



JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES
TO EQUIP THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

September 2021 | Volume 3, Issue 1

THEME

*The coming of
the Kingdom
of God*

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The coming of the Kingdom of God

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Israel and the Church is
 a journal for biblical and
 theological reflections
 concerning Israel and the
 Church in God's plan for this
 world in the light of His coming
 Kingdom.

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Israel and the Church is a
 publication of Christians for
 Israel International.

Design

BladenMakers, Nijkerk



INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Kingdom of God

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ne of the functions of blowing the shofar, the ram's horn (see the picture on the front page), is to proclaim God's kingship. God is King and He reigns! At the same time, in today's life and world, we experience that the belief in

God's reign is very often challenged. Things do not go as they should go. The reality is a reality of sin and brokenness. Yet, we are standing on a solid foundation: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We are looking forward to the full realization of God's kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

The various contributions to this journal deal with the questions and the tensions we may experience as believers when it comes to the rule of God. We will study the Word of God to discover how God's kingdom is real and manifesting itself. We will see how Jerusalem is the centre of His kingdom and discover what the political implications are, for Israel and for the nations. By this, we want to encourage each other in the expectation of the coming Messiah. Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus!

THEME THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

‘God reigns over the nations!’

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

Psalm 47

For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!

God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne.

The princes of the peoples gather

as the people of the God of Abraham.

For the shields of the earth belong to God;

He is highly exalted!

Psalm 47 is a psalm with a bold perspective. It proclaims and sings about what we actually cannot believe at all when we look around us in this world. God has seated Himself on His holy throne. The nobles of the nations stand around His throne as the people of Abraham's God! God is King and He is professed and praised as King. And not only by Israel – but by the nations of the world.

We read that all nations are invited to clap their hands before God. Applause to God! Then we hear that those same nations must stoop, yea, even be overrun by Israel. And further, that they no longer have any existence of their own; no identity of its own. For the nobles, the rulers of the nations, are gathered together 'as the people of Abraham's God'. Imagine: the Palestinians, the Arab world, Europe, America, Russia – God counts them (to cite another psalm, 87) as 'among those who know Me' together with Israel and makes them bear the name of Zion's children: people of Abraham's God.

A BOLD PSALM

There are three possible different concrete backgrounds for this psalm. It may have been used, to begin with, when Solomon brought the ark to the temple. We read about it in 2 Chronicles 5. Secondly, it may have served in a triumphant return of the Ark from battle. The phrase 'Running under the feet of the nations' could fit in well with that.

Third, the psalm may also have had a place in an annual ceremony, such as the accession to the throne of the God of Israel, which was celebrated on the New Year's feast in the fall. The ark – symbol of the throne of God – would have been carried around in procession and brought to the temple: God, who takes seat on His holy throne. In this context, it is striking that the psalm has an important place in the synagogue, still today, in the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year – Feast of the Kingship of God. According to the Jewish

tradition, the sound of the trumpet (5:12-15) refers to the blowing on the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. In any case, it is the idea that God is ascending the throne and is going to exercise His dominion.

THE TEMPLE

It's fascinating to read the description in 2 Chronicles – to stay with that for a moment. Solomon built the temple as an abode of God. But then, of course, the ark – symbol of God's throne and of His presence – also had to be brought to the temple to be placed in the most holy place. The Levites took up the ark to climb the temple mount with the ark to the sanctuary: 'God has ascended'; gone up out of the city up to the temple mount. Then the priests put the ark in the most holy place. Then the song of joy broke out. Dozens of Levites sang the praises of God and played cymbals, harps, and other instruments; 120 priests gave praise. Up to five times there is talk of singing and shouting in this psalm. Music and singing thundered across the temple square in an exuberant praise of the LORD, 'for He is good; His mercy endures forever.'

**Dozens of
Levites
sang the
praises
of God**

The LORD has taken the throne. Jerusalem and the temple have become the residence of the God of Israel. And not only that. The Levite choirs would sing:

The LORD is King of all the earth.
God rules the nations.
God has seated Himself on His holy throne.
The nobles of the nations gather as the people of Abraham's God.

For God's are the shields of the earth.'

There we are back to that bold perspective. And whoever says that experience contradicts that God is King over all the earth is right. It does not seem like it. And yet - all nations; clap your hands!

No, when the ark entered Jerusalem - so when God sat on His throne in the temple, they were not there. The heads of Israel stood in the temple square. What did the nations, the Gentiles, have to do with Israel's God? They were not interested in Him at all. Is the psalm a blow in the air? No. The psalm is a promise of salvation. A faithful anticipation of the future. The psalm is an expectation and confession in faith that the God of Abraham is not only the God of Israel - but the God of all the earth. All nations will serve Him and confess His Name! And so it is a prophetic promise. God is satisfied only with no less than the whole world and all nations. One day the nations that were alienated from Him and had no part in God's covenant with Israel will partake of Israel's civil rights. And that is why they are already called in the psalm to praise God. Because even if they are not there, they are nevertheless included. God is King over all the earth. Not a single piece excepted. He rules over all nations. Not a single one excepted, whether they are aware of that or not. God rules.

JERUSALEM

He does so from Jerusalem. There is His holy throne. That shows the important position Jerusalem and Israel hold in the world. Jerusalem is the hub around which the world revolves. World history is determined from Jerusalem.

The fact that God has gone there and is seated there on His throne makes Jerusalem the center of the world. That is so according to God's election and according to God's plan. He has chosen Canaan as an inheritance for His people Israel. He has subjected the other nations to them. And then he took up residence there himself as King. That piece of land there has become the center of the world.

**All nations
will serve Him
and confess
His name!**

And the other nations may now also come into relationship with Him and gather around Him. The nobles of the nations are gathered together. The princes from all over the world are assembled at Jerusalem and stand around the throne of God. And they are all fully part of it. For they, the princes, the shields of the earth, stand there as the people of Abraham's God. They are part of God's covenant.

'Shields of the Earth' – that is a very striking name for the princes and kings here. That shows something about the function that God has assigned to kings and principalities. A shield provides protection and shelter from imminent dangers. You can hide behind a shield and feel completely safe. That is the function of governments. God has given them as shields.

We know all too well that governments do not always correspond to that picture. There have been numerous governments and they still exist that do not protect but threaten the lives of their subjects. But that does not alter the fact that God has given them that task to be a shield for the people!

And there, in the psalm's bold vision, the protectors of mankind stand gathered around the throne of God! Not like strangers. But as people of Abraham's God. So they are all part of it! The great ones of the earth are standing around the throne of God as shields in God's hand to guard and protect the nations. Incredible, you may say. Yes – but that is the vision that the psalm presents to us! The Lord on His

throne in Jerusalem, King over all the earth. The great of the earth standing around Him in His court.

FAITH FOR THE FUTURE

Well, of course it doesn't look like it at all. But it is a matter of faith and a vision of faith for the psalm to see it that way, that God is King of all the earth, who rules over the nations.

Is it only a dream of the future? It is indeed a vision of the future. The rabbis tell us: this is a picture of the reign of the Messiah. And as the church of the New Testament, we agree. And we know and confess that the Lord has gone a very special way and is going to realize that vision of the future. John the Baptist's message after the first coming of Christ was: repent, for the kingdom is at hand. John saw the coming of the Messiah – and that is a decisive step towards the Kingship of God over all the earth. That way goes through the cross and resurrection and ascension and Pentecost, bringing reconciliation, forgiveness of sins and renewal of life, and calling for repentance. Since Pentecost, the King's message has gone out to the nations. And they have come from the north and the south and the east and the west, also principalities among them. They have become fellow-citizens of Israel through faith in the King of Israel. Jesus said: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.' Ascension was accession to the throne. God the Father has placed the kingship in his hands. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And to his followers he is saying: 'Go and make all nations my disciples.' For He rules over all nations.

