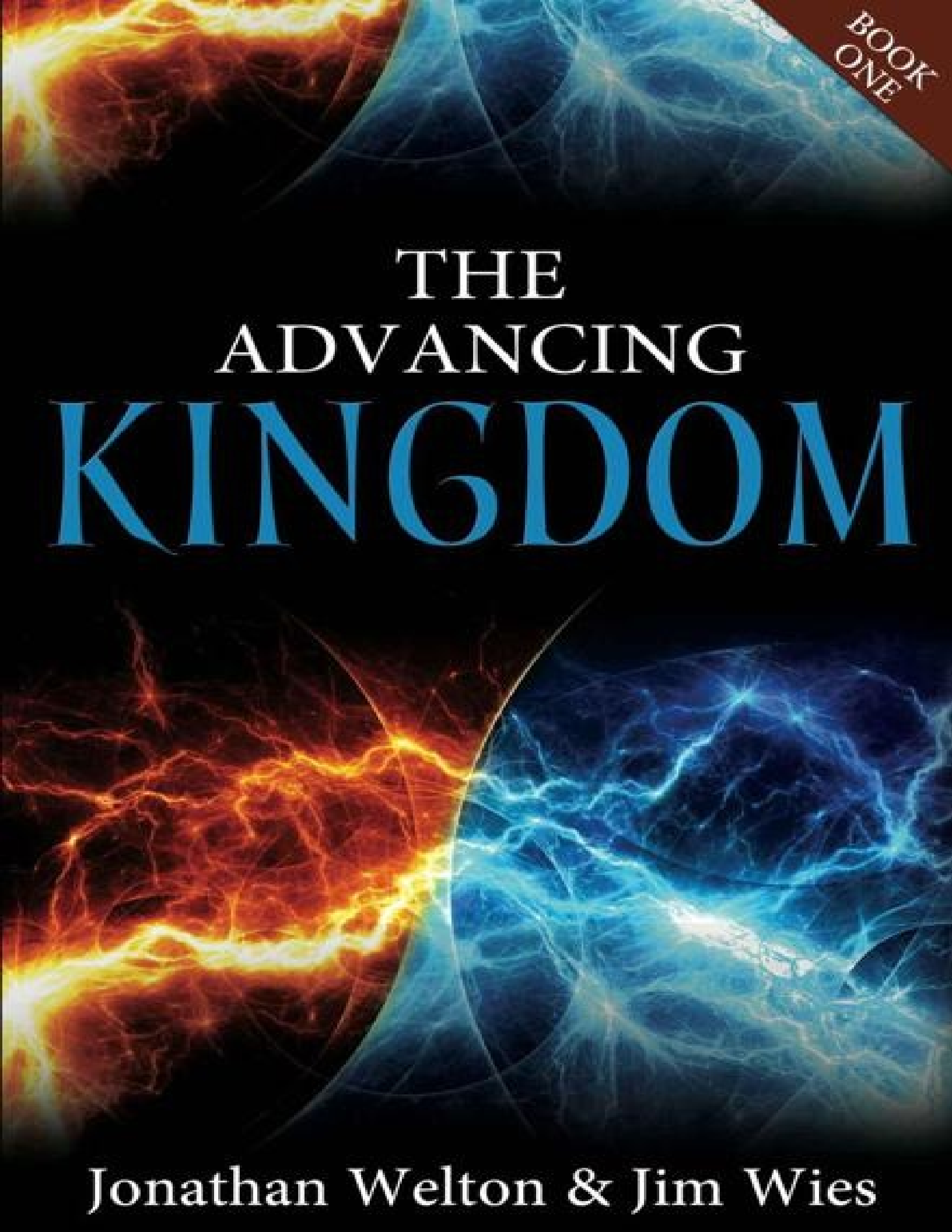

BOOK ONE
THE ADVANCING
KINGDOM
Jonathan Welton & Jim Wies

THE ADVANCING KINGDOM

JONATHAN WELTON
&
JIM WIES

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ISBN 978-1-621660-79-8

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ENDORSEMENTS

A shift is happening. Books like ***The Advancing Kingdom*** are clearing out the nonsense of unbelief and fear. Finally leaders like Jonathan Welton and Jim Wies are shouting the good news from the mountaintops. The Kingdom of God is here. The whole world needs to hear this message. I am so blessed to join my voice in the shout of this victory.

~ Harold Eberle
worldcastministries.com
Author of *Victorious Eschatology* God is at work in our world. He always has been, but we tend to expect Him to be at work in some particular way that fits in with our preconceived ideas and theologies. In this inspiring volume, Jonathan Welton and Jim Wies lift the veil to reveal the true nature of God's Kingdom. It is not just some utopian future or heaven when we die. God's Kingdom is here now! It is God's new world and new way of living, which is emerging amongst us as we open our hearts to believe and our eyes to see. And it is an advancing Kingdom - growing every day. As you read this book, let the veil lift from your eyes too!

~ Rev. Dr. Martin Trench,
Lead Pastor of Gateway Church, Edmonton Alberta, Co-author of *Victorious Eschatology* This book was a very enjoyable read for me and it is my pleasure to highly recommend it. The Lord is releasing a stream of anointed books designed to counter what I call "toxic eschatology". ***The Advancing Kingdom*** is surely one of those books and I found it to be substantive and convincing as Jim Wies and Jonathan Welton invite us to believe that there are no limits on how much of the Kingdom we can contend for NOW. Read it and have your spirit stoked with hope.

~ Johnny Enlow
Author of The 7 Mountain Prophecy and The 7 Mountain Mantle I highly recommend Jim Wies' & Jonathan Welton's new book, ***The Advancing Kingdom***! Jim is a unique and tremendous gift to the body of Christ! He is both a highly anointed and accurate prophetic minister and a very discerning and diligent Bible scholar. His and Jonathan's insights to the Kingdom of God are both biblically sound and prophetically illuminating. Their powerful book, ***The Advancing Kingdom,*** is on the cutting edge of what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing! Get it and grow and go into the advancing Kingdom!

~ Dr. Michael Maiden

Pastor/apostolic leader of Church For The Nations Author of *Turn the World Upside Down* Jonathan Welton is a fresh new voice in the Body of Christ that is being used by God to unlock hidden truths of the Kingdom. His revelation on end-time eschatology and the Advancing Kingdom of God is a breath of fresh air to all who are hungry and want to walk in the fullness of their destiny.

The truth of the matter is that much of the church has been living in fear, tormented by a gross misrepresentation of end time eschatology. Jonathan Welton and Jim Wies have done an incredible job of debunking and unmasking the doctrinal error which the church has embraced as biblical truth. In this generation, as we begin to understand our identity and place in human history through proper biblical context and truth, we will be liberated to move forward with fresh Kingdom power and authority to slay the intimidating spirit of Goliath that has brought paralysis upon many.

This book, ***The Advancing Kingdom,*** is a powerful tool that will bring transformation in your life. As you read it, be prepared to be liberated into an amazing freedom of Kingdom Power and Authority.

~ Jeff Jansen

Author of *Glory Rising* and *The Furious Sound of Glory* Founder of Global Fire Ministries International, & Kingdom Life Institute Global Connect & Global Fire Churches

Jonathan and Jim have given us a first class introduction to a “Kingdom Alignment” that will lead to our “Kingdom Assignment”. Jesus must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

My greatest joy of reading ***The Advancing Kingdom*** is a clear revelation of God’s plan for the future that inspires faith and does not instill fear. Unleashing heaven on earth will take place as the end time army of God fills the earth with His Glory.

This book is an absolute must read!

~ Leif Hetland

President - Global Mission Awareness

Author of *Seeing Through Heaven’s Eyes* In ***The Advancing Kingdom,*** Jim Wies and Jonathan Welton give hope and exciting anticipation regarding the posture and function of the Body of Christ in the coming days. Read it and enjoy the encouragement and empowerment you receive from it. It will build your faith for

sure.

~ Patricia King
Founder, XPmedia and XPministries

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PREFACE BY JIM WIES

There was a time when I felt all alone in my bewilderment about what I saw as a schizophrenic view of the Kingdom of God from much of the Church. Among many there was a prophetic sense of the current nearness and "nowness" of the Kingdom, while at the same time holding the popularized eschatological view of the prophetic Scriptures that indicated the Kingdom of God is a distant hope for a future age, but not a current reality.

