process of time, and in fulfilment of God's will he became their saviour and leader. Jesus too, came to His own, and was rejected; he suffered on the behalf of others, and is now the Saviour of all; one day those, including Israel (Zech. 12:10ff), who rejected Him will recognise Him, and acknowledge Him as Lord of all.

Joseph went down from Canaan to Egypt, and from there he would save his brethren from the enemy of famine; Jesus came down from heaven to the earth to save His brethren from their enemies, the Devil and death,

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:14,15)

As the firstborn Son, Jesus went ahead of His brethren; as their representative and as author and finisher of their faith, he took on their greatest enemies, tasting death on their behalf (Heb. 1:9); triumphing at the cross over demonic powers (Col. 2:15); His resurrection from the dead a declaration that He is the Son of God (Rom. 1:4); and having defeated these enemies He could proclaim,

“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (Rev. 1:18)

And so, the firstborn Son, who had existed from eternity with His Father in heaven, became the firstborn from the dead, the first and only man to take on the grave, and rise triumphant to eternal life; and so He freely offers the gift of eternal life to all who will believe on Him.

## **Resurrection**

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is a central tenet of Christian faith, as Paul notes,

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins! (1Cor. 15:17) however,

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1Cor. 15:20).

This is the great Christian hope, the assurance and confidence of eternal life, the proof being that Jesus has gone before, tasting death, rising from the dead and is alive today. This living hope gives testimony of its reality: there is a calmness, a peace, a certainty, an absence of fear in believers' lives in the way they face the prospect of death, such characteristics speak very eloquently to the unbeliever who has no such hope or certainty. In Jesus, we see the fulfilment of the prophecy about the Messiah that,

He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces. (Isa. 25:8)

The final victory over death and the Devil still awaits. Until Jesus returns His brethren still suffer physical death, but in knowing that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that though they may die, they will live (Jn. 11:25,26), they know that the final victory is certain, and remain steadfast and immovable, rejoicing in serving the Lord who is the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls (1Pet. 2:25). They look forward to life in His eternal kingdom where finally there will be no more curse (Rev. 22:3), God and His redeemed people dwelling together in eternal peace and righteousness (Rev. 21:3).

Jesus is the 'champion' who took on humankind's greatest enemies, He is the deliverer promised throughout the pages of the Old Testament, He is the Messiah who fulfils all the Messianic prophecies. He has won a great victory over death on behalf of those whom He would call His brethren. To win that victory cost Him very much, He who knew no sin, became sin (2Cor. 5:21); He tasted death, dying a real painful death, in becoming the propitiation for the sins of the world, He took God's wrath against sin on Himself (Rom. 3:25; 1Jn. 2:2).<sup>5</sup> Not for Himself He suffered, but for those who would believe and receive Him as their Saviour, and who would become members of the "church of the firstborn, registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:23); and who, waiting to be conformed to His image, look forward to being with Him who is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29); and gathering together will sing to Him, who is the firstborn from the dead, the song of Revelation 5:12:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix for discussion on propitiation.

To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honour and glory and blessing.

Jesus is the most true, perfect and faithful firstborn Son, He is worthy, Hallelujah,  
what a Saviour!

## Chapter 3

### Ruler Over the Kings of the Earth

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (Gen. 49:10)

I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession . . .’ (Ps. 2:7,8)

The Bible presents us with a very honest appraisal of life and the conditions under which life is lived. It is surely very obvious to every thinking human being that life is fraught with the possibility of unexpected and unimaginable threats to its peaceful existence. As well as the threats posed to life by the events of an unstable and unpredictable planet, fear and uncertainty is added by the capricious nature of those who rule: kings, queens, presidents and various forms of government exercise power and enormous influence over their subjects, and can enhance or diminish their enjoyment of life. We are very familiar with the horrors and desperate situations that have been inflicted throughout history on millions of people because of the vagaries of those who hold rule over nations. While it is true that there have been some good rulers, it is equally true that this world has never experienced perfect rule, and even the very best of rulers have failed their subjects in one area or another. It is in this climate that the Bible holds out the promise that the day is coming when one will rule the world with righteousness and equity, the Messiah.

#### A Curse

It is important to understand that this planet we live on is under a curse, that curse imposed by God at the Fall. His words recorded in Gen. 3:17, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.” This curse is manifested in the obvious toil

required to bring forth food from the earth and in the fragile temperament of the natural world, natural disasters being a part of life and cause great distress. Alongside this, we must recognise that the effect of sin on human nature extends into the realm of human relationships. Humankind was created to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26), but now, tainted by the sinful nature inherited from Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12ff), this dominion is exercised without the grace of God, human beings often using their position to further their own selfish and sinful desires for power and dominance over others. This desire for domination manifests itself in lesser or greater degrees in every area of life, from the school bully to the cruel dictator; from the wife-beater to the criminal despot. So often, we see those who are in a position of supposed superiority because of greater physical strength, intelligence, position in society, riches, etc., using their assumed superiority to dominate the less fortunate; the result is that the weak and poor of this world are continually oppressed.

To these terrible consequences of the Fall we must add the fact of demonic powers at work in the world, “The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” wrote the apostle John (1Jn. 5:18). Paul tell us about the “principalities and powers,” “the rulers of the darkness of this age” and the “spiritual hosts of wickedness” with which the Christian wrestles (Eph. 6:12). There are demonic beings, led by the Devil at work in this world, here because having rebelled against God they were thrown out of heaven. Now, “having great wrath” they seek to bring turmoil and grief to the people of this world (Rev. 12:7-12). The Devil himself longs for dominion; his first sin being that he desired the throne of God (Isa. 14:13,14). Now he exerts influence over rulers and governments, the kingdoms of the world being his to give to those who will fulfil his evil purpose (cf. Mt. 4:8,9; Lk. 4:6). Mercifully the Devils’s power is held under restraint for a time (2Thess. 2:7); God is exercising his sovereign authority over the world’s rulers (Rom. 13:1ff). However, the time is coming when that restraint will be removed, and the Devil will for a short period, exercise global dominance through the reign of the Antichrist (2Thess. 2:3ff; Rev. 13).

It is against this background of the curse on the natural world, the fallen nature of sinful humankind, and the demonic influence in the world that the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament must be understood. From the moment God promised Eve that from her seed there would come one who would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), the expectancy is there in the Scriptures of one who will rectify the effects of the Fall, and restore peace and harmony to creation and to life. This promised and expected saviour and deliverer from the curse became known as the Messiah, one aspect of His ministry necessary to fulfil the Scriptures is that He will be a king who exercises perfect and righteous rule over all nations.

## **The Promised King**

Messianic prophecies look forward to a time of great contentment, with the natural world restored to be a place of peace and harmony - the wolf dwelling with the lamb (Isa. 11:6), and the reign of the king bringing peace and harmony in the realm of human relationships. Justice and righteousness are characteristics of this Messianic kingdom: wicked oppressors and evildoers, enemies of the king and his righteous kingdom, are dealt with decisively; the long-suffering poor and needy find freedom from oppression and violence (Ps. 72:12-14). Psalms 45 and 72, recognised Messianic psalms, give a clear picture of the perfect character of this righteous king and of the characteristics of his reign. The cries of the suffering righteous, recorded so often in the psalms and in the prophets will be answered in the Messianic age, and free from their oppressors, life will be fully enjoyed under the beneficial reign of their king (cf. Ps. 37: 5,6; 9-11; 39,40).

Israel had some good kings: David, Solomon and Hezekiah, for instance who brought times of wonderful blessing for the nation, but in contrast to the promised Messiah, none were perfect. Even David sinned and brought a plague on the people (1Kings 24); and Solomon, whose reign initially brought great peace and prosperity, lost his way because of his many wives, his idolatry incurred the displeasure of God, and led to the the division of the nation and return of their enemies (2 Kings 11). The Messianic king must be greater and more perfect than these and his reign much more righteous and enduring. Psalm 72 describes the characteristics of this perfect king: He judges with righteousness; brings justice to the poor; in his days the righteous flourish; there is abundance of peace; his dominion is to the ends of the earth; there is an abundance of grain; his name endures forever, etc. No human king could ever meet all the criteria, and the prophecies show that the promised Messiah could not be like any other human being, but that he must be of divine nature; in fact no one less than the Son of God (Ps. 2:7).

The Messianic prophecies contain very specific information about the character and genealogy of the Messiah, for instance, in Genesis 49:10 when Jacob announced the blessings for Judah, he used words indicative of kingly rule, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah." The Old Testament Scriptures continue this theme of a promised ruler from the tribe of Judah. Eventually the promise is condensed and becomes more specific, to one who will be a descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:12,13).

This expectation that the Messianic king is to be descended from David is found many times in the Old Testament. For example:

The Lord has sworn in truth to David, He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your

throne the fruit of your body” . . . “I will make the horn of David grow.” (Ps. 132:11ff)

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. (Isa. 11:1)

“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 execute righteousness in the earth.” (Jer. 23:5)

When we turn to the New Testament, the importance of such Messianic scriptures is evident, and we find the writers are keen to emphasise their belief that Jesus is the promised Messianic king. Luke records the angel Gabriel speaking to Mary regarding the birth of Jesus,

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign forever and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Lk. 1:32,33).

Gabriel’s words here are highly significant; for Mary, and for other Jews of the time, they would bring to mind the prophetic scriptures, and undoubtedly convey the thought that this child was to be the Messiah, the promised king of David’s line. The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke highlight the descent of Mary and Joseph from David. At His birth, angels proclaimed Jesus, “a Saviour, who is Christ [Messiah] the Lord” (Lk. 2:11). The ministry of Jesus heightened this expectation; as He taught and as He performed great miracles, some would be amazed and question, “Could this be the Son of David?” (Mt. 12:23). On many occasions Jesus was given the title ‘Son of David’ by those who looked to him for some act of mercy and deliverance in their lives (Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30), and when He entered Jerusalem on the donkey, the multitudes applied to Him the words of Ps. 118, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD” and added the title, “The King of Israel” (Jn. 12:13; cf. Mk. 11:9,10; Lk. 19:38), showing their hope that Jesus might indeed be the promised Messiah.

It is clear that the events surrounding Jesus’ birth, along with His life and ministry, created great hope that He was the Messiah. However, the Biblical account tells us that despite the signs and miracles done by Jesus, many did not believe (Jn. 12:37, Acts 2:22,23), and ultimately, except for a few disciples, He was not accepted as the Messiah. Despised and



rejected, He was condemned to a criminal's death on the cross. His own people did not receive Him as their Messiah (Jn. 1:11), they did not fully understand His Messianic ministry, nor did they realise that, in His sufferings and rejection, He was in fact fulfilling Messianic prophecies and the task which the Father had committed to Him (cf. Mt. 16:21-23; Jn. 12:37-41). His death on the cross was the means by which He would redeem sinners from the condemnation and curse of sin, and grant them a place in His righteous and eternal kingdom.

It should of course be noted that, during the time of His earthly ministry, few accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but after His resurrection, which proved Him to be the Messiah, many did accept Him, 3,000 believing on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29-31; 41).

A king must reign over a kingdom: his kingdom will have citizens who are subject to his rule, and who partake of the privileges of the kingdom to which they belong. It stands to reason then that if Jesus is King, there must be His kingdom and subjects of that kingdom. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of God, His subjects those who believe on His name, and accept His terms for admission to the kingdom.

### **The King and His Kingdom**

The kingdom of God is a huge subject, it occupied much of Jesus' teaching and there are well over 100 mentions of the kingdom of God in the New Testament, it is only possible to give a brief introduction here.

Very early in His ministry we find Jesus preaching about the kingdom of God, Matthew and Mark both record the event:

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17)

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk. 1:14,15)

Two things should be noted here:

- i) The kingdom is for the repentant.
- ii) the kingdom is at hand.

These two aspects are instructive and of vital importance:

#### ***i) The Kingdom for the Repentant***

We saw from the Old Testament that there is promised a righteous king whose kingdom will be one of righteousness where evil has no place, and where the righteous are able to flourish (Ps. 72:7). It stands to reason then, that no-one with wicked intentions can have a place in such a kingdom. The unfortunate news for the human race however, is that, “none is righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10 quoting from Psalm 14); both Old and New Testaments acknowledge the sinfulness of humankind’s fallen nature and recognise people’s complete unworthiness for heaven, noting that outside of God’s grace and mercy there is no hope (e.g. Ps. 25:6,7; 1Pet. 1:3,4). Paul writing to the Corinthians said, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” and followed with a list of sins from which no honest person could justifiably exclude themselves (1Cor. 6:9,10). The Bible is clear no one is worthy a place in God’s kingdom! So, repentance is essential, and along with repentance a change of life. Jesus told Nicodemus,

“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God”  
and  
“You must be born again.” (Jn. 3:5,6).

To His disciples Jesus said,

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 18:3)

Such sayings make clear to us that there must be a dramatic change in ones’ life to make one fit for the kingdom of God. That change cannot be made by any human effort, it requires a divine move of the Spirit within the human heart; heaven is for those who “in Christ” have become “new creations” (cf. 2Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:21-24; Col. 3:9,11). That change is only possible for those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, it is dependent on God’s grace and mercy (Col. 1:12), and is only for those who have accepted the goodness of God in leading them to the place of genuine repentance (Rom. 2:4).