And yet - the ultimate fulfillment is still a thing of the future. And it is still going through a deep and fierce struggle. As we read in the book of Revelation 11: 15- 19, where the Elders sing praise to the Throne: 'We thank You Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, that You took up Your great power and accepted the kingdom. The Kingship has come to our Lord and His Anointed One, and He will reign forever and ever.' The Triumph of the Kingship of God and of His Messiah means the fall of the powers, the fall of the evil one. Then every knee will bow, and every tongue will testify to his praise. That is the future on which Psalm 47 prophetically also anticipates. And with that positive and hopeful eye of faith, we can stand in the world and see the world. The nations will be God's own people. All the world will sing praises and pay homage at the throne of God and of the Lamb. That also keeps us going in dark times! Sing praises to our King, for he is exalted on high. His is the glory and the power and the kingdom.

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God is King

TOBIAS KRÄMER

God is king! For the Old Testament and the Jews, this statement is obvious. God will not be king, but He is it already. That goes without saying. From the beginning, God has been ruler and king over His creation. And that has not changed. 'The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake!' (Psalm 99:1) When you look at the world, however, you will not see the rule of God in many places. There is so much that contradicts God! There is Godlessness among the nations. There is disobedience in Israel. There are big political systems against God and there is sin, devil and death. God is King, no question, but there is so much that does not match with God's rule. How should this be understood?

**God is King,
no question,
but there is
so much
that does not
match
with God's
rule**

God's rule seems to be hidden. It is not obvious, but it is real. This is how God is present in creation and how He maintains it. Day after day, in great faithfulness. And He is present in history, writing in it His own history: what we call *salvation history*. God maintains the world and brings it to its destination. All this

He does, however, 'incognito'. In faith you see it. But for the unbelieving it remains hidden. Only those who know Him and know how to read His handwriting can see God's kingly rule. There are not many like this, however, and so, God becomes active.

FIRST STEP: THE GIFT OF THE TORAH

After the fall, God wanted to establish His rule everywhere where it was still not found, and so He began with Israel. God chose Israel out of all nations (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), so that the nations could see how one lives with God. In this way, Israel was called to become a light to the nations (Isaiah 60:1-3). To this purpose, God gave Israel the Torah, His teachings and His regulations. The plan: Israel must live with God and keep the Torah. The nations will see that, become enthusiastic and come near (Isaiah 2:1-5). Very simple. But unfortunately, God's plan was frustrated. Israel all too often broke the covenant and despised the Torah. God sent His judgment, to move Israel to repentance, but that did not help much. More and more, Israel realized: 'We need someone who can help us. A redeemer. A man, who will guide us deep into the Torah, who will restore us as a nation and make us a light to the nations!' This man was the Messiah: the great anointed one, who will come in the end of days. Scripture already speaks of Him. So, the Jews waited for the Messiah (Luke 2:21-39) – and many pious Jews do so until today.

SECOND STEP: THE MESSIAH AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

And the Messiah did come! Jesus of Nazareth is this Messiah. That is what the New Testament says. As the Anointed One, Jesus performed His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. He healed and He freed, He taught and explained the Bible, He found people guilty of sin and forgave them, and He did great miracles. You can see that through Jesus, God was establishing His rule in Israel. Many believed in Him, yet also many did not.

**On behalf of
Israel,
Messiah Jesus
is calling
the nations
and bringing them
to God**

Finally, the Messiah succumbed to the opposition in Israel and was crucified. Was it all over now? No! God raised Jesus from the dead – Jesus is alive! And now something decisive happened, in two stages (cf. Acts 2: 32-36):

The last judgement is necessary, for nothing impure or unholy may enter God's kingdom

1. *God received Jesus to Himself in heaven.* Jesus was placed at God's right hand. God handed the rule over to Him and made Him King, Lord, Messiah (the three titles mean the same thing). The Messiah, however, must bring God's rule on earth! So is it clear that Jesus one day will come again to complete His work. He will visibly come down from heaven and then, every knee will bow before Him.
2. *Jesus sent His Holy Spirit upon the earth.* Jesus, who received the Holy Spirit in fullness, gives it to man. That is tremendous. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is establishing His rule on the earth - in His church, but through her also in the world. This rule is dynamic. It changes people, it heals and frees, and it blazes the trail for the will of God. How good it is, that we have received the Holy Spirit.

A new era came with Jesus. The era, in which God's rule through the Holy Spirit is extended worldwide. On behalf of Israel, Messiah Jesus is calling the nations and bringing them to God – and millions follow Him. This was seen as such an important event, that the church even started to count the years anew. Jesus' birth is officially the year 1.¹ That is why we are now in the beginning of the third millennium. Judaism however has a different view. It continues to count from the beginning of creation, and therefore we find ourselves today near the end of the years 5700.

It is important to remember that this new era is only an intermediate phase. After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples had trusted that Jesus would return very soon. They believed that they would live to see Jesus return to restore Israel (Acts 1:6) and put the world in order. Meanwhile, a long time has gone by. For two thousand years, Jesus has been ruling from heaven through the Holy Spirit. This form of rule is dynamic and powerful, fulfilling and beautiful. And it is familiar to us, Christians. But it is as yet hidden and incomplete. The world seems still to be the same – the purpose has not been reached yet.

For many Christians it is enough to say: 'I am a child of God, I have the Holy Spirit and will go to heaven after death.' That is right and it is good. But history goes on, for the best is still to come: the visible, all-encompassing, eternal kingdom of God, that will change the whole world. The kingdom, for which the Jews have been waiting for thousands of years, and that Jesus, too, has preached. The kingdom of peace on earth (Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 2:14).

THIRD STEP: THE RETURN OF JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The kingdom of God will come. But first the last judgement will come. The last judgement is necessary, for nothing impure or unholy may enter God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Everything negative will be separated and vanquished, so that there will be no

more evil – that is something to look forward to! Through the last judgement, God carries His rule through on earth and establishes His kingdom. So the last judgement is not the end at all – it is the passage to the kingdom of God. At the end is the kingdom! That is what it is all about.

In the last judgement is decided who will enter the kingdom of God and who not. Sinners will not enter it. They have no entry. But the righteous will be allowed and they 'will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (Matthew 13:40-43). Yet, righteous people do not exist, not a single one. The apostle Paul has shown this impressively (Romans 3:9-20). Therefore, Jesus is needed. Jesus makes pure, holy and righteous (1 Corinthians 1:30). In this way, He saves us from condemnation in the last judgement. The question is: who is saved? The Bible clearly answers: all, who believe in Him (Acts 16:30; Romans 10:9) – including all Israel (Romans 11:26). Israel and the church of Jesus will be in the kingdom of God and for ever live with God. That, too, is something to look forward to.

When the kingdom comes, God will assert His claims as king. He will visibly accept the reign and enforce it in the whole world. This will happen for all eyes and nobody will be able to resist Him. Then the kingdom of God is there. The kingdom of God has space and time. The space is the world (Israel included), the time is eternity. The kingdom of God will be established *here* - on this earth. But it will be an *eternal* kingdom, 'which will not pass away' (Daniel 7:14). Zechariah 14:9 says therefore: 'And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.' God will be King over all the earth and only His Name (YHWH) will be venerated. This purpose is behind the prayer: 'Thy kingdom come!' (Matthew 6:10) and that is a reason for joy, too.

But God does not fight the battle Himself. Another one will have to do that: the Messi-

ah. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 describes how Messiah Jesus will return and vanquish all hostile powers – in the end even death. That is how He will establish the kingdom. Then He will step back Himself, hand over the kingdom to the Father (verse 24) and subject Himself to God (verse 28).