As a young Christian I had been taught in Sunday School and from the pulpit the standard dispensationalist view that included an imminent expectation of a pre-tribulation, pre-millennial rapture. There was even a stage in my young adulthood where I abandoned any serious plans for my future, as I thought Jesus' return was certainly going to happen before I crossed my twenty-fifth birthday. But now (thirty+years later), after deliberately ignoring the subject for close to twenty years of ministry, the Lord challenged me that it was time for me to thoroughly study and find out for myself the truth about His Kingdom and its relationship to the end of the age.

As I progressed on this journey I discovered I was not alone, after all. In fact, the position I now hold has been a prevailing view of theologians throughout much of the 2,000 year history of the church. But it was when I discovered the work of Jonathan Welton on the subject, that I felt the greatest confidence that what I have learned and have to say, though certainly controversial, needs to be said. I've become convinced that the Body of Christ needs a major adjustment in what has become virtually fundamental presuppositions in much of the Body of Christ affecting their perspective of the presence of the Kingdom of God and it's relevance for today. So I was pleased when Jonathan agreed to collaborate with me in the writing of this book and for the addition of it to his trilogy of books on the subject. Our desire is that it will contribute to a needed shift in much of the Body of Christ toward a victorious, triumphant view of this present age.

I trust that it will bless you and inspire you in your labors for the advancing of His Kingdom. ***"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."*** 1 Timothy 1:17

~ Jim Wies

PREFACE BY JONATHAN WELTON

After writing *Raptureless; An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World*, I realized the great need for a book like *The Advancing Kingdom. Raptureless* dismantles the misunderstandings that have been taught about the supposed future of the world. Yet for most readers, once the lies are removed, they are paralyzed with the question, “What do I do now?” That is why *The Advancing Kingdom* was needed.

When Jim Wies emailed me an early copy of *The Advancing Kingdom*, I was ecstatic! Even in its early form, it carried my heartbeat for the book that I planned to write. I was glad to add my input and write several chapters to round out the work.

This has also triggered the idea that we will be making a book series. *The Advancing Kingdom* will lay the groundwork of understanding the Church, the Kingdom and our current mission. *Raptureless* then removes lies about the future and restores an optimistic view of the Kingdom. Thirdly will be a book regarding the Book of Revelation. We may write more than three books in this series, but this is what we have in view at the moment.

Thank you for taking the time to invest in your understanding of the Kingdom.

Bless you

~ Jonathan Welton
Bestselling author & Director of The Welton Academy

INTRODUCTION

Changing Our Perspective of the Game

As the story goes, there was once a young boy who had never seen a baseball game before. He was curious about a local game, but didn't have money for a ticket. Around one side of the stadium was a high wooden fence, and to his delight, the boy discovered a knothole in the fence. He peeked through to see what the game was all about.

As he watched, he became a bit disillusioned at what he saw. There were two men standing in a field who would occasionally move forward, then back, and then they would run off to an area he couldn't see, and two new men would come out. Bleachers full of people were watching them do this. He was beginning to think baseball wasn't such a great sport until a buddy came along, and together they climbed up a nearby tree.

The view from high in the tree branches was quite a different perspective than the one through the knothole. Now he saw all the action. He realized he had been viewing a very limited part of the game. He realized things looked quite different from above the knothole.

We, as Christians, have often been in the same position as the boy looking through the knothole. We have a limited view of God and His Kingdom. For centuries we have viewed His Kingdom and His Kingdom agency, the Church, from the limited perspective of our own experiences and the traditions of people. With such a narrow perspective, it is no wonder most people think there has to be something more to this than what we are currently seeing. And there is! But to get the proper view, we must step back and rise above the knothole in order to see the bigger perspective.

This book is an attempt to gain a fresh perspective on the Kingdom of God by rising above what we have seen in the Church so far and taking a look at what it could be and will be. God has in mind a glorious end-time expression of the Church within the bigger picture of a full expression of His Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven—a Church full of apostolic power, prophetic revelation, and unprecedented love of the brethren. Although this is contrary to the prevailing eschatological views of much of today's Church, a thorough examination of the

Scriptures will give us a much bigger view of the “ball game” than most of us have been seeing. God promised David He would raise up the House of David and a descendant would rule there forever.

As Acts 15:15-18 states:

> *Just as it is written: “After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.” Known to God from eternity are all His works*.

This tabernacle, the House of David, is the government of God being restored by Jesus Christ, the Son of David. This restoration was inaugurated at His coming, and it is now beginning to be enforced, not just *within* the Church but *through* the Church into every sector of society.

To make such a statement, we must recognize that we are at a place of major transition and restoration in the Church. Acts 3:20-21 states that Jesus is being retained in heaven “*until the times of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”* We are currently in the unfolding stages of those “times of restoration.”

CHAPTER ONE

THE KINGDOM PREDICTED

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….

—Isaiah 2:2

The House of David

The apostles were baffled. This thing they called the "church" was expanding in a way they had not foreseen. They had just received the reports from Paul and Barnabas of Gentiles coming to God by faith and receiving the Holy Spirit, just as they had. Then "senior apostle" James remembered the prophecy.

His statement is recorded in Acts 15:13-18.

"And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.' Known to God from eternity are all His works."

This was James' revelation: The tabernacle of David, known of and planned by God from eternity past, was now beginning to be rebuilt. But what exactly was this House that God said He Himself would rebuild in the last days? To understand its meaning, let's look to its origin, with King David.

In the days of King David's dominion, righteousness ruled out of Zion. God was pleased with David because of His devotion to the Lord and his desire to worship Him. David loved the presence of God, and God loved that about David.

In David's zeal to worship before the presence of God, he housed the ark of the covenant in an open tent and conscripted a twenty-four-hour choral and instrumental ensemble to offer up continuous praises to the Lord. In fact, throughout history, since the time of David, his manner of worship has been the pattern to which the people of God returned whenever there was a return to God.

Not only did David pioneer the manner of corporate worship that would set the pattern for human worship before God's presence forever, but he also exhibited a dominion of righteousness. David's rule on Earth represented God's rule through humanity. A restoration of David's fallen tabernacle is not only a return to worship but a return to God's rule among people. While David is known as a prophet, he can also be viewed as a type of apostolic government through his service as a righteous king. The House of David, in fact, is destined to rule forever through David's descendant Jesus. Thus, the tabernacle of David is none other than the rule of the Kingdom of God among people.

Ironically, sometime after David set up the tent of God's presence, where the ark of the covenant was housed, he had the bright idea to offer to build God a house. God must have laughed. He simply explained to David that He didn't need a physical house in which to dwell and that He could not be contained within a physical building anyway. However, just because of David's attitude, God would build him a House that would last forever. This House would be a place from which a descendant of David would rule forever. The significance of this House —as it pertains to the characteristics, dominion, and commission of the Kingdom of God in the last days—is much greater than most of us realize.

The promises God gave to David pertaining to this House are recorded in Second Samuel 7:

> *Have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth…. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. 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'" (2 Samuel 7:7-13).

And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Here God clearly spoke to David about the eternal nature of this House. What happened next gives us insight into the covenant-keeping nature of God. Only one generation later, Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord; yet for his servant David's sake, God kept his word:

Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. … However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1 Kings 11:11-13).

About eighty-five years after David, we again see God's commitment to His covenant during the reign of the bad King Abijam:

And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. Nevertheless for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:3-4).

During the reign of good King Hezekiah, 313 years later, deliverance comes once again as God speaks from the mouth of His prophet Isaiah:

"For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: "He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city," says the LORD. "For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake" (2 Kings 19:3134).

Clearly, God intends to keep His covenant. In fact, the rule of the House of David is again expanded upon and defined by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 16:5: *"In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness."*

We see here that mercy, truth, justice, and righteousness are components of this dominion.

Several generations after Isaiah, when things had deteriorated and seemed as though they could not get any worse, the prophet Amos arose and spoke this prophetic promise:

> *"On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," says the LORD who does this thing* (Amos 9:11-12).

This prophecy clearly ties the re-established rule of the House of David with the worldwide declaration of the Kingdom of God. In fact, this Amos prophecy was the very Scripture quoted by James at the Council in Jerusalem, and it is a key Scripture in understanding God's end-time plans for the House of David (i.e. the Kingdom of God). In the New Testament we now see Jesus, the Son of David, who is the cornerstone of the House, as the eternal King of an everlasting Kingdom.

Thus, this House is something much bigger than just a group of people who get together on occasion and sing some songs and do a religious routine. We have become temples in the Lord, dwelling places of God in the Spirit, spiritual Houses to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Wherever there is true worship, we also see a release of a dimension of authority that is characteristic of the Kingdom. We literally take on and, to an extent become, an expression of God's rule upon the Earth.