A place in the kingdom of God cannot be earned, no one is worthy, it is a gracious gift to those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and accept His terms of entrance. To such, Jesus can say, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12:32; cf. 2Pet. 1:10,11).

## ***ii) The kingdom is “at hand”***

The Jewish hope for the Messianic king included the thought that he would free them from

all their political enemies, and restore sovereignty and peace to Israel. Jesus' failure to meet this political expectation, to save Israel from the Roman occupation, thereby manifesting the Messianic kingdom in very real terms, led in a major part to His rejection by the Jews and their dismissal of Him as their king. While there was no obvious physical manifestation of the Messianic kingdom politically, yet Jesus in sayings such as, "the kingdom is at hand" (Mk. 1:15) and, "the kingdom is within you" (Lk. 17:21) gave indication that there is the possibility of real and tangible experience of the kingdom. How then is the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus its king made manifest?

Jesus told Pilate that, "My kingdom is not of this world" and that He had "come into the world" to "bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:36,37). To those who accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub He said, "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Lk. 11:14-20). Such sayings are important in what they reveal about the kingdom of God and Jesus' ministry as its king during His time on earth. There is a hidden, supernatural aspect of the kingdom, yet in the person and ministry of Jesus the kingdom of God had an impact in this world that was seen by those who met Him. Jesus' power to heal disease, command nature and cast out demons were evidence of His supernatural power and authority over creation, and caused amazement among those who witnessed such things (Mk. 1:27; 4:41; Lk. 4:36); even His teaching had an authority unlike any other (Mt. 7:28,29). The miracles of Jesus served to open the eyes and hearts of some to the truth (Jn. 2:11), to others they served to close eyes and harden hearts (Jn. 12:37ff). His parables too worked in the same way, asked by His disciples why He spoke in parables he answered, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Mt. 13:11). In Jesus' teaching we see this aspect of the mystery of the kingdom of God, and it is clear that the kingdom remained hidden to those who rejected Him, but for those who believed, there was growing revelation and understanding of the kingdom, and a realisation that Jesus was the promised Messianic king of the kingdom. Good examples of this are Nathaniel who amazed at Jesus' knowledge of him exclaimed, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (Jn. 1:49); and Peter who when asked by Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" answered, "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:15,16). Jesus subsequent comment to Peter gives further indication to the workings of the kingdom, "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 16:17). In this present age the kingdom of God is hidden to the eyes of unbelievers, there is no recognition or acknowledgement of it or of its King, but for those who obey Jesus' command to "repent and believe" there is understanding, entrance and reception into the kingdom by God, not as reward, but as God's wonderful gift for which there are wonderful benefits.

## **Benefits of the Kingdom**

It is quite obvious, as already mentioned, that this world we live in is far from perfect; wars, disasters, crime, disease, etc., continually bring misery to people's lives. The Old Testament promises a deliverer who will reverse the curse and restore peace and harmony. We have seen that Jesus is that deliverer, the promised Messiah, and though He has visited this earth, no one has yet experienced the complete deliverance promised in the pages of the Old Testament. That completion of His work remains in the future. Something unbelieving Jews did not and still do not understand is that the work of the Messiah on earth is accomplished in two parts, at His first coming as the suffering servant to pay the price for sin and redeem sinners (Isa. 53); then at His second coming as the conquering King of Kings at the end of the age (Rev. 19:11ff).

In this present age the reign of Jesus is experienced in the hearts and lives of His disciples. There are great benefits, the greatest of which is the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Other benefits include: deliverance from the power of darkness; imputed righteousness; an inheritance in heaven; peace beyond understanding; freedom from fear, etc. Such things Paul calls, "spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). These are a real taste of the life of the kingdom of God, ministered in the heart by the Holy Spirit who is Himself a guarantee of our inheritance in the kingdom (Eph. 1:13,14); that kingdom is one of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). These spiritual blessings are a very precious treasure to the believer, the experience of them making up for any other perceived lack of comforts experienced in this world. There is too the knowledge of living life under the reign of Jesus their king, that knowledge includes knowing that He is on the throne of history, that the lives of His subjects are in His hands, that He can be trusted to meet every need and that one day He will come and take His redeemed people to live with Him forever in a perfect paradise (Jn. 14:3).

Believers are "conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13), they are "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20), their lives no longer subject to the powers of darkness. They live as ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven, shining the light of the glory of the Messiah in this world that others may see and believe, and also receive a place in God's kingdom (2Cor. 4:6). As citizens of heaven their conduct should be representative of the life of the kingdom, their changed lives, and their righteous and holy behaviour witnessing to others of its reality. They know the reality of Jesus' abiding presence, His rule over their lives gives a deep peace and calm assurance in their hearts and is further testimony to the truth of the kingdom of God.

### **The Ruler Over the Kings of the Earth**

Jesus rule over the nations has not yet been made manifest on the earth, that day however is sure to come. At His second coming as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, He will fight against the nations of the world who at that time are gathered against Israel, He will defeat them comprehensively (Zech. 14:3; 12; Rev. 19:11-21). Jesus will be seen and acknowledged as “King over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9), the saints also coming to live and reign with Him for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6; Dan. 7:27). At this time the Devil will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. During the millennial reign which follows, the nations which are left will give obedience and submission to Jesus’ rule; every year they will go up to Jerusalem to “worship the King” (Zech. 14:16). That rule will be with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:12), suggesting that during this period His reign is still not accepted willingly, men’s hearts retaining something of the rebelliousness of the fallen nature, but that rebelliousness is kept in check by the fact of His presence and authority, and because refusal to worship Him will result in the withholding of rain (Zech. 14:17). The Devil being released at the end of the millennium is able to convince the nations to mount an attack on the King and His saints, an attack which is ill-conceived and very short lived (Rev. 20:7-10). The great white throne judgment follows, and then at the end new heavens and earth in which all is righteousness and peace forever. Scripture records that, at the end, Jesus will deliver the kingdom to His Father, and put an end to all rule and authority. There will be no more enemies left for the King to subdue, the last enemy death is destroyed, God is all in all (1Cor. 15:24-28), and there is nothing to hamper harmony and peace. Then there shall be no more curse, the throne of God and the Lamb being among men, His servants serving and reigning with Him forever and ever (Rev. 22:3-5).

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!



## Chapter 4

### **Him Who Loved Us and Washed Us From Our Sins In His Own Blood**

In our examination of the seven works of the Messiah seen in Revelation 1:5-7, this is the central point, and it brings us to one of the most important, and essential, functions of the Messiah, that He should deal with humankind's greatest problem - sin.

The matter of sin has become a very unpopular and misunderstood concept in contemporary society. Even in much of the church it has become a subject which is often only broached with great caution; in this age of 'seeker-friendliness' and 'easy-believism', talk of sin is often deemed something that will scare away the unbelieving, and so is avoided. In contrast, the Bible has much to say about sin and does not hold back from presenting its readers with the stark reality of the consequences of sin. We do well to take heed of the proverb,

Fools mock at sin. (Prov. 14:9)

and the words of Paul,

. . . the goodness of God leads you to repentance. (Rom. 2:4)

Sin is a serious matter, we cannot sweep it under the carpet, we must treat it with honest regard to the Word of God, and present the subject appropriately. The truth is that, until sin is dealt with effectively, humanity is at odds with its Creator and meaningful relationship between the two is not possible. A correct Biblical understanding of the doctrine of sin is therefore essential as part of sound comprehension of the doctrine of salvation. If we consider that people's greatest need is the salvation of their souls, then we will surely agree that the church, must, as a priority, faithfully teach and preach the truth about sin and redemption from sin. Jesus, indeed, expected this to be the case,

Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. (Lk. 24:47)

It is of great detriment to the life of the church, and to the society in which the church is called to be salt and light, that the doctrines of sin and salvation are so poorly understood, and so inadequately proclaimed in these days. False and insubstantial representations of these essential doctrines do no-one any favours. Rather, they withhold from sinful people a right understanding of their precarious position in relation to sin, thereby denying them the opportunity to recognise and call on the one who can save them from their sin, the Messiah Jesus.

### **The Bible and Sin**

Taking the book of Genesis as our starting point, we find, from chapter 3 onwards, that human sinfulness is ever-present and its consequences clearly seen: Adam and Eve sinned, and God punished them by making them mortal (physical death), and by separating Himself from them (spiritual death) when He drove them out of Eden. This breach of the relationship with their Creator God is the first and greatest tragedy to befall the human race. In Genesis 4, Cain murdered his brother, and God cursed him and condemned him to be a fugitive and vagabond. Chapter 6 records the terrible fact that,

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Gen. 6:5)

God's response was the worldwide flood, from which only righteous Noah and his family escaped. Chapter 11 has the tower of Babel and God causing confusion of language because of human pride. Chapters 18 and 19 recount the sin and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Here, in these earliest chapters of the Bible, sin and its consequences are clearly presented. In every case, sin was followed by God's judgment, which was disastrous for those involved in the sin.

This pattern was repeated throughout the Old Testament, and seen in the history of Israel, the nation called to be God's witness. From the building of the golden calf (Exodus 32), through to the profaning of the Lord's name in the days of Malachi, (Mal. 1:9ff), sin is ever-present. God's blessings followed righteous obedience, while cursing and judgment followed sinful rebellion against His righteous ways. We can be left in little doubt as to the seriousness of sin, and its consequences. We learn that sin is at the heart of all human



problems, that sin stands in the way of relationship with God, and that God is the Judge who calls to account and punishes the sinner:

I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. (Isa. 13:11)

But your iniquities have separated you from God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. (Isa. 59:2)

### **The Mercy of God**

Alongside this gloomy picture of the sinful human condition, the Bible teaches us that the human race cannot extricate itself from this awful predicament. Humanity is in a helpless state, life being so tainted by sin that no one can attain the level of perfect righteousness required by God for relationship with Him (see Mt. 5:20). Being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), every person has “no hope and is without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Therefore, the only hope for humanity is that God will do something; that He would be merciful, and that He would intervene and provide the solution. This hope and reliance upon God for deliverance from sin is expressed many times in Scripture. For instance, following his sins of adultery and murder, David cries out to God,

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions,  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin. (Ps. 51:1-2)

This hope in God’s mercy is not a vain hope; it is rooted in the Word of God, and in an understanding of the character of God. Yes, He is the holy God, who is of “purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13), He is, “the Judge of all the earth” (Gen. 18:25) who will punish sinners. But He is also,

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. (Ex. 34:6-7)

He is the One who gave Israel the blood of animals to atone for their sin (Lev. 17:11), and

who prescribed laws of worship and conduct through which, by obedience to them, beneficial relationship with Him could be maintained. Deuteronomy 28 lists blessings for the obedient and curses for the disobedient. Verses 1 and 2 record that Moses told Israel,

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you on high above all the nations of the earth, and all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Conversely, Deuteronomy 28:15 states,

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

Many other Scriptures carry the same alternatives. For example, Deuteronomy 7:9-10,

Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.

### **Sins Forgiven**

It is important to note that relationship with God was not based purely on a cold, impersonal and legalistic obedience to his statutes; love was an essential part of the relationship. From humanity's side, love for God issued in willing obedience to His statutes; from God's side, love for humanity issued in the covenants, promises of blessings, and the forgiveness of sins.

Such knowledge and experience gave assurance that God would bless the obedient, and that He was willing to forgive sins and restore the repentant sinner. There was recognition too that no one could say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin" (Prov. 20:9), but that God could and would create a clean heart and a steadfast spirit for the genuinely repentant (Ps. 51:10).

Sin separates humanity from God, and there is "no one who does not sin" (2 Chron. 6:36), but the repentant saint rejoices in the knowledge that God is able to remove his transgressions, "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12), and so fully expects

restoration of relationship with God following repentance of sins. Knowing these things, David could speak with confidence of the very real sense of blessedness for those whose transgression is forgiven (Ps. 32:1).

We are seeing two specific and clearly-defined attributes of God: i) His wrath against sin, manifested in His judgments, and ii) His mercy, revealed in His willingness to forgive sin. Some have considered these two attributes irreconcilable; but, to those who have right understanding of God's character, they are not irreconcilable, but essential, complementary, and wonderful attributes of the God of the Bible - a God who is both holy and merciful, and who longs for restoration of relationship with His created beings. His wrath is directed against all that is sinful and wicked; His mercy compels Him to provide for humankind the means of escape from His wrath. For the saint, there is a corresponding two-fold hope: First, the sure knowledge that God will punish all unconfessed sin and wickedness, eventually destroying the wicked. Secondly, that for the repentant sinner, there is reconciliation with God and assurance of a place reserved in His kingdom of peace and righteousness (cf. Ps. 21:8-12; Ps. 37:9-11; Rev. 22:14,15).

### **A Consistent Message**

So far we have looked mostly at Old Testament scriptures. Turning to the New Testament, we see the picture is much the same. Paul reminds us in the Epistle to the Romans,

There is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3:10)

and,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)

and,

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Rom. 5:12)

and,

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

The Biblical message is consistent throughout: humankind is in a state of sin; sin separates humanity from God; God is holy and must punish sin; death is the consequence of sin; He curses the disobedient and unrighteous; God is merciful and provides a way to escape the consequences of sin; God blesses obedience and righteousness. In the Old Testament, the means of escape was through obedience to the law; in the New Testament, as we shall see, a

far greater and more efficient escape is available through faith in the Messiah.