At the same time, also a resurrection of the dead will take place. All who belong to Jesus, will be raised (verse 23). They will receive a new, eternal body. So heaven is for us, Christians, only an interim post. In the end, we will be with God in His kingdom on this totally renewed earth and God will be 'all in all' (verse 28). The result is a total redemption of the whole creation (Romans 8:18-21). That is the final destination – another reason for joy.²

It may become clear now, why the great hope of the early believers in Christ was not only 'heaven', but above all the return of Jesus. They shared this hope with the Jews, who wait for the Messiah in precisely the same way. The Messiah will not only restore Isra-

The great hope of the early believers in Christ was above all the return of Jesus

el, but redeem and heal the whole world. He will bring down the tyrants of this world from their thrones and bring in God's eternal king-

dom. God will again take full possession of His creation. The Messiah will care for that. Therefore the faithful pray: 'Maranatha, 'come, Lord Jesus!' (1 Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20)

REGAINING BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

Many Christians have lost these perspectives. You can tell this from the fact, that they do not look forward to Jesus' return, but fear it. Many Christians rejoice in the presence of the Holy Spirit and in eternal life in heaven, but not in the second coming of Jesus. That is caused by what they expect. When they look into the future, they see the 'end times' coming: wars, catastrophes, chaos – and finally a terrifying last judgement. After that, the end of the world and then finally, all is over. When you think like this, you can only hope that Jesus' return will be a long way off. You can only hope that there will be time left to have a nice life and to go to heaven at the right time, before the 'end times' really begin. This is the way many people think. At least in Germany.

Why did the first Christians pray: 'Come, Lord Jesus', but Christians today pray: 'Take your time, Lord Jesus'? The answer is simple: because we have lost sight of the purpose of His coming, the perspective on God's kingdom. We should change this. As Christians, we should be full of hope that one day, God's kingdom will come and all things will be restored (Acts 3:21). We should be full of longing that Jesus will come, will set up His victory on the whole world, and that God will wipe away all tears (Revelation 21:4). And we may be fully sure, that the history of this world has a purpose and will reach the goal for which it was created. Then God's kingdom will come. The difficult times in which we are living, are only birth pangs (Mark 13:8; Romans 8:22), and the end of this (evil) world is only the passage to the redeemed world. God will have the last word, however, and God is bringing His kingdom. That is for sure.

Now, God reigns already in a hidden way. He maintains creation, He writes history, He rules through His Word, His Spirit and His Son, the Messiah. We may be grateful for that. How-

ever, the kingdom of God is not yet there in its fullness. We are waiting for it. The biblical perspective on the kingdom of God gives us hope, longing and assurance of a full redemption – for Israel and the whole creation. Let us keep that in mind and let us pray from our hearts: 'Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus! Come, and put all things right!'

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NOTES

- ¹ The year 0, in spite of common parlance, does not exist. The years are counted before and after Christ's birth. The last year before is 1 BC, the first year after is 1 AD.
- ² Scholars debate whether after the return of Jesus first the Messianic realm of peace / the millennial realm will come, which then will result in the kingdom of God, or that the kingdom of God will immediately come. This question can be left open here. What is decisive is that, in the end, God will be 'all in all' and all promises will be fulfilled – for Israel, for the church of Jesus, and for the world.

KEES DE VREUGD

The Kingdom of Heaven

In Matthew 4:17, we read:

**'From that time Jesus began to preach and say,
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Paul the Apostle wrote to the believers in Philippi:

**'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also
we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ'
(Philippians 3:20).**

Finally, the letter to the Hebrews says:

**'But as it is, they desire a better country,
that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed
to be called their God; for He has prepared a city
for them'
(Hebrews 11:16).**

What is the location of the kingdom, that the Bible, both Old and New Testament, is expecting? Is it in heaven, or on earth? Or could it be that this is a false contradiction?

HEAVEN

In general Christian understanding, the word heaven has received connotations which are not necessarily biblical. We tend to understand heaven as opposed to earth. There is something to that, but it is also open to misconceptions. Of course, heaven is above, and earth below. Yet, they belong together in one cosmos, as God created in the beginning heaven and earth. God is in heaven, and we are on earth. And when our life on earth ends, we, or at least our souls, go to heaven, when we are Christ's possession. That is good. But is it enough?

Heaven is a spiritual reality. Many Christians tend to understand that as opposed to the physical reality of the earth. For does not Paul write: 'However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly?' (1 Corinthians 15:46-48)

Moreover, classical Christian theology was strongly influenced by Greek philosophical thinking. Many Greek thinkers tended to see physicality as inferior to spirituality. They thought from the Platonic concepts of the eternal Ideas, i.e. the eternal, divine principles of which everything existing is a reflection. Some went so far as to say, that the spiritual Ideas were the only truly existing realities, whereas the physical reality was mere appearance, and not real. They would say that the body is a dungeon, in which the soul is incarcerated, and from which the soul has to be freed to return to his spiritual origins. The most extreme forms of these teachings are generally called Gnosticism. They ap-

peared on the fringes of Christianity, Judaism and paganism. Some people who were both familiar with these teachings, and were also attracted to the Christian faith, even could not imagine that Christ really had taken human flesh. Is this biblical? No, it is not. But it was a thinking with which the apostles were already confronted (cf. 1 John 4:2). Biblical is, that God created man in His image as body, soul and spirit. The spirit has not to be freed from the body, but after the fall, body, soul and spirit have to be freed from decay. That is what Paul is arguing in 1 Corinthians 15 with regard to the resurrection of the dead. 'For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality' (1 Corinthians 15:53).

PHYSICAL REALITY

So, the physical reality is important to God. After all, He is its Creator! It is one of the reasons of the Word becoming flesh: to save created reality. It is one of the implications of Christ's resurrection from the dead: that created reality is vindicated. If the created reality is important to God and is vindicated in the resurrection, what are the implications for our understanding of the Kingdom of Heavens? Obviously, the Kingdom of Heavens must have an impact, in one way or another, on created reality. But before we go deeper into this question, let us first consider what the word *heavens* in biblical language means. We have already noted that biblically spoken heaven belongs to the created cosmic order. We have also noted that heaven is seen as God's dwelling place. Bearing this in mind, let us compare the verse from Matthew with which we started with the parallel text in Mark and a comparable verse in Luke.

Matthew 4:17:

'From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mark 1:14-15:

'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel

of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Luke 4:43

'But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."

We see, that whereas Jesus in Matthew says 'kingdom of heaven', in the other gospels He says 'kingdom of God'. If we would do a survey of all the appearances of the saying kingdom of heaven / kingdom of God in the gospels, we would see that Matthew would always (except once: Matthew 12:28) would have 'kingdom of heaven', whereas the parallel texts in the other gospels would have 'kingdom of God'. This suggests that the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God. Otherwise, Jesus would, in the same context, in one gospel say something else than in the other.

Why then, the difference in expression? And why is the expression *Kingdom of Heaven* almost entirely limited to the gospel of Matthew?

**We tend to
understand
heaven
as opposed
to earth**

Here, we must take into account the Jewish custom of the New Testament era. Jews did not – and until today do not – pronounce

the Name of God that is revealed in the four letters YHWH at all. In the time of the temple, only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would pronounce the Name in the Holy of Holiest. However, then as well as today, out of reverence for God, Jews would avoid even mentioning the word God. Instead, they would use phrases that circumscribe God, like 'Heaven'. So, the Hebrew expression *Malchut Hashamayim*, kingdom of heaven, means nothing else than kingdom of God. There are strong historical indications that Matthew's gospel was originally written in Hebrew. This, in combination with form and content of the gospel, indicates that Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience. Matthew, writing in Hebrew for a primarily Jewish au-

We must take into account the Jewish custom of the New Testament era

dience, is using Jewish idiom. Therefore, we have to understand the phrase kingdom of heaven against its Jewish background, rooting in the Hebrew Bible.