This pattern and progression is seen in the ministry of Jesus when He came into the temple surrounded by pure and true worship, as described in Matthew 20 and 21. A very loud procession traveled with Jesus the distance between Jericho and Jerusalem that day. Many people felt the prophetic significance of the moment, and some even began to cry out:

> *"Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!"* (Matthew 20:30).

Here's what happened next:

> *As He came close to the city, riding on a donkey, the multitudes began to cry out: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!" (*Matthew 21:9).

Notice the things being associated with Jesus as He's acknowledged as the Son of David. The people knew that David's House would someday be restored, and they were undoubtedly wondering, Could this be the one? It is in this context that we see a side of Jesus not often observed as He comes into His temple full of the authority of God and begins to set the House in order.

> *Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves." Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise'?"* (Matthew 21:12-16).

Jesus had been there many times before, but this time something was different. Now He was moving in His apostolic mantle. He was sent from God with the authority of God. Because of the traveling chorus of Hosannas that accompanied Him into the city, He entered the temple in an atmosphere of perfected praise. As a result, He began cleansing the temple, calling for prayer, and healing the sick. Restored dimensions of worship release restored dimensions of authority, out of which apostolic order is released on the Earth.

In the context of this discussion, it is very important to recognize the attributes of the rule of God. As almost a parallel to the study of the Kingdom authority within the Davidic covenant, we see a commitment from God to show forth what Scripture calls the "sure mercies of David" as a sure part of this covenant. Isaiah 16:5 states this clearly: *"In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness."* In the Kingdom, authority and mercy walk hand-in-hand.

In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at two of the primary attributes of the Kingdom of God—mercy and righteousness.

CHAPTER TWO
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KINGDOM

> *In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.* —Isaiah 16:5

His Throne Established in Mercy

In Paul's dramatic sermon recorded in Acts 13 he stated:

> *"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. 4s it is written in the second Psalm: "'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "'I will give you the holy and* ***sure mercies*** *promised to David.'*
>
> Acts 13:32-34 NIV

We see here that through Jesus we have become partakers of the sure mercies or the covenantal mercies of David. The sure mercies of God are simply the steadfast intentions of God to do us good. In other words, we must know that God is a God of compassion and mercy. Deuteronomy 7:9 tells us: *Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments*.

Over and over again the Scriptures clarify the point that God is a gracious God, full of mercy. The following is an abreviated list of Scriptures driving home the point. As you read through the following excerpts from Scripture, let the truth about His merciful nature invade your mind and persuade your heart.

God speaks this in Isaiah 54:7-8; *"For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but* ***with great mercies I will gather you.*** *With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the LORD, your Redeemer*.

Jeremiah declares this about God's mercies, calling them his hope: *"This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through **the LORD's mercies** we are not consumed, because **His compassions fail not.** They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness"* (Lamentations 3:21-23).

David, too, knew of the mercies of God, the steadfast intentions of God to do him good. The following is an abbreviated survey of the Book of Psalms, which reveals David's insights into the mercy of God:

> *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, **mercy shall surround him*** (Psalm 32:10).
>
> *But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and **abundant in mercy** and truth* (Psalm 86:15).
>
> *For the LORD is good; **his mercy is everlasting,** and His truth endures to all generations.* (Psalm 100:5)
>
> *The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and **abounding in mercy…** He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities* (Psalm 103:8-10).
>
> *For as the heavens are high above the earth, **so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him** (Psalm 103:11).*
>
> *But **the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting** on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children (Psalm 103:17).*
>
> *"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! **For His mercy endures forever.** Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! **For His mercy endures forever.** Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! **For His mercy endures forever:…*** [This is repeated twenty-six times in twenty-six verses.] (Psalm 136).

The prophet Isaiah also prophesied of the sure mercies of David, indicating that we are partakers through covenant:

> *Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. …and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and **I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- the sure mercies of David.** … Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for*

He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:1-3,7).

Clearly, the dominion of God is a Kingdom of mercy. His rule is full of mercy for those who come to Him in faith, yet His rule is also established in righteousness. While these may seem to be opposing concepts, we must see that, through the Cross of Jesus, God established both righteousness and mercy. He found a way around His just judgment in order to show us His mercy and grace.

Government in Zion

David established his rulership out of Jerusalem, a city on the top of Mount Zion. The Scriptures refer to Mount Zion and the city of Jerusalem as a picture of the government of God. Psalms 2:6 prophetically decreed in reference to Jesus: *"Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion."* This picture is carried forward in Isaiah's prophesy to show the eventual, total dominion of the Kingdom of God over all other kingdoms and dominions.

> *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. … 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).

We know this is a direct reference to the Kingdom of God because of what is stated in Hebrews 12:22-24:

> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.*

For many who have grown up in western democratic forms of government, rather than those of kings and kingdoms, the term kingdom can easily lose its simple significance. For me, the interposing of the word government for kingdom put it into a much clearer perspective. In other words, the Kingdom of God is the government of God. It is the domain in which the King rules; it is wherever Jesus is Lord.

Daniel saw and described it like this:

> *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* (Daniel 7:13-14).

This prophetic Scripture described Jesus' eventual ascension and enthronement. Thus, at His ascension, Jesus said, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me…"* (Matthew 28:18). The rule of Jesus extends over all. He rules over space. He rules over time and eternity. He rules over nature. And His rule shall eventually and inevitably extend to every individual, for Scripture states in Philippians 2:1011 that *"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow… and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

The Scepter of Righteousness

We first looked at the fact that His throne is established in mercy; yet it is also established in righteousness.

> *Your Throne, Oh God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness* (Psalm 45:6,7a).

A scepter is an ornate rod or wand that serves as an emblem of regal or imperial power and authority in the hand of a ruler. The scepter in the king's hand represents his authority and dominion. Here we learn that God's scepter is a scepter of righteousness. That is, His authority is righteousness; or it could be said that the authority of righteousness is the authority of His Kingdom. So the extension of His rule is the extension of His righteousness. In fact, His Kingdom is described as a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (see Romans 14:17).

Add this to the fact that God wants to extend His rule and His dominion through His people and we see that it is through righteousness that we have dominion. Therefore, as we reflect His righteousness, we express His dominion. Put more simply, our level of righteousness determines our level of dominion. It is through righteousness that we have rule in life.

Of course, we must first understand that we are not talking about the righteousness by which we are saved. That is an imputed righteousness given to

us as a gift and received by faith. There is, however, a righteousness that is manifested when we walk out the righteousness that has been provided for us. God desires for us to not only receive a positional righteousness (i.e. right standing in His eyes) but also a practical experience of being righteous.

It is this latter righteousness that determines our level of rule and dominion in life. It is the righteousness that comes as we choose to walk in the empowering grace He has provided. It is our destiny and purpose to be extensions of God's rule in the Earth. Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us that we are to be His body, the fullness of Him whole fills all in all. In other words, He wants to restore to us the dominion betrayed to the devil at the fall of humanity and grant us to reign in life in Christ Jesus. We are meant to be extensions of His righteous rule. We are called to advance His Kingdom, which is simply the domain of the King. It has come wherever Jesus is ruling.

The Source of Authority

The point of all this is that we must see the authority inherent in righteousness. Righteousness gives us dominion. Unrighteousness robs us of dominion. We are to arise and go forth in righteousness, full of the authority of God Himself to press back the domain of darkness and usher in the Kingdom of God, just like Jesus did.

Wherever He went, Jesus demonstrated what this would look like as He declared, "the Kingdom is at hand," and then healed the sick, preached the gospel, and set the captives free. As Acts 10:38 tells us:

> *Even Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (ASV).*

He did this as one who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, and He received His anointing and commissioning to do these supernatural works from the Father. Luke chronicles it this way:

> *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness.*
> *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and a fame went out concerning him through all the region round about.* (Luke 4:1,14 ASV).

We all love to read about the powerful and wonderful things Jesus did as He opened blind eyes, healed the maimed and crippled, bound up the broken, and

gave people the good news of their sins being forgiven. But when it comes to today, we often say; “Well, that is what Jesus did, but I’m not Jesus.” That is true, we are not Jesus, but it is also true that Jesus expects us to do the same things He did in the same way He did them.

At the end of His earthly ministry, He said He wanted us to continue with His same ministry. In fact, He said the same anointing and commissioning He received from the Father was now being imparted to us. John 20:21 states: *“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’”*

In reality, He not only expects us to move in the same anointing and commissioning, but He also promised that we would do even greater things than He did:

> *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father* (John 14:12 NASB).

