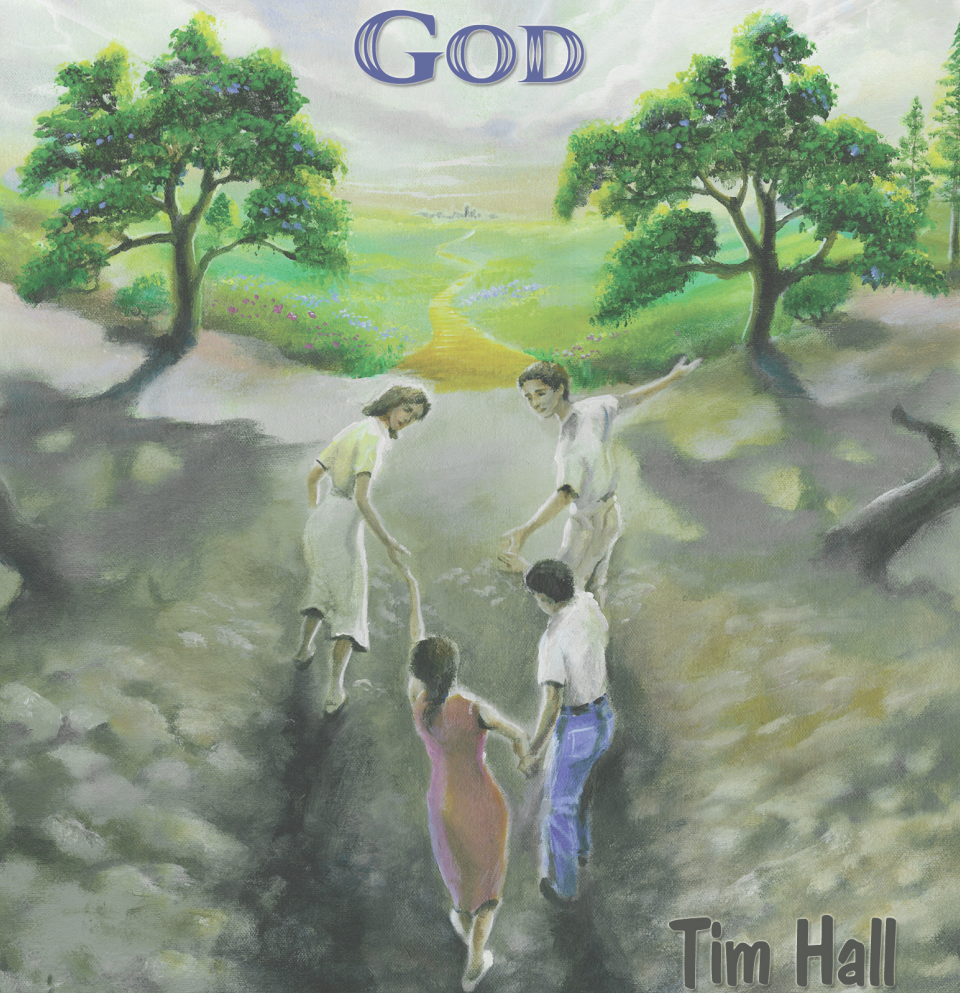


Discovering the Kingdom of **GOD**



Tim Hall

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Tim Hall

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Introduction

“Kingdom.” Just the mention of the word conjures up images of castles encircled by moats, knights on white horses and kings on ivory thrones. Many of us view such images as fantasy, unacquainted with kingdom concepts in our sphere of life.

When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, Christians may be just as vague on what to think. We understand the idea of “church”, but what is this “kingdom” all about? Is it merely fantasy? Or is there something real about such ideas?

There is much misunderstanding in the religious world regarding this kingdom. Without any doubt, God told the truth when He spoke of His intentions to establish His kingdom on earth. But when was it to come? What would it look like? Who may become citizens of this kingdom? Answers to those questions vary greatly, depending on the beliefs of the person giving the answers.

Yet interest in the Bible’s teachings about God’s kingdom is extremely high. A twelve-volume series of Christian fiction debuted in 1996, and popular attention was again drawn to religious ideas on the subject. The accuracy of the teachings presented in that series has been disputed by many. Alternative views of the doctrine have been laid out in great detail.

Will this book settle all the controversies surrounding the Bible’s teachings about God’s kingdom? That’s not likely. But it is our aim to set forth in a clear and faithful manner the salient points that are clearly taught in the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments. We ask the reader to compare what will be found in this book with the teachings of the Bible.

Some readers will be completely unfamiliar with differing views of this kingdom. So much the better. We consider it ideal (though not common) to come to the Bible free of preconceived notions on a subject. God’s word can completely furnish us with all we need to know (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:2-4). It is easier to raise a garden in soil that is free of weeds and thorns, and it is likewise easier to learn truth when there are no erroneous views to first be uprooted.

Above all else, we hope to communicate one thought: The graciousness of God to offer any of us (“Whosoever will!”) the privilege of citizenship in His kingdom. Though we may be unclear on certain details, we know that whatever the Lord prepares will be far better than anything this world can offer. May we never hesitate to cast off whatever would hinder us from entering this divine realm!

We invite you to join two young couples as they discuss and explore Biblical concepts about God’s kingdom. The teachings of this book are not exhaustive nor scholarly, but perhaps they will whet the appetite of some to find out all God has said on this topic. May it be the beginning of an exciting journey that will lead us all into the very presence of God!

We have used the New King James Version, unless otherwise specified.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is given to Bill Farris, a man whose heart is given to serving God's kingdom, for first inviting me to undertake this project, and to Jim Sherman for recommending me to him. Thanks are also extended to the elders of the Tom Bean Church of Christ, Tom Bean, Texas, for their support and encouragement of this work. My own shepherds, the elders of the Central Church of Christ, Johnson City, TN, have been very supportive of this endeavor. Most of all, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my wife, Joyce, for her constant encouragement and nurture. Without her, I could not engage in the work that I do.

Publisher's Statement

In his book, **Discovering the Kingdom of God**, brother Tim Hall uses a fascinating format for helping people all over the world in their search for truth. He has based the story on a true-life event, but has written it in novel form so that it is both easy to read and convincing in its message.

Bill Farris has taken the lead in transforming the book into a video version for World Video Bible School, which is based in Maxwell, Texas, and operates a video service for continuing education in the Scriptures to training schools and individuals in over 70 nations and all 50 states. Currently, plans call for the video, **God's Kingdom**, to be translated into Spanish for the benefit of the many Spanish-language readers in the States as well as in Central and South America.

Brother Hall works with Central Church of Christ in Johnson City, Tennessee. I have known Tim for a number of years and highly respect him for his love for the truth and for his evangelistic abilities. I commend this book to you with the prayer that you will not only read and study it for your own benefit, but that you will share it with others who are open to **Discovering the Kingdom of God**.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS 38967
October 24, 2005

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The Kingdom in Prophecy

“I can’t believe we’re finally on our way,” exclaimed Julie. “When we began planning this trip last year, it seemed so far away. But now we’re out of college.”

“And celebrating our graduation with a month-long tour of Europe,” added Meghan. “All those months of no movies and no eating out are finally paying off. This is going to be a great trip!”

Meghan’s husband, Mark, spoke up: “What I’m looking forward to most is getting a good look at the remains of those glorious empires of the past. The castles, the towers, the fortresses — I’ve dreamed of a trip like this for years. I’ve never been able to decide which of those old kingdoms was the greatest of all: Spanish, French, Greek, Roman, British — all of them had some pretty glorious days.”

“You’re right. It will be pretty awesome to see the ruins in Athens and in Rome,” Julie said. “But I’ve got to tell you, Mark, I already know which kingdom stands as the greatest of all time.”

“Absolutely,” said Julie’s husband, Bill. “I think we’ve told you that we recently became Christians. And we’ve learned some amazing things about a kingdom that is far superior to any we’re going to see on this trip.”

“Yeah?” Mark asked. “I’d like to hear a little about this ‘supreme kingdom’. We’ve got some time before we arrive at our next stop. How about telling us some of what you’ve learned? I’d really like to know.”

“Yes,” Meghan agreed. “I’d like to hear it, too.”

“One of the really amazing things about this kingdom is that

people were talking about it hundreds of years before it actually came into existence,” said Bill.

And with that, he pulled his Bible out of his backpack and began.

“Prophecy” is the idea Bill had in mind. Prophecy is a prominent feature of the Bible. The Bible claims to be different from any other book; it claims to be from God. This God described in the Bible has not been silent, but has revealed His will through men called “prophets”. In the Biblical sense, a prophet is a spokesman for God. Most of the time, he simply spoke God’s message. But sometimes these prophets were given special messages, predictions of future events. These predictions often spoke of things that would come to pass many years later. This amazing predictive ability of the Bible is one reason why we can know that the Bible is really the word of God.

The apostle Peter spoke of this extraordinary feature in his second letter. After assuring his readers that his messages about Jesus Christ were not fairy tales or myths, Peter went on to make this claim for the Bible in general: *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:20,21). The words of Scripture, Peter claimed, are the very words of God. No wonder the prophets were able to write about future events with amazing accuracy!

What sort of things did these prophets foresee in the future? Sometimes they spoke about wars, righteousness or sin. But one of the most frequent topics the prophets addressed was the idea of a kingdom that was to come. There were many things about this kingdom revealed by the prophets. We can sum up these

facts into four categories: **When** the kingdom would come; **Where** it would be founded; **Who** would be the ruler of this kingdom, and **What** would be some of the unique characteristics of this kingdom. Let's briefly consider each of these groups of facts.

When would this kingdom appear? When speaking of any important event that has not yet occurred, people naturally want to know "When will it happen?" When will the new laws take effect? When will the new highway be opened? When can we expect the house to be built? If the Bible speaks of a kingdom, we certainly want to know when it will be established.

One prophecy that gave a hint about the time of the kingdom was Isaiah 2:2: "*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.*" Whatever Isaiah was referring to was of great interest, for all nations were flowing to it. He used images to describe how great this thing was; he said it was "*the mountain of the Lord's house*". It would be established on the top of the mountains, a very visible place that anyone could see. Note also when this would happen: "*It shall come to pass in the latter days.*" Isaiah doesn't say precisely when; but only that it would happen sometime later.

Micah was a prophet who lived about the same time as Isaiah. He made a very similar statement in Micah 4:1: "*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.*" It's virtually the same prophecy, and Micah also said only that it would happen "*in the latter days*".

Is there no information that is more specific about the time of this kingdom? In fact, there is. Daniel was a prophet who lived many years after Isaiah and Micah. While still a young man, he was carried away as a prisoner of war to the land of Babylon, the mightiest nation on earth at the time. Daniel quickly made a name for himself, and even the Babylonians realized that this young Jew had unusual abilities.

The king of Babylon had a very troubling dream, and he wanted to know what it meant. There was a problem though: he didn't remember the details of the dream. After all of the wise men of the kingdom admitted their helplessness, Daniel was called. Without hesitation, he told the king exactly what he had dreamed. The main feature of the dream was an enormous statue of a man. The statue was made from different metals: The head was made of gold; the chest and arms were made of silver; the torso and thighs were made of bronze, and the legs were made of iron, with the iron being mixed with clay in the feet. It was a puzzling dream, but Daniel told the king exactly what it meant.

Daniel began with the head: "*You are this head of gold,*" he told the king of Babylon (Daniel 2:38). There would follow another kingdom, inferior to Babylon; and following this would be kingdoms represented by the bronze and the iron. Students of world history have no difficulty identifying these world powers that followed the Babylonian kingdom: There was the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire and the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire, therefore, would have been represented by the legs of iron, and the feet and toes that were of an inferior quality of iron.

Daniel's most dramatic announcement is found in verse 44. After describing the part of the statue that represented the Roman

Empire, he said, *“And in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”* Clearly, this would be a kingdom vastly superior to any earthly realm. It would *“never be destroyed”*, and it would break other kingdoms. It would be set up by God Himself. And when would this momentous event take place? *“In the days of these kings”*, that is, during the time of the Roman Empire. Daniel was very specific about that.

The Roman Empire, however, covered a long period of time. We still are left to wonder, When would this great kingdom of God be established? More information is given in the New Testament. In Matthew 3:2, we are introduced to a man named John who preached a new and clear message: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”* John, the cousin of Jesus, lived in the days when the Romans ruled much of the known world. Could this be a signal that the kingdom was about to appear?

The same message was also preached by Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Here is what Mark recorded: *“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’”* (Mark 1:14,15). This was indeed exciting news. The prophecies made hundreds of years before by Isaiah, Micah and Daniel were about to be fulfilled. The kingdom had not yet come, for Jesus said, *“The kingdom of God is at hand.”* When, then, would it come?

Another clue is given in Mark 9:1, where Jesus told His disciples, *“Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present*

with power.” This is the most specific statement yet. Jesus announced that the kingdom was so close that some of those standing there with Him would be alive to see the kingdom’s arrival. It was that close!

Did the kingdom arrive on schedule? Luke tells us, in Acts 2, about a dramatic occasion, a Jewish feast called Pentecost. It had not been long since Jesus had been raised from the dead and had ascended back into heaven. Peter preached to a large audience in Jerusalem, and he pointed to a prophecy given by Joel. The prophecy was about things that would happen in “*the last days*” (Acts 2:17), and Peter declared that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled at that very moment. It was the coming of the kingdom of God! It should be noted that the events on that day of Pentecost took place *during* the rule of the Roman Empire.

Further proof that this kingdom did arrive on the day of Pentecost can be found in Colossians 1:12,13: “*Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*” Paul affirmed that God had already delivered some into the kingdom. This shows that the kingdom was now present on earth.

Yes, the Bible gives us much information about the “when” of the kingdom of God. And according to that information, *the kingdom has come!*

As Bill spoke about these remarkable teachings of the Bible, he was jotting down notes to help Meghan and Mark keep the ideas clear in their minds. “As you can see,” Bill said, “the Bible made some very accurate predictions about when this kingdom would be established. But let’s look at our second question:

Where would this kingdom be established? If there is a kingdom, then there must have been a place of its beginning. Did the prophets happen to mention anything about that?"

Let's look again at Isaiah 2, a passage we've already considered. In verses 2 and 3, Isaiah wrote: *"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."*

The Jewish people who first heard Isaiah's prophecy were well acquainted with the Lord's house. The temple that Solomon had built was located in the city of Jerusalem, on top of a hill. It was a glorious building, made of white marble, and it could be seen from a great distance. But Isaiah was obviously not speaking of this temple. The kingdom of which he spoke would come in the latter days. But one thing would remain the same. This new kingdom would also find its beginning in Zion, the name of one of the hills of Jerusalem, and a name that was often used to describe Jerusalem itself. Then, to remove all doubt, Isaiah specifically said that the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem.

We saw earlier that Micah's prophecy nearly echoed that of Isaiah. He agreed with Isaiah on the place of the kingdom's beginning. He stated, in Micah 4:2: *"For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."* These two prophets spoke clearly. The great event of which they spoke was going to happen in the city of Jerusalem.

Joel's prophecy, noted earlier, pointed also to Jerusalem. He had said, *"And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls."* (Joel 2:32) It was from this passage that Peter quoted in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, adding, *"This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel"* (Acts 2:16). And where was Peter as he spoke those words? In Jerusalem, just as Isaiah, Micah and Joel had predicted.

How appropriate that God chose Jerusalem for the beginning point of His new kingdom! Jerusalem had been the center of worship for God's people, the Israelites, for many hundreds of years. There in Jerusalem, the City of David, was where Peter announced *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). The kingdom had come, and its first appearance was in the city of Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem, huh?" asked Mark. "So if we were to travel to that part of the Middle East, I guess we would find the headquarters of this kingdom?"

"No," replied Bill. "God's kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms. Since it is spiritual, there is no official headquarters on earth. But we'll talk more about that a little bit later. Right now, I'd like to think about another aspect of the Bible's predictions — the question of **Who would establish this kingdom?**"

Bill began showing Mark and Meghan some of the prophecies found throughout the Old Testament that point to a significant person who was to come. One such prophecy is found in Genesis 49:10. In this passage, Jacob was pronouncing blessings

upon his sons. Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, was the one God had renamed “Israel”. When Jacob came to his son Judah, he said: *“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.”* The word “Shiloh” in the Old Testament often refers to a place. Here, however, it refers to a person, because Jacob said *“to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”* We learn from this that a very powerful ruler would descend through the tribe of Judah.