Both the Hebrew *malchut* and the Greek *basileia* might be better translated as 'kingship'.¹ Jewish tradition has the expression of 'taking up the yoke of the kingdom' (Hebrew:

'ol hammalchut), which means accepting and proclaiming God's kingship by saying the Shema: 'Hear, o Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one' (Deuteronomy 6:4).

God's kingdom in the Bible is always that God reigns over heaven and earth, and that His kingship must be accepted by all nations. Ultimately, the establishment of God's kingdom is implied in the restoration of Jerusalem as His dwelling place, and Israel as His nation (Zechariah 14:9).

The prophecy of Zechariah to which I referred, offers a visible picture of what the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is. We see the Lord coming down and standing on the Mount of Olives. He will destroy Israel's enemies and enter Jerusalem as His dwelling place. In other words, the kingdom is the kingdom of heaven, that is realized on earth (and is extended to all creation). It has a heavenly origin, and an earthly impact.

That is also implied in the words of Paul to the Philippians cited above: 'For our citizenship is in heaven, *from* which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Philippians 3:20; emphasis added). The Saviour will descend from heaven, to transform our bodies into conformity with the body of His glory (ib. verse 21). Yes, the earthly reality will be transformed, but it will still be earth – a renewed earth under a renewed heaven. Both together will be a unity in the kingdom of God. Yes, our bodies will be transformed, but they will still be physical bodies, though with heavenly qualities. In our present state of humility, we look forward to the day that Christ will appear in glory and subject all things to Himself.

This is what the ancient fathers of Israel were expecting, the letter to the Hebrews tells us. They desired a better (the Greek word in fact means 'stronger', but is used for 'better' as well) country, a heavenly one. In the previous issue of Israel and the Church, I have pointed out that this does not mean a spiritual country in heaven that will replace the physical country on earth. It rather means – again

**Yes,
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reality
will be
transformed,
but it will
still be
earth**

– that the present provisional state will pass by. In the end, the heavenly principles will be realized on earth and in all creation.

I also suggested that the letter to the Hebrews supposes the existence of a heavenly reality, that corresponds to the reality on earth. Like in the original Platonic thought I described above, the heavenly reality is the origin and pattern of the earthly reality. And while this correspondence was distorted by sin, God will restore it through the Messiah. He will establish the heavenly city where it will be: in Jerusalem (cf. Zechariah 12:6 NIV).

On earth, as it is in heaven

Finally, let us briefly consider the first stanza of the prayer that Jesus has taught: Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus taught His disciples – taught us – to

pray for the coming of the kingdom. The sentences of the prayer are very closely connected. In a sense, they parallel each other. To put it differently, they are all facets of the same diamond. Each sentence brings down the Name of God from heaven to earth. When God's Name is hallowed on earth as it is in heaven, then His kingdom has come (cf. Zechariah 14:9). When He is hallowed as King, His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven. As His will is done in heaven by the heavenly beings, first and foremost by the Son, likewise it must be done on earth. On earth, Jesus, the Son, the Word incarnate, has fulfilled and will fulfil the will of the Father. He will come to bring His reign of glory on earth, as it is in heaven – a renewed earth under a renewed heaven.

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NOTES

- ¹ For this, I may refer to James Patrick's article elsewhere in this journal
- ² Kees de Vreugd, 'The letter to the Hebrews and the future of the Land' in: *Israel and the Church* 2/2, December 2020, pp. 14-19.
- ³ In the Greek, the word order of the last sentence is: 'like in heaven, even on earth'.

REV. WILLEM J.J. GLASHOUWER



Jerusalem, the heart of the kingdom

'In the last days the mountain of the LORD's Temple
[the Temple Mount, Mount Zion, Mount Moriah]
will be established as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.
Many peoples will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the Temple of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths."
The Law [Torah] will go out from Zion, the Word of the LORD
from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations
and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.'
(Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3)

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

T Jesus one day answered a question about when the Kingdom of God would come by saying: 'The Kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation [its date cannot be calculated], nor will people say Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:20-21). 'Within you' can also be translated as "among you." Both translations are correct, for both meanings are true: wherever Jesus is, the Kingdom is, and the signs of the Kingdom will be present. Look at all the miracles that occurred during His lifetime: the Kingdom was really present, because the King Himself was there in person.

The verse also means that when Jesus is in you by his Holy Spirit, the Kingdom is also present in you. That is why He says that signs and miracles will also accompany believers to such an extent that they will do even greater

things than He has done! 'I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father' (John 14:12). 'He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My Name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well' (Mark 16:15-18; emphasis added).

KINGDOM FOR ISRAEL

After the Lord Jesus had completed His work on the cross and given His precious blood for the sins (plural) of the world; after He had broken the power of sin (singular), defeating the devil and his powers of darkness; after His triumphant resurrection, and imme-

diately before His ascension, His disciples excitedly asked: 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?' The Lord Jesus did not answer: 'What a dumb question! Do you still not understand that it is not about an earthly Kingdom in which Israel will have a prominent place, but that it is all about a heavenly, a spiritual Kingdom?' No. All He said was: 'It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:3-8). These were His last words before the enveloping cloud of God's (Shekinah) Glory took Him away.

Then the angels tell the disciples: 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11). Then His feet will stand again on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. Jesus is not coming back to Moscow, or Rome, or New York or Beijing: He is coming to Jerusalem. 'On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem' (Zechariah 14:4). He spoke of these same things in His discourse on the Mount of Olives regarding final events and the 'end of this age': 'And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come' (Matthew 24:14). The hidden form of the Kingdom in the hearts of people, in the Church of Jesus Christ, must come first.

REVOLUTION

It is worth noting that the proclamation of the 'Gospel of the Kingdom' is not the preaching of a revolution. If Jesus had intended to establish a kingdom by armed forces, by violent revolution, He would never have said to Pilate: 'My Kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). In Greek, the word used for world here is *kosmos*, meaning 'order' or 'world', in other words: 'the order of this world'. What Jesus says is: "My Kingdom is not of this world [this cosmos]. If it were, My servants would fight to

prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36-37). The Kingdom of God on earth will be given by God. Not realized by human efforts, by military might, by the powers of man in science and technology, by humanism and political ideologies, by dictatorship or democracy. The Kingdom of heaven on earth will be given by God from heaven.

Yet when Pilate then asks Him if He really is a King, Jesus confirms it. But He is more than

**Jesus is not
coming back
to Moscow,
or Rome,
or New York,
or Beijing.
He is coming
to Jerusalem**

merely a King; He is also the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the way to God. He is the truth against all lies (and against the father of lies, the devil). He is the Life, eternal life. He does not merely propagate a theology, a philosophy, or a theory: He is what He preaches! He Himself, in person, is it! Where Jesus is in full control by the power of God, there the Kingdom of God is becoming visible.

The turning point in history has passed. Christ has died, and what is more, He has risen from the dead! The bridgehead of the victory

is secured. From this point on, everything will be different. First He will establish His Kingdom in the hearts and minds of the people of His church, through the Holy Spirit. After that, when He comes in glory for all to see, His Kingdom will be openly and visibly established. Israel has everything to do with this. The return of the Jewish people, as we have seen it take place before our very eyes over the

The kingdom of heaven on earth will be given by God from heaven

past decades, has everything to do with this. It is the beginning, the prelude, to worldwide deliverance. Israel is on the way to her rest. The Law will go out from Jerusalem. People will learn war no more! Peace will cover the whole earth. Then the Kingdom will have come, because the King of that Kingdom has come, the Messiah of Israel, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords - Jesus Christ. 'I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns. He has a name written on Him that no one knows but He Himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them

with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS' (Revelation 19:11-16).