This Biblical picture of sin and its consequences is essential knowledge for basic understanding of God and of the Holy Scriptures. The Devil knows this and is very happy to keep people in a state of ignorant denial of the truth about sin - for where there is no recognition of sin and its outcome, there is of course no perception of the need for a Saviour from sin, and no turning to Christ for salvation. The Devil blinds the minds of unbelievers, “lest the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ” should illuminate their darkness, (2Cor. 4:4). The gospel, being “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16), is God’s ordained means for bringing sinners out of the condemnation of sin and into a rich eternal inheritance in His kingdom (see Acts 26:18). The gospel, in its basic form, is the story of the Messiah’s first visit to Earth, and of the work which He accomplished in order to procure our full and wonderful salvation, (see 1Cor. 15:1-4).

### **The Messiah’s Love**

John writes of the Messiah that He is, “Him who loved us.” While there are frequent Old Testament references to God’s love for His people (e.g. Deut. 7:13; Jer. 31:3; Hos. 3:1), there appears to be no clear declaration in the Old Testament Messianic texts that love is a specific attribute of the Messiah. However, we can consider the Song of Solomon to be Messianic, and its portrayal of the love between “The Beloved” and “The Bride” as an allegory of the love between Jesus and His bride, the church. Similarly, Psalm 45 speaks of the Messianic King and His bride, and tells us that He will greatly desire the beauty of His bride (Ps. 45:11). Also, the first three chapters of Hosea contain the theme of God’s love for Israel, who is here pictured as His unfaithful wife, and to whom He offers forgiveness and restoration. While such scriptures hint at the love of the Messiah for the church, the fullness and depth of His love is only fully revealed in the New Testament. The Old Testament shows that love is an attribute of the character of God, and it therefore should be no surprise to find that the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, exhibits the love of God in all His dealings with humankind.

In turning to the New Testament we find an abundance of texts linking love with the Messiah (e.g. Rom. 5:8; 8:35,39; 2Cor. 5:14; 1Tim. 1:14; Tit. 3:4-6). This love is expressed not only towards the church, but to all the world. In the most famous Bible verse of all we find that God’s love was His motivation in sending Jesus into the world:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son . . . (Jn. 3:16)

Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints that,

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

Paul expresses some wonderful and delightful thoughts concerning the Messiah: he is encouraging the saints to enter into a deep, personal relationship with Christ; he sees a love exhibited in Christ which is beyond human understanding; and he wants the saints to grasp the reality of this love. The Old Testament is full of references regarding the love of God, but in Jesus the Messiah there is seen a far greater expression of the love of God than could ever be envisioned by only reading the Old Testament. That love was demonstrated most profoundly on the cross where the Messiah gave His life for the sins of the world.

### **The Messiah's Death**

A once popular chorus asks, "How can I be free from sin?" and responds, "Lead me to the cross of Jesus." Simple words, yet within them is contained profound truth and the wonder of God's love. We have seen that sin is humanity's greatest problem: every person is born with a sinful nature; sin disqualifies from heaven; sin is behind all inhumanity; sin brings God's curse; sin separates humanity from God; sin is the cause of death; people cannot change themselves from sinner to saints, and without God's intervention humanity is lost forever. Thankfully, we have also seen that God is immensely merciful. He entered into covenant with Israel and gave them the blood of animal sacrifices to make atonement for their sin. He promised forgiveness to the repentant and blessing for the obedient. But, the Old Testament covenant was not faultless (Heb. 8:7), and God promised a new, better covenant in which sins would be fully dealt with, wherein His laws would be written in hearts and minds, and in which relationship with Himself would be on a new and more intimate level,

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD; I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

"No more shall every man teach his neighbour, 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." (Jer. 31:33,34; cf. Heb. 8:8-12; Heb. 10:16,17)

As Moses mediated the old covenant, so too this new covenant required a mediator; that

mediator was to be the Messiah, and as the old covenant was dedicated with blood, so too the new covenant required dedication by blood. That blood, as we know, was not the blood taken from animals, but the blood of Jesus the Messiah. His death would be the seal of the new covenant, His own innocent blood thereby availing for the remission of sins (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 9:12-15).

The necessity of the Messiah's death was hidden from the Jewish mind. They expected a conquering king who would free them from their enemies, their minds blind to the Messianic texts which spoke of the Suffering Servant who would be, "smitten by God, and afflicted"; "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:4.5). They did not understand that the LORD would "lay on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Even Jesus' closest disciples did not at first understand this aspect of His Messianic ministry. It is recorded that He told them,

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again. (Lk. 18:31-33)

But we learn of the disciples,

. . . they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken. (Lk. 18:34)

### **Truth Revealed**

It was not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus that the truth of His Messianic ministry was revealed to His disciples. During the time between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus taught them the full significance of the Messianic texts, opening their understanding, and showing how, "it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day" (Lk. 24:27, 46).

This new revelation and understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures was a great wonder to the early church, and the Messianic prophecies, fulfilled in Jesus, formed the basis of all their teaching and preaching.<sup>6</sup> In Acts chapter 2 we find that Peter was the first to express this new revelation when he preached on the Day of Pentecost, showing how the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus proved Him to be the Messiah. By quoting and expounding well-known Messianic prophecies, he convinced his hearers that Jesus is both

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<sup>6</sup> See appendix 3 for a table of Messianic teaching and preaching in Acts.

Lord and Messiah. Convicted of the truth, they cried out, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), Peter responded,

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

This one statement of Peter encapsulated all that had been promised through the Old Testament pages in regard to the remedy for humanity’s plight due to its sin. From the moment sin entered the world, God had promised a Saviour, One who would “bruise Satan’s head” and reverse the effects of the curse. Now Peter and the disciples, convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, would boldly preach Him to all.

We have seen how Israel was given the law, with its sacrifices, to enable forgiveness and the establishment of relationship with God, but the law, of itself, could not effect the perfect cleansing of the sinner, nor could it effect a permanent change of heart, nor provide full restoration of the relationship with God - such was its weakness and failure (themes developed in Hebrews, and see Rom. 8:3). Full deliverance only began with the Messiah’s first visit to earth, when He came to deal with humanity’s greatest enemy, sin. That enemy, in the face of which people are completely helpless, Jesus conquered and put to death on the cross. In that one victorious act, His obedient, sinless life was sacrificed, and He became the propitiation for the sins of the world ( 1Jn. 2:2; 1Jn. 4:10; cf. Heb. 2:17; Rom. 3:25).<sup>7</sup> His love, and the Father’s love, brought Him to our world; the King of glory became the Lamb who was slain. He paid the price for our redemption with His own precious blood, and so He can give the promise that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

### **The Love of God**

There is wonderful and profound truth in the apostle John’s words that Jesus the Messiah, “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5), they are central to the message of the gospel and ought to be deep in the heart of every believer who is called to be an ambassador for the Messiah,

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. (2Cor. 5:20)

That message is one of reconciliation: that God, towards whom we have all lived in

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<sup>7</sup> Propitiation: see Appendix 2 for discussion of the New Testament use of this word.

rebellious alienation, has in Christ comprehensively dealt with sin on humankind's behalf. Forgiveness of sin is on offer; the way is open to deep intimate relationship with our God, and an eternal home in the kingdom of God awaits the repentant.

The apostle Paul also understood these profound truths. Thinking on the wonder of the love of God for sinners, he linked it with the ministry of the Messiah,

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall we be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:8-11)

The theme of God's love weaves its way through the pages of the Bible (and has inspired countless hymn-writers). That love supremely expressed at the cross where the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, shed His blood for the sins of the world. For repentant sinners, who have experienced such depth of love and are amazed at God's grace, there is awesome wonder and thankfulness. And so, the saint, having been reconciled to God, and having appreciation of the price paid for him because of the Lord's love for him, rejoices, and is persuaded that nothing can separate him from that love which is in Christ Jesus the Lord (Rom. 8:35-39); the knowledge of His love sustaining and comforting through life's trials and tribulations. Assured that entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Jesus the Messiah (2Pet. 1:11), and that in the "kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. 1:13) peace, joy and righteousness will be his portion forever, the disciple of Jesus is content, knowing that "God is love," and abiding in that love, he is without fear, and at perfect peace (1Jn. 4:16-19; Isa. 26:3).

Let those of us, who know the love of God, be like those first disciples, and boldly proclaim "repentance and remission of sins" to all (Luke 24:47), knowing that this is the heart of the gospel, that it is the focus of the Messiah's ministry. And, that it is in hearing these things that the sinner is brought to see his own dire condition, and so, being convicted by the Holy Spirit, cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" In this way he is led to the Saviour who loves him, and who can wash him from his sins with His own precious blood, and so make him fit for a place in His kingdom (1Cor. 6:9-11).

There is no love like the love of Jesus,



Never to fade or fall,  
Till into the fold of the peace of God  
He has gathered us all.  
Jesus' love, precious love, boundless and pure and free!  
O turn to that love, weary wandering soul,  
Jesus pleadeth with thee. (W.E. Littlewood)



## Chapter 5

### A Kingdom of Priests

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father. (Rev. 1:6)

This text in Revelation highlights the high priestly ministry of Jesus the Messiah, and indicates that those who have received the cleansing of His blood have become members of His kingdom of priests.<sup>8</sup> The second half of the sentence is the subject of this chapter, and the text readily connects with the words of Peter in his first epistle,

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people, but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1Pet. 2:9,10)

That quote, in turn, takes us further back into the Old Testament with the calling of the nation of Israel to be God's own people, and the words of God given to them through Moses,

'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (Ex. 19:5,6)

There are important elements in these scriptures, they reveal to us God's desire to call out of the world a people to be His own, in the Old Testament that people was Israel; in the New

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<sup>8</sup> The phrase in NKJV, "kings and priests" can also be translated, "kingdom of priests," some manuscripts contain the Greek *basileus* which means king, others contain *basileia* which means kingdom. The same is true of Rev. 5:10. "Kingdom of priests" seems more likely and fits with other Scriptures such as Ex. 19:6, where Israel is called to be a "kingdom of priests." See, Notes: (1) under "KING" in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.

Testament it is those, Jew and Gentile, who are born-again through faith in Jesus and thereby constitute the church. There are similarities, with some marked differences, between the two groups:

- In both cases, God's people are described as "special," as "priests" and as a "holy nation." Peter, writing to New Testament believers calls them, "a chosen generation"; Moses speaking of Israel said, "the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself" (Deut. 7:6).
- Both are witnesses: the church by proclaiming, "the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light"; while to Israel, God said, "You are My witnesses," and Israel was called to show that their God was the one, true God (Isa. 43:10-12).
- Israel, as a holy nation, was called out from Egypt under the leadership of Moses; New Testament believers, also called a holy nation, are called out from the world under the headship of Jesus the Messiah (Col. 1:13). Israel was (and still is) a distinct ethnic group, the church is a mixture of all ethnic groups, Jew and Gentile.
- Both groups are covenant people, Israel was called to observe the Mosaic covenant; the church is called to observe the new covenant; the old covenant was ratified with the blood of animals, the new with the blood of Jesus (Heb. 9:16-28).

Such similarities and differences highlight the important Biblical truth that the church is not a separate entity from Israel, or a replacement of Israel; Gentiles are grafted into Israel, while unbelieving Jews are broken off (Rom. 11:17). The church therefore, comprising believing Jews and Gentiles, is a continuation, and a physical and spiritual expansion of Israel, not a replacement of Israel. In this respect, and relevant to our study, is the fact that the new covenant was promised to be made with "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). To partake of the new covenant, Christians must therefore, of necessity, be grafted into Israel.

### **Priesthood**

To understand what it means to be a kingdom of priests, we need to examine some of the Biblical teaching on priesthood. At its most basic, the Biblical concept of priesthood is mediatorial and representative. The priest took position between the people and God, he mediated the relationship on behalf of God and the people, acting as representative for both. The necessity of such a function is there, because on one hand there is the absolute holiness of God, and on the other hand the intrinsic sinfulness of humankind, these two aspects make meaningful relationship between the two impossible. God is love, He seeks worshippers (Jn.

4:23), and He desires to show love and give blessing to the people He created; humanity being estranged from its creator finds no lasting relief from its painful and seemingly hopeless experience of life, there is therefore, mutual benefit if the relationship can be restored.

### ***Priesthood Prior to the Law***

Prior to the giving of the law at Sinai, Scripture has little to say about priesthood, and it is difficult to know exactly when and how the concept of priesthood developed. In Genesis chapter 4 we see Cain and Abel going before the LORD to present offerings, indicating that a level of access to God was still possible at that point in time for the immediate sons of Adam. From that time onward, God appears to become more distant from the people of the world, and we find that only certain chosen individuals communicated with Him.

In Genesis, two priests are mentioned, Melchizedek (Gen. 14); and Joseph's father-in-law, Poti-Pherah (Gen. 41:45); and in Exodus, Jethro, Moses father-in-law was a priest (Ex. 2:16; 3:1). Such mentions show that the need of mediatorial priesthood was recognised even among people groups outside of the patriarchal families, and there must have been among them the concept of a God who was distant and unreachable to the majority, but accessible to certain individuals. Amongst the patriarchs, it seems that the head of the family often took on the role of priest: Noah (Gen. 8:20,21), Abraham (Gen. 15:1ff; 18:1ff), Jacob (Gen. 35:1) and Job (Job 1:5; 42:7,8) are seen on occasions taking up a priestly role, making offerings, communing with God and interceding on behalf of others.