Another prophecy that looked forward to a great ruler to come occurs in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. King David had asked God for the privilege of building a temple to the glory of God. God refused his request, but instead made a wonderful promise about future events that would involve David’s family. *“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the son of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”*

In these statements, God promised two things to David. First, He promised that Solomon would be allowed to build the temple that David had longed to build. Solomon would be established as the king of Israel, and God would bless him if he followed Him. However, if Solomon should depart from the way of righteousness, God would punish him, but He would not remove David’s seed from the throne of Israel.

The second promise contained in 2 Samuel 7 is what especially catches our attention: *“Your throne shall be established forever.”* Saul, the first king of Israel, had not followed God’s will, and his descendants did not rule over Israel after him. But God promised that David’s seed would continue on the throne. As we will see in a few moments, this is a very significant prediction that was completely fulfilled.

Psalm 89:3,4 is another prediction regarding David’s descendants: *“I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to my servant David; your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.”* When God promised to establish David’s seed upon the throne throughout future generations, was He referring to kings of Israel? Or was there something more in God’s mind?

Isaiah spoke of a special person to come. In Isaiah 9:6, he wrote: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”* It’s obvious these words were not pointing to a mere human king. When Isaiah spoke of *“the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace”*, he was looking ahead to someone very special.

The prophet Micah gives us another clue of this much-anticipated ruler: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2). These words could not possibly refer to a man who would become king, even though Micah said he would be *“ruler in Israel”*. This ruler would be *“from of old, from everlasting”*. And this very special person,

destined to be God's ruler, would come from a relatively obscure village called Bethlehem.

One final prediction of a special person to come will be noted, found in Isaiah 7:14. *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* This statement must have sounded very strange to those who first heard it, for children cannot be born to virgins under natural circumstances. There must be a union of a man and a woman, something that has not occurred if a woman is a virgin. But these would not be natural circumstances. This was part of the plan of Almighty God!

"Let's review the clues these prophecies have given us about the one who would establish this amazing kingdom," Bill said. "Out of all the tribes of Israel, this ruler would come from Judah. From all the families of Judah, He would come from the family of King David. One title He would be given is 'Mighty God', and He would be born in the village of Bethlehem to a virgin. Now, all we have to do is find a person whose life matched those predictions, and we'll know who was the founder of the world's greatest kingdom."

"Not much chance of that!" remarked Meghan. "The odds of those predictions all coming true in one person's life must be astronomical. You'd never find such a person."

"You would think that, wouldn't you?" responded Bill. "But in fact, we do find someone who fulfilled each one of these predictions. And He is the only one who ever has. His name is Jesus."

Bill was right. He knew the teachings of Luke 1, a passage in which an angel announced the future birth of a son to a young woman named Mary. In Luke 1:30,31, the angel said, *"Do not*

be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.” A prediction that a woman would someday bear a son would not normally be so unusual. But the angel Gabriel was speaking to a woman who was not yet married. She had never had sexual relations with a man. If Gabriel’s prediction came true, it would be history’s only instance of a virgin birth.

Gabriel continued with more details regarding this Son to be born to Mary: *“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”* (v. 32). From this we learn that Jesus, the Son who would soon be born to Mary, was of the tribe of Judah and of the house of David. Mary was a descendant of David, of the tribe of Judah, and thus her Son would be as well. Again, the prophecies of the past were being fulfilled. Notice, too, that Gabriel said this Son would be called *“the Son of the Highest”*, fulfillment of another of those prophecies we’ve seen.

Verse 33 of Luke 1 contains another detail about this Son: *“And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”* This statement points back to God’s promise to King David, that the throne of David’s seed would be established forever. Though other great kingdoms of the past have arisen and fallen, this kingdom would never fail.

From this one passage alone, the announcement of Jesus’ birth, we can see that He is the One who had been anticipated for so many hundreds of years. The kingdom of God was near at hand, for the One who would establish it was about to be born.

More than thirty years later, Jesus agreed that He was the Christ, the One anointed by God to rule over God’s kingdom.

Some of the last words He spoke while on earth testify to this: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18). Are these not words of a ruler? A few weeks earlier, Jesus had stood before the Roman governor, Pilate, who asked Him: *“Are you a king then?”* *“Jesus answered, ‘You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice’”* (John 18:37). Yes, Jesus saw Himself as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Ruler of God’s eternal kingdom.

Days later, Peter, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, stood before a large assembly and boldly proclaimed the truth about Jesus: *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:38). This was a powerful moment in history. The One about Whom many prophecies had been made had been in their presence, and they had not recognized Him. Yet despite their rejection of Jesus, God’s plan was unchanged. Jesus was still the Lord and Christ, the ruler of God’s kingdom.

“That’s incredible,” Mark interrupted, “that the people of His own nation didn’t recognize Jesus as the One in all those predictions. When you read the record of Jesus’ life on earth, it’s clear that He fulfilled those predictions.”

“It is clear,” Julie responded. “But their rejection of Jesus didn’t change the fact that He was still the King.”

“No, not at all,” said Bill. “Jesus was declared Lord and Christ by God Himself. That means that His rejection by people didn’t prevent Him from becoming King. As Peter said in another place, *‘Unto you therefore which believe He is precious; but*

unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner' (1 Peter 2:7). Some believe that Jesus' rejection by the Israelite nation forced God to postpone His Kingdom, but that's not at all what the Bible teaches.

"We'll get back to that idea later, but let's look quickly at three other ideas while we're talking about prophecy. We'll be at our station soon, and I'd really like to show you these things before we have to stop.

"We've now seen amazing Bible prophecies regarding when this kingdom would be established; we've seen where it would begin, and now we've seen who would be the founder. Let me now show you some passages that address the question of **What some identifying marks of the kingdom would be**. This ought to help us really pin down the identity of this great kingdom of God."

"Yes, let's hurry," exclaimed Mark. "I'm absolutely getting into this discussion. Do we really have to get off at the next station?"

With that, Bill began to show that this kingdom of God would be unlike any earthly kingdom. He mentioned three particular ways in which this kingdom would be unique: The fact that it would never end, that it would be open to people of all nations, and that it would have a powerful beginning.

First, the prophets pointed to a kingdom that would never come to an end. That's quite different from the great kingdoms of history. Many empires have become strong and powerful, such as the Greeks, the Romans, and others. But where are they now? We have only fragments on display in museums to remind us of what they once were. The nations we now consider strong

and powerful — will they still survive if the world continues for another five hundred years? Out of all the nations and kingdoms of earth, only one has endured the tests of time.

The prophet Nathan delivered this message of an unending kingdom to King David. In 2 Samuel 7:13 he said, *“He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever.”* Daniel gave a similar prediction of the great kingdom to come in Daniel 2:44: *“And in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”* Both of these prophecies agree with the words of Gabriel, the angel, to Mary in Luke 1:33: *“And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”*

As we have seen, the One who established this kingdom was Jesus, born in Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago. Since that time, many nations and empires have traveled across the stage of history. No other government has endured for more than a few hundred years. But the kingdom of prophecy remains strong and powerful — just as the prophets of God predicted!

A second identifying mark of this kingdom in prophecy is that it would be open to people of all nations. Most nations of history have had limited citizenship requirements. People of different nationalities or ethnic backgrounds have not always been welcomed in certain nations. According to the prophecies of old, however, the kingdom God would establish would open its doors to anyone, regardless of the language they speak, the color of their skin or their level of education.

We’ve noted before the blessing pronounced by Jacob upon

his son, Judah: *“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”* (Genesis 49:10). The word “people” in this passage points to more than just the people of Israel. In some translations that word is “peoples” or “nations”. The idea is that this Person will become ruler over people from many different nations.

This view is confirmed by the words of Isaiah: *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2:2,3). This kingdom, said Isaiah, would see peoples from *“all nations”* flowing to it. That points to the multi-cultural nature of God’s kingdom, and it also says a great deal about the attractiveness of the kingdom. People want to become part of this wonderful nation!

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul spoke of how the church is a body made up of many different nationalities. He said, in Galatians 3:28: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* None would be excluded from God’s kingdom on the basis of their race, gender or nationality. The doors would stand wide open to any who desired to come.

“That’s pretty remarkable for a kingdom established so long ago,” said Meghan. “There are governments even today that will not allow people of certain backgrounds to come across their bor-

ders. But this kingdom you've been talking about admits anyone? That must have been really good news to many people throughout history: slaves, oppressed, minorities — how wonderful that anyone could become a citizen!”

“Yes, that’s part of what makes God’s kingdom so attractive,” replied Bill. “There have been many who had given up hope in their earthly government. But when they heard about God’s open door policy, they jumped at the chance to be part of this. In fact, some of the most receptive people throughout history have been the poor and the downtrodden.”

Some of the most beloved words of the Bible are those spoken by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* People who feel the yoke lying heavily on their shoulders have longed for a kingdom like God’s. And none who are willing to receive God’s will for their lives have ever been turned away!

“I see our stop is coming up,” said Bill, “so let me quickly point out one more unique characteristic of God’s kingdom that was spoken of by the prophets. It’s the fact that this kingdom would come with great power.”

With that, Bill returned to the prophecy in Daniel 2:44: *“And in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”* The power of this kingdom is obvious. It would have the ability to crush and destroy other kingdoms, some of them mighty empires. It sug-

gests, too, that the authority of God's kingdom would supersede the rule and authority of other nations. You would expect that of God's kingdom.

Jesus also spoke of this powerful kingdom: *"And He said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power'"* (Mark 9:1). Obviously, the kingdom had not yet arrived when He spoke those words, but it would come soon, during the lifetime of some of those present. When it did come, He said, it would come with power. Later, just before Jesus ascended back into heaven, 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). Again, Jesus said that the coming of the kingdom would happen with power.

Less than two months after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles were gathered in Jerusalem on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. Luke, an accurate historian, records for us in Acts chapter 2 some of the events of that day. *"Now when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:1-4). These were very unusual and remarkable things that were happening, things that might be described as "powerful". Tongues of fire, the sound of a great wind, men speaking in languages they had never before studied — What did all of this mean?

Peter told the people what these events meant. He said, “*But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel ...*” (Acts 2:16). In other words, Peter saw the events that were happening on the day of Pentecost as the fulfillment of prophecy. The things spoken so long ago by God’s prophets were coming to pass. God had kept His promises, and His kingdom was now upon earth.

Passengers were beginning to collect their things as the train slowed to a stop.

“Let’s take just one more minute to see what we’ve learned from these passages,” said Bill. “Hundreds of years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God’s prophets were predicting things about the kingdom that Jesus would establish. They predicted it would be established during the time of the Roman Empire, in the city of Jerusalem by the Messiah who would be born in the tiny village of Bethlehem. They also told that He would establish a kingdom that would never end, that it would be open to people of all backgrounds, and that it would begin with great power. Every one of these predictions was fulfilled in a period of about 33 years, while Jesus lived on earth and shortly after. It’s just too obvious to doubt: The establishment of the church was also the beginning of the kingdom.”

“That’s really fascinating,” said Mark. “I’ve always thought of the church as just a human institution. I’ve frankly been turned off by the scandals and abuses you sometimes hear reported in the news. But these things you’ve shown us make me want to take a second look. Bad things often said and done in the name of religion may not at all represent what God had in mind.”

“Exactly,” Bill replied. “People don’t always portray in their lives the way God intends for things to be. That’s why I’ve taken you to the Bible, to show you what God has had in mind. You

don't need to hear my ideas and opinions. But you really should consider the things God has said."

"Let's be sure to talk more about this spiritual kingdom," said Meghan as they stepped off the train. "I knew we would see some pretty impressive kingdoms on this trip, but I never imagined we might discover one so awesome as the one God has established."

The foursome would soon return to their discussions about the kingdom of God. And the ideas they would discover are concepts every person should know.

The Authority of the King

“Man, this guy had some real power!” Mark was examining a larger-than-life statue of a king of an ancient empire. This section of the museum had many displays showing the glory of that long-ago kingdom, and this was one of its most powerful rulers. “Gold was about as common to this guy as cotton is to me. Whenever he snapped his fingers, I imagine twenty servants jumped.”

“Yes, he was powerful, no doubt,” replied Bill. “Did you read about how many people were put to death during his reign? This fellow seemed to have an unquenchable thirst for blood. I’m glad I didn’t live under his domain!”

“Me, too,” said Julie. “It just makes me more thankful that we have a different kind of King that we serve.”

“King?” asked Meghan. “Hey, our home is in America, remember? We don’t have a king; we have a president.”

“Oh, I’m not talking about that kind of kingdom,” said Julie. “I’m talking about Jesus, the King of all kings. When I became a Christian, I made a promise to make Him the King of my life.”

“King Jesus?” thought Mark. “How do we know He was any better than some of these tyrants? Wasn’t it all about power for Him, too?”

“Power is a good word to use for Jesus,” replied Bill. “But it’s a very different kind of power. It’s the kind of power you’re glad to live under.”

Later that evening, Meghan and her husband Mark joined Julie and her husband Bill in the hotel coffee shop.

“Bill, you raised my curiosity back there in the museum,” said Meghan. “You talked about Jesus having power as a King, but that it was a different kind of power. Tell us some more about that.”

“Be glad to,” said Bill. “It just so happens I’ve got my Bible here in my pocket ...”

“Hey, you’ve got that Bible with you everywhere, don’t you?” quipped Mark.

“No, not everywhere,” replied Bill. “But considering the exciting things I’ve learned since I became a Christian, I have to admit I read from it a lot. Now, let’s talk about that question you asked, Meghan.”

Bill began by turning to Bible passages that speak of Jesus as a powerful King, a King with great authority. He turned to Matthew 28:18,19, a passage in which Jesus claimed to have all authority: *“Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’”* Jesus spoke those words after He had been crucified and raised from the dead three days later. That resurrection was a powerful proclamation, said the apostle Paul in Romans 1:4: *“And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”* After the resurrected Jesus spent several days with His disciples, He was ready to ascend back into heaven to God. Before He left earth, though, He claimed to have been given *“all authority ... in heaven and on earth.”* If that claim is true, then Jesus is a very, very powerful Ruler.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews affirmed this claim.

He began his letter with these declarations about Jesus: *“God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* Again, the scene is one of a person given great power and authority. That person, the writer proclaimed, was the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. He is God’s spokesman, and He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Again, if this claim is true, Jesus deserves our attention because He holds great authority and power.

But is it fair to call Jesus a “King”? Yes, for “King” is a title Jesus used of Himself. Standing before the Roman governor Pilate, Jesus announced, *“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world ...”* (John 18:37). Jesus, therefore, claimed to be a King.

This claim of Jesus to be King is also in keeping with the prediction made before He was born. The angel Gabriel announced Jesus’ future kingship to Mary, the woman who would bear God’s Son in her womb. In that announcement Gabriel said: *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name 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 over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”* (Luke 1:31-33). Yes, Jesus spoke with heaven’s approval when He told Pilate that He was indeed King. It had been God’s plan all along.

Jesus' claim to be King, however, was different than what most might think. Many in His day, including His own disciples, expected Him to become King over the physical land of Israel. But that was never the plan of Jesus, nor of God. *"My kingdom is not of this world,"* He told Pilate in John 18:36. *"If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."* No, there is no support from the New Testament that Jesus ever desired to establish a kingdom on earth. His kingdom would be over an even greater domain — the hearts and lives of people all over the earth for centuries to come.

This kingdom, as we have seen in a previous lesson, is none other than the church that was established on the day of Pentecost in approximately 33 A.D. Later, Paul would look back to that event: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:15-18). Those words ring with power. Jesus is the preeminent One, the One by Whom and for Whom all things were created. He is the head, said Paul, not of an earthly domain, but of the body, the church. That is the kingdom of which Christ is the King.