Will the history of this world simply flow on into this Kingdom? Will the coming of Christ round off and complete the peace-process that mankind is trying to set up (and which is occupying so much of the time and minds of the people who are preaching a new world order)? Will it be the capstone on a human structure, as many theologians seem to think? No, that capstone will be the Antichrist, the Christ-in-the-place-of-Christ. The Greek word *anti* means 'in the place of', but it can also mean 'against'. He will be against Christ, against God, against the Christians and the Jews, against the Bible. Beautiful theories and slogans will be proclaimed, using words like freedom, justice, reconciliation, tolerance, unity of all religions, peace, wealth, and bread and fun for all. Promises will be made: the state will guarantee prosperity, fortune, and happiness for all. There will be free medicine and hospitals for all. There will be no boundaries or limits. Science will guarantee our future and will overcome all our problems. Sexual lusts may be satisfied as never before.

People who oppose these glorious developments will be judged to be in need of re-education or retraining. If they persist in their objections, they will be sent to psychiatric hospitals (as in the former USSR) or annihilated in concentration camps. And we will know how to locate these people, because our administrative systems will be flawless. Our computers will be all powerful. And our police forces, both national and international, will be meticulous. Everyone will be forced to toe the line, for his or her own good, and for the good of all. The Beast wants everyone to worship him, and everyone will worship him.

Time and again, history has shown what happens when people try to establish the kingdom on their own. 'Liberty, equality,

fraternity' was the slogan of the French Revolution, but streams of blood flowed and the revolution devoured her own children. The communist revolution advocated by Karl Marx was supposed to lead inevitably to a utopian classless society. The upshot was tens of millions of casualties in Russia and China, and a totally impoverished and disintegrating society. Hitler intended to build a Third Reich, a kingdom of peace. Never has Europe, and ultimately the whole world, gone through such a dark night. Many people lost their lives, but the main thrust of hate was directed at the Jews and the Christians, the people of the Book. The hatred was not directed at Muslims, even though some people also consider them to be people of the Book. On the contrary: the Arab world stood right behind Germany and hoped Hitler would succeed with his *Endlösung*, the killing of all the Jews in the world.

No, the Kingdom, the Kingdom of Peace, will only come when Christ returns. He will return to Jerusalem, for Jesus says in Matthew 5:35: 'Jerusalem is the City of the Great King'. That happy event will be preceded by God's worldwide catastrophic and apocalyptic trials and judgements, which the great visionary John describes in the book of Revelation. When the demonic powers seem to have almost full control and seem to be ruling the whole world, then He will come and make all things new. He will bring to fulfilment all the promises made to His people Israel, as well as all the promises He made to His Church.

CONCLUSION

One thing is certain: the Church is not going to bring in the Kingdom. But another thing is certain as well: God will bring in the Kingdom! Christ will bring the Kingdom, and that perhaps very soon! The return of the Jews to their own land of Israel in our days tells us that Israel is returning, and that Jesus is coming. Who knows how soon that will be. Maranatha!

Jesus says in John 4:22: 'Salvation is from

the Jews'. Salvation was from the Jews through the wisdom of Torah that God had given to Israel. Salvation is from the Jews, because the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, was given to the world through His Jewish mother Mary, through Israel. And salvation will be from the Jews when from Jerusalem and from the Promised Land of Israel and through the Jewish people will reach the whole earth. Then all the covenants made with Israel will have their final fulfilment in that kingdom to come. Then Jerusalem and the temple will be the centre of the world and the wisdom of Torah will be the guiding light for all nations.

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Time and again, history has shown what happens when people try to establish the kingdom on their own

The Kingdom of God as a Political Manifesto

DR. JAMES EARLE PATRICK

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel!' These four short phrases are how the whole 'good news of God' preached by Jesus is summarised at the start of the Gospel of Mark (1:15). Both halves of the message give a general statement with a more detailed explanation. The 'appointed time' (*kairos*) immediately locates us inside a big story with pre-planned events, and the most important of these is specified as the coming 'Kingdom of God'. The message of Jesus also calls for a response, literally to change our mind (*metanoëō*), and our resulting change of behaviour is then explained as to put our trust (*pisteuō*) in the good news. But what are we turning away from? If the good news is about the Kingdom of God, then this would imply that we reject the mindset of worldly kingdoms. The clash of kingdoms is the core message of Jesus, and our aim in this article is to understand its political implications for us today.

MUST THE GOSPEL BE POLITICAL?

The word 'gospel' or 'good news' (*euangelion*, Hebrew *besorah*) was a word commonly used in both Hebrew and Greek to refer to news of victory in battle, but also to public interest reports such as the arrival of a baby or a visiting monarch. The prophet Isaiah used the term to anticipate the victory of Israel's God on behalf of His captive exiled people, giving it very real political significance for both them and their imperial rulers (40:9-11; 52:7-10; 60:6; 61:1-3). In first-century Greek culture, the term used in political proclamations had conversely taken on a religious significance. Roman emperors from Julius Caesar onwards had been officially declared to be divine, and the imperial cult of worship to the emperor and his family was promoted widely, through sacrifices in temples, portraits including coins, and public proclamations. This official propaganda included glad tidings about the emperor's life events, decrees, and public acts, because peace and prosperity flowed directly from the emperor who bore the title 'saviour of the world'.

So when the 'good news' of an anointed Jewish 'King' and 'Lord' and 'Saviour of the world' started to spread from Galilee, both the political leaders of Israel and the Roman establishment took notice. The governor Pontius Pilate eventually dismissed the accusation that Jesus posed a political threat to Caesar's rule. Even the other quasi-Jewish 'king' of Herod's line decided He was no threat to his authority even at a national level. But despite that, the death of this 'King of the Jews' was both demanded by His own people and then publicly presented as if it were a political statement of loyalty to Caesar (Luke 23:2; John 19:12-22). The world was not big enough for two supreme kings.

Was that just a false charge, confusing the mutually distinct categories of religion and politics? Wasn't Jesus trying to move beyond his narrowly ethnic role as 'King of the Jews' to call for spiritual allegiance instead? Today we might ask the same question. Should we still proclaim Jesus as 'Ruler over the House of Jacob', 'Son of David', 'King of Israel', or 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 21:9; Mark 15:26, 32; Revelation 5:5)? Or are these now redundant ethnic titles, since Jesus has been elevated to a higher throne in heaven? If Jesus' kingdom is 'not of this world' (John 18:36), does His reign actually pose any political challenge to current world leaders? After all, we all know that the New Testament commands us to submit to the governing authorities and pay our taxes (Luke 20:22-25; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Maybe the gospel was seen as a political statement in Jesus' own generation, but should not be any longer in ours.

The answer to this question lies in the big story that Jesus refers to when He says that 'the appointed time is fulfilled'. The Jewish concept of the 'Kingdom of God' was understood to be the final chapter of the story of God and His world, the part where all of their hopes and calamities and injustices would finally be resolved at the end of the age, in the 'restoration of all things' spoken of by

all the prophets (Acts 3:21). But despite being a worldwide or even cosmic kingdom, they believed it would never stop being a Jewish kingdom as well (Zechariah 14). This is reflected in the final chapters of Revelation, where the eternal rule of God is centred within the holy city of Jerusalem, whose gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel (21:2, 10-12).

The clash of kingdoms is the core message of Jesus

And in case we see this as purely symbolic, Jesus' own teaching confirms this. He promised His twelve disciples that they would be enthroned over the twelve tribes of Israel in the 'regeneration' (Matthew 19:28). Also, after He rose from the dead, having 'opened their minds to understand the Scriptures' (Luke 24:45), He then delayed His ascension for forty days to ensure they fully grasped His essential message 'concerning the kingdom of God'. By the end of those six weeks, although they were still unclear on the timing of the Kingdom's arrival (as was their Master), they had no question about its geographical or national centre: 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:3, 6; Matthew 24:36). Nor did Jesus Himself challenge their assumption, confirming Jerusalem as the start and finish-line, to which He would return (Acts 1:7-8, 11-12; Zechariah 14:4).