Priests are mentioned in Exodus chapter 19 (vv. 19; 24), before the institution of the Levitical priesthood, and it is not clear just who this group was, it is likely that following the example of the patriarchs recorded in Genesis, Israelite families expected that senior family members would perform some priestly duties such as prayers and offering of sacrifices. It may be a reference to the seventy elders who went up to see God (Ex. 24:1, 9); or to the young men who made offerings to the LORD (Ex. 24:5). Whatever the case, it shows that prior to an established and recognised priesthood, there was recognition of separation from God and the need of an assigned mediatorial role to specified persons.

### ***Mount Sinai***

It is with the background of scriptures leading up to Exodus 19:6, that the Lord's call of Israel to be, "to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) should be understood. The promise contained within these words of the Lord is that every Israelite would have access to God. No longer would communion with him be the privilege of a select few, but God would be available to all. What followed in Exodus chapters 19 and 20 however, showed that the

children of Israel were not ready for such relationship. There in the wilderness of Sinai at the foot of the mountain the people gathered, washed and consecrated themselves, and got ready to meet with God (Ex. 19:10-17), that meeting proved to be very dramatic,

Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. (Ex. 19:18,19)

This was an awesome and terrifying spectacle, and the response of the people to it is recorded in Exodus 20:18,19,

. . . they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

Called to be a kingdom of priests, but here confronted with the terrifying reality of the presence of the God, the Israelites were overcome with fear, they felt keenly their own unworthiness to stand in God’s presence, and they pleaded with Moses to speak on their behalf. They were not ready to be priests, they could not bear to be in God’s presence, and so they asked Moses to mediate before God on their behalf. The prospect of relationship with God, and of individual and personal priesthood was too awesome and too fearful for the Israelites to contemplate. With this in mind, we should see God’s provision of an appointed, mediatorial priesthood as an act of His grace and mercy, He gave them the law with its statutes so as to make relationship possible, the priests, as mediators, would represent God and act on behalf of the people.

### **Priesthood in the Law**

God called the nation of Israel into covenant relationship with Himself, Exodus through to Deuteronomy give the terms of that covenant, and we see the development of the priestly ministry. Aaron is appointed as high priest, his sons called to minister as priests alongside him (Ex. 28:1), they alone allowed to minister the holy things within the tabernacle. The high priest was the only one allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. In Numbers we see that the Levites were appointed to the practical aspects of worship, assisting the Aaronic priests; and while it was the family of Aaron who conducted the sacrifices and offerings at the altar on behalf of the people, the Levites also held a mediatorial role, camping around the tabernacle, “that there may be no wrath on the

congregation of the children of Israel” (Nu. 1:53).

In summary, certain points should be clear from the preceding examination of priesthood in the Pentateuch:

- God desires relationship with humanity, sin stands in the way of that relationship.
- God will not compromise His holiness.
- The presence of a holy God is terrifying to sinful people, and they cannot stand in His presence.
- To deal with sin, and effect relationship, God, in His grace, initiated priesthood and atoning sacrifices, as part of the covenant with Israel.
- The Levitical priesthood, operating between God and the people, representing both parties, and by conducting the atoning sacrifices and rituals, ensured the covenant relationship was maintained.
- The Mosaic law limited priesthood to the tribe of Levi.

God’s desire was that the nation of Israel would be a kingdom of priests, a people who would have intimate relationship with Him, and the law gave partial fulfilment of that desire. However, from the human side, the prospect of relationship with God remained fearful. From God’s side, the people retained sinfulness, the blood of animals could not take away sins (Heb. 10:4); a level of relationship was possible, but intimate, personal interaction was possible only with a few individuals. God’s plan was for something better, as promised through the prophet Jeremiah,

“Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah - not 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. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

“No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least or them to the greatest of them says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34)

Concerning this study, the relevant part of this promise in Jeremiah’s prophecy is that “all

shall know Me,” this promise is fulfilled through the ministry of Jesus the Messiah, our great High Priest who is not of the tribe of Levi, but He is of the “order of Melchizedek.”

### **A New High Priest**

Jesus the Messiah is unique because He is both priest and king. In Israel, the high priests (Lev. 8:12) and kings (1Sam. 16:1; 13) received anointing at the outset of their ministries; but no one could hold both offices, the two roles were kept distinct, and neither priest or king was allowed to assume the duties of the other. This is clearly illustrated on the occasion when King Uzziah took it upon himself to undertake priestly function and burn incense in the temple, Scripture records that by doing so, “he transgressed against the LORD his God”; he was struck with leprosy because of this sin, and had to spend the rest of his days in an isolated house (2Chron. 26:16-21). Jesus as Messiah however, is anointed (Lk. 4:18) to be both priest and king: through Mary He had natural descent from King David (Mt. 1:1; Lk. 3:31), and so had right to the throne; but according to the law, priests were of the tribe of Levi; and from within Levi, only Aaron and his descendants could be appointed high priests. Jesus’ birth made Him a member of the tribe of Judah, He was not descended from Aaron, but Jesus’ priesthood is not Levitical, His priesthood is of another order - the order of Melchizedek.

### ***The Order of Melchizedek***

Psalm 110 is very important, it is a recognised Messianic psalm and contains the promise that the Messiah will be, “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (v.4).

Melchizedek is mentioned in only three places in the Bible (Gen. 14:18-20; Ps. 110; Heb. 5:6-7:21), yet he is of huge significance when it comes to understanding the ministry of the Messiah. The first mention of Melchizedek is in Genesis chapter 14, where he meets Abraham who is returning after defeating four kings, and from whom Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot. Melchizedek translates as “king of righteousness,” and he was given the titles, “king of Salem,” and, “priest of God Most High.” Abraham honours him by giving him a tithe. This event is taken up in Hebrew chapter 7 where the writer shows that Melchizedek, being a king and a priest, was a type of the Messiah.

The Mosaic law appointed high priests specifically from the line of Aaron, Jesus could not therefore be a priest according to the law; but now that Jesus has been revealed to be both king and priest according to the order of Melchizedek, as prophesied in Psalm 110, the stipulation in the law that priesthood could only be undertaken by the tribe of Levi is no longer valid, and so, the priesthood is changed, and along with it a change of the law (Heb. 7:12). The old covenant is “annulled” (Heb. 7:18), and there is the bringing in of a “better



hope” through which “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:19; 22).

Because Jesus’ priesthood is not according to the law, but of the order of Melchizedek, all those who through faith belong to the kingdom of Jesus, and know Him as their High Priest and their King, are not subject to the stipulation in the law that priesthood is only from the tribe of Levi. Believers in Jesus are therefore able to serve as priests in His kingdom, and can justifiably be called “a royal priesthood” (1Pet. 2:9), and a “kingdom of priests” (Rev. 1:5; 5:10). It is important for New Testament believers to understand that their priesthood is not a Levitical priesthood, and therefore it is not undertaken according to the rules contained in the Mosaic law (though, as we shall see, there are similarities and shadows contained within the Levitical priesthood). The most obvious aspect of this is in the area of atoning sacrifices, Jesus as High Priest gave Himself, once for all, as the perfect sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:10), there is no longer any necessity for any other sacrifice, and Levitical priesthood is therefore rendered irrelevant.

### **A Better Priesthood**

New Testament believers are called to be a kingdom of priests, but not according to the terms of the law of Moses, their priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek, from which Jesus is their forerunner (Heb. 6:20). There are significant differences and similarities between the two, and while the order of Melchizedek has replaced the Levitical priesthood, there are within the Levitical statutes “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb.8:5). These things are instructive and assist in understanding of the ways of God.

#### ***Differences:***

***Atoning sacrifices are no longer necessary.*** Jesus, by offering up Himself has made the one perfect sacrifice for sins. The law required continual sacrifices year after year (Heb. 10:1), Jesus offered Himself as “one sacrifice for sins forever” (Heb. 10:12), therefore those sacrifices required in the law no longer have any validity.

***There is one Mediator, Jesus.*** Aaron and his descendants died and were replaced by others, over the years there were many priests. Jesus lives forever and is now the, “one mediator between God and men” (1Tim. 2:5).

***Jesus’ high priestly ministry is eternal.*** Jesus lives eternally and sits at the right hand of God, interceding on behalf of His people, and so He is able to “save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (Heb. 7:24,25).

***Jesus’ blood is more efficient than the blood of animals.*** God ordained that, “without shedding of blood there would be no remission” (Heb. 9:22); and under the law, things and people were cleansed by the blood of animals. The blood of animals could not take away sins, and the

worshippers were not perfected. Jesus' willing offering of Himself as a man accomplished that which the law could not, and those who come to God through faith in Him, are cleansed fully, even to the conscience (Heb. 9:14), and are said to have been "perfected" by His one offering (Heb. 10:14).

***There is no fear in God's presence.*** We saw in Exodus chapters 19 and 20 how the presence of God brought fear and trembling to the people of Israel. That fear of God remained even to New Testament times. Zacharias the priest, in his prophecy, looked forward to the Messiah's salvation which would be proclaimed by his son, John, and saw that the time had come that they,

Might serve Him [the Lord God of Israel] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Lk. 2:74)

Zacharias realised that there would be redemption and complete remission of sins available through the Messiah's ministry, a salvation that would bring peace (Lk. 2:76-79). Those saved through faith in Jesus have, "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us" (Heb. 10:19); and can, "draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22), for them, there is no fear on entering the presence of God.

***All have access to God.*** According to the terms of the law, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. Only certain privileged individuals, such as prophets, heard the voice of God on a regular basis. Now, according to the new covenant, all believers have free access to God at all times, and all can have deep intimate communion with Him.

These differences are significant and may be summed up by the words, "one," "eternal," "perfect" and "better." Under the new, everlasting covenant, there is one perfect high priest, whose ministry is eternal; He made one perfect offering, which gives perfect eternal salvation; those who receive His salvation are being made perfect; all the benefits of the new covenant are so much better than those of the old.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Similarities:***

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<sup>9</sup> For further study, see the use of these words in The Epistle to the Hebrews:

"One": 10:12; 10:14

"Eternal": 5:9; 6:2; 9:12; 9:14; 9:15; 13:20

"Perfect": 2:10; 5:9; 7:19; 9:9; 9:11; 10:1; 11:40; 12:23; 13:21

"Better": 1:4; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16; 11:35; 11:40; 12:24

Looking closely at the Levitical priesthood, there are certain characteristics, which while specific to the regulations of the law, also contain elements which are clearly applicable to New Testament believers. These characteristics are shadows in the old covenant, and they point to spiritual realities experienced in the present dispensation by disciples of Jesus:

**Chosen.** Aaron and the Levites were chosen by God for their roles in the priesthood (Ex. 28:1, Nu. 3:12); New Testament believers have also been chosen by God (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13).

**Service.** The Levites were chosen and called by God to serve Him and the people (Nu.3:5-13); New Testament believers are also to serve, called by God to be, “His special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14); they are exhorted to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God as an act of “reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1), and to serve one another in love and humility (cf. Rom. 12:3-16).

**Cleansing.** The Old Testament priests were washed with water before they could enter into service (Ex. 29:4); the blood of the Messiah cleanses the “conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). The washing experienced by the believer in Jesus, is not merely outward, there is a deep inner cleansing, Paul speaks of the “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), and Hebrews talks of “hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

**Clothing.** The priests wore the garments prescribed in the law (Ex. 29:5-9); believers in Jesus, have, “put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24), they have the armour of God (Eph. 6:11) and will wear fine linen, pure and white at the marriage supper (Rev. 19:8); such are their garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10)

**Anointing.** The high priest was anointed with the holy anointing oil (Lev. 8:12); believers have been, “sealed [anointed] with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13).

**Consecration.** The priests were presented to God and went through the rituals of consecration by which they were set apart (or “hallowed,” Ex. 29:1) and were to be wholly devoted to their ministry (Lev. 8). Believers in Jesus, are also to present themselves to God: they are saved and called with a “holy calling” (2Tim. 1:9), that they may be “instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13), and “vessels of honour, sanctified and useful for the Master” (2Tim. 2:21). This setting apart is a separation from all that is worldly, fleshly and demonic, and so to be holy and completely dedicated to God and His purposes, in this way believers are a “holy nation.”

### **New Testament Priesthood**

Having looked briefly at some of the background regarding Biblical priesthood, we who know Jesus as our High Priest and King, can make practical application to our own function

as a kingdom of priests.

Now that the Messiah has come and fulfilled His ministry according to the order of Melchizedek, we understand that the Levitical priesthood has no practical application for our lives as disciples of Jesus. Aaron, his descendants and the Levites stood as representatives of the people and of God, and mediated between both sides. Now that in Jesus, all believers have personal access to God, there is no need for a defined group of priests.

A major part of the Levitical priesthood was taken up with the offerings and sacrifices for sin, now that Jesus has made the once for all sacrifice, there is no need for this aspect of priesthood. Jesus fulfils His priestly ministry from heaven, from there mediating salvation on behalf of all who through faith receive Him as their Saviour.

Though there is no practical application for us of the Levitical priesthood, the shadows contained therein point to our priestly function as New Testament Christians. The fruition of these can be seen in the following areas:

### ***Reconciliation***

Priesthood was necessary because of the enmity between humankind and God, and relationship being impossible while sin was present. The priests were God's ordained mediators between Himself and humankind. Now all believers in Jesus are reconciled to God and brought into a new and wonderful relationship with Him. Every believer can fulfil a ministry of reconciliation, witnessing and testifying to their salvation and leading others to the Saviour (2Cor. 5:18-20).