This kingdom, the church, is not a physical territory or a domain. Instead, His kingdom may be found wherever people submit to the rule of this great King Jesus. The ultimate goal of each citizen of this heavenly kingdom is, as Paul said in

Ephesians 4:15, to “*grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ.*” Since Jesus Christ is the head of the kingdom, or the head of the church, the mission of every citizen of that kingdom is to turn their full attention to this King who possesses such great authority and to become, as much as possible, like Him.

Is this a noble ambition, though? As history will attest, so many powerful rulers of the past have not been good people. They have been quick to protect their power with the edge of a sharp sword. Millions have suffered because of this greed for control which corrupts so many. But as we will see, the power of Jesus is different. It is an attractive power unlike that of any earthly ruler. The authority of Jesus Christ is wonderful.

“What exactly do we know about this ‘King Jesus?’” asked Mark. “Is there some kind of biography of His life, or is it just myths and legends, sort of like King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table?”

“No, we have reliable historical documents of the life of Jesus,” Bill responded. “In fact, there were four different men who wrote detailed accounts of this remarkable Man’s life. The names of those writers are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and their biographies of Jesus are the first four books of the New Testament in the Bible.”

“Four different accounts?” interrupted Meghan. “It’s hard for four people to agree on anything. I imagine those four writers all told very different things about Jesus.”

“Actually, their accounts are all completely consistent with each other,” said Bill. “And the things they tell about Jesus show Him to be an exceptionally good King.”

With that, Bill began looking at some of the ways in which Jesus stands out as unique. The demands Jesus makes of His followers are not what you might expect, but they are all to be obeyed.

“After all,” said Bill, “if you have a King with absolute power, the subjects in that kingdom must obey that King absolutely. Let me show you some of those unusual demands Jesus makes.”

First, the King has demanded that His subjects be characterized by humble service, not position-seeking. Matthew recorded an occasion in which Jesus’ followers asked Him, “*Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” (Matthew 18:1) It was a natural question. With earthly governments, power is an important question. Who will issue the orders and tell other people what to do? Jesus surprised His followers, though, with His answer. He called a little child forward, and placed him where all could see him. Then 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. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3,4). No, greatness in the kingdom of heaven would not be defined by giving orders and being served, but rather a matter of humbling oneself and serving.

To give His disciples a living demonstration of the concepts of humility and service, Jesus performed a task that was so unexpected it still causes people to marvel. At the last meal He shared with these men before His death on the cross, Jesus arose during supper, John tells us in John 13. He arose to perform a task that was normally expected of a slave — washing the feet of the guests. As dinner guests arrived, this lowly servant would

remove their dusty sandals and wash their feet with clean and cool water. On this occasion, however, there was no slave present; no one had performed the lowly task of washing feet. So Jesus did it Himself. The Son of God was not too proud to serve the needs of others!

Later, Jesus explained why He had done this: *“Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you”* (John 13:12-15). What a memorable lesson! Jesus had shown them that in order to achieve greatness — in order to become more like Jesus — they would need to learn how to humble themselves so they could be servants to the needs of others. It would prove to be a very hard lesson to learn.

“Wow, that’s a really incredible story!” said Meghan. “Jesus claimed the position of a king, but He also acted like a slave? I don’t think I understand why.”

“It’s because Jesus really wanted to stress the importance of serving other people,” replied Bill. “In order to do that, He had to get across three ideas.”

First, Bill went on to say, serving others means that we have to humble ourselves. That’s not easy in a world that teaches us to look out for number one. But Jesus’ example of washing His disciples’ feet shows the value of humility. If our Lord could put aside His pride to help other people, then so should His followers. In fact, that’s what Jesus said in Matthew 20:27,28: *“And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

The second idea Jesus stressed was that seeking God's praise is much more important than seeking the praise of people. That was obvious when Jesus washed their feet. It was also what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:2-4: *"Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."* Helping others, Jesus taught, is not about winning fame or popularity. It's about doing the right thing, the thing with which God will be pleased. It is a powerful lesson from a powerful King.

The third idea stressed by Jesus is that we serve God by serving others. In a scene of the great judgment of all mankind, Jesus commended those people who help the sick, the hungry, the thirsty and the poor. Here are His words in Matthew 25:34-36: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."* The people to whom Jesus spoke were puzzled. They couldn't recall doing these things for Jesus. Jesus removed their doubts with this pronouncement: *"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"* (v. 40). To serve the needs of others is to serve God. And when we come to believe that, we will find it so much easier to reach out to others to help. That was Jesus' goal.

The first unusual command of the King, therefore, is that His followers be humble servants, not power-seekers.

Second, the kingdom must be sought first in life, above all other pursuits. All will admit that there are many things in life that can distract us: Our jobs, possessions, sports, family, recreation, education, and a thousand other things. Above all of these, Jesus said, place God's kingdom first. He summed up the idea in this phrase in Luke 12:22: *"Do not worry about your life."* More specifically, He said this in Luke 12:29-31: *"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."*

The main thing, said Jesus, is to seek to do God's will, to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. Everything else should take a back seat to that priority. Christians are to make pleasing God their number one priority. Yes, the Christian continues to hold down a job, pay his bills, care for his family and enjoy wholesome forms of recreation. But nothing is more important to the citizen of God's kingdom than God's kingdom. It is a demand Jesus clearly made.

Someone once asked Jesus what was the greatest command of all. Without hesitation, He responded, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment"* (Mark 12:30). Being in God's kingdom demands that we make Him number one. There is no room for negotiation!

"Commitment" was a key idea with Jesus. Anyone thinking about becoming a member of God's kingdom must be willing to make this great commitment. *"So likewise, whoever of you does*

not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple”, Jesus said in Luke 14:33. In Luke 9:62, He said, *“No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”* Being in the kingdom is not a game or a part-time hobby. It’s a total commitment.

“Now Jesus is beginning to sound like a tyrant,” Mark interrupted. “Isn’t that the way tyrants act — ‘Give me all you’ve got, or else’? That doesn’t sound so good for Jesus to be making those kinds of demands.”

“But you’ve not heard the whole story yet, Mark,” replied Bill. “When you see what we receive for making such a commitment, the word ‘tyrant’ will never again come to your mind. I can show that through some of the parables Jesus taught.”

“Parables?” asked Meghan. “I’ve heard that word before, but I’ve forgotten — isn’t it some kind of a story?”

“Exactly. A parable is a story, a way of teaching a spiritual lesson using earthly objects,” replied Bill. “It was a method of teaching that Jesus used often. And it was one reason He was so popular among the common people. Instead of using big words, Jesus spoke in language anyone could understand. And the lessons He taught got people excited.”

“Really?” said Meghan. “Tell us some of them.”

Bill began by reading Jesus’ parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it”* (Matthew 13:44-46).

What was Jesus' point in comparing the kingdom of heaven to these things — the treasure and the expensive pearl? He was pointing to the kingdom's value. Why did the people in these parables experience such joy? They had found something very valuable. Two thousand years after Jesus told those stories, we still regard treasures and pearls as very valuable things. That's how we will come to see the kingdom of God, and it will bring us great joy.

Because the kingdom is of great value, it is worth great sacrifice. The men in the parables sold everything they had in order to possess these treasures. Seeking God's kingdom above all other pursuits of life is worth the price, because the object we're seeking is so valuable to us.

Bill turned to another of Jesus' parables, found in Matthew 13:31,32: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches."* This parable points to the influence of God's kingdom. It may begin small, with the first time a person hears about the kingdom. But the more that seed grows, the more influential and beneficial it becomes. In time, the kingdom proves to be the best thing that ever happened in a person's life. For that reason, it is worth any sacrifice a person has to make.

"So you see," said Julie, "if the kingdom of God is more valuable than anything else in life, and if it has such a great influence in our lives, Jesus is certainly not a tyrant to ask us to seek His kingdom first. He is so generous and good to us that anything we do for Him is small in comparison."

"I can see that," said Mark. "Jesus does sound like a very

generous King. Wouldn't it be nice if He could be King over all people, and not just the Jews?"

"That's even more good news," said Bill. "This offer of a kingdom with a generous King is open to all. In fact, that's the third unusual demand Jesus makes of His followers."

Third, the kingdom is to be open to all people. As noted before, some of Jesus' last words on earth ordered His followers to go everywhere inviting people to come into God's kingdom. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus' disciples were not free to choose the kinds of people they would allow into God's kingdom; they were to invite everyone to come in.

Years later, Peter echoed that fact: "*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*" (2 Peter 3:9). God doesn't want anyone to be excluded. He desires that all should come to repentance and enjoy the blessings of being a member of His kingdom.

It must be admitted, however, that not everyone shares this kind of outlook. Prejudice is strong among many people all over the world. We are not always happy to be in the presence of certain other people. Hatred fills many hearts, and efforts are made to keep people away because of the color of their skin or the language that they speak. If it were up to people, the kingdom would be very restricted, and only a select few would be admitted.

Jesus the King taught a different view of who should be allowed into the kingdom of God. Another parable, found in Matthew 13, stresses this idea: "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is*

like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind” (v. 47). Note that the net catches all kinds of fish. There is no effort to catch only one kind of fish, and not another. The net is made for catching anything that is in the sea.

Not all who are caught in this net, however, will be admitted. Jesus continued with the parable: *“Which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:48-50). No, not everyone caught in this dragnet will be kept by God. But the distinctions are not based on nationality, skin color, or language spoken. The separation will be between those who are just and those who are wicked.

Some will be attracted to the idea of God’s kingdom on earth, but not prepared to make the deep commitment Jesus expects. They will act as hypocrites, pretending to be Christians while actually living according to their own desires. Jesus is generous, but He is also firm. Anyone may come to Him. As the children’s song teaches, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world.” But all who come to Him must decide to live no longer for their own pleasures but for His will.

“I’ll have to admit that I have sometimes been turned off to the idea of religion by people who are hypocrites,” said Mark. “One of my college roommates claimed to be a Christian, but his lifestyle was about as bad as anyone I’ve known. I didn’t think much of his religion.”

“Neither would Jesus,” replied Bill. “Jesus makes demands

of us. But anyone who is willing to submit to the King's authority is welcome. And that's good news."

"It really is," agreed Meghan.

"That leads to the next mark of Jesus' kingship," said Bill. **Fourth, obedience and preparedness are required.** "A lot of religious people talk about the importance of faith," continued Bill. "But not all of them stress that obedience is part of faith. If we're not willing to obey certain commands Jesus gave us, can we really say we trust Him?"

Matthew 7:21 was the first passage Bill read to illustrate this point. "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*" According to Jesus, the way we live is more important than what we simply profess. A person may claim to be a Christian; but does he or she do what Jesus has commanded? This is the real test of one's faith.

Will Jesus' commands always be comfortable? Will we always agree with what He has commanded? No, Jesus recognized that people would often clash with Him. But when our wills are in opposition, whom will we obey? Jesus posed the question simply in John 14:15: "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*" Surrender to the will of the Lord — that's the demand Jesus makes of His followers.

Continual surrender to God's will is also stressed often in the Bible. Sometimes we feel religious; sometimes we don't. Sometimes our enthusiasm is hot, sometimes it's cold. But those who take seriously the demands of the kingdom of God will try always to be prepared. In another parable, the Parable of the Ten Maidens, Jesus taught this idea of constant readiness.

Ten young women were awaiting the arrival of a wedding party, Jesus said; it would be a joyful time when the bridegroom arrived. But his arrival was delayed. As they waited, the maidens fell asleep. Suddenly they were awakened by the announcement that the groom would arrive shortly. Five of the young women realized their lamps were about to go out; they were almost out of fuel. They rushed off to buy more oil, but while they were gone the groom arrived and the wedding party went inside.

The five maidens who had rushed off to buy more oil returned to find the doors closed. *“Lord, Lord, open to us!” they cried.* But they were too late. They could not enter now. And what was Jesus trying to teach? *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming”* (Matthew 25:11,13). Because they were not constantly prepared, the maidens were called “foolish”, and they missed the most wonderful opportunity of their lives.

Being a citizen of God’s kingdom not only means that we obey Jesus in doing what is required to become a citizen, but also that we continue to be prepared by faithful obedience. This remains true throughout our lifetime. The King must have first place in our lives. Nothing less will do.

One other unusual demand is made by the King. **Fifth, love and forgiveness must be practiced.** In John 13:34,35, Jesus made this important announcement: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

Many symbols have come to be identified with Christianity: the cross, the fish, the sign of the dove descending from heaven,

and others. But Jesus did not command His followers to wear any of those. Instead, He commanded them to wear love. This, He said, would prove to the world that they were truly followers of Him, a very different kind of King.

Love is what began the series of events that brought the kingdom of God to earth. Jesus said, in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* It is that kind of love, Jesus said, that He expects of all of His followers — love that does good things for others, even if those others happen to be your enemies.

The apostle Paul marveled over that love which flowed so freely from God: *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:6-8). How often have we experienced love like that?

Christians are not only people forgiven by God, however; they are people who are willing to forgive others. Instead of being like people of the world, who bear grudges and seek revenge, followers of the King must be willing to forgive, even as they have been forgiven by God.

One more parable from Jesus will help us see the importance of obeying His command to forgive others. In Matthew 18, Jesus told of a man who owed an enormous debt to his master. He didn't have the money to pay the debt, so he fell down before the master and begged for more time. The master, however, acted very generously and forgave the man's debt. It was erased from the books; he now owed nothing!

That same man, just forgiven of a huge debt, met a friend on the street who owed him a very small amount of money. He demanded payment. His friend had no money, so he asked for more time to pay him back. Enraged, the man had him arrested and sent to a debtor's prison. He showed no mercy at all toward his friend.

In the meantime, the master was told what had happened out on the street. He called the man back before him and asked if it was true that he had shown his friend no mercy. His words were stern: “*You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?*” And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him” (Matthew 18:32-34).

It should be obvious that Jesus was teaching us, who have been forgiven so much by God, to forgive our friends and neighbors of their small sins against us. And what if we don't? Jesus concluded by saying, “*So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses*” (v. 35).

Forgiveness is one of the hardest things Jesus demands of His followers. When someone has hurt us, it's much easier just to write them off than it is to try to make things right. We find it much easier to harbor a grudge in our hearts. But that's not how citizens of God's kingdom behave. If they truly submit to the authority of the King, they will make every attempt to be reconciled to their brothers and sisters. They will try to imitate the great example of Jesus Christ, who said from the cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*” (Luke 23:34).

Bill closed his Bible and began making notes on a napkin.

“Look, here are the things we’ve learned about Jesus that show Him to be an unusual but wonderful King.”

- He commands His followers to be humble servants, not power-hungry.

- He demands that we put God and His kingdom first in our lives.

- He opens His kingdom to every race and nationality of people on earth.

- He requires that we obey Him and be constantly prepared for His return.

- His followers are to be identified by their attitudes of love and forgiveness.

“Now, wouldn’t you say that Jesus is a very different kind of King?”

“Absolutely,” said Mark. “I’ve studied many kings and kingdoms that have appeared throughout history. But this is a whole different kind of domain. I’ve never seen anything like it anywhere else.”

“No wonder time has been divided into ‘B.C.’ and ‘A.D.’ — before and after Christ,” observed Julie. “No one else has had the impact on world history that Jesus has had.”

“That’s pretty obvious,” said Meghan. “He’s really given the world a higher standard of living. If only more people were like Him ...”

“Hey, can you believe it’s so late?” interrupted Julie. “And we’ve got to catch that early bus. We’d better start thinking about some sleep.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” said Mark. “But, Bill, I was wonder-

ing; would you mind if I borrowed that Bible for tonight? I'd like to glance over it just a bit."

"Be my guest," exclaimed Bill as he handed his Bible to Mark. "In fact, this is one that I borrowed from a friend who first introduced me to God's kingdom. It's been the best book I've forgotten to return!"

As the two couples went their separate ways, talk continued for the next several minutes about the King. It was quite awhile before Mark turned out the light in their room. He couldn't quit thinking about this King to whom He had been introduced.

Identifying the Kingdom of God

“I wonder what’s keeping them?” wondered Julie out loud. She and her husband Bill were waiting in the hotel lobby for Meghan and her husband Mark. Their itinerary for the day was tight. There was so much to see, and so little time remaining in their trip before they had to head for home. The couples had agreed to meet in the lobby; from there they would catch the bus to their next destination.