We ourselves continue to pray 'Your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven', so how can we not expect it to be a geographical kingdom, embodied in nations and territories? If, then, we pray for and proclaim a Jewish kingdom and a Jewish king who will rule over all of our nations, tribes, peoples, and languages,

this gospel will be unavoidably political in today's globalist-leaning world, where astonishingly there is once again a Jewish state.

THE POLITICAL STORY OF THE KINGDOM

To understand the Kingdom of God on earth, the end-point of the story, it makes sense to sketch the story as it was told from the beginning, so that we can recognise our own place within that unfolding narrative.

1. Heavens and Earth

The idea of a 'kingdom' is essentially about the king's authority to rule, and implies both subjects and a territory. The 'kingdom of God' began with the act of creation, therefore, and ultimate authority belongs to the Creator as the Father of life and Source of all that exists. But even before creation was completed, God declared His intention that His authority would be mediated through mankind, who would rule over all other created kinds of fish, birds, animals and everything that moves (Genesis 1:26). Moreover, the first of the ten toledot headings in the book of Genesis enlarges this appointed kingdom of mankind to encompass the whole created order of 'the heavens and the earth' (2:4). Each of the ten 'generations' sections is designed to explain who legally receives the inheritance from the one named in its heading. Toledot tangents or parentheses list all nations descended from Noah's three sons (10:1-11:9) and all tribes who inherited from Esau and from Ishmael (25:12-18; 35:1-43). But the other seven sections tell detailed stories to prove the main line of inheritance from creation all the way down to the nation of Israel. Starting at the end, all the sons of Israel in Egypt inherited from Jacob (37:2 < 50:25), Jacob and his twelve sons inherited from Isaac (25:19 < 35:22-27), who inherited from his grandfather Terah (11:27 < 25:11), Terah's three sons inherited from Shem (11:10 < 11:26), who inherited from Noah (6:9 < 9:26-27), who inherited from Adam via Seth (5:1 < 6:8), and Seth and his son Enosh inherited the authority over 'the heavens and the earth' (2:4 < 4:25-26), whose

creation is described in Genesis 1:1-2:3. So, in summary, the twelve-tribes nation of Israel inherited the authority to rule over the heavens and the earth, by direct descent from Adam and his legal heirs. It was always meant to be a Kingdom on earth.

2. Abraham and All Nations

After the Flood, Noah was ruler of his family, and therefore ruler of all humans on earth, so his decree which granted Shem authority over his brothers and over Canaan, carried the force of international law for all their descendants, even to the present (Genesis 9:26-27; 10:1-32). When Canaan and his family travelled away from the incomplete Tower of Babylon to settle their own territory, that territory would automatically become the legal kingdom of Shem and his successors. That is why Canaan's territory is the only one of the seventy nations of mankind whose specific borders are given in the list of chapter 10 (verse 19). It is also why Shem's direct legal heir, Terah, set out from Ur to go to the land of Canaan (11:31). His son Abram was thus legally entitled to rule over Canaan, but God also reiterated His promise to him explicitly that 'in you all the families of the ground will be blessed' (12:3). By faith as well as by descent, he inherited Shem's authority, which was wider than just Canaan, applying to every nation who had descended from Noah's three sons. So, Abraham's rightful Kingdom would be centred in the land of Canaan, but the reach of his blessing would extend outwards to include every territory on earth. He was truly entitled to be 'heir of the world' and 'father of many nations' (Romans 4:13, 17).

3. Joseph and Judah

By the end of the book of Genesis, the story of Joseph had illustrated this blessing upon Abraham literally, when 'all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph' (Genesis 41:56). It was not just a spiritual blessing, but had tangible political and economic effects. Yet Joseph was not the only firstborn son of Jacob, through his mother Rachel. The firstborn son of Jacob's other wife Leah was Judah, once his older brothers Reuben and Simeon and Levi had been disqualified for their sins (Genesis 49:3-7). For

this reason, in Jacob's 'end times' prophetic blessings upon his twelve sons, he divided the rights of the firstborn between Joseph and Judah. The double-portion blessing went to Joseph, but the authority to rule went to Judah (Genesis 48:21-22; 49:22-26; 49:8-12). The unending tension between Judah and Joseph, whose son Ephraim's tribe ruled the northern kingdom of Israel, can be traced all the way down the following thousand years of history of the twelve tribes – spying out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:6, 8), settling the land (Joshua 14:4-17:18), appointing a king (Psalm 78:9-10, 55-72; 2 Samuel 19:9-20:2), dividing the northern and southern kingdoms (1 Kings 11:26-12:24), being taken into exile to Assyria and to Babylon (2 Kings 17; 25), and even post-exilic prophecies of return together (Zechariah 10:3-12; also Isaiah 11:11-16; Ezekiel 37:15-22). This was not just a long-running family feud; it was a constant reminder to Judah that it does not have the right to exclude Joseph and the other ten tribes from the inheritance. Only as a whole nation of twelve tribes regathered into their land will Israel finally inherit both the authority and the double-portion blessing of the firstborn, to be able to bless all nations as promised to Abraham.

4. A Kingdom of Priests

The shared authority of the whole nation of Israel was promised again at Mount Sinai, as the reason for the Law that was about to be given. God promised that if Israel obeyed His covenant law, this would qualify them to become 'to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation', 'among all peoples' over 'all the earth' (Exodus 19:5-6). Regardless of which tribe ruled internally in Israel, Israel as a whole nation would be able to serve all other nations in leadership as a priestly kingdom in their midst. King David was the first to begin to implement this vision politically, with his righteous rule extending out from Canaan over all neighbouring nations for the glory of Israel's God (2 Samuel 8:11-12; 22:33-50). And his son Solomon built the Temple as a house of prayer for all nations (1 Kings 8:41-43; Isaiah 56:6-8), so he was blessed with a reign of peaceful prosperity, 'greater than all the kings of the earth' (1 Kings 10:23). Once again, the legitimate political authority that David and Solomon inherited by faith over their tribe of Judah, and therefore over Israel, brought both the physical and spiritual blessings of

Israel, of Abraham, to all nations.

5. Kings in God's Kingdom

Yet Solomon broke the laws specifically given by God to Israel's kings, by accumulating all three forms of worldly power – economic (gold), military (horses) and diplomatic (wives) (Deuteronomy 17:16-17; 1 Kings 9:26-11:8). As a direct result, his heart was turned away from the God of Israel, and because he was not trusting in God's kingship, his own kingship over the whole nation of Israel was also inevitably broken. The divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah were never healed, and each state instead became enslaved to the power of other empires, the Egyptians, Arameans, Assyrians, and Babylonians. Only as an obedient kingdom of God would the kingdom of Israel be able to re-unite and regain its rightful position as chief of the nations. Only then would God's eternal promise to David and his royal heirs be fulfilled: 'I also shall make him firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth' (Psalm 89:27; also Psalm 72). Hezekiah and Josiah, kings of Judah, both made great efforts to re-unite the land politically in the worship of Israel's God (2 Chronicles 30-31; 34-35), inspired by this vision of the Kingdom of God.