### ***Worship***

Jesus stated that God seeks worshippers who worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:23). The Levites were involved in all aspects of worship around the tabernacle and later in the temple. Among them were musicians, teachers, treasurers, scribes, evangelists and those who undertook the practical aspects of care for the house of God. The Hebrew word, "*abad*," and the Greek word, "*latreuo*" are often translated "worship," both contain the thought of service, and we should not think of worship being confined to singing or praying, true worship involves every area of life, and includes the surrender of life to serve the living God. As disciples of Jesus we are exhorted to, "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). As the priests and Levites were called to a life of service to God, so too are we as followers of Jesus, and all we do, practically and spiritually ought to be done as an act of worshipful devotion to Him,

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks

to God the Father through Him. (Col. 3:17)

### ***Access to God***

Under the dispensation of the old covenant, only the high priest had access to the Holy of Holies once a year, there to make atonement before God for the sins of the people. Now in Jesus, every believer has access to the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). We need to see this as a wonderful and tremendous privilege. From the beginning of creation God has desired a people with whom He could have deep and personal relationship. God is love, and He desires to pour out blessings on the people He created, and Scripture hints at the anguish He feels when sin comes between Himself and people (e.g. Ezk. 18:31,32). God determined to do something to restore the relationship, He gave the law to Israel, and in the fulness of time, He sent His Son to pay the price for our sins so that the relationship could be fully restored, and redeemed people could receive His love and blessings. What a price He was prepared to pay! For us, who have received Jesus as our Saviour it means we can have experience of unimaginable, intimate relationship with the God of the universe; at His feet, in His throne room we may hear His voice and present to Him our own petitions. And we may do that boldly and without fear, because our sins are forgiven and the blood of His Son has cleansed us completely, the barrier, represented by the veil before the Holy of Holies, is completely removed. In that place of communion we may fulfil a priestly ministry of intercession, interceding on behalf of the lost, praying for those in need and supporting one another in our desire to serve the Lord. The apostle Paul undertook such ministry, praying for the saints (Eph. 1:15-21), and appreciated those who did the same for him (Eph. 6:18-20).

### **No Fear**

In the Messiah's kingdom of priests, there is fulfilment of the longing expressed in Zacharias' prophecy that, "we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Lk. 2:74,75). Zacharias was himself a priest descended from Aaron, and perhaps as he served in the temple he felt the uncertainty and the fear of trying to serve a living and holy God, and maybe his thoughts sometimes troubled him: Had he fulfilled all he was supposed to do? Could he be sure all his sins were forgiven? Would God accept Him? Had he made any mistakes and erred from the law? Zacharias' son proclaimed the way of salvation, pointing to the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. From that time, all who believe in the Messiah, have been grafted into Israel (Rom. 11:17); and so become fellow citizens of the commonwealth of Israel, partakers of the new covenant and the promises; the middle wall of partition is broken down, and together believing Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God and are at peace with God.

They are able to fulfil their priestly ministry, because, through Jesus the Messiah, they all have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:14-18).

Hebrews 12:18-29 provides a comparison between the Israelites who in the past met God on earth at Sinai, and those of us who today commune with Him in the heavenly city, and (here briefly stated) it provides a fitting conclusion: We have not come to the mountain which burned with fire, the sight of which terrified Moses and those with him, but we have come to Mount Zion, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, which is far better. At Sinai, God spoke on earth, now He speaks from heaven, we should not refuse Him; with grace we should serve Him acceptably, not with terror, but with reverence and godly fear. We are reminded that God is a consuming fire, and there is something of a warning for us in these verses: Yes, we know God and have relationship with Him in a wonderful way because of Jesus and the price He paid for us, and we have wonderful spiritual blessings. However, we are not excused from service, rather, we are exhorted to serve Him with far more diligence and fervour than those of the old covenant. There is a spiritual principle, mentioned by Jesus, that to whom much is given, much will be asked (Lk. 12:48); God has given us so much, in sending His Son to effect reconciliation, should not we who understand these things, respond, not because we are terrified of him, but in loving thankfulness, with the giving of our all in return?

Let us rejoice and appreciate all that God has done in order to make us a kingdom of priests; and like the priests of old, spend our lives in serving the living God, declaring His praises, for His honour, and to the glory of His name, knowing that this is what He has called us to do.

## Chapter 6

### Glory and Dominion

To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1:6)

The Apostle John's words here echo a twofold desire that is in the hearts and minds of all who know Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Those desires are: one, for the day to come when every person will recognise and acknowledge Jesus for who He truly is, which will be the revealing of His glory; and two, that He would reign over all, exercising His dominion, and finally put away all that opposes His kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy. Such desires are also given expression in the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples,

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done . . . Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. (Mt. 6:9-13)

Daniel too, in a prophetic vision of the Messiah, looked forward to the time of the Messiah's glory and dominion,

I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
Which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one  
Which shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13,14)

Throughout the ages, those who know God, and hunger and thirst for righteousness, have held this longing and expectancy that the Lord will come, and with His coming put an end to all unrighteousness and set up His eternal kingdom of peace.

### **A Tension**

Christians live life in something of a tension, we know God's promises for a future of perfect peace and righteousness in His eternal kingdom, and the Holy Spirit acts as a deposit in our hearts giving us a foretaste of the things to come (Eph. 1:13,14). At the same time, we live in this world with its trials and tribulations, and experience in our own lives the effects of universal corruption because of sin. This tension is expressed in Romans where Paul writes,

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (Rom. 8:22-25)

The reality of this tension is felt when we suffer, and when we see others suffer. Suffering is the detrimental effect of living in a sin-infested universe where wickedness abounds, where disease and natural disasters cause terrible suffering, and where people are robbed of true fulfillment in life by demonic forces which steal, kill and destroy (see Jn. 10:8-10). These things exact a terrible toll on humankind. The knowledge that these sufferings were never God's intention for us, and that God has something far better in store, adds a certain profound complexity to the Christians's thoughts and emotions; we are saddened to see the sufferings of others, and sometimes perplexed by our own infirmities, while at the same time, our hope of better things sustains and strengthens us in the walk of faith. Such thinking is compounded when we see those we love going through suffering and trials, and when those ones are unbelievers, without Christ and without hope, then our hearts are rent, and we long for them to receive Jesus into their lives, and experience the same living hope and divine help that we ourselves enjoy.

The Bible makes clear that before the return of Christ, things on earth will get very bad. Paul wrote to Timothy that,

. . . in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of money,



boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. (2Tim. 3:1-5)

Paul was writing about the evil that men will perpetrate one against another; Jesus, also speaking of the last days, told of events that will occur in the natural world,

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Lk. 21:25,26)

While such a future appears very bleak and distressing, for Christians there is the blessed assurance that their lives are safe in the hands of Jesus, and that even if they should suffer in this life, there is the great comfort of a wonderful, eternal and pain-free future promised and awaiting them. Again, the thought of such things brings tension, for while we know the time is limited and we look forward to the day when the Lord will bring things to an end, we also know this present age is the day of grace when people may call on the Lord for salvation; on one hand our hearts cry, "Come, Lord Jesus," while on the other hand we do not want the end to come while our loved ones remain unsaved and in danger of hell. Similar tensions may have been in Peter's mind when thinking about the scoffing of unbelievers who say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2Pet. 3:3,4), and he wrote that,

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass 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. (2Pet. 3:9,10)

We long for God's kingdom to come quickly and put an end to all misery; God in His longsuffering is giving time for repentance, His justice demands an end to wickedness, while His mercy requires Him to reach out with the offer of salvation and delay the day of wrath. Peter tells us how to relate and behave under these circumstances,

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you

to be, in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the day of God . . . be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless, and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. (2Pet. 3:11-15)

As we wait for the day of the Lord to come, we may not escape this tension, but Peter gives good advice: We are to be living the Christian life, our holy conduct being a testimony to others, that they may look to Jesus for salvation. Our lives are to show the reality of the presence of Jesus; the full revelation of His glory and dominion lies in the future, in the meantime, our lives, as His followers, ought to show that we know His glory, and live our lives under His dominion.

### **Glory**

There are several words in the original text of the Bible which are translated by the English word “glory,” the most common in Hebrew is *kabhodh*; and in Greek, *doxa*. The basic meaning of the words is encapsulated by such English words as: weight, glory, honour, excellence, majesty, purity, brightness, prominence, ample and ornamental. Biblical examples of the use of the word in a human or material sense include the following:

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, “Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s, and from what was our father’s he has acquired all this wealth [Hebrew, *kabhodh*]. (Gen. 31:1)

So you shall tell my father of all my glory [Hebrew, *kabhodh*] in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; (Gen. 45:13)

Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honour [Hebrew, *kabhodh*] be united to their assembly. (Gen. 49:6)

. . . I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory [Greek, *doxa*] was not arrayed like one of these. (Mt. 6:29)

. . . when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory [Greek, *doxa*] in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. (Lk. 14:10)

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the

earth shall bring their glory [Greek, *doxa*] and honour into it. (Rev. 21:24)

These examples show the use of the word “glory” to express the pinnacles of human achievement, and it was often applied to that which was considered good, great and honourable. The word can also be used to describe the splendour of natural things, for example in 1Corinthians,

There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. (1Cor. 15:41)

And speaking of the resurrected body of the saints, Paul says,

It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. (1Cor. 15:43)

Interesting though it is to look at these examples, and some understanding of the use of the words in the ordinary things of life does help us to see how it relates to spiritual realities, our concern here is with the glory of God and of the Messiah Jesus. When we read of the glory of God, we should therefore think of it as the highest possible expression of His perfect being. God’s greatness is unsearchable (Ps. 145:3), and the fullness of His glory is beyond human comprehension, yet something of it can be grasped by the human mind and spirit, because He has chosen to make Himself known through the Scriptures, and He has at times revealed Himself with physical manifestations of His glory.

### **The Glory of God**

The first mention of God’s glory is in Exodus chapter 16, the congregation of the children of Israel having been delivered from Egypt, their journey brought them to the Wilderness of Sin, there they complained against Moses and Aaron about the lack of food. Moses’ response was to tell them that, “in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD” (v. 7); and next day the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud (v.10), that evening He sent quail, and the next morning manna appeared on the ground. The cloud (Hebrew *‘anan*) mentioned here is an important aspect in the manifestation of the glory of God, it is first mentioned in Exodus 13:21,

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night.

This cloud is mentioned many more times in the Pentateuch, it was a sign of God's presence among the people, it also served as a covering for the LORD so that the fullness of His glory was not revealed. When Moses asked of the LORD to see His glory, the LORD told him, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me and live." The LORD's response to Moses' request was to descend in the cloud, putting Moses in the cleft of the rock and covering him with His hand while He passed by (Ex. 33:18 - 34:5). Even Moses, as intimate as His relationship was with the LORD, could not see God in the fullness of His glory and live, so God used the cloud as a covering, and spoke out of the cloud (see also Ex. 19:9). The Israelites, looking on while Moses communed with God on Mt. Sinai, saw the mountain covered with the cloud, from which "the sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire" (Ex. 24:15-17).

Christians often talk of the 'shekinah glory,' and the word shekinah comes from the Hebrew *shakhan* which means dwelling, abiding or rest. In relation to the cloud it refers to its abiding presence, or its resting place among the children of Israel; the cloud, the shekinah and the glory come together at the completion of the tabernacle,

And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud [*'anan*] rested [*shakhan*] above it, and the glory [*kabodh*] of the LORD filled the tabernacle [*mishkhan*]. (Ex. 40:35)

The cloud stayed with Israel, hovering over the tabernacle throughout their journeys in the wilderness (Ex. 40:38), it was to them a sign that God was dwelling in their midst. The Hebrew word used for tabernacle is *mishkhan*, derived from *shakhan* it reinforced the Israelites understanding and sense that the LORD had His dwelling place among them.

In the revelation of His glory to Israel, God was showing His desire to make Himself known to humanity, and that He wanted to manifest His presence among His people (Ex. 29:45). This experience of God dwelling in the midst was very important, His presence being a source of comfort and assurance in the midst of life's uncertainties. The covenant with Israel set the rule and standards of behaviour for Israel, by keeping the covenantal statutes they would be assured of God's abiding presence; when there was sin and disobedience then God could withdraw His presence, and with it His protection and blessings (see 1Sam. 4:21.25; Ezk. chapters 9,10).

God's glory, revealed in the cloud to Israel during their wilderness wanderings, was a sign of His presence, an assurance that He was with them as they headed to the promised land of Canaan. It had a sanctifying effect (Ex. 29:43), marking out Israel as His special nation, and distinguishing them from the surrounding nations. Scripture does not record when the

cloud was taken away, it is recorded that it was, “in the sight of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Ex. 40:38), and it is reasonable to assume that the cloud no longer appeared once Israel had entered Canaan. The ark and the tabernacle continued to be a sign of God’s presence, and the cloud is not mentioned again until the completion of Solomon’s temple when, in an event which resembles that of the completion of the tabernacle, “the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1Kings 8:10,11), and the priests could not enter the temple. Solomon saw this as a sign that the LORD would continue to dwell among Israel,

“The LORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud.