In addition to that, Jesus also promised:

> *And these signs shall accompany them that believe: in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues, etc*. (Mark 16:17 ASV).

Our mandate is clear. We are called to perform even greater miracles than Jesus did and to walk in the same authority that He did—an authority birthed through righteousness.

Drawing the Battle Lines

In spiritual warfare, we are literally entering into the conflict of two kingdoms—the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Our task is to bring the power and purpose of God to bear against the power and purpose of the enemy. In every area of life, there is a will and purpose from God against which the enemy schemes relentlessly, trying to thwart God’s redemptive work on the Earth. Yet the ultimacy of God’s Kingdom is a foregone conclusion; that issue was settled once and for all on Calvary. The salvation God has provided through the cross of Christ is thorough. It has provided everything we need for life and godliness. So why does it seem, at times, that provision isn’t being realized in our lives?

To answer that question, we need to understand something about the nature of our battle. We need to understand that, although the Kingdom of God has claimed legal right of redemption, delivering humankind and the Earth itself from every curse, our enemy is a squatter who only reluctantly leaves at our insistence, but knows he must if we insist. The problem is most often that we don't know the extensive implications of God's redemptive work or the powerful tools and weapons He has put in our hands to bring this redemption to bear against the enemy. We don't understand that He has commissioned us to be instruments of His dominion.

The primary way we accomplish this is through prayer. It is by prayer that we experience the breakthrough of God's redemptive purpose into humankind's affairs. It is by prayer that we enforce the authority of heaven on Earth. By prayer we literally cooperate with God to bring His dominion to bear against whatever is contrary to it. Prayer is most often the missing ingredient that will move us beyond the realm of natural strength into the realm of the supernatural power of God. Is it any wonder, then, that the enemy will do anything he can to keep us from prayer or that he runs scared when God's people find their place at the throne of grace and begin to pray in earnest?

We must understand our job is to persist in our prayers against the kingdom of darkness and to relentlessly proclaim, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done…*" (Matthew 6:10 ASV). If we see our prayers as weapons against the powers of darkness, we then begin to realize how important it is to persist in prayer and insist that God's will be done. We then become instruments of His dominion in the Earth. So let us be in prayer at all times, in the spirit, and with all manner of prayer and entreaty. To that end, let us keep alert and watch with strong purpose and perseverance, interceding on behalf of all the saints and pressing back the domain of darkness until God's Kingdom has complete preeminence.

The Kingdom and Power

The conclusion we must come to is that God wants to allow us to demonstrate His love and power in the same way Jesus did. For this reason, He has given His promise that we can move in the miraculous, even as He did. The world out there waits to see the Church demonstrate the Kingdom and move, not only in a proclamation but also in a demonstration of the Spirit and power so that their faith will rest not merely in the wisdom of people but in the power of God.

As the apostle Paul stated, "*For the kingdom of God is not in word but in*

power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). Elsewhere, he also stated, *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance…"* (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Truly, Paul modeled how we should minister by the power of the Spirit. As he wrote to the Corinthians:

> *And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasivewords of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

He even warned in Second Timothy 3:1-5 against those who have a form of godliness but deny its power.

> *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves…lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

The Kingdom we belong to is a Kingdom of power. We need to understand this power: where it comes from, what its purpose is, what it supplies to us, and who can wield it. To that end, let's examine some Scriptures that clearly spell out the truth about God's power:

1. **The source of power is God**

   > *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." …When the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men (Matthew 9:6-8).*
   >
   > (Also see 2 Peter 1:3a; Ephesians 6:10)

2. **The purpose of power is to do good**

   > *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*
   >
   > (Acts 10:38).

3. **His power saves us**

   > *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes* Romans 1:16). (Also see 1 Corinthians 1:18b)

4. **His power heals us**

And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. (Luke 5:17b). (Also see Luke 6:19)

5. **His power delivers us**

   Then they were all amazed… saying, "… with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out" (Luke 4:36).

6. **His power produces fresh hope**

   Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13).

7. **His power keeps us**

   Blessed be God… who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope … reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5)

8. **His power gives us authority to press back the kingdom of darkness.**

   Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you (Luke 10:19).

And God's invitation to walk in power is echoed many times throughout the New Testament (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 1:18-20).

In conclusion, His promise of power is more than adequate for every thing we need, in order to press back the kingdom of darkness and advance His Kingdom of light. *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever." Amen* (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Truly He has called and commissioned each one of us to exercise this power of the Kingdom, yet we are only able to do it as we accept the mercy of God and walk in the righteousness of God. These are the keys of the Kingdom that empower us to enter the fight and enforce God's victory on the Earth.

In the next chapter, we will discuss the inauguration of the Kingdom and what Jesus' Lordship really means.

CHAPTER THREE
THE INAUGURATION OF THE KINGDOM

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder…. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end; upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. —Isaiah 9:6-7

More Than a Baby

The rough ride to Bethlehem probably contributed to the onset of labor as the young Jewish girl and her betrothed husband made their way into the small and overcrowded village for the Roman census. Fortunately, the innkeeper saw their dilemma and made accommodations in his stable for the young couple. Little did he know that the King of the universe had come under his roof.

The birth was probably not easy for the young mother or the child. Though once clothed in glory, this infant had relinquished heaven's privileges in His quest to rescue humankind. Like all other women who give birth, Mary probably had to push with all her strength, as if the God of the universe could not be born without her help. With the final push, her labor was over. The Messiah had arrived—the Son of God—umbilically tied to a humble and obedient Jewish girl. And so, with hardly a notice, the King of the Kingdom had arrived.

On that first Christmas day, God stepped into the stream of fallen humanity. That event, which was almost completely unobserved, inaugurated a phenomenal restoration of dominion that God had intended for humanity from the foundation of time.

This almost unnoticed beginning marked a shift of dispensational proportions. Yet with amazing detail, the event had been prophesied throughout the sacred Scriptures. It had been planned from the foundation of the world.

And the final result of Christ's birth and the inauguration of His Kingdom had

also been carefully planned and foretold. In a vision, Daniel viewed the actual enthronement of Christ as the King of that Kingdom.

> *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* (Daniel 7:13-14).

However, many Christians have misunderstood the reality of Christ's enthronement. Part of the problem is the lack of understanding regarding exactly what happened at Christ's first appearing, when Jesus, as a man, was enthroned as Lord over all creation. In the Old Testament, the term Lord refers to a word that comes from the root word meaning "to rule; sovereign, controller, master, owner."

Thus, throughout the Old Testament we find the clear declaration that there is only one Lord and God. He is the Lord of Heaven. He is the Lord who ruled over the flood. He ruled sovereignly, as King over all His creation, including the expanse of the galaxies; the entire realm of the heavenly hosts; the domain of fallen angels, whose fate is already sealed; the domain of the Earth, encompassing the ecosystems of the Earth, the plants, and the animals.

This, however, did not include the domain of the human heart. That domain had been betrayed to the enemy through the fall of humanity. Mankind had become enslaved to sin; we could not choose.

So, while God ruled sovereignly over all His creation, this one domain had, for a time, eluded His Lordship. (And even that happened by sovereign permission.) That domain was the heart and volition of people, including the world system created by people, which people had, in turn, betrayed to the evil one.

Enter Jesus! We find Jesus introduced and referred to as Lord close to 3,000 times in the New Testament. Jesus demonstrated His Lordship—His rulership over creation—by turning water to wine and multiplying bread and fish. He demonstrated power over the elements when He commanded peace to the wind and waves. He exerted authority over demons and the domain of darkness, and even over sickness and disease.

Where Jesus rules, demons flee, sickness is healed, and captives are set free. Over and over again when Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom are mentioned

together in Scripture, those things were happening. And, of course, there are many other characteristics of His reign besides power and authority over the works of darkness, such as righteousness, peace, and joy.

The Scripture indicates that, through His coming, Jesus bought back that one last lost domain, thus establishing Himself as Lord of all once and for all, which now gives the conclusion of the matter.

This final dimension of His Lordship is clearly stated in Acts 2:36:

> *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

He is Lord of all, and He rules out of Zion. But His Kingdom has also been likened to leaven, which slowly and subtly invades and infiltrates the entire loaf of bread. The Kingdom is come wherever Jesus is given rule, and that rule is eventual and inevitable. That is why, when Jesus becomes Lord of our lives, the Kingdom has come to our lives. Where Jesus is Lord in the Church, the Kingdom of God has come to the Church. Where Jesus is Lord of our eating habits, our financial dealings, our relationships, and so forth, there the Kingdom has come.