6. Hope for a Renewed Kingdom

But the narrative of the Kingdom received a massive interruption in the form of physical exile of the people from their land, first the northern tribes to Assyria, and then the southern tribes to Babylon. This had been warned about by Moses and the prophets who followed him, and as God's people reflected on it theologically, they realised that it actually sharpened the picture of the expected Kingdom in two ways. First, it illustrated the real death of the nation in the form of exile, scattering its bones, and therefore required a supernatural intervention to resurrect the nation if the promise would ever be fulfilled. And second, careful investigation into the causes of exile by the prophet-historians who wrote the book of 1-2 Kings revealed the same theological truth for both states:

despite widespread sin and idolatry in each state at various times (such as Ba'al-worship in the time of Elijah), each exile could be attributed directly to the wicked actions of one particular king – Jeroboam I and his golden

The twelve-tribes nation of Israel inherited the authority to rule over the heavens and the earth

calves for the north (1 Kings 12:26-33; 2 Kings 10:28-33; 17:21-23), and Manasseh's idolatry in the south (2 Kings 21:1-15; 23:24-27). It stood to reason, therefore, that if the wicked acts of the nation's king could earn national death in exile, then the righteous acts of another king in the future could earn national resurrection and restoration. This would entitle both Israel and Judah to return, not only to their land but also to their joint inherited authority to bless all nations on earth (Isaiah 53; 54; 55; also Ezekiel 37:1-28). So, despite the exile of the Jewish people, now scattered as disarticulated bones of a dead nation amongst all nations, they still carried hope to be resurrected as the Kingdom of God.

7. Countdown to the Kingdom

During the exile of Judah to Babylon, the prophet Daniel was interceding for their promised return after seventy years. In visions and dreams he received or interpreted, he was informed that the Stone of Israel, a clear reference to the Messiah (Genesis 49:24; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16), would not appear

until the days of a fourth world empire – Babylon > Medo-Persia > Greece > Rome. But when he did, he would utterly destroy their power all at the same time, and God's Kingdom would grow to be a mountain that filled the earth (Daniel 2:28-45; 7:1-27; compare 8:19-22). 'In the days of those kings, the God

Each exile could be attributed directly to the wicked actions of one particular king

of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and the kingdom will not be passed on to another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure for ever' (Daniel 2:44). Daniel also received a precise calculation of 69 sabbatical years, 483 years, between the issuing of an imperial decree to rebuild (the walls of) Jerusalem and the arrival there of Messiah, the anointed Prince (Daniel 9:24-25). The decree was eventually issued to Nehemiah by the Persian king Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-8; Ezra 6:14), so from the mid-400s BC the clock began counting down towards the "appointed time" for the Kingdom of God, stirring political hopes in Israel.

8. A Kingdom for All Nations

Therefore, when Jesus arrived as the legitimate Son of David, precisely on time during the rule of the fourth empire, Rome, and announcing the imminent Kingdom of God, the people of Israel thought they knew just what

to expect. The oppressive imperial power of Rome would be crushed by Messiah and utterly blown away before the ever-growing mountain of God's purified Jewish Kingdom, centred in Jerusalem. His purified nation would become a kingdom of priests (Malachi 3:1-6), to take up their birthright again and rule over all other nations, as in the days of David and Solomon. Once more, foreigners would become sources of wealth and subjects to serve them (1 Kings 10; Isaiah 14:1-2) or else perish (Isaiah 60:11-12). What they failed to realise was that not only is God's Kingdom entirely independent of worldly powers like Rome, but so are its purpose and method of conquest.

As for purpose, God's rule is not only over His subjects but also for their sake. Jesus shared the heart of Abraham who had interceded for the kingdom of Sodom. He would intercede for all the nations in His death (Genesis 18; Isaiah 53:12; Zechariah 12:10-14; Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7), but this time He would be more successful. He would also ensure that every tribe and language has at least 'ten righteous men' in it, to avoid having to destroy any nation (Zechariah 8:20-23). God had promised Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18 to bless all nations of the earth through his promised 'Seed', a word both in the plural (Israel) and in the singular (= Messiah; Galatians 3:8, 16). So, the Servant

God's kingdom is entirely independent of worldly powers like Rome

King must work through Israel to bring light and salvation to the ends of the earth (Psalms 67; 87; Isaiah 49:5-7, 22-23; 60:1-3; Acts 13:47). The prophets saw that Messiah would call all nations to be His disciples, and invite them into the same new covenant of His Spirit that would restore Israel (Isaiah 50:4-51:5; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 55:1-7). Foreign rulers would be taken 'captive' and purified to serve in His expanded kingdom of priests alongside Israel (Isaiah 66:18-21), before being given back as rulers over their own nations under Messiah's

God's kingdom is entirely independent of worldly powers like Rome

imperial authority (Psalm 68:18, 29 + Ephesians 4:8, 11-16). In this way, Messiah will grant to every people group on earth the blessing of their own territorial inheritance (Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:11-14; Hebrews 9:15; 10:34).

As for method, by conquering Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, Jesus was giving public notice that He would abolish the military in Israel, even against Rome. Instead, as the same prophecy said, 'He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth' (Zechariah 9:9-10). This is why Jesus taught His apostles from the Scriptures 'that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Luke 24:47). The apostles will rule on twelve thrones over the

tribes of Israel, but not to dominate other nations. So, they first had to imitate their servant King by embodying Israel's way of leading, going out to serve all other nations. All nations will become disciples through their proclamation of good news about the coming Kingdom. Only then will their King's physical return bring this age to an end (Matthew 19:28; 24:14; 28:18-20), and inaugurate the new one, the Empire of Jerusalem.

9. The Final Chapter

The ultimate vision of the Kingdom of God, therefore, is a very real political vision, as the prophets and apostles repeatedly spoke about. Israel will be regathered and exalted to become the leader nation in the earth. Its legitimate king, from the royal line of David, will reign in Jerusalem as King of Israel and emperor over all nations. He will pass judgments even for mighty distant nations, so that they will no longer need to make war (Micah 4:1-8). The nations will send envoys up to Jerusalem to seek the favour of Israel's God and King, and He will even be authorised to grant rain upon their territories (Zechariah 8:20-23; 14:16-19). The narrowly ethnic Jewish titles of Jesus are not optional extras, now to be discarded because of His exaltation to the right hand of God. On the contrary, they are still His unique qualifications, proving His inherited ancestral right to take up the political throne of mankind over all nations, all living creatures, and even over the entire heavens and earth.

FROM A POLITICAL VISION TO PRACTICAL REALITIES

A political manifesto requires a clear vision of the intended future for the constituents – in this case all nations and tribes. But it also needs to break down the vision into specific goals, and most importantly show how the practical implementation of this vision differs from those of other competing parties.

So, who is the competition to the Kingdom of God? The Bible describes 'the kingdom of the world' as being under 'the dominion of Satan', who as 'the ruler of this world'

The ultimate vision of the Kingdom of God is a very real political vision

is being cast out (Revelation 11:15; Acts 26:18; John 12:31). Satan's legal authority began when Adam himself obeyed the serpent rather than God, but it was finally taken away from him again by Adam's legal heir, the Son of David. In the garden, the last Adam submitted to God not only His right to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and decide what was right for Him, but also His right to eat from the tree of life and avoid death. For His obedience, God authorised Him to re-enter Eden and eat from both trees, becoming both Judge and Life-giver for all (John 5:19-30). Yet all other humans are still 'slaves of the one whom you obey' (Romans 6:16), so each individual and group must now submit to Jesus to cast off Satan's authority (Acts 17:30-31). To do this, we first accept Jesus' purification to become royal priests, secondly testify publicly to the legitimate authority of Jesus, and thirdly choose to obey our King Jesus even to the point of death (Revelation 5:9-10; 12:11).