“There they are,” noted Bill, as he spotted the pair coming in from outside.

“Finally!” Julie exclaimed half-jokingly. “Where have you guys been already this morning?”

“Mark decided we had to stop by a bookstore before we went anywhere,” Meghan responded.

“A bookstore?” asked Bill. “Was it a book you heard about on the late news?”

“Actually, I wanted to get my own copy of the Bible,” answered Mark. “Last night I really got to reading about Jesus in that Bible you loaned me. I had to fight the urge to mark places in your Bible, so I decided to get my own and mark it up anywhere I wished.”

“Thanks, man!” responded Bill. “I actually wouldn’t have minded if you had marked in my Bible. But I’m really glad to see you so interested in reading about Jesus for yourself.”

“Our discussion yesterday about Jesus as a King is what got

me so interested,” Mark said. “The things you told us about Him — I just couldn’t wait to find out more of what the Bible says about Him. I read over half of Luke’s account last night, and probably would have read it all if Meghan hadn’t turned out the lights!”

“Luke, huh?” replied Julie. “That’s one of my favorites. The thing I like so much is the way you can read about the life of Christ in Luke, and then what happened after He left the earth in the book of Acts, which Luke also wrote. The same author continues the account. They’re both exciting books.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” said Mark. “Luke was an excellent writer, and the things he wrote about Jesus make you want to keep on reading. That’s why I wanted to get my own Bible. Anyway, I figured I’d eventually have to return your copy, Bill.”

“You’re right about that, Mark,” joked Bill. “It just didn’t feel right this morning reading from the hotel copy of the Bible. It’s still the Bible, but it didn’t have the same feel.”

It was time to catch the bus, so the couples walked out to the street. The ride to the next stop on their tour was going to take nearly an hour, so their conversation about Jesus continued.

Soon after they had settled into their seats, Mark took out his new Bible.

“Bill, there’s something I read last night about the kingdom that I didn’t quite understand. I wonder if you might have some thoughts about it.”

Mark turned to Luke 10 and read verses 8-11. In this passage, Jesus was giving instructions to His disciples before sending them out to preach in the nearby villages: *“Whatsoever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before*

you. And heal the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.'"

“Yeah, I’ve read that passage,” Bill said. “What’s your question?”

“It sounds like some people who heard these men teaching about the kingdom recognized the opportunity before them, but others didn’t. Is that what it’s saying?”

“Yes, that’s definitely what’s going on,” replied Bill. “The people who would be hearing these messages were Jews who had been looking forward to the Messiah and God’s kingdom for centuries. Some of them, however, just didn’t accept what Jesus’ disciples were saying. They rejected God’s kingdom, if you can believe that.”

“What a mistake that would have been,” agreed Mark. “But I don’t see how people could miss it. Don’t people know what to look for?”

Bill began showing Mark and Meghan passages in the Bible that stress the need for careful study. One such passage was 2 Timothy 2:15: *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* Bill emphasized the phrase *“rightly dividing the word of truth”*.

“Doesn’t that imply that it’s possible to interpret God’s word incorrectly?”

“Yes,” answered Mark, “it obviously means that. But how

can we be sure we're not mistaken in our understanding of God's word?"

"Look at the first words again," said Bill. "*Be diligent*". Those who want to correctly understand God's word must be diligent. They can't assume anything. They must keep on reading the Bible as long as they live, always aware that there may be something they've not yet learned.

"You see, those people in Luke 10 who missed the kingdom of God missed it because they hadn't carefully studied what God had revealed about it. If they had paid closer attention to what the Bible taught, they would have recognized their opportunity to enter God's kingdom."

"Then what you're saying is that people today who want to enter God's kingdom need to read the Bible carefully?" asked Meghan. "Does the Bible tell us the things to look for in His kingdom?"

"That's my question exactly," said Mark. "How do we know what God's kingdom looks like? There are so many religious organizations out there, and they're all so different from each other. How's a person to know which one is right — or whether all of them are right?"

"You're definitely on the right track, guys," laughed Bill. "The Bible claims to tell us everything we need to know about how to live righteously." Bill then turned to 2 Timothy 3:16,17: "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" The couples discussed that passage for several minutes, noting how it teaches the special nature of the

Bible — inspired by God — and how it gives people everything they need to know to be complete in the sight of God.

“The bottom line is this,” said Bill. “If we want to enter into the kingdom of God, we can be sure He has told us in His word what to look for.”

“Makes sense to me,” said Meghan. “Now tell us: What does the Bible teach us to look for?”

First, the Bible teaches the terms of gaining citizenship in the kingdom. It would have been a cruel God to tell people about the blessings of being in His kingdom, yet never show them how to get in! But God is not cruel, and He has given simple-to-understand information to all who want to be members of this glorious kingdom.

Faith is given great emphasis in God’s word. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). *Faith* in the Bible is the idea of *trust*. In the next verse in Hebrews 11, Noah is given as an example of faith. God had told Noah that the earth would be destroyed by a flood, and the only way Noah’s family could survive would be to build an ark, a huge ship. Did Noah believe what God told him? *“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household ...”* (Hebrews 11:7). Noah trusted God so much that he accepted the monumental challenge to build a very big boat. That’s the nature of faith; it trusts God in everything He says.

God has told all of us what we must do to be saved. Paul made that point in Titus 2:11,12: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, deny-*

ing ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” God has been very kind to make possible our salvation. He has clearly shown us the way to be delivered from the condemnation of our sins.

The next question is, Do we believe God? Do we trust that He is telling us the truth? Those who don’t believe God — who don’t even believe there is a God — cannot possibly be saved. That’s why Paul once stated, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). A person who has no faith in God will not be interested in entering His kingdom.

In addition to faith, God has also commanded **repentance** as a term of entrance into His kingdom. “Repentance” means that we are convinced that something we have been doing is wrong, and we resolve to do it no longer. God’s word teaches us that certain things people do are “sin”, not the right things to do. Those who have faith in God will agree with this and will make up their minds not to do those sinful things anymore.

Jesus spoke about repentance: *“... unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3). This is a sober requirement, for it often means big changes in our lives. But it also gives us hope. Those who are guilty of breaking the laws of God are given the chance to change. A thief can be pleasing to God — but only if he decides to never steal again. So it is with all the things God calls sins; we are guilty for having done them, but we are given a chance to make a clean start. Repentance of sin is clearly one of God’s terms of citizenship in His kingdom.

A third requirement for citizenship is **confession of faith in Christ**. As Jesus lived on earth, people were forced to make decisions about Him: Was He really God’s Son? Was He teach-

ing them the truth? John wrote about some who believed in Jesus: *“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”* (John 12:42,43). In an earlier lesson we noted how King Jesus demands total submission. Those who are more interested in pleasing people than they are in pleasing God can’t be citizens of God’s kingdom. These rulers, mentioned by John, were more concerned with what people thought of them. They weren’t willing to confess their faith.

That’s why Paul’s statement in Romans 10:10 is so important: *“For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.”* Until we have the courage to openly profess our faith in Jesus Christ, we are not yet ready to be citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

The terms of admission to the kingdom of heaven noted thus far are these: Faith in Christ, repentance of sins and confession of our faith. There is one other requirement given great emphasis in the New Testament for those who want to be citizens of the kingdom of God: **baptism**.

“Baptism” is a word which means total submersion in water. Paul, in Romans 6:3,4 compared the act of baptism to the burial of a person’s body after death. *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* The person in question had died to sin; that old person was symbolically buried in the act of baptism; and there occurred a resurrection from the dead to a new way of living.

In verse 5 of that same chapter, Paul compared baptism to the planting of a seed: *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”* The word “united” in this verse is from a Greek word which was used to speak of a seed that had been planted. A seed must be covered with soil in order to spring forth to life. In the same way, Paul taught, baptism is a covering of water, symbolizing our death to the old way of living in sin.

When the people gathered in Jerusalem in Acts 2 heard Peter preaching about Jesus, they grew quite concerned. If Peter was speaking the truth, then they were guilty of executing the Son of God. Naturally, they were alarmed, and cried out, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37) Peter’s answer gave them hope: *“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).

About 3,000 people believed the message Peter preached and were baptized that same day. Luke then tells us this: *“... And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:47). **The church**, as we saw in our first lesson, **is the kingdom of God**. This shows, therefore, that baptism is the final step that leads one into the kingdom. The commands God has given — belief in Jesus as His Son, repentance of sins, confession of our faith in Jesus, and baptism — are all simple and well within the ability of anyone to do. “Whosoever will” can become a citizen of God’s kingdom!

“Hold on a minute,” Meghan interrupted. “I used to go to church when I was younger. I never heard anything about a person having to be baptized to become a Christian.”

“Unfortunately you’re correct in your observation, Meghan,”

responded Bill. “Many churches never mention baptism when teaching people how to become Christians. They emphasize faith, repentance and confession, but baptism gets left out of the instructions.”

“I don’t get it,” said Mark. “If it’s something the Bible teaches, how come everyone doesn’t agree on it?”

“I have no answer for that, Mark,” responded Bill. “You’ve seen for yourself how clearly it’s stated in the Bible. And there are many statements just like these we’ve not yet looked at. I don’t get it either. All I know is that if the Bible tells me I need to do something, then I need to do it. After all, the Bible is inspired by God. It’s how God speaks to me.”

“Let me ask one more quick question before you go on, Bill,” said Meghan. “These 3,000 people who were baptized in Jerusalem — what were they called?”

“I know the answer to that one,” said Julie. “... *the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*’ — that’s in Acts 11:26, isn’t it, Bill?”

“Exactly!” responded Bill. “That’s the only name we find given to followers of Jesus in the New Testament. Often they are described as ‘disciples’, a word which means ‘one who learns’. But when you’re talking about names, there was just one: Christian.”

Second, the Bible teaches the organization of the kingdom. Organization is an important consideration; it speaks to the issue of who possesses power and authority in the kingdom, the church. There are many types of hierarchies to be found in human institutions, but only one is revealed in the New Testament for the church.

It all begins, of course, with Christ. Paul noted this in Ephesians 1:22,23: *“And He put all things under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* Colossians 1:18 repeats the same truth about the headship of Jesus Christ: *“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”* The point should be above all dispute: Jesus is the head of the church, the ultimate source of authority. There is no other head mentioned in God’s word to govern His kingdom.

It is a power that Jesus rightfully claimed. Just before going back to the Father, He said this: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). The Son of God who had come down to earth had lived a victorious life, free of sin and completely righteous. When death tried to claim Him, He broke the bonds. In death He made the atonement for the sins of all who would come to God through Him. Does anyone wonder why Jesus alone should be the head of the church?

“But what about the headquarters of the church, Bill?” Mark asked. “Who is in charge there? And, by the way, where is the headquarters of the church?”

“Again, that’s a point where people have come up with their own ideas,” Bill responded. “You see, the Bible doesn’t talk about any earthly headquarters for the church. Under the Law of Moses, Jerusalem was the center of religious events. But under the New Covenant, the only headquarters the church has is in heaven. And we all know who is ruling from that seat of power, don’t we?”

“Jesus!” exclaimed Meghan.

“That’s what the Bible teaches,” said Bill.

With ultimate power over God’s kingdom situated in heaven, every congregation of the Lord’s church is self-governing, or autonomous. We can see this in Paul’s instructions to Titus about how to organize the churches on the island of Crete: *“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict”* (Titus 1:5-9).

In these instructions, Paul stated a major principle in setting things in order in the churches. That step is to appoint elders. The word “elder” is synonymous with “bishop”, mentioned later in that passage. A “bishop” is an overseer, one who watches out for the good of the Christians in that body. And one important thing to notice in every mention of these overseers is that there is always a plurality in each congregation. In that way, no one person comes to hold more power than is appropriate.

Toward the end of his life, Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus. Among other things, he said this: *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise*

up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28-30). How important it was for the early churches to have the proper form of leadership! These elders, also called “overseers” and “shepherds” in this passage, were to watch out for the well-being of the church. Their role was not to make laws and regulations; Jesus Christ as head of the kingdom would take care of that. These men were charged with the responsibilities of making sure each Christian was growing properly, and that the church would remain pure, free from false teaching.

“So the organization of the church in the New Testament is really pretty simple, isn’t it?” observed Mark. “I’ve read about some groups that have very complicated organizations, with various levels of power and ability to make new laws. That’s not at all the picture we’ve seen in the Bible, is it?”

“No, Mark, it really isn’t,” agreed Bill.

“Let me make sure I’ve got this straight,” said Meghan. “One way we can identify the kingdom of God in the world today is by looking at the way it’s organized? Is that what you’re saying?”

“No, Meghan, it’s not me saying that,” said Bill. “That’s what the word of God says. If it were just my opinion, it wouldn’t be a big deal. But if this is what the head of the church has said, then it becomes a really big deal.”

At that, the three others in unison said, “Right!”

Third, the Bible teaches the worship of the kingdom. Almost everyone knows that worship is an important activity of the church. The word “worship” suggests a bowing down before another. It means that we recognize the greatness of God, and we

want to submit ourselves to His guidance. But how do we worship God? Does it matter? Has God taught us how to worship Him?

The prophet Micah asked this kind of question: *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?”* (Micah 6:6). It was a good question, and Micah thought about it for a few moments, suggesting various ways to worship God. Then the answer came: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good”* (verse 8). In saying that, the prophet summed up a principle that is true even in our day. God has shown us how to approach Him. We don’t have to guess what will please God; He has shown us what He desires.

Documents from the early days of the church reveal that all the churches worshiped in the same basic ways. Specifically, there were five different activities in which early Christians participated every first day of the week. These were prayer, singing, giving of money, observance of the Lord’s Supper, and teaching God’s word. The churches, scattered over the face of the earth, were different in many ways, but those who held to the teachings of God’s word all worshiped God in these ways.

In another of his letters, Paul gave instructions to Timothy on the subject of **prayer**: *“Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”* (1 Timothy 2:8). Prayer is a gift from God, a way of voicing our concerns and requests to the Lord who is able to help. It was practiced often by Christians in the New Testament, and it remains a strong source of strength two thousand years later. No wonder Paul commanded Christians to *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is a lifeline we can’t do without.

Singing was also commanded of the early Christians.

“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,” wrote Paul in Ephesians 5:19. The command to sing was not just for those who can sing *well*, but for all Christians. In singing to one another, we remind ourselves of the greatness of God, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the preciousness of Christian fellowship. Early Christians realized the power of singing and engaged in it whenever they came together to worship.

“That’s the part of worship that I always enjoyed the most,” said Meghan. “It sent chills down my spine when that big pipe organ played those majestic old hymns.”

“I know what you’re saying, Meghan,” replied Bill. “But one thing I’ve learned as I’ve read the Bible is that the music God commands for Christians is singing. He never mentioned playing instruments like they did in the Old Testament. Actually, I think it’s kind of special that way. The only instruments we use when we sing are the ones God Himself created — the human heart and the human voice. That’s the kind of music that really pleases God.”

“I’d never thought of it in that way,” said Meghan, “but it does make sense.”

“Add to that,” continued Bill, “the fact that instruments were not used in worship for several hundred years after the beginning of the church. There must have been a reason why they sang only with their voices.”

Giving of their financial means was another way early Christians worshiped God. Paul had written instructions about this to the church at Corinth: *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each of you lay*

something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). The money that was collected was used to help feed the poor, to support those who gave all their time to preaching the gospel, and for the needs of the church itself. But the main objective of this part of worship was to remind each Christian that God is the source of all our blessings. We please God when we give from a thankful heart. We’re not afraid to let go of some of our resources, for we know God will bless us by giving us what we really need.

A fourth way early Christians worshiped was by **observing the Lord’s Supper** each first day of the week. Luke noted this in Acts 20:7: *“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ...”* To “break bread” was a way of saying that they were observing the Lord’s Supper in which unleavened bread was broken and eaten and grape juice was shared among all. This feast, instituted by Jesus Himself, reminded Christians that Jesus had paid the ultimate price for their sins. Paul wrote: *“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes”* (1 Corinthians 11:22-26). What a special time for Christians to reflect each week on the sacrifice Jesus made for their forgiveness!