His Kingdom is inevitable. We are all destined to acknowledge it by the confession of our tongues and the bending of our knees. The fact is that everyone will acknowledge Him as Lord. The choice each one has is whether to do so willingly now, for which there is great benefit, or to do so under duress later, at the Final Judgment. Nevertheless, He is Lord! Glory to the King!

Yet the Lordship of Jesus Christ is apparently one of the most neglected or least understood aspects of Jesus. Scripture points to the fact that a belief about Jesus as Savior is not the same as a surrender to Jesus as Lord. In fact, one very grave problem within western Christianity has become an easy believism that is void of repentance and Lordship. It is characterized by faith without repentance, salvation without sanctification, and mental assent without life-changing surrender.

It gives rise to a Church without even mention of a Kingdom. In our zeal to be theologically proper regarding the grand theme of grace, modern Christianity has often been guilty of presenting a gospel of faith without Lordship, a cheap grace that’s not really grace but licentiousness (licentiousness is “the absence of restraint; indecency, wantonness”). Jude noted this same problem in his short epistle:

> *For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 4).*

This "grace" is justification of sin without repentance on the part of the sinner. It is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. It is Church membership without Church discipline, communion without confession, and faith without action. It gives us a Church without even mention of a Kingdom. From it comes the desire for Jesus as Savior but not as Lord—the expectation that He would save us but not rule over our lives.

Christ gave all for us and expects nothing less in return. Our relationship with Him is the treasure in a field, for which a man sells all he has to purchase, or the costly pearl a man gives all he has to acquire (see Matthew 13:45,46). It is the call of Jesus for which a disciple leaves his nets, forsakes all, and follows. Such a gospel demands total surrender. It says "If you receive me as Lord, I will save you." It is costly because it costs us our lives, but is redemption because, in exchange, we gain that which is true life, that which is eternal.

This final dimension of His Lordship is clearly stated in Acts 2:36: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

Two thousand years ago a baby was born, but He is much more than a baby. He is the King of an eternal, inexorable Kingdom.

In the next chapter, we will talk about the ever expanding nature of this Kingdom that Jesus established.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE EVER-INCREASING KINGDOM

> *Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.…* — Isaiah 9:7

In the prophetic Book of Daniel, God revealed to the prophet an outline of history represented by a towering statue. This statue prophetically unveiled the four world empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—as well as a fifth modified version of the Roman Empire with ten toes. Historically, this has been identified as the ten Roman provinces of Augustus Caesar, who ruled from 27 BC to AD 14. In Daniel's vision, the four empires are struck and cast down by a small stone: "… *And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth"* (Daniel 2:35). As Daniel's vision continues, he further learns that this stone, which grows into a mountain, is none other than the Kingdom of God:

> *And in the days of these kings* [during the period of the Roman Empire] *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* (Daniel 2:44).

As we mentioned in the last chapter, in a later vision, Daniel also sees the actual enthronement of Christ as the King of that Kingdom (see Daniel 7:13-14).

Some have assumed this is a description of the second coming of Christ, but to assume that is to ignore the clear fact that Daniel's vision said this would occur during the time of the Roman Empire. What is clear is that this prophetic vision was the inauguration of the Kingdom of God during the first advent of Christ. This is further reinforced during the discourse Jesus delivered to His disciples just before His death, resurrection, and ascension, in answer to their questions about His coming (see Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

In that discourse, Jesus used some of the same prophetic language and wording from Daniel about this event, clearly linking His first advent to this inauguration

of His Kingdom. We can further identify the specific time of this enthronement/ inauguration by Jesus' own words, when He specified that this would happen during the disciples' lifetime. *"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place"* (Mark 13:30).

Jesus Preached the Gospel of the Kingdom

The message that Jesus preached was the *"the gospel of the kingdom,"* which included *"healing every sickness and every disease among the people"* (Matthew 9:35).

As we've mentioned before, a simple definition of a kingdom is "a domain where a king rules." The Kingdom of God implies a King, and Jesus is that King.

Not only did Jesus preach the Kingdom of God, but He also instructed His disciples to preach the Kingdom (see Luke 9:1-2). In fact, Jesus connected the accomplishment of the Church's mission to the full declaration of the gospel of the Kingdom to all the nations, as a witness, before the end would come (see Matthew 24:14).

At His ascension, Jesus said to His disciples, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me"* (Matthew 28:18).

The implications of that are staggering. His supreme rule extends over all. He rules over space. He rules over time and eternity. He rules over nature. And, as we have discussed, although there are pockets of rebellion currently remaining in the hearts of people, His rule shall eventually and inevitably extend to every individual.

The Progressive Restoration of the Kingdom

Although it is evident from Scripture that the Kingdom of God among humanity was inaugurated at the first advent of Christ, it is also evident that the Church, for the most part, is not experiencing the fullness of the Kingdom. But the Bible also speaks of a progressive restoration of dominion that we are to experience before Christ's return.

The apostle Peter made this very clear in his exhortation at Solomon's porch in Acts Chapter 3, after he healed a lame man.

He declared:

> *But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began* (Acts 3:18-21).

Much of the Body of Christ has often taken a stance of waiting and longing for Jesus to return. But here we see that Jesus will remain in heaven until certain things are done. In reality, it is He who is waiting and longing for us to finish the work He told us to do; then He will return.

He is not waiting for the Body of Christ to become sickly, anemic, and in need of rescue before He returns; He is waiting for all things to be restored that were spoken by the mouth of the prophets. He is waiting for a Church that will be glorious, and without spot or wrinkle, not one that He has to put on life support when He comes for her (see Eph. 5:25-27). From these Scriptures, it seems clear that Christ will not come back until the conditions are met and even that our preparations can hasten the day of His return. With this in mind, an objective survey of the progress of the Church should give us hope.

We are living in a most incredible season of spiritual history. The Christian Church is right now witnessing a harvest of souls of historic proportions, far greater than any of the early apostles ever witnessed. We are living in a season of great harvest. Yet unfortunately, many Christians in the western world aren’t even aware of it.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is uniting in unprecedented ways for global prayer, fasting, and world evangelism initiatives. The zeal of God is arising within His people and crushing His enemies, and the Church is bursting with a prophetic expectation of a great worldwide awakening and the dawning of a new era of a Church that is full of the glory of God, built on proper apostolic/prophetic foundations, and living with a full declaration and demonstration of the power and love of the gospel.

Jesus set in motion a Kingdom that is still progressing and being established more and more each day. *“Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end…”* (Isaiah 9:7). It will continue to progress until it has fulfilled every one of these prophecies:

*For the earth will be filled with the **knowledge of the LORD** as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9).*

*For the earth will be filled with the **knowledge of the glory of the LORD** as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).*

*But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with **the glory of the LORD*** (Numbers 14:21).

Considering this, it is important to understand that Jesus set up His Kingdom upon His first vi-sit. Many have been taught that Jesus set up the Church Age and that we are not currently living in the Kingdom Age, but that the Church Age continues until Jesus' return, at which point He will initiate the Kingdom Age. Scripture does not support this point of view in any way; Jesus clearly brought His Kingdom (see Matt. 4:17) and sent His disciples to preach the gospel of the Kingdom (see Matt. 10:7), not the gospel of the Church Age. The whole concept of a Church Age cannot be found in Scripture. Rather, the Kingdom arrived in the first century when the rock cut without hands, Jesus, crashed into the Roman Empire, and it has been growing ever since.

Statistical Proof

The Gospel is reaching even the remotest places in the world, and Christianity is experiencing phenomenal growth globally. In fact, worldwide, more than 80,000 people are being born again daily. That adds up to more than a half million people who are becoming Christians every week. The tiny seed that came into the Earth in that little nation of Israel has grown to permeate the Earth. Christianity is, in fact, the largest, most influential force of humanity in the world today.

Certainly, we are not saying our world is perfect or that global peace and utopia are just around the corner. Until Jesus' return, the struggle between light and dark will continue. Difficult times of war, famine, disease, and poverty may yet happen in the future, and during such times, people are often capable of the most inhumane acts. We are not denying the reality that life is sometimes tragic and excruciatingly painful. But we also want to highlight the definite reality that, though it is not anywhere near perfect living here on Earth, it is consistently becoming morally, ethically, and spiritually better. We must be watchful and hard at work, for we still have much to accomplish before Christ's return, but we must do this with the understanding that we are gaining ground, not losing it. The increase of God's government and peace is truly without end.