I have surely built You an exalted house, and a place to dwell in forever.” (1Kings 8:12,13)

We see in the Old Testament the continuing fulfilment of God’s promise to “dwell among the children of Israel,” and to “be their God” (Ex. 29:45). But there was to be a greater revelation than this, for the LORD promised that one day, “all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” (Nu. 14:21).

### **Jesus, Lord of Glory**

The glory of God, as we have seen, expresses the highest and most majestic manifestation of His true character. The nation of Israel was privileged to have had a real view of that glory, and it proved to be awesome and too much for them to bear (Deut. 5:23-26). That God chose to manifest His glory shows that He desires to live among men in relationship with them, whereby He is worshipped, and grants beneficent blessings to those who will love Him and live according to His righteous statutes. In the New Testament we have a fuller more perfect revelation of the glory of the Lord, that glory is seen in the person of the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah. The writer of Hebrews, speaking of Jesus, said that He is,

The brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. (Heb. 1:3)

And John in his gospel, says of Him,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:14)

The apostle Paul calls Jesus, “the Lord of Glory” (1Cor. 2:8); such language used in the New Testament for Jesus tells us about His divine nature, that He is equal with God, and

shares the same glory (i.e. the essential nature) as His Father. Jesus was aware of this, and spoke of the “glory which I had with You before the world was” (Jn. 17:5). Jesus appeared on earth, not revealing His glory in a cloud with lightnings and thunderings, but by living as a man, and doing the works the Father had sent Him to do. Those works proved that He is truly the Son of God and worthy of glory and honour and praise.

The first mention of Jesus manifesting His glory was at Cana when He turned water into wine (Jn. 2:11), His miracles bore testimony to His divinity and the truth of His words (Jn. 5:36), and His disciples believed in Him because of it. There would however, be a far greater demonstration of Jesus’ glory, and shortly before going to the cross He said, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified” (Jn. 12:23). At the cross Jesus manifested His own glory and that of His Father; not with dramatic and powerful, awe-inspiring manifestations of His power and majesty, but it is in the agony, shame and horror of a criminal’s degrading death that we see the most wonderful representation of the true character of God. We noted that when Moses asked the LORD to show Him His glory, he was refused a full sight of the glory, but the LORD hid him in the cleft of the rock and proclaimed His name (Ex. 33:18-34:7). For the Israelite, names indicated the essential nature of a person, so when the LORD proclaimed His name, He was revealing something vital about His own character. Two essential aspects of God’s character are expressed in this name: first, His mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth, expressed in His willingness to forgive sin; and second, His punishment of sin, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon their descendants, by which we see His wrath against sin. These aspects must be held together if we are to have a right understanding of God, and they come together at the cross.

It is at the cross that we see a most wonderful expression of the character of God: on one side we see His Son suffering for the sins of the world because of His love and mercy for us; on the other we see the Son suffering punishment on our behalf, taking on Himself the wrath of God. And it is at the cross that guilty sinners find forgiveness for their sins, and escape from the wrath of God. The result is reconciliation, peace and eternal life. When Jesus said the hour had come that He should be glorified (Jn. 12:23), He was indicating that at the cross, humankind would see the fullest, most perfect expression of the character of God. That manifestation of the glory of God at the cross is for the benefit of those who live in this present age. Israel saw God’s glory in the cloud, the sight terrified them, today we do not go to Mt. Sinai, or to the tabernacle and the temple to see the glory of God, but we look, “to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel” (Heb. 12:24).

God desires that all the world would see His glory, and one day, “the earth will be

filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” (Hab. 2:14). In our present age that glory is seen in the Messiah, Jesus the Lord, and particularly at the cross; this glory, now that Jesus is in heaven (the place of glory), is manifested to the world through His disciples.

### **Manifesting the Glory of God**

In John chapter 17, Jesus praying to His Father, made several mentions of glory: He asked that the Father would glorify Him that He may glorify the Father; He had glorified the Father by doing the work asked of Him, and He looked forward to His return to heaven, and to the glory which He had with His Father “before the world was” (Jn. 17:1-5). He also prayed for those who would believe in Him that they would be one in Father and Son (Jn. 17:20,21), and He desired that His disciples would be with Him and behold His glory (Jn. 17:24). He also said something quite amazing when he stated,

“And the glory which You gave Me, I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.” (Jn. 17:22)

There are very important aspects in John 17 which relate to the relationship between Father and Son, and to those who become part of that relationship through faith in Jesus, and who are said to be one with Father and Son. When we consider that glory relates to the essential character of something, then when Jesus said He gave His disciples the same glory which His Father gave Him, it is saying something very special. Peter gives more understanding of this when he writes,

His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.  
(2Pet. 1:3,4)

Believers in Jesus become “partakers of the divine nature,” and this thought indicates the very deep relationship shared between Father, the Son and disciples of Jesus. Jesus’ words in John 17 reveal His desire that His disciples would experience a depth of unity, a oneness with Him that is comparable to the unity He shares with His Father, and that such unity would find expression in the shining forth of the glory of God in the world. In John 17 Jesus sees this unity expressed in such spiritual experiences as: eternal life (v.2); knowing the true God (v.3); keeping the word of God (v.6); belief (v.8); not being of the world (vv.14,16); sanctification

(v.17); being sent (v.18); glory (v.22); unified relationship (v.23); love (v.26). The purpose and result of this unity is, “that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You loved Me” (v.23). There is evangelistic intent stated here, and we see that there is a distinct purpose in the manifestation of the glory of God: God desires to make Himself known, and desires that people would see Him and be led to seek relationship with Him. In the Old Testament His glory was manifested to Israel; in the gospels we see the glory manifested in Jesus, and particularly at the cross; now the glory is manifested through the disciples of Jesus. Throughout the thrust is evangelistic, God wants the people of the world to know Him, and to enter into mutually fulfilling relationship with Him.

### ***Jesus’ Disciples, Vessels of Glory***

For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2Cor. 4:6)

In 2 Corinthians Paul points out that the Devil blinds the minds of unbelievers to the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2Cor. 4:4), and that the antidote to that blindness is the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is preached by those who have in their own hearts the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God,” this light is called by Paul a, “treasure in earthen vessels” (2Cor. 4:7). We see here that there is a very wonderful and glorious treasure imparted into the hearts of Jesus’ disciples. That treasure is nothing less than the glory of God!

We saw from John 17 and 2 Peter that believers are partakers of the divine nature, this is not to make believers into ‘little gods’, but what it does mean is that within the heart of every believer there is an impartation of the nature of God, something of His life, His glory, the very essence of His being and His abiding presence, these are ministered by the Holy Spirit. There is here a very profound truth, and a wonderful privilege, and we have to be careful to keep it in the right Biblical perspective: Jesus is the Vine, His disciples are the branches and abide in Him. Jesus gives life to the branches, and the branches can do nothing without Him (Jn. 15:1-5). God is self-existent, He was not created, and He does not need anything or anyone to sustain His existence, if it was any different He would not be God, He is the great I AM. Every human being is a created being, who for now and for eternity, is wholly dependent on God for life and all that pertains to his or her existence, and is unable to exist without God who “gives to all life, breath and all things” (Acts 17:24,25). Created human beings cannot become gods, but their potential is very high; redeemed believers



through faith in Christ become adopted sons of God and can call Him “Father” (Jn. 1:12,13; Rom. 8:14-17), and being renewed in His image (Col. 3:10), and daily being changed from glory to glory (2Cor. 3:18), they grow more like Him, expecting that the time will come when they will be transformed, and will see Him and be like Him (1Jn. 3:2; Rom. 8:29).

There is very profound wonder and indescribable depths concerning the intimacy of a believer’s relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Jn. 14:23-26; Rom. 8:9-11), the closeness of that relationship is summed up in John 17 with the thought of unity with God and sharing His glory, and in 2 Peter with the thought of partaking of divine nature. This unity does not make believers into divine beings, but it does mean that they are in-dwelt by the divine presence, which is the glory of God, and that through them God is making Himself known to the world. That manifestation of God’s presence in the believer’s life carries with it the obligation to live as He would in holiness and righteousness (1Pet. 1:15,16); Father, Son and Holy Spirit in-dwell the believer, and the believer receives power to live a godly and virtuous life that glorifies God (2Pet. 1:3), and witnesses to the world of the reality of the God of the Bible.

### **Knowing God**

God wants the people of the world to know Him, and from the beginning of time He has made His presence known. Paul, speaking at Athens where he had seen an altar made “to the unknown god” told those gathered at the Areopagus,

God who made the world and everything in it . . . gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being . . . (Acts 17:24 - 28)

Psalm 19 tells us that “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork”; and in Romans we read that “since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen” (Rom. 1:20). Such scriptures tell us that God has set within His creation certain attributes that proclaim His existence; the wonder, the majesty, the complexity and the order of the created universe gives ‘general revelation’, and is such that humankind ought to wonder upon it and seek the One who made it all.

More ‘specific revelation’ of God is given to us in Scripture where we read of God’s dealings with humanity. At the beginning we see Him enjoying relationship with Adam; after

the fall and breach of the relationship, we see God maintaining relationship with humanity through the patriarchs, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; God not hiding Himself away, but making His presence known. Then with the call of Moses and Israel to be His “special people,” God revealed more of His character and designs for humanity, He made Himself known to Israel as the LORD (YHWH, the great I AM), and He gave them the law, making known His righteous requirements for relationship, Israel thereby being His witnesses that He is the one, true God (Isa. 43:10-12).

In the fullness of time God sent His Son, the Messiah Jesus, to be our Saviour; Jesus being “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (Heb. 1:3), in whom was revealed the “glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (Jn. 1:14), and who declared God (Jn. 1:18). Jesus went to the cross to pay for the sins of the world, and it is at the cross that God exhibits His glory to the world. At the cross is the fullest and clearest expression of His character, as there because of His love, we see Jesus willingly suffering the penalty for the sins of the world.

After the resurrection Jesus returned to heaven, but He did not leave the world without witness, and shortly before His ascension He told His disciples,

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

That promise of power was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, and from that time, the disciples of Jesus, baptised in the Holy Spirit, have proclaimed the Kingdom of God to the world. God is now making Himself known to the world through the witness and testimony of the church.

### **Epistles of Christ**

2 Corinthians chapters 3 and 4 speak much about the glory of God, and Paul shows how the glory revealed in the New Covenant far surpasses that of the Old. Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth that they were,

. . . an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (2Cor. 3:3)

Paul goes on to show that believers are “earthen vessels” who contain a treasure (2Cor. 4:7);

that treasure is, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor. 4:6). We saw how Christians are partakers of the divine nature, and share a remarkable unity with Father and Son, and here Paul shows that believers being in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit, have within their beings, written on their hearts, something of the divine presence, a portion of the glory of God. That glory is there for a purpose, to shine in the darkness of this world, and reveal the very presence of God, this is the great privilege and responsibility of every believer. The Devil blinds the minds of unbelievers, not wanting them to see the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2Cor. 4:4); as the gospel is preached and believers give testimony by their holy conduct, the light shines in the darkness, God is revealed in His glory, and lost souls are given opportunity to meet and call on the name of the Lord for their salvation.

An epistle is a letter, a message from sender to recipient, the God of the Bible has a message for the world: He is real, He is our Creator, He is Judge of all the earth to whom we must all give account; sin hid Him from human sight, but throughout history, in His loving grace and mercy, He has revealed Himself to humankind and made relationship possible. In this present age He reveals Himself through the church, which is His people amongst whom He dwells (Eph. 2:22). The day is coming when the Lord Jesus will return in “His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Lk. 9:26, 21:27), He will exercise His dominion and the world will know that He is Lord of all. For many that day will be a day of shame and woe, and it will come as a “snare upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth” (Lk. 21:35). We who know Him, and are vessels of His glory, expecting to escape the terrors of that day, ought, as we await His return, to be living as His epistles, proclaiming His truth in word and deed, shining the light of His glory in the darkness that others may see and believe, and thereby accepting Him as Lord of their lives may join with us in the “general assembly and church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23), and so receiving a place in His glorious and eternal kingdom, may also give their lives to serving Him with “reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). It is only in acknowledgement of the Messiah, who is the Lord of Glory, and in joyful surrender to His dominion that human souls find true peace and fulfilment in this life.

Blessing and honour and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever. (Rev. 5:13)



## **Chapter 7**

### **He is Coming**

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so. Amen. (Rev. 1:7)

There is at the first, a certain simplicity to the Christian belief in the second coming of Jesus: During His first visit to earth Jesus promised that He would return “on the clouds of heaven with power and glory” (Mt. 24:30), and He exhorted His followers to, “Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Mt. 24:42); at His ascension to heaven, two angels told the disciples that, “This same Jesus . . . will so come in like manner as you saw Him go to heaven” (Acts 1:11); Paul, writing to clarify and comfort the Thessalonian believers on the matter of Christ’s second coming wrote,

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess. 4:18-18)

For nearly 2000 years, Jesus’ followers have lived with the expectation of His imminent return to earth, this is their “blessed hope,” a great longing in their hearts, a central tenet of faith, and a source of great comfort; this life is full of trials and tribulations, the return of Jesus will herald the end of this present age, and establish a new age of peace and righteousness on earth under His perfect reign.

In Revelation 1:7 John reminds His readers of the return of the Messiah, he presents it as a climactic point of Jesus’ Messianic ministry, and he states it in simple terms, using phrases that are familiar to Christians and Jews. Once again he is pointing us to the Messianic

teachings which lie at the roots of Jesus' ministry, urging us to look deeper and to explore the significance of his statements.