The fifth way in which early Christians worshiped was in **teaching the word of God**. Again, consider Paul’s instructions

to Timothy on this matter: *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”* (1 Timothy 4:13). The reason for this part of worship ought to be obvious: It is only through knowing God’s will for our lives that we can become what we ought to be. If we don’t know His will, how can we please Him? Even our worship will become displeasing to God if it is not based on the commands He gave. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 15:8,9: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* Christians certainly don’t want their worship to become vain. Therefore, they should pay close attention to the details of the word of God.

“Is that the way you guys worship?” asked Mark. “Do you do those five things every Sunday — prayer, singing, giving, taking the Lord’s Supper and teaching the Bible?”

“Yes, Mark, that’s how we worship — every first day of the week,” said Julie. “We want to do things just the way the early Christians did. We know they were pleasing to God, and that’s how we know we can please God, too.”

Fourth, the Bible teaches the mission of the kingdom. “Worship,” said Bill, “is kind of like the huddle for a football team. When the players are in the huddle, the quarterback tells which play is coming and gets the team all fired up. But they don’t stay in the huddle. They’ve got to come out and play the game. For Christians, worship is our time to get instructions from above. It’s our time to be reminded of how much God loves us and what He is doing for us every day. But we don’t stay in that huddle. We come out and actually ‘play’ our Christianity before the spectators of the world.”

What Bill was talking about is the “mission” of the church. What is the church supposed to do or to be? Jesus summed it up in Matthew 5:13-16: *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* The two images Jesus used illustrate the same point: Christians should make a difference in the world. Their job is not just to worship God on Sunday, but to be an influence for good every day of the week.

One way Christians can make a positive difference in the world is by **doing good things for others**. In Matthew 25, Jesus described what would happen on the Day of Judgment. Some would be honored by Jesus. Why? What had these people done? Had they risen to great fame or power or wealth? No, these were not the things Jesus commended. He said, *“For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me”* (Matthew 25:35,36). The Christians to whom Jesus spoke were puzzled. When had they ever met Jesus personally? When had they served Him? *“Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”* (verse 40).

The example Jesus provided as He lived on earth taught this idea. Everywhere He went, He did good things for people in need. There was no one too poor, too humble, too sinful for Jesus

to serve. In these acts of service, He gave us the charge to go and do likewise. Wherever we see human needs and suffering, there is where we can make a positive difference. Our small lamp can be a light in someone's room of darkness.

Our ultimate opportunity for effective change in this world is by **proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ** — the message that salvation is available to all who desire it. The Great Commission puts it plainly: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ...”* (Matthew 28:19,20). Serving physical needs of others will help them be more comfortable for a time; but bringing them to the Savior will provide for their most important needs throughout eternity!

“So that’s kind of what you’re doing with us, isn’t it, Bill?” asked Mark. “You’re trying to bring us to Christ, aren’t you?”

“I won’t deny it, Mark,” Bill replied. “Becoming a Christian has been the best thing that’s happened to me, and I’d love to pass it on to someone else; especially the two people I consider my closest friends.”

Meghan and Mark quickly glanced at each other, but said nothing.

Julie spoke up to break the awkward silence: “Of course, you’re going to continue being our friends, even if you decide not to become Christians. But helping you to find Jesus would make us happier than anything I can think of.”

“Thanks, Julie,” Meghan said softly. “I appreciate you for not putting pressure on us. Believe me, it’s something we’re going to think about.”

Mark nodded in silence.

Fifth, the Bible teaches the brotherhood of all kingdom citizens. The bus was getting close to their stop, so Bill spoke quickly. He turned to passages in the Bible that teach that all disciples are on equal terms. None are superior to others, but all are equally acceptable to God. Romans 8:16,17 was one passage he read: *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”* There is no hint in this passage (or in any other) that any Christians are more acceptable to God than others. If a person is a Christian, he or she is a child of God; they are all heirs of the glorious kingdom.

Bill also turned to Galatians 3:26-28: *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* The world may recognize degrees of status, but in God’s kingdom we’re all the same. Yes, we are different in many ways: The color of our skin, our different economic levels, degrees of education, and so forth. But in the one area that matters most — acceptability to God — we’re all alike.

“But what about the ‘clergy’ that you hear about? Aren’t there certain holy people in the churches that are above other folks?” asked Mark.

“I’m afraid that distinction between ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’ isn’t in the Bible,” said Bill. “Here’s what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9: *‘But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the prais-*

es of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.’ According to Peter, every Christian is a priest. We each stand before God on our own.”

“That’s really nice to know,” reflected Meghan. “God doesn’t have any favorites. We’re all equal in His sight. Just like I used to sing as a child, ‘Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight’. That’s the way it ought to be.”

As the two couples stepped off the bus, Bill handed a sheet of paper to Mark.

“I wrote down the five ideas we talked about; you know, the five ways to identify the kingdom of God.” Mark glanced over the list quickly:

- Terms of obtaining citizenship
- Organization of the kingdom
- Pattern of worship
- Mission of the church
- The brotherhood of all Christians

“Thanks, Bill, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us about this,” he said. He carefully folded the paper before placing it in his backpack.

“Hey, since tomorrow is Sunday, are you guys going to church?” Mark asked.

“Yeah,” said Julie. “We found one listed in the phone book. They’re even going to send someone to pick us up at the hotel.”

“Do you think we might come along, too?” Mark asked. “I’d like to see this kingdom in action?”

“Of course you can come with us!” exclaimed Bill. “We’d be honored to have you at our side.”

“Well, here we are,” said Julie as they approached the gates of the palace they had come to visit. “I’m really looking forward to seeing this!”

The four set off along the beautiful garden paths, pausing frequently to enjoy the sights. But Mark was having trouble staying focused. He had a great number of thoughts running through his mind about the King of kings.

“That’s one palace I really want to see,” he thought to himself. Would he ever walk through those gates?

A Spiritual Kingdom

“Mark looks upset,” said Julie to Meghan, Mark’s wife. “Is anything wrong?”

“Yeah, he’s still angry over getting lost this afternoon,” Meghan replied. “That trip to the marketplace shouldn’t have taken more than an hour. Instead, we ended up driving around for three hours — and never made it to the market!”

“That’s really a shame,” responded Julie. “We’ve got only a couple of days left on this trip. I know how bent out of shape Bill gets when we take a wrong turn!”

“Why can’t these men learn to ask for directions?” whispered Meghan to Julie. “Is there something in their genes that makes them want to figure things out without any help?”

“I heard that!” said Bill, surprising Meghan and his wife, Julie. “You’re stereotyping us men!”

“You’ve got to admit, Bill,” said Meghan, “life would be a lot easier if you guys would just stop and ask someone for directions.”

“I won’t deny that,” said Bill. “That’s a lesson that applies spiritually just as much as it does for finding our way around on earth.”

“Spiritual?” asked Mark, who had just walked up to hear the last part of the conversation. “That’s just the word I’ve been thinking about. Since we started talking about the Bible on this trip, I’ve been reading quite a bit in it. I’ve noticed that the New Testament talks a lot about that word ‘spiritual’. I’m not sure I understand what it all means.”

“Excellent question, Mark,” said Bill. “When you start talking about ‘spiritual’, you begin to capture the essence of the kingdom that the Bible describes. It’s a hard concept for people in a material world to comprehend, but it’s vital that we do.”

“Tell us more, Bill,” said Meghan. “I’m ready for that bottle of water in my backpack; why don’t we sit here in the park and talk more about ‘spiritual’ ideas.”

With that, the two couples sat down in a cool shade overlooking the river and began discussing the spiritual kingdom of God.

“Spiritual” is a word often found in the New Testament. It stands in contrast to words like “physical” or “material”. Many consider humans to be entirely physical, but the Bible strongly affirms that there is more to people than flesh and bones. There is a spirit that inhabits the body, and that spirit, or soul, will outlast the physical. The Bible was written to help us understand this dual nature of people.

Therefore, the concept of a kingdom that is spiritual in nature shouldn’t surprise us. When Daniel predicted a kingdom that would appear during the days of the Roman Empire, he described it as “*a kingdom which shall never be destroyed*” (Daniel 2:44). That obviously requires a kingdom unlike any other, because all other kingdoms eventually crumble into dust.

When Jesus stood before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, He was asked about the charge that had been brought against Him by the Jewish leaders: “*Are You the King of the Jews?*” Pilate bluntly asked (John 18:33). Jesus’ response should be carefully noted: “*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here*” (John 18:36). Could Jesus’ claim have been any clearer?

He emphatically denied that His kingdom was to be of a physical nature; it is *“not of this world”*, He said. Furthermore, it would not be a kingdom to be defended by physical armies or weapons.

This was a point on which Jesus has often been misunderstood. From the time He began His ministry by announcing *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17), people have assumed that He was speaking of an earthly kingdom. For many years the people of Israel had longed for a champion, someone to cast off the yoke of Roman oppression and enable Israel to again become mighty and independent as it had been in the past. Even as Jesus was about to leave the earth to return to heaven, His disciples still thought the kingdom would be physical. They asked Him, *“Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:7).

But such views of the kingdom of God are not based on Scripture. The Bible clearly identifies this kingdom as essentially different from any other nation that has existed. When we come to understand what God has always had in mind, we will find this concept of a spiritual kingdom to be wonderfully refreshing and hopeful!

The spiritual kingdom has a spiritual King:

Early in His ministry, Jesus was recognized as being extraordinary. John recorded an amazing miracle performed by Him in John 6. People had gathered to hear Him teach, and had spent all day listening to His remarkable lessons. Toward the end of the day, Jesus fed the entire assembly — over 5,000 people — using only five small loaves of bread and two fish. No one had ever witnessed anything like it! His power was undeniable.

In response to this display of supernatural power, John tells us, some attempted to take Jesus *“by force to make Him king”*

(John 6:15). But being king over the physical nation of Israel was not what Jesus had in mind. John says simply that “*He departed again to a mountain by Himself alone*” (John 6:15). Many would have advised the Lord to seize the opportunity before Him. “This is Your chance to be King, Jesus!” But it was an opportunity He declined. This was not what He had come to be.

Yet no one should conclude that Jesus never became a king. In fact, Paul made a stirring declaration in 1 Timothy 6:14,15. In urging Christians to live a pure life, he said “*That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords.*” Though Jesus passed up the chance to become king of physical Israel on that occasion, He would later become a King. Indeed, He would become the greatest King of all times, the “*King of kings*” as Paul said.

Toward the end of Jesus’ life on earth, He made a dramatic entry into the city of Jerusalem. The feast of Passover was near, and the streets of the city were overflowing with pilgrims who had traveled great distances. Jesus entered the city riding upon a donkey. As He entered, word spread quickly that this amazing Man of God was approaching, and everyone rushed to see Him. In their excitement, they cut branches from the trees and laid them, along with articles of their clothing, on the street ahead of Him. This was the customary way of receiving a king.

Matthew, in describing the scene, reveals that this triumphal entry was no accident; it had been prophesied hundreds of years before. “*All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘Tell the daughter of Zion,*

“Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”” (Matthew 21:4,5). By entering Jerusalem in this way, Jesus illustrated important truths about Himself. He showed that He had indeed come to be King over mankind, and that His style was to be different from other kings. Though He might appear to be weak and powerless to some, yet He would rise to the position of King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus, as spiritual King over God’s spiritual kingdom, is thus revealed in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand He is meek and lowly, as suggested by His entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. But it must never be forgotten that He is also powerful, and will one day use that power to judge all who have lived. Again, He is a King like no earthly king.

Jesus’ meek and gentle ways are well documented. Consider His own words in Matthew 11:28-30: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* How many have been attracted to Jesus because of His gentleness! He has often been portrayed as standing with outstretched arms, ready to receive any who will come to Him. Paul used this image of Jesus in an appeal: *“Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:1). Paul accurately presented Jesus. He is indeed a meek and gentle King.

He is also a powerful and fearful King. In another letter Paul spoke of this same King, but in very different terms: *“... 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 ...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). Is this the same King? Yes, it clearly is. The same Jesus will show gentleness toward those who receive Him, but fearful justice to those who oppose God and His righteous will.

“Wow, those are some powerful words about Jesus,” observed Mark as Bill spoke about King Jesus. “It’s kind of like the way we look at policemen. If you’re living by the law, you see the police officer as your friend, as your protection against lawbreakers. But if you are the one breaking the law, he becomes your greatest enemy.”

“Yes, Mark, that’s a good analogy,” said Bill. “Jesus can be a powerful ally or a fearful foe. It all depends on how we accept His claims as King.”

A spiritual law for God’s spiritual kingdom:

Bill continued talking about the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God by turning to passages which describe the laws of that kingdom. As he pointed out, those laws frequently refer to more than physical obedience, but they stress proper response from within.

“It’s more than just obeying *‘the letter of the law’*,” Bill stressed. “God is very interested in our motives, our attitudes — the things people can’t always see.”

In his letter to the Christians of Galatia, Paul wrote this: *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens,*

and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1,2). Two things in this passage are noteworthy: First, that Christ has given His followers a “law”; and, second, that this law is observed by those who are “spiritual”. This is yet another way in which God’s kingdom is different from other governments which have appeared on earth.

The law of Christ should not be confused with the law of Moses. That law, given on Mount Sinai soon after Israel’s exodus from Egypt, laid down many rules and regulations. It was a covenant given by God to His people, and strict obedience was expected. But that covenant was not meant to last forever. Here’s how Paul described it in Romans 7:4: *“Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead ...”* In saying they had become “dead to the law”, Paul obviously referred to the law to which they had formerly been subject, the law of Moses. Becoming “married” to Christ, they had been released from their former obligations. But, as suggested by Galatians 6:1,2, this did not mean that Christians are freed from all law. They are now subject to “the law of Christ”. That law is a very spiritual law.

In another place, Paul again contrasted the law of Christ with the law of Moses: *“You are manifestly 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” (2 Corinthians 3:3).* Paul was thinking of how Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai. On that occasion, God had written the Ten Commandments on stone tablets (Exodus 31:18). But the law of Christ is different. Rather than being engraved on stone, God writes His laws on people’s hearts.

Their allegiance to God comes from deep within. They serve Him with all of their spirit.

Such whole-hearted devotion has always been God's desire. Jesus pointed to this in Matthew 15:7-9: *"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"* It's not possible for us to detect hypocrisy as Jesus did. To our eyes, it may appear that a person is worshiping God as he should. But God looks upon the heart. He knows whether one is sincerely worshiping or if his mind is a thousand miles away. It's not enough to give "lip-service" to God; He demands that our obedience to His law be from the heart. Jesus said in John 4:24, *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

Yes, God's spiritual kingdom has a law. It is contained in the pages of the New Testament — the new covenant God has given to man (see Hebrews 8:1-13 to see God's longstanding plan to replace the law of Moses with another covenant). And the essential nature of that law in God's kingdom is that it is spiritual.

"That's really a pretty radical idea," said Meghan. "The laws of earthly governments can only demand obedience; they can't demand our hearts or our loyalty. That has to come from inside each of us."

"You're absolutely right, Meghan," said Bill. "That's another unique feature of God's wonderful spiritual kingdom. He makes it clear that He doesn't want just outward submission. He is seeking total submission. That's what Jesus meant when He said the greatest commandment of all is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind."

“Bill, where did Jesus say that?” asked Mark as he took out his pen to make a note. “I want to be sure to read that one.”

“That’s found in Matthew 22:37,” said Bill. “That’s one of the first passages of Scripture I memorized. It’s such an important concept for us to understand.”

Spiritual thinking in God’s spiritual kingdom:

“If we love God with all our heart, soul and mind,” Bill continued, “then we’re going to think differently than other people.”

“What exactly do you mean?” asked Meghan. “How does a Christian’s thinking differ from people who are not Christians?”

“It’s not that we think with different physical organs,” laughed Bill. “But the perspective we have on life is different. Before I became a Christian, I pretty much saw myself as number one. My choices were made from selfish motives. But now that I’m a Christian, I think with a spiritual perspective.”