Many of you may have been stretched by the statements you just read. You may need to read them a few more times to grasp the shift in thinking required of you. But when you are ready to be stretched some more, here are some additional enlightening statistics.

The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2.3 billion as of 2011, representing 33 percent of the world population.[1]

In his book *Mega Shift, Igniting Spiritual Power* author James Rutz points out that when the Spirit was first poured out on the early Church, 3,000 people were saved in one day. That was amazing. Back then, it was a huge number. However, today approximately 3,000 people get saved, somewhere in the world, every 54 minutes! The math is almost overwhelming. He further states that until 1960, western evangelicals outnumbered non-western (Latino, black, and Asian) evangelicals two to one. In 2000, non-western evangelicals had surpassed westerners four to one.

According to Rutz, often these numbers happen through large events, such as the crusade that Reinhard Bonnke held in Lagos, Nigeria, in November 2000. During those six days and nights, almost six million people attended, and 3.4 million registered decisions to follow Christ, over one million of them being on the final night. One important element of such events is the widespread healing of all kinds of physical deformities, diseases, and illnesses through the power of the Holy Spirit. At this event, over 1,000 physicians were present to examine people and confirm healings. Bonnke also had 30,000 ushers and spent the six months prior training 200,000 counselors to assist the many converts.

Such massive influxes of new believers are not isolated events, but are increasingly becoming common occurrences. Some have even estimated the advent of a billion new converts within ten years.

Rutz goes on to say:

> “From our vantage point in North America and Europe, where church membership is going nowhere, this sounds like a cooked-up fantasy, but it is true. This is the biggest mega shift in history. Can you think of any time when over a billion people eagerly changed their lives and loyalties in one generation?” Looking at the statistics, we can clearly see that if growth continues at this rate, whole nations will experience transformation on all levels. In fact, as Rutz predicts, “We are in the early stages of a total

transformation of our planet."[2]

Christianity today, unlike a century ago, is truly a global faith.

Here are some more global Christian statistics:[3]

Since 1900 the number of Latin American Christians has grown by an incredible 877 percent. Three of the top 10 countries in Christian population are in the Americas (the United States, Brazil, and Mexico). Two are in Europe (Russia, and Germany), two are in the Asia-Pacific region (the Philippines, and China), and three are in sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, D R Congo and Ethiopia), reflecting Christianity's global reach. Christians are so far-flung and geographically widespread, in fact, that no single continent or region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity.[4]

A century ago, this was not the case. In 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe, where the bulk of Christians had been for a millennium, according to historical estimates by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.[5] Today, while about a quarter of all Christians live in Europe (26%), and more than a third now are in the Americas (37%); about one in every four Christians lives in sub-Saharan Africa (24%), and about one-in-eight is found in Asia and the Pacific (13%).[6]

Africa has been the most stunning area of Christian growth over the past century where there were relatively few Christians at the beginning of the 20th century. The Christian population in sub-Saharan Africa climbed from nine percent in 1910 to sixty-three percent in 2010, or from 8.5 million to 516 million during that time.

The Asia-Pacific population of Christians jumped from 27 million in 1910 to 285 million in that same time frame. In 1950, China had one million believers; by 1980, it had 40 million; and by 2010, it had 75 million.[7]

Another astonishing growth spurt, measured typologically, has been among Pentecostals and Charismatics: 981 thousand in 1910 to 612 million in 2011, with an average of 37,000 new adherents every day - the fastest growth in two millennia of Christian history.[8]

The point of these statistics is clear. When we remove our tinted lenses in order to see what really is happening now, we can clearly see that God's Kingdom is

markedly advancing.

The Time of the End

Of course, this should be no surprise to us. Thousands of years ago, the Lord spoke to the prophet Daniel of these days. *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased* (Daniel 12:4).

Here Daniel is told two specific aspects of our day. First, Daniel heard *"Many shall run to and fro.."* The fastest people had ever traveled prior to 1900 was thirty-five miles per hour. At that pace, one hundred years ago, a twenty-mile trip was a full day's journey. Now that same journey can be accomplished in less than thirty minutes. So much has changed. Global travel is now taken for granted, and communications are at an all time high. Second, Daniel heard, "… *And knowledge shall be increased."* This too has come true in our day in ways our ancestors could have hardly imagined. On one thin flash drive for my computer, I have stored over 220 resources, such as Bibles, commentaries, theologies, word studies, maps, histories, dictionaries, biographies, and famous quotes. Truly this prophecy is coming true in our day.

We are in times of restoration, and we are part of an ever-increasing Kingdom.

If we understand that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated with the first advent of Christ and that it has been, from that point, an ever-increasing Kingdom, we will recognize that our job is to hasten His return through fulfilling the things He has for us to do—advancing the Kingdom and bringing all under the dominion of the Lordship of Christ Jesus.

Global Revival

An unbiased survey of the prophetic Scriptures seems to indicate that before the second coming of Christ, the vast majority of Jews and Gentiles will be converted to the Christian faith. The Scriptures actually indicate that an unprecedented global revival will precede the second coming of Christ. One such Scripture is Amos 9:11-12:

> *On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," says the Lord who does this thing.*

Beyond that, the historic census also demonstrates an ever-increasing Kingdom through a continuous growth of the numbers of believers throughout the centuries since the time of Christ. While the numbers show that the population of planet Earth has certainly grown, they also show a continuous increase of the percentage of that population that is Christian throughout the centuries.[9]

At AD 100, 1/360th of the world population was Christian.

By AD 1000, 1/220th of the world population was Christian.

By 1500, the percentage of Christians rose to 1/69th of the world wide population. By 1900, with a world population of slightly over one billion, Christianity had risen to 1/27th of the population.

By 1990, the percentage of Christians rose to 1/7th of the world wide population.

As was stated previously, it is now estimated that there are seven billion people on planet Earth and that a full one third of them (one out of every three people worldwide) are followers of Jesus!

A Faith-filled Future Focus

Discovering the optimistic view of the end-times is one of the most exciting and wonderful bits of news that the modern Christian can hear. Examining the Scriptures and the historic facts should provoke us to look to the future with a faith-filled focus and a confident expectation. This is important because how we view the future has a powerful effect on what we do today. We all have three blocks of time in our lives—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. What sets some apart from the others is how we choose to focus on those three blocks of time.

Many people begin with the present but spend their time comparing it to the past. This can lead to living in the present but longing for the past and fearing the future—in other words, a life of cynicism, skepticism, and anxiety.

On the other hand, those who have a faith-filled future focus look at the present but view it in light of the future. Those who are focused on the future and believe what God says about it may appreciate the past and may even feel like they are enduring the present while anticipating the future. Along these lines, the Bible teaches us, as Christians, to have hope, not despair; to expect victory and dominion for the gospel, not flight and defeat. How we view the future dramatically shapes our present goals, our ethical behavior, and our sense of God’s purpose for our lives, as well as the job description of the Church.

God has declared that He will have a glorious end-time Church in the Earth. God will have a latter House that will be more glorious than the former. God will cause His glory to cover the Earth as the waters cover the sea. God will raise up the fallen tabernacle of David and cause the ends of the Earth to come to the glory of its rising. Great boldness, faith, and optimism should arise in the hearts of believers when we realize we are part of an unstoppable Kingdom and have inherited a grand prophetic mission in our generation, according to the Scriptures and in accordance with God’s inexorable purposes.

In the next chapter, we will discuss the transcendent, spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God.

Endnotes

1 www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0146.htm

2 The statistical information in this section is paraphrased from James Rutz, Mega Shift, Igniting Spiritual Power (Colorado Springs, CO: Empowerment Press, 2005), 25-27.

3 www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0146.htm

4 www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-exec.aspx

5 www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/Center-for-the-Study-of-Global-Christianity.cfm Christianity.cfm

6 www.pewforum.org/Christian/Global-Christianity-exec.aspx

7 Ibid.

8 www.catholiceducation.org/articles/facts/fm0146.htm

9 The 1990 report of the Statistics Task Force of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRANSCENDENT NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

> *Jesus answered, "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

The Kingdom is here, and the Kingdom is now, and the Kingdom is continuously increasing. Or we could actually say, "Kingdom now…but not all the way…but on its way." The conundrum is that we know, from our exploration of Scripture, that there is a fuller expression of the Kingdom of God on Earth than most of the Body of Christ has been experiencing so far.