While there is a profound, and acceptable, simplicity to belief in the return of Jesus, there is also for those who seek to delve deeper into the subject, great complexity and much that is hard to understand. Such complexity has led to a multitude of explanations and various doctrinal positions as Bible scholars have sought to make sense of the end-times, sometimes this has led to disputes and breaches of fellowship, sad to say, angry words have been spoken over the subject. It is not the aim here to present a definitive viewpoint on controversial aspects of the subject, nor of the time-scale or sequence of events such as the rapture and tribulation. A pre-millennial stance is assumed,<sup>10</sup> and it is hoped that whatever one's view regarding the timing of the rapture and other end-time events, there will be found here that which is edifying and useful. Our main aim is to see the Messianic roots of John's words in Rev. 1:7, and to understand that Jesus must fulfil certain Messianic expectations at His second coming.

### **Messianic Scriptures Demand the Second Coming of the Messiah**

The Old Testament contains many recognised Messianic prophecies, Alfred Edersheim recorded 456 Old Testament passages that were applied Messianically in Jewish Rabbinical writings.<sup>11</sup> These Messianic scriptures have for long presented something of a paradox to Jewish scholars because of two seemingly uncomplimentary strands. On one hand, the Messiah is presented as one who will suffer greatly and be put to death, Isaiah 53 being the most well-known passage in this respect. On the other hand, Messianic scriptures speak of an all-victorious and righteous king, of which the covenantal promises made by God with David are good examples (see 2Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:19-29). The rabbis of Old Testament times solved this apparent contradiction by proposing two Messiahs, the suffering Messiah who would die they called Son of Joseph, the all conquering Messiah they called Son of David. Over the years the Son of Joseph Messiah was largely forgotten and the Jews of New Testament times were looking forward to, and expecting, the coming of the Son of David. We see this expectation played out in the gospels as the Jews wondered whether Jesus was indeed the promised Son of David (Mt. 12:23); their misunderstanding of Jesus' Messianic ministry, along with His failure to meet their expectation and so overthrow their enemies, led in a large

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<sup>10</sup> Pre-Millennialism, briefly stated, is the belief that following the return of the Messiah, and prior to the events following Rev. 20:11, He will reign from Jerusalem over a 1,000 year period of peace on earth, the saints reigning with him, and the devil being in prison (see Rev. 20).

<sup>11</sup> The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Appendix IX; available online at:<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.html>

part to their rejection of Him.

Christians readily accept the teaching that Jesus is Messiah, and understand that He must visit the earth twice: once He came to be the suffering redeemer, in the future He will come as the victorious king. Such understanding did not come easily to the Jews of Jesus' day, and when we see Peter proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah at one moment, and at the next rebuking Jesus when He speaks of His sufferings to come (Mt. 16:16-23), we are seeing the difficulty played out. It was only after Jesus' death and resurrection that the disciples began to comprehend the full significance of the Messianic scriptures, Jesus Himself explaining them (Lk. 24:25,26; 44-46). The early church, with its new understanding of Messianic prophecy and its fulfilment by Jesus, was able to take such scriptures, prove from them that the Messiah had to suffer and die, and so show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Act. 9:22; 17:3; 18:28).

### ***Unfulfilled Prophecies***

Many Messianic scriptures were fulfilled with Jesus' first coming, many remain unfulfilled and thus demand that if Jesus is truly the Messiah, He must visit the earth again and so complete His Messianic ministry and fulfil the Word of God. An examination of unfulfilled Messianic scriptures reveals a number of events that are linked to the Messiah and which await His return to the earth, seven such events, here given with relevant scriptures, are:

#### ***1. Messiah's judgment of and reign over the nations:***

I will declare the decree:  
The Lord has said to Me,  
You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth for Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. (Ps. 2:7-9)

(See also: Isa. 13:6-16; Jer. 33:14-18)

#### ***2. Peace on the earth:***

In His days the righteous shall flourish

And abundance of peace,  
Until the moon is no more,  
He shall have dominion from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth. (Ps. 72:7,8)

(See also: Isa. 11)

### ***3. Acceptance of the Messiah by Israel:***

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced ...  
They will call on My name,  
And I will answer them.  
I will say, 'This is My people';  
And each one will say,  
'The LORD is My God.'" (Zech. 12:10-13:9)

### ***4. Defeat of nations gathered against Israel:***

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations,  
As He fights in the day of battle.  
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives ...  
... And this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem:  
Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet ... (Zech. 14:3-12)

(See also: Joel 3:1-17)

### ***5. Restoration and exaltation of Israel as chief of all nations:<sup>12</sup>***

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah:  
'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness;

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<sup>12</sup> Israel's restoration follows a time of severe judgment, known as Jacob's trouble and/or the Great Tribulation (Jer. 30:7; see also: Isa. 4:1-5; Zech. 13:7-9).



He shall execute judgment in the earth.  
In those days Judah will be saved,  
And Jerusalem will dwell safely. (Jer. 33:14-16)

(See also: Isa. 2:1-4; 14:1,2; 49:5,6; 60:1-22; Jer. ch's 30-33; Mic. 4:1-5:5).

#### ***6. The revealing of Messiah's glory to all nations:***

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see it together,  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 40:5)

I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. (Dan. 7:13,14)

#### ***7. Messiah shares His dominion with the saints:<sup>13</sup>***

... the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.  
... Then 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. (Dan. 7:22-27)

Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. (Zech. 14:5)

### **New Testament Revelation of the Second Coming**

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel sees that the time of Messiah's dominion follows the time of rule by the "little horn" (Dan 7:8; 23-25). This little horn becomes a world ruler who, during the seven year period prior to Messiah's return, persecutes the saints, makes a covenant with Israel, and sets up the abomination of desolation (Dan. 7:25; 9:26,27); the New Testament knows him as the Antichrist (1Jn. 2:18), the man of sin, and son of perdition, who exalts himself above God (2Thess. 2:3,4), and as the beast of Revelation 13.

The apostle John was no doubt familiar with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament; as a disciple of Jesus he had listened to Jesus' teaching about the last days, and had received from Jesus, with the other apostles, understanding of the Messianic scriptures (Lk. 24:44,45). The New Testament expands and clarifies the teachings of the Old, and in a few succinct words John encapsulates much of the Biblical teaching on the second coming of Jesus the Messiah. We turn now to these words of John recorded in Rev. 1:7.

### ***He is Coming***

The Greek word used here, and throughout the New Testament is the noun *parousia*, it was a word used to describe a visit from a high official, it means 'being present', and denotes arrival and consequent presence. Paul sometimes used *parousia* in relation to a ministerial visit (e.g. 1Cor. 16:17; 2Cor. 7:7; Phil. 2:12). With reference to Jesus, it signifies that His arrival is a real and tangible event, involving His actual presence in order to accomplish specific purposes. The *parousia* means different things for different groups: for the saints, Jesus' *parousia* holds the promise of their "gathering together to Him" (2Thess. 2:1), and that they will then be, "always with the Lord" (1Thess. 4:15-17); for the people of the world, it marks a time of judgment ("as in the days of Noah," Mt. 24:37); for the Antichrist it marks the time of his destruction (2Thess. 2:8). It is of interest to note that the Antichrist has his own *parousia* ("coming" in NKJV), which is accompanied by power, signs and lying wonders (2Thess 2:9), and is a counterfeit of the *parousia* of the Messiah which is accompanied by signs, power and great glory (Mt. 24:27; 30). The Antichrist, working with the power of Satan, seeks only to deceive, whereas Jesus' coming will be a revelation of truth to the world.

There are certain exhortations for the saints as they await the coming of their Lord Jesus. Only the Father knows the day and the hour (Mt. 24:36) and Jesus tells His disciples to, "Watch therefore" (Mt. 24:42), and they are to conduct themselves as "faithful and wise servants" who await the return of their absent master (Mt. 24:45-51). James exhorts patience like the farmer waiting for his crop to bear fruit, "Establish your hearts" he says, "for the coming of the Lord draws near" (Jms. 5:7,8). John encourages regard to relationship with Jesus, "abide in Him" he exhorts, "that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1Jn. 2:28). The emphasis throughout, in respect to the return of Christ, is on service and conduct, speculation on the time of His return is somewhat pointless, so the disciple must always be ready, knowing He will come at an unexpected moment, Paul exhorts similarly,

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all,  
just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before

our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.  
(1Thess. 3:12,13)

### ***With Clouds***

Jesus spoke of His arrival on the clouds, and clouds are often seen in Scripture in association with God and his judgments. Psalm 97, in what is a close proximation to Jesus' words concerning His second coming, states,

Clouds and darkness surround Him;  
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.  
A fire goes before Him,  
And burns up His enemies round about.  
His lightnings light the world;  
The earth melts and trembles.  
The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD,  
At the presence of the LORD of the whole earth.  
The heavens declare His righteousness,  
And all the peoples see His glory. (Ps. 97:2-6)

In the previous chapter we saw how the Lord at times revealed His glory in a cloud, the cloud acted as a sign of God's presence, it also served as a covering and hid the full glory of God from human eyes. This association of the cloud with glory is apparent in sayings of Jesus regarding His second coming: "... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30); "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Mt. 25:31). In the Old Testament, God's glory was revealed at times to the nation of Israel; with Jesus first visit to earth, His glory was revealed to His disciples; when Jesus returns, His glory will be revealed to all the world.

There is a second Greek word related to the return of the Messiah, *epiphaneia*, from which comes the English word epiphany, it means a shining forth, and was used of the appearance of a god to men. The word is used of Jesus' first appearance on earth to be our Saviour (2Tim. 1:10), and is also used concerning His second coming (2Thess. 2:8; 1Tim. 6:14; 2Tim. 4:1; Titus 3:8). The related verb, *phaino*, is used of the the flashing of lightning that occurs at the coming of Jesus (Mt. 24:27) and of the light which shines in the darkness (Jn. 1:5). The second coming of Jesus will be a most remarkable event, the world will see the bright glory of His appearing, there will be no hiding of His true being.

### ***Every Eye Will See Him***

A third word used in the New Testament in relation to the second coming is *apokalypsis*, which means a revealing of something previously hidden. At the present time, the majority of the world, blinded by Satan and unbelief (2Cor. 4:4), rejects the Christian belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the second coming will reveal Him to the world, every eye will see and acknowledge that He is Lord (Phil. 2:10,11). This day is eagerly awaited by His disciples (1Cor. 1:7), and it will prove to be a vindication of their faith, and vengeance on their persecutors,

... it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2Thess. 1:6-9)

We see there is a duality in reactions to the return of Christ: For those who love Him and are eagerly looking forward to His appearing, it will be a day of fulfilment of long held hopes and desires, an end of suffering, and a day of rejoicing and exceeding joy (1Pet. 4:12). For those who have rejected Him, and led lives of wickedness, it is a day of judgment and woe, such as in the days of Noah and of Lot (Lk. 17:24-30); as it was then, so it will be again, the righteous escaped while the judgment of God wrought terrible disaster on the wicked.

### ***Even They Who Pierced Him***

This phrase has particular relevance to the Jewish nation, and is a very clear reference to Jesus death on the cross (Jn. 19:36,37), and to Zechariah's prophecy,

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes they will mourn for Him as one mourns for His only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10)

We have seen that there must be fulfilment of the Messianic promise of Israel's acceptance of

the Messiah. The Jews erroneously expected two Messiahs, and when He appeared the first time He was rejected by them, even this was a fulfilment of prophecy (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 53). That rejection of Jesus as the Messiah brought God's judgment upon Israel in the form of blindness and hardness of heart (Acts 28:25-28), and a spirit of stupor (Rom. 11:8), so that they cannot understand. This blindness is temporary, and covers a period of time during which the Gentiles are given opportunity to receive Jesus as their Saviour. Paul writes of a time to come when the "fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25, see Lk. 21:24; Mt. 24:14), at which point, "all Israel will be saved," and the "Deliverer will turn ungodliness away from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26). Zechariah shows that day will come after a terrible time of tribulation, when the nations war against Israel and two-thirds of the Jewish population has died, then the remaining Jews will call on the name of the Lord, He will return (see Mt. 23:37-39), defeat the nations ranged against them, and establish Jerusalem as the seat of His rule and centre of worship (Zech. 13:7-14:21).