Bill read from Romans 8:1-4: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* Those who “walk according to the flesh” are those who do the things that “feel” right to them. They may choose to do things that are immoral or unethical because it advances their comfort or pleasure. But those who walk according to the Spirit are those who choose to follow the teaching of Jesus Christ.

They often pass up opportunities to do things that might bring pleasure or wealth so that they can enjoy rewards that are more spiritual in nature.

Jesus once illustrated the difference spiritual thinking will make. In the parable of the good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:30-35, a Jewish man was assaulted by thieves as he traveled on a lonely stretch of road. He was robbed, beaten and left for dead. Two men later came by and saw the wounded victim lying by the side of the road, but they chose to ignore him and continued on their way. A third traveler, however, saw the man in need and stopped to help. He bandaged the man's wounds, helped him up on his donkey, and led him to the nearest inn. At the inn, he paid for a room where the man could recover, and instructed the innkeeper to care for any needs this wounded man might have. He promised to return later and pay for whatever expenses might be incurred.

Jesus told that story to show the kind of people God wants us to be. The man who showed compassion was a Samaritan, a person the Jews would not have regarded as acceptable to God. But Jesus showed that Samaritans can be acceptable to God. Anyone, in fact, who shows concern for other people is well on their way to God's approval.

As we think about that Samaritan, notice how he chose another person's well-being over his own. By giving up his donkey for the other man to ride, he accepted physical discomfort. By paying for the man's care during his recovery, he was accepting financial hardship. A person who "walks according to the flesh" will not often make such choices. But those who trust the teachings of Jesus Christ will walk according to the Spirit.

Paul again stressed the concept in Romans 12:1,2: "I

beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” In the days of the Law of Moses, “sacrifices” were gifts offered to God. They consisted of animals, grain and other tangible things. But in the new covenant, the nature of sacrifices has changed. Now, according to this passage, our sacrifice begins with a changed lifestyle. Instead of being conformed to the world, doing things that everyone else does and valuing things the world values, Christians look to God for instruction. The transformation that God seeks comes by “*the renewing of your mind*”. As we read and meditate on the word of God, we come to see better ways of living, thinking and relating to others. Instead of doing only the things that lead to our personal pleasure or comfort, we are motivated by spiritual values.

Understanding the importance of developing a spiritual mind helps us to see the importance of worship. Worship, as it is revealed in the Bible, is not a ritual, something mindlessly conducted week after week. Instead, it elevates the mind to a higher plane to think about God and the things He has revealed. As we’ve seen from John 4:24, those who worship are to worship “*in spirit and truth*”. “*In truth*” reminds us that we must worship in the ways God has revealed; “*in spirit*” stresses the necessity of thinking about the significance of what we are doing.

One example can be seen in the Lord’s Supper. Paul wrote about this act of worship in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, noting how Jesus used bread and the juice of grapes to symbolize His body and blood that would be offered on the cross. But why should

Christians, living hundreds of years later, be asked to repeat such a scene? *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup”* (1 Corinthians 11:28). Those who merely eat the bread and drink the juice while thinking of other things have not truly worshiped God. Proper observance means that we consider our own sins that led Jesus to His death. We also consider the great love that prompted Him to willingly offer Himself for our sins. In thinking such thoughts as we worship, we participate in a process that transforms our minds. Regular worship that is offered *“in spirit and truth”* will help us become people with spiritual minds.

“So that’s what worship is all about,” observed Meghan. “I’d always wondered why it was so important for Christians to go to church every week. In fact, most people I’ve known who claimed to be Christians went only now and then.”

“No, worship is very important for all who want to change the way they think,” said Julie. “If I have to miss worship because of sickness or travel, I really feel the difference. It’s like I’ve not fed my soul what it needs.”

“Well said,” added Bill. “Spiritual growth means spiritual nourishment. That’s what we get from worship and Bible study with other Christians.”

Spiritual armor in God’s spiritual kingdom:

“Hey, Bill, I’ve got a question for you.” Mark was stretching from sitting so long under the tree. “Anytime I think of the word ‘kingdom’ I can’t help but think of an army. Kings always had knights or soldiers to protect their kingdom from enemies. Is there anything like that in God’s kingdom?”

“Yes, Mark, there is,” said Bill. “There are quite a few passages in the New Testament that talk about spiritual warfare.”

“But wait,” objected Mark. “Didn’t you say that Jesus said His servants wouldn’t fight?”

Bill replied, “When He stood before the governor Pilate, He said that His servants would not fight the Roman army because His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). But that didn’t mean there is not a conflict going on in the spiritual realm. We said earlier that those who walk by the Spirit see things that others don’t. And God has revealed to us that there are many enemies trying to overpower us.”

“Enemies?” asked Meghan. “I want to hear more about this. What kind of enemies do Christians face?”

Bill turned to 2 Timothy 2:3,4 and read: *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”* From that statement, Paul made it clear that Christians are actively engaged in spiritual conflict. A *“good soldier of Jesus Christ”* must be alert to the enemy and always ready to fight. That’s the idea found in many places in the New Testament.

In another place, Paul stressed that the warfare in which we are engaged is not physical: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Our weapons may not be visible to the human eye, said Paul, but they are powerful weapons! They are effective in bringing down spiritual strongholds, potent in destroying arguments against the greatness of God. When properly used, these spiritual

weapons cause others to see the great power of God's kingdom.

No passage is clearer in describing those weapons than Ephesians 6:10-18. Paul compared various Christian attributes with pieces of armor. Truth becomes a breastplate of righteousness, protecting the Christian soldier's heart from injury. The word of God is compared to a sword with which we fight the enemy. Salvation is our helmet, Paul argued, protecting our minds from worldly thoughts. Most importantly, Paul identified our enemy: "*Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one*" (Ephesians 6:16). The "*wicked one*" refers to Satan, the great arch-enemy of humans. He spoiled the wonderful blessings of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and seeks to frustrate God's plans for all of humanity. It is only through the constant use of these spiritual weapons that one will be able to "*stand against the wiles of the devil*" (Ephesians 6:11).

The spiritual motivation of love:

"Let's not forget, however," said Bill, "that even though the Christian must be ready and able to use weapons to defend himself from the devil, we are still to be a people of love. Jesus was strong against the devil, but He never failed to show love for the people around Him. We, too, must fight the devil, but love other people."

"I think there are Christians who get that mixed up!" laughed Mark. "I've known some Christians who seemed to enjoy fighting everyone around them."

"I won't deny that," said Bill. "I will, however, deny that Jesus wants it to be that way."

The night before He was crucified, Jesus spoke candidly with

His disciples. He knew how vengeful they would feel toward those who would participate in His persecution and death. He stressed the importance of love: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34,35). Christians through the ages have been known for many things. The one thing above all others for which they should be known, Jesus said, is love, the kind of love Jesus Himself demonstrated.

Did Jesus live by His own teaching? Indeed He did, like no one who has ever lived before or since! Some of the strongest proof of that claim can be found in Luke 23:34. After being arrested on false charges, treated shamefully by rough soldiers, and cruelly nailed to a cross to die a slow and painful death, Jesus cried out to God, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”* Though innocent of all charges, Jesus was condemned by the jealous religious leaders. But instead of returning their hatred and spite, He prayed for their forgiveness.

Paul, like numerous others, marveled over this fact: *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:6-8). Even though all of humanity was guilty of transgressing God’s laws, He still desired to save them from the penalty of their sins. He gave His own Son to die in their place.

“Bill, are you telling me that God would give His own Son to die a painful death on the cross just so my crimes could be wiped from the record?” Mark was speaking more quietly than usual,

and his face had an unusually serious appearance.

“Yes, Mark, that’s what the Bible teaches us,” said Bill. “It’s pretty amazing that God would love us that much.”

“Pretty amazing is right,” responded Mark. “I’ve never really thought of God as being loving. But hearing you describe Jesus and what He did during His trial and execution really throws a new light on things.”

The couples sat silently for a few moments, looking down at the boats on the river. Then Mark spoke again: “I’ve done things in my life that I’m not proud of; I guess the Bible would call them sins. I’ve always felt that God wasn’t too pleased with me. But you’re saying Jesus gives me the chance to start over? To wipe the record clean?”

“That’s why the message of Jesus Christ is called ‘the gospel’,” said Bill. “‘Gospel’ means ‘good news’, and what Jesus has made possible for all of us is truly good news. It doesn’t matter what we’ve done or how many times we’ve done it; all that matters is that we commit our lives to Jesus in faith and obey His will. Those who are willing to do that are given a chance to start all over again.”

“Oh, I’ll bet I know what comes next,” interrupted Meghan. “I’ve heard my friends talk about ‘the sinner’s prayer’, or something like that. All you have to do is ask Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you. Is that the way it works?”

“I’ve heard the same things, Meghan,” answered Bill. “But ‘the sinner’s prayer’ is not found in the Bible. I’m really not sure who first came up with that.”

“So I guess it takes something really hard to be forgiven by God, huh?” asked Mark.

“No,” said Bill, “it’s not hard at all. Jesus has done the hard part. The things we are told to do are actually pretty simple.”

Bill then told Meghan and Mark about Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a devout Jew who lived during the time of Jesus. When he saw the beginning of Christianity, he vowed to do all he could to stop it, thinking it was a rebellion against Judaism. He even took part in the arrest and execution of several Christians.

“But one day,” Bill said, “Jesus, who had been raised from the dead and was then in heaven, met Saul on the road to Damascus. Never again could Saul deny that Jesus was alive again. From that experience, he was so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah that he spent the next three days weeping over his terrible sins. He refused to eat anything, and prayed continually to God.”

“So I guess God forgave Saul after three days of fasting and prayer?” asked Meghan.

“No, Meghan, it wasn’t the fasting and praying that led to his forgiveness,” said Bill. Bill turned to Acts 22:16 to read God’s message to Saul, sent by a man named Ananias: *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

“That’s just what Saul did,” continued Bill. “He was baptized — immersed in water — in obedience to the command of God.”

“So did God forgive Him?” asked Mark. “It sounds to me like he was guilty of some pretty heavy crimes against God.”

“God promised to wash away his sins when he was baptized,” replied Bill. “I believe God always does what He promises He will do. And besides, this Saul of Tarsus is the one who would become known as the apostle Paul.”

“The apostle Paul?” exclaimed Meghan and Mark in unison. “You’ve mentioned his name so many times we thought he was some holy man!”

“He did become pretty special,” said Bill. “But Paul started out the way we all began; he was a sinner who needed God’s forgiveness. When He showed his faith in Christ by his penitent attitude and his obedience to the command of baptism, Paul was forgiven. It’s the same plan God has given to all of us.”

“All I have to do is to be baptized?” asked Mark.

“If you truly believe Jesus is the Son of God and you are sorry for the sins you’ve committed, you will be forgiven when you are immersed into Christ,” said Bill. “That’s the pattern we always find in the book of Acts.”

“Then ...” said Mark thoughtfully, “Why couldn’t I be baptized right now? There’s the river down there. You could do it, couldn’t you, Bill?”

“Oh, honey,” said Meghan, “you need to wait awhile and think this over. Besides, they probably can’t baptize you in a river.”

“Actually, we can,” said Bill. “This is very similar to an incident in Acts 8. On that occasion, a man wanted to be baptized right there on the spot. In fact, let’s read it now.” With that, Bill began reading from Acts 8:26-40.

The sun was beginning to sink low on the horizon as Mark dried his hair with the towel Julie had given him.

“I can’t tell you how happy I feel!” said Mark. “I’ve really been struggling with guilty feelings since we started talking about Jesus a few days ago. Now it’s like all my past sins are at the bottom of that river. Thanks, Bill, for doing this for me.”

“No — thank you,” exclaimed Bill with a trembling in his voice. “You have encouraged me more than you know.”

Mark continued speaking, as if thinking out loud. “It’s really becoming clearer to me; all this talk about ‘spiritual’ things. I realize now, more than ever, that I have a spirit. And I’m feeling pretty good about what God now sees.”

“It’s all because of Jesus,” said Julie.

“Right,” added Bill. “Don’t ever forget that He is the reason for all the spiritual blessings we enjoy. We can’t do it without Him.”

“The kingdom of God! Now I’m a citizen of the kingdom of God!” thought Mark to himself as the four walked toward their hotel. Meghan sensed that his arm around her shoulder seemed to hold her stronger than before. She was happy for her husband, though she still wasn’t sure how she felt about what he had just done. But she was thinking. And the kingdom of God was beginning to appeal to her, too.

A Kingdom to Come?

“They’re here!” shouted Julie. She had been standing at the window watching for Meghan and Mark. Bill was out back, getting the grill ready.

“Get in here, you guys!” she shouted excitedly. “We haven’t seen you in so long!”

“Hey, girl, you’re really looking good,” exclaimed Meghan. “Looks like expecting a baby is agreeing with you.”

“Oh, I have my bad days, let me assure you,” laughed Julie. “But I’ll have to admit, I’m getting really excited about having a little one around. Just six more weeks, you know.”

The wives wandered off into the newly decorated nursery, chatting happily as they went.

“Mark! Good to see you, man!” said Bill. “How long has it been?”

“Too long,” said Mark. “When you told us about moving to take that new job, I knew we wouldn’t be seeing each other too often.”

“Yeah, that was one thing that made us hesitant about taking the job,” said Bill. “We really got close to you guys. After that trip through Europe, we felt like we were family.”

“You and me both,” said Mark. “And I’ll never forget how you helped lead me to Jesus. Becoming a Christian was definitely the best thing I’ve ever decided to do.”

“Hey, we heard that Meghan is a Christian now, too,” said Bill.

“That’s right,” said Mark with a tone of joy in his voice. “I

baptized her into Christ myself. We went out to that little lake on the south side of town, and we helped her put on Christ.”

“Just like Phillip and the eunuch in Acts 8,” noted Bill.

“Exactly,” said Mark. “She was so happy. We’re closer now than we’ve ever been before.”

It wasn’t long before dinner was ready, and the couples enjoyed reminiscing while eating their meal out on the deck. They had shared so many special memories, but had had so little time together in recent months. The sun was beginning to set as they scooted their chairs back to have another glass of tea.

“Hey, Bill, you really helped me understand the Bible on that trip. I was wondering if you could help me with another question, one that has been making me think a lot lately.”

“Sure, Mark, I’ll be glad to help if I can.”

“Well, one of Meghan’s friends let her borrow some books. They’re really exciting reading, describing things the author thinks will happen at the end of time when Jesus comes back. People are raptured up into heaven, an evil person rises up to try to take over the world, there’s a battle called ‘Armageddon’, and all kinds of things. Meghan’s friend says it’s all based on what the Bible teaches about the kingdom. But I don’t remember you talking about any of that, and I haven’t found it in the Bible.”

Bill and Julie exchanged a quick glance. They had had other friends talk about those same books, and even a movie that had been made on the theme. It wasn’t the first time they had been asked what they thought about the books.

“Well, Mark, I don’t want to sound harsh or ugly, but that’s really not what the Bible teaches. When people say that the kingdom will be set up on earth when Jesus comes again, they’re not

teaching what the Bible says.”

“Well, how about helping us get a grip on these ideas?” asked Mark.

“Yes,” agreed Meghan, “my friends keep pressing me on these books, and I’m not sure what to say. I’d appreciate some help.”

With that, the two couples moved inside where there was more light. Bill brought out a couple of Bibles, and they began looking together at some passages of Scripture. Mark took notes while Bill talked.

A Future Kingdom? Bill began by turning to Revelation 20:4, a passage viewed by many as teaching the idea of a future kingdom. John, the author of Revelation, wrote: *“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”*

“That’s the passage they always read,” said Meghan. “They say that the people ‘reigned’ with Christ for a thousand years. They insist that means that the kingdom won’t begin until Jesus comes again, and then the kingdom will be on earth for a thousand years. After that, everyone will go either to heaven or hell.”

“Yes, I’ve heard many people talk about those very ideas,” said Bill. “It’s part of a doctrine called ‘premillennialism’. But it’s just not what the Bible teaches.”

Bill began by reminding Meghan and Mark of a fact they had studied on their trip. According to several statements in the New

Testament, the kingdom and the church are the same. “Clearly, the church was established soon after Jesus went back to heaven, and therefore the kingdom is already on earth,” said Bill.