But we also know, from Church history and contemporary experience, that these experiences are increasing and that the corporate faith of the Body of Christ is growing and apprehending more and more of what has been described in the prophetic Scriptures regarding the era of the Kingdom rule of Christ on the Earth (cf. Psalm 72; 110:1-4; Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 11:1-11; Ezekiel 34, Daniel 2, etc.) As we have stated before, the Kingdom of God started growing at Jesus' first coming and will continue to grow until it culminates in His final return.

Jesus explained it in this way in these two parables:

> *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of 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 the greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*
>
> *Another parable spoke he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened* (Matthew 13:31-33 KJV).

The Kingdom will continue to grow until His glory and knowledge fill the whole

Earth. This is exactly what Isaiah prophesied—"

> *…For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of The Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).*

This is not a promise for the future alone; this increasing expansion is a present reality.

Meanwhile, Jesus is currently sitting on the throne, waiting until all His enemies are made into His footstool. These three verses clearly show the progression:

> *When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and **sat down** at God's right hand (Mark 16:19 TLB).*
>
> *But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time **he waits** for his enemies to be made his footstool (Hebrews 10:12-13 NIV).*
>
> *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put **all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death** (1 Corinthians 15:24-26 NIV).*

Jesus has been sitting at the right hand of God for more than 2,000 years waiting on us. The assignment of the Church for the last 2,000 years has been to crush satan under our feet—"*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"* (Romans 16:20a)—thus putting Jesus' enemies under His feet. As His delegated authorities, by crushing satan under our feet, we are placing him under Jesus' feet. In this way, we are part of a progressive destruction of the demonic kingdom, which will continue until death, the final enemy, is destroyed.

In the Spirit

Lest we read these Scriptures and think we are to force some kind of ecclesiastical dominion upon others, as some have attempted to do, it is also important to realize that the Kingdom of God is "in the spirit." (Romans 14:17) While we can be certain that the realm of the spirit will affect every other dimension, the fact that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual reality tells us some important things about how it works.

Jesus explained this clearly to the governmental authorities of His day when He said to Pilate:

"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.

"Pilate therefore said to 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 18:36,-37).

The unseen and transcendent nature of the Kingdom is also evident in Jesus' response to the question of Pharisees (ecclesiastical authorities) about when the Kingdom of God would come: He answered them and said,

"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

He further baffled the religious leader Nicodemus with His mystical description of the Kingdom's spiritual, or other-worldly, nature:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:3-6).

The apostle Paul also brought clarity to this reality when he wrote, *"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption"* (1 Corinthians 15:50).

We must see that Jesus' Kingdom dominion reflects the concept that He is currently reigning, but His reign is a spiritual reality that is increasingly being reflected from within the hearts and lives of believers into every area and sphere of society and creation around us.

However, it is not solely limited to what is reflected from within the hearts and lives of believers. At numerous times described in Scripture, the unseen spiritual

realities broke into the realm of the natural or physical world. One such incident happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, where the glory of the Lord descended both as a cloud and as a bright light upon Jesus.

> *[Jesus] took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him (Luke 9:28-32 NIV).*

Of this instance, it might be said that the Kingdom of God was present all along, but that a breakthrough of the unseen realm of the Kingdom into the realm of the disciple's physical perceptions occurred.

We read in other places in the Bible that Jesus demonstrated the Kingdom of God when He exhibited signs and wonders, going about changing hearts through pardoning sin, healing the sick, performing miracles, casting out demons, and raising the dead (see Luke 7:21-23).

Author Phil Mason, in his groundbreaking book *Quantum Glory,* described it this way:

> The Kingdom ministry of Jesus resulted in powerful physical experiences everywhere He went. Every single healing was a powerful physical event. But it was not uncommon to see people shaking violently, trembling and weeping at Jesus' feet. The most common phenomenon when the glory showed up was for people to fall facedown. Peter, James and John heard the audible voice of God and "they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." (Matthew 17:6) A woman reached out and touched the hem of Jesus garment and was instantly healed. "Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet, trembling with fear." (Mark 5:33 NIV)
>
> Intense physical effects were the hallmark of Jesus' Kingdom ministry. A demonised boy was brought to Jesus to be healed. When the boy saw Jesus, "immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth." (Mark 9:20) One of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus "returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and

> fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks." (Luke 17:15-16) When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, He said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am!" Now when He said to them, "I am!" they drew back and fell to the ground." (John 18:46)
>
> We could imagine Jesus travelling the countryside, moving from village to village, leaving a pile of bodies on the ground weeping and trembling because they had just encountered the glorious power of God.
>
> When the glory of God is revealed, there are always physical manifestations. The glory becomes visible as physical infirmities and deformities are instantly healed. Withered hands suddenly grow back! New eyeballs appear! Deaf ears are physically opened! The cripples stand up and walk! Leprosy instantly disappears! The dead are raised up from their graves! This is spectacular stuff! There is no greater pleasure than participating in the Kingdom works of Jesus."[1]

Not only did Jesus perform the physical manifestations of the Kingdom, but He also trained His disciples to do likewise (see Matthew 10:7-8) and told them to train their disciples to do likewise (see Matthew 28:18-20). Then He said, *"Truly, truly, I say unto you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go to My Father"* (John 14:12).

Clearly, the Kingdom of God is a supernatural Kingdom that transcends our natural existence. We, as believers in Jesus, were supernaturally birthed into that Kingdom, and the Scriptures indicate that, as a result, these supernatural tools were made available to us so that we can live the life and do the works of that Kingdom. We are even told in several places to earnestly desire spiritual gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1), and whole sections of Scripture are actually devoted to instruction on the proper use of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit for every believer.

God has called us as followers of Jesus to be supernatural expressions of His supernatural Kingdom. As believers, we are called by God to function *"…in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). This is what these phenomenal miracles were—demonstrations and manifestations of the Kingdom of God. Jesus exercised powerful authority over nature, sickness, disease, and the kingdom of darkness. But the point must be made again that His

authority was spiritual in nature, rather than being an ecclesiastical or geo-political authority. It is on this point that we must get specific and pragmatic about what we can do to advance the Kingdom.

Advancing the Kingdom

One of the profound mysteries of the Kingdom of God is that God has limited His intervention into human affairs to a very amazing trigger—He waits for us to invite Him to do so. We must discover that there are things we cannot do without God and that He will not do without us. Thus, if we want to cooperate with God in His agenda for Kingdom advancement on Earth, we need to recognize the key roll prayer has for Kingdom advancement. In the beginning of the Lord's model prayer, in Matthew 6:9-10, Jesus states:

> *"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

Here we see two important components of prayer that ignite a release of power. The first is the power of praise, adoration, and worship, and the second is petition to invite His Kingdom to come and His will to be done.

One facet of real worship is in our yielding to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, King of the Kingdom. Wherever there is that kind of true worship, we see a release of a dimension of authority that is characteristic of the Kingdom. Heaven's authority visits Earth. Restored dimensions of worship release restored dimensions of authority, out of which Kingdom order is released on the Earth.

So we see that it is prayer that fuels the fire of God's manifested glory in the Earth. It is through prayer that we experience divine intervention into human affairs. It is by believing prayer that mountains are moved, sinners are saved, the sick are healed, and revival fires are rekindled. It is also by prayer that the human heart is transformed. Prayer is a must if we want to move beyond the realm of human strength and initiative and into the realm of the supernatural power and blessing of God.

Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords, has made us ambassadors of His Kingdom. He desires to rule through us. He desires to grant apostolic authority—His rule—to His Church. He wants to extend His scepter of righteousness through us, and that scepter is bestowed and utilized as we take up the ministry of prayer and intercession. Then, through the authority of righteousness, we will reign on the Earth— extending His rule as *"the fullness of*

Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23).

So to the King we say:

> *You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth* (Revelation 5:8-10).

As children of God, we were born again into His family. This means we have dominion in our genetic code. As children of God, we are destined to rule. We are destined to be kings and priests.

We are called to submit to the irrepressible King and His unshakable Kingdom—and then to participate in the amazing privilege of cooperating with Him in the advancing of His inevitable, inexorable Kingdom in the Earth.

Let us continue to be a people of worship, devoted to prayer, that we might be instrumental in seeing the advance of God's Kingdom and the implementation of His will on Earth. In prayer, we must contend for His Kingdom to come and for His will to be done on Earth as it is in heaven.

In the next chapter, we will look at a system of beliefs that has misplaced the Kingdom, casting it as a distant future reality rather than as our present experience.