When we have shifted our allegiance from one kingdom into the other, we can then begin to work for 'the increase of His government and of peace' (Isaiah 9:7 [6]). We might assume that the clash of kingdoms requires direct spiritual warfare to overpower

evil by physical or supernatural force. But this was not the method of Jesus. The Kingdom of God is founded on law, and conquers by submitting to God and then just standing firm against every attack of the enemy (James/Jacob 4:7; 1 Peter 5:6-11; Ephesians 6:10-13). We go forth as lights into a dark world, and the indestructible life of the Kingdom keeps multiplying like yeast through the whole dough, or like a seed that dies to produce many seeds. Jesus proved how victory came through carrying His cross daily. His teaching and practical demonstration of the Kingdom were inseparable from His death and resurrection that activated the Kingdom, and from His future triumph over all worldly powers at the end of this age through His Church. As holy seeds sown by Jesus, our own daily King-shaped life is His inspired Kingdom strategy, which is steadily transforming the world from within and turning it upside-down (Acts 17:6).

Expressed politically, our ultimate goal is to realign our own nations to acknowledge the God-ordained supremacy of Israel for blessing all other nations. Only in that way can our nation submit to Israel's king as our own lawful emperor, and then learn from Israel's sacred writings what God expects from a nation under allegiance under His authority. To achieve this goal, we proclaim the good news

The kingdom of God is founded on law, and conquers by submitting to God

of the Jewish King's soon return, and distribute healing and spiritual freedom as tangible signs of what His Kingdom will look like. But we also model in our own holy communities of His citizens, just how different the principles of God's Kingdom are from those of the world's government. I will finish with just three key political principles of God's counter-cultural Kingdom, though there are many:

(i) It is Written

The Word of God created and sustains the universe, so law-observance is not an optional extra in the Kingdom. Nor is the law of God cancelled or rewritten to reflect current social preferences of each new generation, whatever the political authorities of the world might decree. Every word and letter in Scripture remains in force until it is fulfilled, because God's words contain promises like seeds within them, unfolding with ever-greater significance as they are put into practice. Satan's first challenge to God's authority was to ask, 'Did God really say...?', but Jesus defeated his temptation every time by directly quoting Scripture. Every word that God has spoken in Scripture is trustworthy and true, and it takes priority over any sceptical theories and any opposing laws of men. The law of God must be applied correctly and in the way it was intended, which requires careful study and interpretation by the Holy Spirit. Only by His step-by-step enabling can it be obeyed rightly.

(ii) The Greatest Among You

God has made Himself the defender of the poor, and has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit His Kingdom. He chooses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and the despised to shame the noble. He looks beyond outward appearance into the heart, and hides His treasure in clay jars. His Spirit gives to every citizen of His Kingdom a gift for the common good, and rewards each equally if they have faithfully used their gift. Therefore, those who are powerful or wealthy or wise are to be pitied, because much will be required of them. Those who think themselves wise in this age must become foolish, exchanging empty deceptive philosophies of men for the spiritual mysteries found only in Messiah. In the Kingdom, it is the children and the servants of all who are esteemed most highly. God opposes the proud but

gives grace to the humble. Great men and great nations rise and fall, but Israel with its humble King will reign for ever.

(iii) Give to Those Who Take

The economy of the Kingdom must also be upside-down, if it is to thrive with the poor. The Israelites were given daily manna, and taught not to work every seventh day, nor plant or harvest every seventh year, and to cancel all debts and rural land purchases every fiftieth year, forcing them to depend upon the faithful generosity of God rather

The kingdom of God is founded on law, and conquers by submitting to God

than on themselves. In the Kingdom, those who have must give to those who have not, prioritising God's rule and justice over their own welfare, and they will find they have all they need. When serving God, any need that arises will have already been anticipated, as an opportunity for God's miraculous provision. When enemies take, or governments tax, they should be given even more, overcoming evil with good. Lending should be to all who ask, charging no interest on the loan, and not expecting to be repaid. Giving should be to those who cannot give back, so that the Kingdom economy is not based on trade but on God's rich generosity to each person, group

and nation for the common good. This is why the nations will bring their wealth and glory into Jerusalem, and each person will sit under his own vine and fig tree without fear of lack or loss. Since God has promised that He will give more to us than we give to others, we seek to excel in the grace of giving, beyond our own ability. We trade worldly wealth for treasure that the world cannot access nor confiscate, secure in heaven's bank to be 'repaid at the resurrection of the righteous... in the kingdom of God' (Luke 14:14-15).

It takes time being immersed in the prophets and psalms for the Bible's political vision of the Kingdom of God to develop into a full-colour image in our hearts. But when we understand the practical, tangible reality of God's promises for this earth, especially for the poor, we cannot be stopped from proclaiming to them the good news that this Kingdom is nearly here. The clearer we see it, the more we will pray for it and demonstrate it. God's counter-cultural political principles will overcome all worldly powers as we put our trust in the good news.

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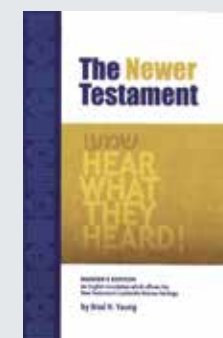
NOTES

- ¹ *Josephus records that the generation of Jesus' contemporaries were motivated in their disastrous rebellion against Rome in 66-70 AD by a prophecy 'found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world' (Jewish War 6.312-15). N.T. Wright makes a convincing argument that Josephus is referring to a combination of Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 9, in The New Testament and the People of God (London: SPCK, 1992): 312-14.*

BOOK REVIEW

KEES DE VREUGD

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic (the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible) and Greek (the New Testament). That is to say; there are theories about a Hebrew original of the Gospel of Matthew, based on reference in Eusebius' Church History (4th century). It is true that the language of the Gospel of Matthew as we have it has a Semitic colour. It is also true that Luke purposely applies a Hebraic style, imitating the language of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, all apostles and evangelists were Jews (including Luke, I believe). They have their roots in the Hebrew Bible and second temple Judaism. They apply Jewish methods of expounding Scripture. The scene of the stories of the Gospel is the landscape of Israel. The teaching of Jesus breathes the connection with the people and their living in the land of Israel.



Brad H. Young,
The Newer Testament.
An English
translation that
affirms the New Testament's authentic
Hebrew heritage.
Tulsa, Oklahoma 2021.
ISBN:
978-1-7362270-0-8

METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

How should the Bible be translated? There are different methods and principles of translating the Bible, depending on the aims of a specific translation. Should it be an easily readable translation, then the receiving language is the governing principle. In those cases, however, often specific characteristics of the original language or subtle intertextual connections are lost. Should these be preserved, the translation becomes less accessible but would serve specific interests in studying the text.

HEBREW HERITAGE

In his newly published 'Newer Testament',

Brad H. Young, the eminent Bible scholar, presents a translation that is meant to affirm the authentic Hebrew heritage of the New Testament. What does that mean, and how does he pursue this goal? The title is already an eye-catching example. The use of the comparative 'newer' reflects that the New Testament does not substitute the Old Testament but rather affirms it. Personally, I would prefer to translate the Greek *kainè* with 'renewed'.

In other cases, Young does not literally translate but circumscribes the Greek to give an impression of how the original readers might have understood the words or highlight a certain Jewish practice. For example, the verb *baptizomai* is not translated as 'baptise' but as 'to immerse oneself', as that was common Jewish practice. One would immerse oneself ritually under the supervision of a religious official.

HEBREW NAMES

Most remarkable in all Hebraizing translations is the use of the original Hebrew names instead of the Greek forms. Jesus is rendered as Yeshua, Peter as Kefa and Paul as Shaul. Sometimes I find

that a little pedantic. Does it really evoke the Hebrew heritage, or does it rather alienate the reader? The apostles have adapted the name Yeshua to the Greek language in which they preached. On the other hand, over time, this has alienated Jesus (as well as the New Testament) from His Jewish origins. Again, on the other hand, the time has long been overdue to rediscover the Jewish origins. Can we find a language that affirms both the Hebrew heritage and the grace of hearing the Gospel 'in our own language to which we were born'?