Bill took them to Daniel 2:44, reminding them of the words the prophet spoke in interpreting the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar: *“And in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.”* “*These kings*” obviously referred to the time of the Roman Empire.

“The question is really this,” said Bill, “Did God do what He promised to do or not? Was the kingdom of God set up during the days of the Roman Empire? Or did God have to change His plans because the people of Jesus’ day didn’t cooperate?”

“That wouldn’t speak very highly of God’s power if humans were able to throw His plans off course,” said Mark.

“No, it wouldn’t,” agreed Bill. “But that’s the dilemma people face when they say that the kingdom was not established when Jesus came to earth the first time.”

Bill then turned to Mark 1:15 and read the words of Jesus at the beginning of His ministry on earth: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.”* He emphasized that the phrase “is at hand” strongly suggested that the time for the kingdom’s establishment was drawing near. Next he turned the pages to Mark 9:1, reading again the words of Jesus: *“Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”*

“Think on that one for a minute,” said Bill. “If Jesus was right, then the kingdom was going to be established very soon

after He spoke those words. But if the kingdom didn't come ..."

"I get it," interrupted Mark. "If the kingdom didn't come, then there must be some very old people still alive on earth, waiting for that kingdom to come."

"Yeah, about two thousand years old," laughed Meghan.

Bill turned to one other passage on this point, Colossians 1:13,14: "*He [Jesus] has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*" Bill then summed up the passages they had just read: "God promised to set up a kingdom during the days of the Roman Empire; Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, said that the kingdom was at hand; He later said that some people would not die until they saw the kingdom come with power; and Paul still later said that God had transferred Christians into that kingdom. To me, that sounds like the kingdom is already here."

Mark had been writing as Bill talked. He looked up, though, with a question: "Bill, what about where Jesus said in the Lord's prayer, 'Thy kingdom come'? If Jesus taught His disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come, doesn't that mean it hasn't come yet?"

"That's a good question," Bill responded. "I used to have trouble with that, too. What you've got to remember is that Jesus taught His disciples that prayer *before the church was established*. Remember, Acts 2 tells of the beginning of the church. The things Jesus taught in the gospel accounts were before the kingdom began."

Mark nodded thoughtfully, and returned to his note-taking.

A Material Kingdom?

“Let me come at it from another angle,” said Meghan. “This is the argument I usually hear: Suppose the church is just a preliminary phase of the kingdom. Maybe Jesus didn’t build the whole kingdom at once. According to my friends, He’s going to come back and set up an earthly kingdom. They say that the headquarters will be in Jerusalem, Jesus will actually sit on a throne, and there will be a big war against Satan’s forces somewhere over in the Middle East. That kind of thing could be the way Jesus is going to set up His kingdom, couldn’t it?”

“Meghan, if we were talking about a human being, I would agree,” said Bill. “People build things in stages all the time. My company is planning to expand its overseas production, but they have a five-step plan. They’ll do a little now, a little more next year, and so on. But we’re not talking about people. We’re talking about the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Is He not able to set up His kingdom all at once? I mean, if He couldn’t do it the first time, what’s to say that He’ll succeed the second time?”

Bill started turning to passages in the New Testament that speak of events that will happen when Jesus returns the second time. They first looked at Acts 1:11. Luke had described Christ’s ascension back into heaven. The disciples present must have been quite surprised to see their Lord lifted up into the air and gradually removed from their sight. Then an angel appeared with this message: *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* From that moment followers of Jesus began looking forward to a second coming.

Bill then read from 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17: *“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and*

remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

According to this passage, certain things will happen at Jesus' second coming. First, there will be a dramatic announcement of His coming. A loud shout will be heard throughout the earth, the voice of an archangel will be heard, and the trumpet of God will sound a loud blast. Every person living on earth will know something significant is about to happen. Graves will begin to open and those who have died in Christ will be raised back to life. This time, however, their lives will be different. They will not live on earth, but they will join the Lord in the air. There is no mention in this passage, or in any other, that Jesus will establish a kingdom on earth. Instead, He will take His followers home to heaven.

These words of Paul agree with the promise Jesus had made to His apostles in John 14:1-3: *"Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

There are many who teach that Jesus will return to this earth and set up a kingdom in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus, however, taught in this passage that the home He is preparing for His followers is located in the place to which He was going. From that

place He would someday return, coming for the very purpose of receiving His disciples to Himself. And what was the location of the “place” of which Jesus was speaking? He would take them to heaven, not to Jerusalem.

Another passage that speaks clearly about events that will take place at Jesus’ second coming is 1 Corinthians 15:22-26: *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”* Here again is a clear statement of what to expect when Jesus returns to the earth.

Note that in this passage Paul declared Christ to be the “firstfruits” of those who will be made alive. This is another way of saying that Jesus was raised from death by the power of God. After saying that Jesus is the firstfruits, Paul went on to record that there will be others who will also be raised from death. That event will occur, Paul said, when Christ comes again. *“Then,”* Paul continued, *“comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.”* Compare his statement with the teaching often heard that Jesus will “begin” the kingdom at His second coming. Such a claim is not the same as Paul’s declaration that the kingdom, already in existence and over which Christ is reigning as king, will be “delivered” to God when Jesus comes again.

Paul makes it clear in this passage that the kingdom exists *now*. He said that Jesus must reign *until* all enemies are subdued. The last enemy to be conquered is death. Since we know that death has not yet been destroyed, Jesus must still be reigning. For Jesus to reign, there must be a kingdom. Again, this is different

from the teaching of many that the kingdom does not yet exist.

Another passage that allows no room for an earthly kingdom after Jesus' return is Hebrews 9:27,28: "*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*" Again, the writer plainly affirms that Jesus "*will appear a second time*". But what will happen after His return? He taught that "after this" — after Jesus' return — the judgment will occur. Nothing is said about a kingdom on earth that lasts a thousand years.

Jesus taught the same idea in Matthew 25:31,32: "*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.*" In the verses that follow, Jesus describes some of the things that will occur in the judgment of mankind. In other words, Matthew 25:31-46 is a description of the great Day of Judgment when all who have ever lived will be judged by the Lord. When does that Judgment occur? "*When the Son of Man comes in His glory ... then He will sit on the throne of His glory*" to judge the nations. Again, there is no mention of a kingdom being erected in Jerusalem that will endure for a thousand years.

"Wow!" said Mark, putting down his pen. "That's a lot of passages you've given us."

"Yes," responded Bill, "And they're all teaching the same ideas, only with different words. What we have seen is this sequence of events — do you mind if I write these on your paper, Mark?"

“Be my guest,” said Mark, sliding the paper to Bill.

“What we have seen,” continued Bill, “is that Jesus will appear in the sky with different kinds of loud noises. The dead in Christ will be raised and will meet Him in the sky. After that, those who are still alive will be raised also, and all of them will be taken to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. At the end of the judgment, some will be sent away into everlasting life, and the rest will be sent to everlasting punishment.”

“But nothing in those verses spoke about a literal, physical kingdom on earth when Jesus comes again?” asked Meghan.

“I didn’t see anything about that, did you?” asked Bill.

“No, nothing,” agreed Meghan.

“In fact,” said Bill, “there is nothing ever said about Jesus setting foot on the earth again. He will come a second time, to be sure. But He is not coming to walk upon the earth again.”

Bill continued: “You see, all of this talk about Jesus setting up a kingdom in Jerusalem when He comes again is because people just don’t grasp that He *did* set up His kingdom, already. It’s not the kind of kingdom they expected, so they don’t believe it really came. But remember what Jesus said in John 18:36 when He was standing before the Roman governor Pilate? He said, *‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’*”

“That’s right, I remember you talking about that verse,” said Mark. “Now it’s beginning to make a lot more sense. Instead of Jesus coming to set up an earthly kingdom, He really came to set up a spiritual kingdom. Is that right?”

“That’s what I understand from reading the Scriptures,

Mark,” said Bill.

The Kingdom in Revelation: “Bill,” said Meghan, “I keep hearing my friends talk about the book of Revelation when they talk about these ideas. From what I’ve read in Revelation, there does seem to be a lot of strange things going on. In fact, the passages they keep talking about make it seem like there will be a kingdom set up on earth. What do you know about the book of Revelation?”

Bill sat back in his chair and took a deep breath. “I’ll tell you right off the bat that there’s a lot I don’t know about Revelation,” he said. “But there are some ideas that are pretty clear. Let’s begin by looking at the very first verse of that book.” He then read Revelation 1:1: *“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show his servants — things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.”*

The first thing Bill emphasized in that verse was that the things written in Revelation were to take place “shortly”. Many of the first readers of John’s writings were Christians under severe attack. Not long after the establishment of the church, the Roman Empire declared Christianity to be illegal. Many Christians, however, were determined to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). Some were thrown into prisons; others were driven from their homes; some were even put to death. In such an environment of persecution, Christians would need encouragement. The message of Revelation was directed to them, therefore, to assure them that Christ would ultimately conquer all of their enemies. It was a message that was needed “shortly”. A revelation of things that would occur hundreds of years into the future would not be of great practical benefit to those Christians.

Another idea presented in Revelation 1:1 is that this message was “signified” to John. The Greek word from which this is translated suggests imagery, figures of speech. Another example of how John used this word is found in John 21:18,19, where Jesus was speaking to Peter: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.*’ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.” The word “signifying” declares that Jesus was using figures of speech to show Peter what would happen to him. According to uninspired information, Peter was crucified, a position in which his arms were stretched out. (At Peter’s request, we are told, he was crucified in an upside-down position; he did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus!) Through passages like this, it becomes clear what “signify” means in Revelation.

The very first words of the book of Revelation alert the reader to the fact that signs and symbols will be used. One must take care when reading from this book. Figurative language is not meant to be interpreted literally. There is meaning behind the imagery that must be carefully sought out.

“Now, with that in mind,” said Bill, “let’s go back to that verse we looked at earlier, Revelation 20:4. Look at the end of that verse, where it says *‘And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years’*. Many people have taught that Jesus will set up a kingdom on earth that will last a thousand years. But is that really what this verse means? Or could this be figurative language, the kind of language John said in the first verse of the book that he would be using?”

“Bill, show them that verse about cattle on a thousand hills,”

said Julie.

“Excellent idea!” answered Bill. “That ought to help. Julie is talking about Psalm 50:10, where God said, *‘For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.’* I wonder which hills are among those thousand? If we can figure that out, then we will know which cattle don’t belong to God.”

“That’s crazy,” exclaimed Mark. “Everybody knows that’s poetic language. God is just saying ‘a thousand’ to mean all the hills.”

“You’re absolutely right,” said Bill. “In fact, in most instances where that word ‘thousand’ is used in the Bible, it’s obviously a figure of speech meaning ‘a lot’. And that’s how Revelation 20:4 should be understood.”

“Here, let me state it this way: The only place in the Bible where anything is said about Jesus reigning one thousand years is in this verse in Revelation. But John had already told us that the things written in Revelation were ‘signified’ to him. And that’s how this statement in Revelation 20:4 should be understood. It simply means that Christians were reigning with Christ, even though their enemies thought they were losers. Even while they were being persecuted, they were really reigning with Christ.”

The Rapture of the Saints?

“Okay, I think I’m getting a handle on that part,” said Mark. “But what about this thing they call ‘the rapture’? You’ve got to admit, that’s pretty dramatic stuff! People suddenly vanishing from the face of the earth; their loved ones finding nothing but a pile of clothes left behind? What does the Bible say about that?”

“Actually, it doesn’t say anything,” responded Bill.

“Nothing at all?” asked Meghan and Mark in unison.

“Not really,” said Bill.

The word “rapture” does not appear in any standard translation of the Bible. It is a word often used in discussions of events that are believed to take place when Jesus comes again. According to this view, Christians will join Jesus in heaven for a period of seven years. Meanwhile on earth, things will get worse and worse until Jesus will return (a third time!) to finally defeat Satan in the battle of Armageddon. At that third return of Jesus, all who earlier had gone with him to heaven will return to earth to reign with Him for one thousand years in the earthly kingdom.

There is no Bible passage that teaches those events, however. Some passages are misapplied to make these things seem to be true. But again the question must be asked: Did Jesus succeed in setting up His kingdom when He came the first time? According to many passages that show the church to be the same as Christ’s kingdom, He did succeed!

One passage that seems to teach the ideas of premillennialism (the doctrine of an earthly kingdom that will last for a thousand years) is Matthew 24:40,41. In speaking of the end of the world, Jesus was noting that it will occur without warning. He pointed to the flood in the days of Noah, and observed that people were going about their daily lives when the flood came. They were not expecting the tragedy that was about to end their lives.

Jesus then taught that people would be caught off-guard at His coming, just as people were unprepared for the flood. *“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left”* (Matthew 24:40,41). To many, this sounds like proof of the concept of the rapture. Just as in the best-selling books and in the movies, some people will suddenly vanish while

others will be left behind, we are told.

But is there any other possible interpretation of these verses? As we have seen, the clear passages which speak of the second coming of Christ allow no room for a millennial kingdom on earth. So, there must be another interpretation of Jesus' words which would not contradict other passages regarding the end times.

A more consistent explanation would be that Jesus is simply stating that people will have different perspectives toward God's word. In the days of Noah, most went on with their daily lives, making no attempt to prepare for the flood which Noah was preaching. In the same way, some people will be ready for the Lord's return, some will not. Two men who work side by side in the fields may have very different attitudes toward Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in Christ will be ready for His coming; those without faith will be woefully unprepared.

Later in the same passage, Jesus compared His coming to that of a thief who comes in the night (Matthew 24:43,44). Since we never know when the thief will strike, we strive always to be ready for his coming. . In the same way, Jesus said, *"you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him."*

Peter, who was present when Jesus spoke those warnings in Matthew 24, used the same imagery in 2 Peter 3:10 to describe the coming of Jesus. Note what will happen at that time: *"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."* Is this the same great day about which the Lord spoke in Matthew 24? Apparently so, for in both passages

the same analogy is used — a thief who comes unexpectedly in the night. But in Peter’s statement, no time is found for an earthly kingdom after Jesus comes. Instead, the earth will be destroyed. Its usefulness will have been fulfilled. The former occupants of earth will be taken elsewhere. (Check Matthew 25:31-46 to see again where those former occupants are taken.)

Is Jesus Presently a King or Not?

“Here’s what it all boils down to,” said Bill. “Is Jesus a King right now or not? According to those who claim the kingdom has not yet been established on earth, Jesus is the head of the church, but He’s not yet a King. If there is no kingdom, then He can’t possibly be a King. But there are so many passages in the Bible that clearly state that Jesus is a King, now reigning up in heaven. If those passages are true, there must be a kingdom already in existence.”

Bill then turned to Daniel 7:13,14: *“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.”* Here is a prophecy pointing to the time at which the Messiah would be given a kingdom. When would that take place?

Notice in this prophecy that Daniel says the events began when the Son of Man came “with the clouds”. Is it just a coincidence that Jesus left the earth in clouds? After He was raised from the dead and had spent several more days with His disciples, Luke told how Jesus was taken up from the earth: “Now

when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Many have suggested that Acts 1:9 gives us the earthly view of Jesus’ ascension back up into heaven, and Daniel 7:13,14 gives us the scene that next occurred. Jesus went from the presence of His apostles directly into the presence of the Ancient of Days (God).

Strengthening this view is a vision that Stephen described in Acts 7:56. Stephen had enraged his enemies by condemning them for executing the Son of God; now he was himself being executed. As he was dying, he looked up into heaven and said, *“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”* Stephen was seeing the fact prophesied in Daniel 7:13,14 — the “Son of Man” (another name for Jesus) was now at the right hand of God. After leaving earth, He had been seated at His Father’s side.

If that is true, then consider what else Daniel saw in his prophecy about Jesus: *“Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him ...”* Not only was Jesus given a seat beside God when He ascended back into heaven, but He was also given *“a kingdom”*. He was not given a promise that someday in the future He would be head over a kingdom; He was given the actual kingdom at that time.

