

## 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. 19:11 ff).

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!