### ***All the Tribes of the Earth Will Mourn Because of Him***

With this statement, John's thought moves from that of Israel's circumstances at the return of the Messiah, to that of the gentile nations. John is making an obvious link with the mourning of the tribes of the earth and prophecies concerning the expected day of the Lord, and John further links that day with the second coming of the Messiah. The day of the Lord is presented in Scripture as a time of God's judgment on wickedness, and is often known as the day of wrath (Job 21:30; Isa. 13:9; Ezk. 7:19; Zeph. 1:15); for the wicked and unbelieving it is a time of mourning, woe and terror. It has relevance both for Israel and for the gentile nations, though the outcomes are somewhat different. Concerning Israel, following judgment, there will be repentance and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah. For the Gentile nations, the culmination will be destruction of their armies at Armageddon, and the annihilation of some nations, followed by imposition of the millennial rule of Jesus (Zech. 14:3; 16; Rev. 19:11-20:6). These two outcomes are clearly portrayed in Obadiah's prophecy, where, of the gentile nations he writes,

For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near;  
As you have done, it shall be done to you;  
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.  
For as you drank on my holy mountain,  
So shall all the nations drink continually;  
Yes they shall drink and swallow,  
And they shall be as though they never had been. (Ob. 15,16)

While of Israel, he writes,

But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,  
And there shall be holiness;  
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.  
The house of Jacob shall be a fire,  
And the house of Joseph a flame . . . (Ob. 17,18)

The New Testament contains similar themes as the Old when speaking of the day of the Lord, and while it is again portrayed as a day of woe for the wicked, it is also a day of rejoicing, vindication and redemption of the saints (2Thess. 1:6-10; 2Tim. 4:8). The New Testament applies various terms to the day, such as: “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Cor. 1:7,8); “the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:6); “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5); “the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30); “the day of visitation (1Pet. 2:12); the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2Pet. 3:7); “the day of God” (2Pet. 3:12), etc. The second coming of Jesus is closely linked with this day, and so for the believer there is a great sense of expectation and longing for that day to come. The believer is exhorted many times to be in preparation for the day, first by the Lord Jesus who encouraged watchfulness (Mt. 24:42) and faithful service (Mt. 24:46-51), and by the New Testament writers who exhorted holy conduct and readiness (1Cor. 1:7,8; 2Pet. 3:11,12).

The New Testament emphasises the unexpectedness of the day of the Lord, Jesus teaching that, “of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Mt. 24:36), and while no one knows the time, there are signs that indicate the day is near: a great earthquake, the sun becomes black, the moon becomes like blood, the stars fall from the sky, the sky recedes like a scroll, mountains and islands move out of their place (Mt. 24:29-31; Rev. 6:12-14). Matthew and John make very similar observations, Matthew recording the teaching of Jesus that after these events,

The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Mt. 24:30)

And John writes that,

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty

men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:15-17)

Paul gives further indication of conditions preceding the day of the Lord in his letters to Timothy. First that there will be an apostasy from the faith, as some give “heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1Tim. 4:1; see Mt. 24:23,24), and second he points to moral collapse, perilous times in the last days as men descend into the most base and brutal behaviour (2Tim. 3:1-5). So there is for the alert believer warning signs of the approach of the day of the Lord, and Paul can therefore write to believers that, “you are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief” (1Thess. 5:4). For the unbeliever and the unwary however, “the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1Thess. 5:2), and though they feel themselves to be at peace and in safety, “sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1Thess. 5:3). It is indeed a time when all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.

The day of the Lord should not be thought of as a single day, but rather as a series of events including the reign of the Antichrist, judgment and restoration of Israel, the battle of Armageddon, and the glorious return of Jesus the Messiah to set up His reign on the earth, the culmination being the creation of new heavens and earth (2Pet. 3:12,13). The chief characteristic of the day is God’s judgment of the wicked, both of Israel and of the gentile nations. One of the clearest signs given in Scripture of the beginning of the day of the Lord is the revealing of the Antichrist (2Thess. 2:3,4), then follows the seven year period of the Antichrist’s rule as prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 9:27), during this period is an unprecedented time of tribulation as God pours out His wrath on the world, this is the period covered in Revelation from 6:1 to 19:21.

***The Rapture.*** Debate centres on the timing of the rapture when the saints are gathered together to be with Christ (1Thess. 4:16,17), some believing it to be before the revealing of the Antichrist (pre-tribulation, at Rev. 4:1), others after Antichrist’s revealing but prior to the start of the day of the Lord (mid-tribulation, prior to Rev. 6:17), and some at the end of the tribulation period at the time of Jesus’ return (post-tribulation, at Rev. 19:7). What is certain is that believers will not be subject to the wrath of God (1Thess. 5:9), the day of the Lord is therefore not for them one of mourning and fear.

As noted earlier, the Biblical emphasis is on the need for readiness, the Lord will return for His saints at an hour that even His disciples do not expect (Mt. 24:44); it is this

note of uncertainty regarding the time of the rapture, that should engender continual watchfulness and readiness. The complexity and difficulties presented in attempting to reconcile relevant scriptures ought, it seems to this author, to strike a note of caution regarding dogmatic assertions as to the timing of the rapture.

The Messiah's second coming to earth is an absolute Biblical necessity: Messianic prophecies demand it, the words of Jesus demand it, the New Testament demands it, every true disciple of Jesus expects it, and waits eagerly for it. We do not know the day or the hour, but for sure we know it is about 2000 years nearer than when Jesus first exhorted His followers to be ready.

He's coming soon, He's coming soon  
With joy we welcome His returning;  
It may be morn, it may be night or noon-  
We know He's coming soon. (Thoro Harris, from the hymn, *In These the Closing Days of Time*)



## Conclusion

There are vital truths contained within New Testament teaching regarding the Messiahship of Jesus. What is the importance today for believers to understand the Messianic background of their faith? The apostle John gives insight into this, for him these truths about Jesus are so vitally important that he wrote,

Who is the liar but he who denies that Yeshua is the Messiah? This is Anti-messiah who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son, the same doesn't have the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1Jn. 2:22,23)<sup>14</sup>

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that doesn't confess that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is not of God, and this is the spirit of the Anti-messiah, of whom you have heard that it comes. Now it is in the world already. (1Jn. 4:2.3)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who don't confess that Yeshua the Messiah came in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the Anti-messiah. (2Jn. 7)

For John, a Jew of His day, who had met the Messiah in person, who was fully convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, and who had been personally given understanding of the Messianic scriptures by Jesus, thoughts of the Messiah must have brought to mind a myriad of prophetic concepts and hopes all rooted in the words of the Old Testament. John sees belief that Jesus is the Messiah as a linchpin of true Christian faith, and a test of true and false belief.

Knowledge of Messianic prophecies and understanding of how they are fulfilled in Jesus is therefore an effective tool for recognising false doctrine. If Jesus is truly the Messiah, then He must satisfy every word written about the Messiah in the Old Testament; denial of any single aspect of Messianic prophecy being fulfilled in Jesus can then be seen as the work of

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<sup>14</sup> Bible quotes in the Conclusion from *World English Bible: Messianic Edition*; used here for its use of the Hebrew word Messiah where most translations use Christ.

the Antichrist. Where there is a denial of, or failure to apply, any of the Messianic prophecies to Jesus, then the spirit of the Antichrist is active.

Perhaps it would be helpful if at times we replaced the word “Christ” with “Messiah”; it does seem that the word Christ, in the minds of many believers, has only New Testament connotations, but when we use Messiah, our thoughts are drawn to the Old Testament; there is something intrinsically ancient, and mystical, along with triumphal expectations and thoughts of the end-times, attached to the word Messiah. The world has made Christ a meaningless swear word, whereas Messiah retains its implications of victory, salvation and deliverance, and we do see many so-called “messiahs” portrayed in the world, perceived figures of power and wisdom, who are going to rescue some group from its difficulties. When we present Jesus as the Messiah, we are then encouraging the already held notion of one who is greater than ourselves, who will be victorious, who holds the answers to our problems, and as one who is closely linked with the end of the world. Jesus is, of course, all these things, and much more.

It is obvious in the New Testament writings that the first disciples and the early church were fully convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messianic prophecies formed a large part of the preaching and teaching of the early church, they did not have written New Testaments, their resource was the Old Testament and oral accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. With such resources they effectively preached the gospel with power and authority and thousands believed and were saved, an examination of the use of Old Testament quotes used by the preachers in Acts will prove this point.<sup>15</sup>

By God’s grace I trust these studies will help us to grow deeper in our understanding of Jesus the Messiah, to understand how Jesus fulfils, and will fulfil, Messianic hopes, and so, as the early church did, we may also teach and proclaim the truth about the Messiah (Acts. 5:42), thereby guarding ourselves, and rescuing others from deceit. It is sure that false messiahs and the Anti-messiah will come and deceive many, and lead them to destruction (2Thess. 2:9,10), but the true Messiah came to give life and to give it abundantly (Jn. 10:10; Rom. 6:23).

May we who know and love Him, faithfully proclaim Him who is the true Messiah, the giver of peace, and Lord of all (Acts. 10:36).

Whoever believes that Yeshua is the Messiah has been born of God. (1Jn. 5:1)

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 3 for a table of Messianic teaching and preaching in Acts





## Appendix

### 1. Messianic Scriptures

The following Scripture references are major Messianic prophecies (note: not an exhaustive list):

- Genesis: 3:15; 22:18; 49:10
- Numbers: 23 & 24
- Deuteronomy: 18:15-19
- 1Chronicles: 17:10-14
- Psalms: 2:7-12; 16:1-11; 22:1-31; 80:17; 110:1-7
- Proverbs: 30:4
- Isaiah: 7:1-17; 8:9,10; 9:6,7; 11:1,2; 40:3-5; 42:1-6; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3
- Jeremiah: 23:5,6
- Daniel 9:1-27
- Micah: 5:2
- Zechariah: 11:1-7; 12:10; 13:7
- Malachi: 3:1

## 2. Propitiation

Propitiation: The word “propitiation” is little understood today, and most modern translations of the Bible use phrases such as, “sacrifice of atonement” or “atoning sacrifice” in its place. Such phrases do not do justice to the true meaning expressed by the original Greek group of related words: *hilaskomai* (verb); *hilasterion* (noun) and *hilasmos* (noun). The use of these words in the New Testament is few, but significant: *hilaskomai* (Lk. 18:13; Heb. 2:17); *hilasterion* (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15); *hilasmos* (1Jn. 2:2; 4:10). For the original writers and readers of the New Testament this word group had very clear meaning:

The uniform acceptance of the word in classical Greek, when applied to the Deity, is the means of appeasing God, or of averting His anger; and not a single instance to the contrary occurs in the whole of Greek literature. (G. Smeaton in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed, London, Tyndale, 1998, p.145)

The *hilaskomai* word group signified appeasement of an angry god, it included the act (such as sacrifice) by which the anger of the god was placated and his attitude to the worshipper changed from one of wrath to one of favour. In the New Testament, it refers to the sacrificial act of Jesus in giving His own life to appease God’s anger against the sins of the world. The propitiation achieved by Jesus is unique, because Jesus is both the one making the propitiation (*hilaskomai*) and He is the propitiation (*hilasmos*); Jesus is both the offerer and the offering. Hebrews expresses this truth several times, for instance:

. . . He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb. 9:26)

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb. 10:12)

Propitiation therefore, properly understood, brings together several important doctrinal truths: God’s wrath is directed against the sinful human race; there is enmity between God and humankind; Jesus’ death appeased God’s wrath; by virtue of Jesus’ death, God offers reconciliation to humankind.

Liberal theologians have disdained the evangelical teaching on the doctrine of the wrath of God, and what appears to them the crude and unworthy notion of Jesus’ death appeasing that wrath. Such thinking has had a detrimental influence on the church, and, it would seem, some of the modern translations of the Bible.

Propitiation, it seems to me, is the only English word that properly expresses the true

meaning of the hilaskomai word group. It would be good for Christians to re-new their acquaintance with this word and add it to their vocabulary - with understanding.

***Further Reading:***

See under, "Propitiation"; *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

For a full and technical study of the use of the hilaskomai word group see: Chapters V and VI; *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Leon Morris.





### 3. Table of Messianic Teaching and Preaching in Acts

<b>Text and Occasion</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>OT Quotes/References</b>
Acts 2:14-39 Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost	The Messiah could not stay in the grave - Jesus' resurrection.	Joel. 2:28ff., Ps. 16:8-11; Ps. 68:18; Ps. 110:1; Ps. 132:11
Acts 3:12-26 Peter preaches following healing of lame man	The Messiah would suffer - Jesus suffered.	Deut. 18:15 A prophet like Moses. Seed of Abraham.
Acts 4:8-12 Peter preaching to the Sanhedrin.	The Messiah rejected - They crucified Jesus, God raised Him from the dead.	Ps. 118:2: The stone rejected by the builders is the chief cornerstone.
Acts 4:24-31 Disciples pray	Request for boldness in face of persecution and opposition to Jesus,	Ps. 2:1,2: The nations gather together against the LORD and His Messiah.
Acts 5:42 Comment on apostles	Daily ... they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Messiah,	
Acts 8:5 Philip goes to Samaria	He preached the Messiah to them.	
Acts 8:29ff Philip meets the Ethiopian	Reading from the prophet Isaiah - who does he speak of? He speaks of Jesus.	Isa. 53:7,8 The sufferings of the Messiah.
Acts 9:20 Saul begins to preach	He preached that the Messiah is the Son of God.	
Acts 10:36 Peter preaching to Cornelius	Peace through Jesus the Messiah, He is Lord of all.	
Acts 13:16ff Paul preaching at Antioch	A Saviour from the seed of David, promises to the fathers fulfilled in Jesus. His rejection, suffering, resurrection.	Ps. 2:7; Isa. 55:3; Ps. 16:10
Acts 16:31 Paul and the Philippian Jailer	Believe on the Lord Jesus the Messiah and you will be saved.	
Acts 17:3 Paul preaching at Thessalonica	He explained and demonstrated that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. Jesus is the Messiah.	
Acts 18:5 Paul at Corinth	He was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.	
Acts 18:28 Apollos (an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, 18:24).	He vigorously refuted the Jews, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.	
Acts 26:22,23 Paul preaches to King Agrippa	Things that Moses and the prophets said would come - the Messiah would suffer, would rise from the dead and proclaim light to Jew and Gentile.	
Acts 28:31 Paul in prison in Rome	Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus the Messiah.	