Peter, speaking by God’s inspiration, confirmed this view in Acts 2. In the first gospel sermon on record, Peter pointed to a prophecy by David in Psalm 16. He then declared the importance of David’s prophecy: *“Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit*

on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:30,31). In saying these things, Peter was establishing a crucial truth: Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead, and this was a matter that had been prophesied long ago by David.

Peter continued, referring to what had been prophesied about the Christ: *“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God ...” (Acts 2:32,33). The apostle then pointed to other prophesies in the Psalms, all fulfilled by Jesus: “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’” (Acts 2:34,35). Peter is thus confirming that the vision Stephen saw later was in agreement with all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus had gone from the grave to His Father’s side, and was now sitting in a seat of power and authority. Peter’s conclusion was therefore inescapable: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). It was a conclusion that pierced the hearts of many who were listening, prompting them to repent of their participation in Jesus’ death and to be baptized so they might be forgiven by God (Acts 2:37-41).*

The Keys of the Kingdom: This account of Peter preaching the first gospel sermon is significant for another reason. In Matthew 16:16, Peter made the confession that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”*. Jesus then said to Peter, *“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ...”*

(Matthew 16:18,19).

“Now let me ask this,” said Bill. “Was Jesus making an empty promise to Peter? Did Peter ever get to use those keys that would open the doors to the kingdom of God? Or is it true, as some say, that the kingdom had to be postponed and the keys have not yet been used? This account in Acts 2 looks like an occasion on which a ‘grand opening’ was announced to the world; the kingdom of God was now open and ready for business. I’d say that Peter was using the keys of the kingdom, just as Jesus promised he would.”

That’s not the only time Peter was involved in the opening of the church. Acts 10 records the calling of Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. After he preached Christ to these non-Jews, the Holy Spirit made it obvious to Peter that God was ready to receive Gentiles into the kingdom. Cornelius and his family were all baptized into Christ (Acts 10:47,48), just as the 3,000 people had been baptized on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Some of the Jewish Christians later objected to what Peter had done; they felt Gentiles were not worthy to be admitted into the church. But when they heard the details of what had happened at Cornelius’ home, they submitted to what was obviously God’s will. Luke wrote: *“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’”* (Acts 11:18). Therefore Peter, on two different occasions, was involved in using the keys of the kingdom. The first time he opened the door to the Jews, and the second time to all the rest of the world.

Paul’s comment in Romans 1:16 confirms this interpretation of Peter’s actions: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who*

believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” That’s just what we find in the book of Acts: The gospel was preached first to the Jews, in Acts 2, and then to the Greeks, or Gentiles, in Acts 10. Both times the door was opened by Peter, the one to whom Jesus promised to give the keys of the kingdom. Does this not again convincingly point to the establishment of the kingdom after Jesus’ return to heaven?

This view also agrees with the prophecy in Isaiah 2:2,3: *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”* Just as Isaiah predicted long ago, the law of the Lord began first in Zion, and then proceeded to go forth into all the world.

God saw the future clearly, and events happened just as His prophets said. Those who teach that God’s plans had to be altered because of the unexpected rejection of the Messiah are suggesting that God depends upon man for the success of His plans. That’s not a concept the Bible teaches!

“Bill, you’ve helped me see this issue a lot more clearly,” said Mark. “It gets so confusing when people start reading from Revelation, making it sound like dragons and monsters are actually going to appear on earth, and the moon is literally going to turn to blood. But you’ve helped me see that Revelation is a book of imagery, and we’ve got to be careful how we interpret it. You’ve also taught me an important principle about Bible study

— you don't make a passage teach something that other passages contradict. And that seems to be what happens when people teach that the kingdom of God has not yet come."

"Mark, I couldn't have said it any better," laughed Bill. "You are exactly right. God's word is consistent, and it doesn't contradict itself. If a passage seems to be teaching something that goes against a clear teaching in another place, we know we've made a mistake somewhere. We've just got to work hard to make sure we're letting the Bible be its own commentator and interpreter."

"Hey, I'm sorry to have to say it, but we've got to be going," interrupted Meghan. "I have an important meeting early in the morning, and I need my sleep if I'm going to be sharp."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," said Mark. "I just love talking about the Bible, though. And I can never thank you guys enough for introducing me to these ideas about Jesus and His kingdom."

"I'm only trying to pass along what someone else did for me," said Bill. "But it's good to know that we're more than friends now; we're brothers and sisters in Christ."

"And fellow-citizens in the kingdom!" added Julie.

The friends said their goodbyes and embraced one another. Julie and Bill stood on the sidewalk as Meghan and Mark drove away. There was a peacefulness about the evening that could not be described. For several minutes, the two stood looking up into the clear sky, each silently praising God for the beauty of the stars and for the joy that He had placed in their hearts.

Questions For Deeper Learning

Those who wish to learn the lessons about God's kingdom more thoroughly may want to study the questions on the following pages. Here are some suggestions about using the questions as a correspondence course:

Conventional methods:

Using a blank sheet of paper, write the answers to each question, being careful to keep your answers corresponding to the question numbers. When more than one answer is sought in a question, write down your answers in the order in which the question asks for them. When complete, mail your answer sheet to the address below. It will be graded and returned to you. (This method will enable others to use the book as a correspondence course.)

Or Write your answers directly onto the pages. When a lesson is complete, carefully cut the page from the book and mail it to the address below. It will be graded and returned to you.

Electronic method:

Follow method **1a** above. When you have answered all the questions, copy your answers onto an e-mail and send it to Tim@GraceMine.org. Your answers will be graded and a prompt response will be sent back. (We cannot guarantee, however, how long this e-mail address will be valid. If this method fails to

work, use one of the conventional methods.)

Those who satisfactorily complete this correspondence course will receive a Certificate of Completion, suitable for framing.

Address: Central Church of Christ

2722 Oakland Avenue
Johnson City, TN 37601
(423) 282-1571

Please note: Questions are based upon the New King James Version of the Bible. If you do not have access to this translation, simply use the quotations given in the book.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV).

Chapter 1: "The Kingdom in Prophecy"

Prophecy in the Bible:

1. In the Biblical sense, a prophet was a _____ for God who sometimes made _____ about future events.
2. 2 Peter 1:20,21 _____ men spoke as they were _____ by the _____.

When would the kingdom appear on earth?

3. Daniel 2:44 In the days of these _____, the _____ of heaven shall set up a _____ which shall never be _____. The time to which Daniel pointed was during the _____ Empire.
- 4, Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:14,15 Both _____ and _____ urged the people to _____, for the _____ of God was at _____.
5. Mark 9:1 Some who were _____ with Jesus would not _____ before they saw the kingdom come with _____.
6. Colossians 1:12,13 _____ said that

the Father has _____ us from
the power of darkness and _____
us into the _____ of the Son
His love.

Where would the kingdom be established?

7. Isaiah 2:2,3; Micah 4:2 The law would go forth from _____, and the _____ of the Lord from _____.
8. Acts 2:36 _____ preached the first sermon about Christ in _____.

Who would establish God's kingdom?

9. Isaiah 9:6 Unto us a _____ is _____. ... His name shall be called _____, _____, the Mighty _____, the everlasting _____, the _____ of _____.
10. Micah 5:2 The one who would be _____ in Israel would be born in _____.
11. Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:30,31 _____ fulfilled the prophecy that _____ would conceive and bear a _____, whose name would be called _____.

12. Matthew 28:18 All _____ has been given to _____ in _____ and on _____.

13. John 18:37 Jesus was _____ to be a _____.

Some identifying marks of God's kingdom:

14. Three identifying marks of the kingdom: (1) It would never come to an _____; (2) it would be _____ to people of _____ nations; and (3) it would come with great _____.

15. Galatians 3:28 There is neither _____ nor _____ ... for you are _____ in Christ Jesus.

16. Acts 2 The beginning of the _____ was accompanied by the coming of the _____ upon the apostles, causing them to miraculously speak in other _____.

Summary:

17. From what we've seen in the Bible in this lesson, the kingdom is the same the _____.

Chapter 2: “The Authority of the King”

Does Jesus have power as King?

1. Matthew 28:18,19 Jesus has been given _____ authority in _____ and on _____.
2. Romans 1:4 Jesus has been _____ to be the _____ of God with _____ by the _____ from the dead.
3. John 18:36 He declared to _____ that His kingdom is not of this _____.
4. Colossians 1:15?18 _____ is the _____ of the body, the _____.

The King demands that His subjects be humble — not power-seeking:

- 5, Matthew 18:1?4 Those who humble themselves as a _____ will be the _____ in the kingdom of heaven.
6. John 13:12?15 _____ s example of _____ the disciples _____ is a powerful lesson in humility.
7. Matthew 20:27,28 The Son of _____

did not come to be _____, but to
_____.

8. Matthew 25:34?40 We serve _____
when we serve _____.

**The King demands that the Kingdom be sought first,
above all other things:**

9. Luke 12:29?31 If we seek God s
_____, all other things will be
_____ to us.

10. Mark 12:30 The most
_____ command is to
_____ God with all of our _____
soul, mind and strength.

11. Matthew 13:44?46 Finding God s
kingdom is like finding a
_____ or an expensive
_____. It s worth everything we
have!

**The King has opened the Kingdom to all people on
earth:**

12. Matthew 28:19 Jesus last
_____ while on earth were the com
mand to go and make _____ of
all the _____.

13. 2 Peter 3:9 _____ is not willi

that any should _____, but that
_____ should come to
_____.

The King requires obedience and preparedness:

14. Matthew 7:21 The ones accepted into the kingdom are not the ones who merely say _____, _____! , but those who _____ the will of the Father
15. John 14:15 _____ said If you _____ Me, keep my
_____ .

The King commands love and forgiveness to be practiced:

16. John 13:34,35 People will know we are Jesus _____ if we _____ one another. It is the _____ command He has given us.
17. Matthew 18:32?35 We will lose our own _____ if we are unwilling to _____ one another.

Chapter 3: “Identifying the Kingdom of God”

1. Luke 10:8,11 Even though the Kingdom of God would come _____ some people, they would not _____ it. Why not?
2. 2 Timothy 2:15 We must be _____ to present ourselves approved unto God. We must _____ divide the _____ of truth.

The Bible teaches the terms of gaining citizenship in this kingdom:

3. Hebrews 11:6,7 No one can _____ God without _____. Like Noah, we must _____ God if our faith is to be acceptable to Him.
4. Luke 13:3 If we don't _____ our _____, we will _____.
5. John 12:42,43; Romans 10:10 We must be willing to _____ our faith in _____ if we wish to be _____.
6. Romans 6:3,4 When we are _____ into Christ's _____, we are also _____ to walk in _____ of life.

7. Acts 2:37-38, 47 Peter commanded them to _____ and be _____ for the _____ of their sins. About _____ obeyed and the _____ added them to the _____.

The Bible teaches the organization of the kingdom:

8. Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18 Jesus is _____ of the _____, which is the church.

9. Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:28-30 Those who are to watch over the affairs of each congregation are the _____ (who are also called _____).

The Bible teaches the worship of the kingdom:

10. Micah 6:6-8 We don't have to _____ about what will please God; He has _____ us what we should do.

11. 1 Timothy 2:8 Christians are to _____ when they worship God.

12. Ephesians 5:19 God has commanded _____ as the type of music He desires. (Nothing is said in the Christian covenant about using _____ when we _____.)

13. 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 On the _____ day of the week, Christians _____ of their _____ means as form of worship.
14. Acts 20:7 Also on the _____ day of the week, they observed the _____ s _____.
15. 1 Timothy 4:13 When Christians worship, they also _____ God s _____.

The Bible teaches the mission of the kingdom:

16. Matthew 5:13,16 God s people are to be the _____ of the earth and the _____ of the world they should make a _____.
17. Matthew 25:35,36 Jesus wants us to do _____ things for _____.
18. Matthew 28:19,20 We are to _____ the _____ news of _____ to others.

The Bible teaches the brotherhood of all kingdom citizens:

19. Galatians 3:26,28 We are all _____ in Christ Jesus.

20. 1 Peter 2:9 Every Christian is a _____ to God; there is no _____ mentioned in the New Testament.

Chapter 4: "A Spiritual Kingdom"

1. John 18:36 Jesus said His _____ was not of this _____. It would be unlike any other kingdom that has ever existed.

The spiritual kingdom has a spiritual King:

2. 1 Timothy 6:14,15 Jesus has been proclaimed as _____ of _____ and _____ of _____.
3. 2 Corinthians 10:1 Jesus as King can be _____ and _____ toward His followers.
4. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 But He will take _____ on those who do not know _____ and who do not _____ the _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The spiritual kingdom has a spiritual law:

5. Galatians 6:1,2 Those who are _____ will try to follow the _____ of Christ.
6. Romans 7:4 The law we follow today is _____

not the law given through _____;
we have become _____ to that law
through the body of _____.

7. Matthew 15:7-9 Our worship to God is
_____ if we teach as
_____ the _____ of
men.

8. Matthew 22:37 The _____
commandment is to _____ God with all
of our _____, soul and _____.

Those in the spiritual kingdom think spiritually:

9. Romans 8:1-4 We no longer _____
according to the _____, but according
to the _____.

10. Romans 12:1,2 Instead of being
_____ to this _____, w
are to be _____ by the
renewing of our _____.

11. John 4:24 Christians are to
_____ God in _____ and in
truth.

Spiritual armor is provided in the spiritual king- dom:

12. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 God has
provided _____ for us to use in

our _____.

13. Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul urged Christians to put on the _____ armor of God so they could _____ against the wiles of the _____.

The spiritual motivation of love:

14. John 13:34,35 Jesus _____ commandment was to _____ others as He had _____. This would be how others would _____ we are Jesus disciples.

15. Romans 5:6-8 While we were still _____, Christ _____ for us.

How to receive the forgiveness of our sins:

16. There is no mention in the Bible of a sinner's _____ that leads to _____.

17. Acts 22:16 Ananias, a man sent by _____ told Saul (later renamed Paul) to arise and be _____ and _____ away your sins, _____ on the name of the Lord.

18. Acts 8:26-40 The eunuch didn't wait to be _____.

Chapter 5: “A Kingdom to Come?”

A future kingdom?

1. Revelation 20:4 is often used to support premillennialism , the idea that Christ will set up His kingdom on _____, and it will last for _____ years.
2. Daniel 2:44 In the days of these _____ (i.e. the Roman Empire), God would set up a kingdom which would _____ be _____. Was God able to do that?
3. Mark 1:15 _____ came preaching, The time is _____, and the _____ of God is at _____
4. Colossians 1:13,14 Paul argued that Christ has _____ us from the power of darkness and _____ us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.
5. Acts 2 makes it clear that the kingdom is to be identified with the _____

A material kingdom?

6. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 When Christ _____ again, we ll meet Him in the _____, and thus we shall _____ be with the Lord.

7. John 14:1?3 _____ was going away to _____ a place for His followers. He promised to come _____ and receive His disciples to be with Him.
8. 1 Corinthians 15:22?26 Jesus will _____ until the last enemy, _____ has been destroyed. Then will come the _____ when He delivers the kingdom to His _____.
9. Hebrews 9:27,28; Matthew 25:31?46 After _____ comes the _____, and then _____ will begin. (There is mention of a kingdom on earth.)

The Kingdom of God in Revelation:

10. Revelation 1:1 John wrote of things that must _____ come to pass. Signifying means that John used _____ of speech to communicate the message.
11. Revelation 20:4; Psalm 50:10 The word _____ almost always is used in a figurative sense. (Does the Lord own the _____ of only _____ hills?)

The Rapture Of The Saints?

12. Matthew 24:40,41 Rather than teaching that some people will be _____, Jesus was showing the different _____ people will have toward the truth.
13. 2 Peter 3:10 In the day that the Lord comes as a _____ in the _____, the earth will be _____. (This is the same day which Jesus spoke in Matthew 24:43,44.)

Is Jesus presently a King or not?

14. Daniel 7:13,14; Acts 1:9 When Jesus was taken up in the _____, He was then given dominion and glory and a _____.
15. Acts 7:56 _____, just before his death, saw _____ seated at the right hand of _____.

The keys of the Kingdom:

16. Matthew 16:18,19; Acts 2 Jesus gave to _____ the keys of the kingdom. It was _____ who first taught how to enter the _____, the kingdom of God.

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