Endnote

1. Phil Mason, *Quantum Glory: The Science of Heaven Invading Earth* (Maricopa, AZ: XPPublishing, 2010), pg #282

CHAPTER SIX
THE KINGDOM HIJACKED

"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand;"
(Mark 1:15) ~ John the Baptist

Unfortunately, many modern Christian have been taught that the Kingdom is reserved for some distant future era, instead of being a present reality. This teaching is relatively new, whereas throughout history the Church has believed that Jesus established the Kingdom with His arrival and that it has been growing since. The idea that the Kingdom is not here yet is named dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism was created by a Plymouth Brethren evangelist named John Nelson Darby in the 1830s, and it was popularized by the C.I. Scofield Study Bible, published initially in 1909. It gained more popularity toward the end of the twentieth century through bestselling books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the fictional "Left Behind" series.

Dispensationalism as a system divides God's dealings with humanity into certain time periods. It goes something like this:

The Dispensational System

The first dispensation of the Church Age was a dispensation of miracles. This dispensation was when God gave supernatural attestation to the writing of the Scriptures. This dispensation ended with the closing of the canon of Scripture (with the Book of Revelation) and the dying off of the initial apostles. (Author's note: This causes a theological conflict because all twelve of the original apostles would have died by AD 100, yet the Bible was not officially canonized until AD 325 at the Nicene Council. This creates a confusing gap, and there is nothing in the Bible that points to the ceasing of miracles before Jesus' final return.)

The remainder of the Church Age consists of a downward spiral toward apostasy, also known as the great falling away. This downhill spiral is reflected

in seven phases of the Church Age, reflected by the letters to the seven churches written in Revelation 2-3, hypothesizing that the final condition of the Church will be characterized by the church in Laodicea, which was described as *"wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"* (Revelation 3:17). (Author's note: Dispensationalists claim to read the Bible "literally," yet when it comes to prophetic passages like this one, they typically stretch the meaning way outside the bounds of any sensible interpretation.)

At the end of the Church Age, when the Church is at its weakest point, an antichrist ruler will surface who will try to turn being a Christian into a living hell. But just before that, there will be a secret partial return of Christ during which Christians disappear in an event dubbed "the rapture." (Author's note: There isn't anything in the Bible about a partial second coming, and this teaching was not believed before John Darby created it.)

The secret rapture doctrine takes several different forms. Some believe all Christians will disappear while others believe only certain groups within the Body of Christ will go. One version suggests that the overcomers (those walking in victory at the moment of His return) will get rescued. Others believe only those who are ready and expectant of His appearing will get to go. Another variation (popular among Pentecostal groups) teaches that only those who are baptized in the Holy Spirit and who speak in tongues will be included.

This rapture event signals a seven-year dispensation commonly called the Great Tribulation, when evil totally triumphs in the Earth. (Author's note: Considering the fact that there is not even one seven-year period in the Book of Revelation, this belief comes from a misunderstanding of Daniel 9:24-27.)

At the end of that time, Jesus will return again, along with the group He raptured, but this time He will set up His throne in Jerusalem and initiate the dispensation of the rule of God on Earth for a one thousand-year period called the Kingdom Age or the millennium.

Some dispensational literalists say that the physical Jesus will be ruling out of His headquarters in Jerusalem, along with all of the immortalized Christians, but at the same time there will be regular mortal humans on the Earth. However, everybody will be tame because the devil will be locked up during that time. Some also contend that the ancient mode of ceremonial temple worship will be re-implemented, with red heifers and blood sacrifices being offered in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

At the end of that one thousand-year era, the devil will be let out for one last attempt at a coup before he is thrown into hell with all the people he sways in his last big hurrah.

At that point the final phase of Christ's return will happen where all the dead are resurrected and all the nations and peoples (except for the Christians) will be judged before the great white throne judgment of God.

The Fruit

Not surprisingly, this belief system has reaped some pretty bad fruit. One of the worst examples is cessationism, which teaches that all things supernatural ceased with the death of the first century apostles and are now reserved for the future millennium Kingdom Age.

Cessationism has produced a people who think the reign of God and His glorious Kingdom are not a present reality, but are instead reserved for some distant future era. This theology keeps the Church from building the Kingdom of God and bringing heaven to Earth. This has been particularly troubling to Penticostal/Charismatic groups who have had to try and reconcile their dispensationalism with their experiences.

If people do not understand the present implications of the Kingdom of God and the Lordship of Christ Jesus, how will they find motivation or interest in bringing the Lordship of Jesus into every area of life beyond a personal salvation? Yet, we are called to impact every aspect of culture and civilization, including relationships, family, business, education, economics, government, civil law, media, and entertainment.

It is easy to sit back and expect to escape from a spiraling deterioration of humanity through a partial rapture; the new goal becomes to simply get people saved while ignoring Christ's commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to disciple nations. As the dispensationalist would say, "We are simply polishing brass on a sinking ship."

This doctrine sabotages any real hope or expectation for renewal and revival. According to this view, any time a new outpouring of revival occurs it is just stalling off the inevitable deterioration of the Church that needs to happen before Jesus comes back. It consequently creates a mindset that celebrates bad news as a sign of the times and a necessary requirement for the return of Jesus.

In an excerpt from his latest book, *Turn the World Upside Down*, Dr. Michael

Maiden, put it this way:

> Even though Jesus could have called legions of angels to subdue the earth and enforce the Kingdom of Heaven upon every person of every nation, His plan was to use people like you and me to spread the good news of the Kingdom. This is in stark contrast to the dispensational view of establishment of God's Kingdom on earth which anticipates a failed church, and last minute airborne rescue, and a divine army to enforce the Kingdom upon the nations.[1]

This version of eschatology, which is rooted in the belief that Satan wins in the seven-year Great Tribulation, teaches people to be fatalistic and to assume that an antichrist is about to emerge in the Earth and make them accept a tattoo or computer chip in order to buy and sell. It re-empowers a disempowered devil (see Luke 10:19; Colossians 2:15)! Further, it has contributed to a fear that a vast and comprehensive worldwide conspiracy of evil looms all around us, sometimes called the revived Roman Empire, poised and ready to take over the government, the economy, and even the apostate churches.

From this perspective, the Church's goal, then, is reduced to getting everybody saved so they can get in on the big escape, all the while ignoring Christ's directive to disciple nations.

Unfortunately, dispensationalists retreat behind the walls of the Church instead of moving out to be salt and light to the culture around us—which is exactly what Christ exhorted us to do.

Johnny Enlow, author of The Seven Mountain Prophecy and The Seven Mountain Mantle writes:

> I believe our Rapture mentality has directly played into our under-caring for the well-being of the earth and for social injustice in general. Our subconscious mentality is that problems are good because they are signs of Jesus coming soon. Other than seeking decisions for Christ, we have not addressed social ills because our hope in the Rapture is predicated on a societal collapse of some nature or other. Many don't want to fix the injustices on the mountain of economy because they have believed the lie that it's all going to end up as a one-world economy anyway. In other words, the sooner we're faced with the economic mark of the beast, the sooner we'll realize our hope of the Rapture. We are consciously or subconsciously expecting the Antichrist, the beast, the false prophet, and

> the one-world government to ultimately mess up any social repairing we do anyway, so why bother? But that old wineskin of thought must be eradicated.[2]

Also thoroughly intertwined with the belief system of dispensationalism is the view that this world is getting worse and worse, that it is literally balancing on the brink of destruction, and that this must happen as a sign of Jesus' imminent return.

We hear statements like, "All hell will break loose on planet Earth; a furious time of pain, mayhem, and agony for millions is on the horizon." Such dire warnings permeate the teachings and belief systems of the popular dispensationalist teachers in the Body of Christ. And certainly, if we focus on what the television newscasts choose to emphasize and bring into our homes every day, things can look pretty dismal.

Some would have us believe that humanity is worse than it has ever been and that we are sliding down a slippery slope toward hell in a hand-basket. Is that really true?

Harold Eberle, in his book *Victorious Eschatology,* points out that an unprejudiced review of history will give us quite a different perspective on the deterioration of our current culture.

> Let's compare our world today with what the world was like in the past. Start by taking a snapshot of what life was like in the USA, 200 years ago. In the early 1800s there were about five million immigrants in the United States, but 20% of them were slaves. That alone reveals a great evil, but consider what else was happening. The age of sexual consent in many states was nine or ten years old. Abortion was legal throughout most of the 19th century and records tell us that more than one fifth of all pregnancies were aborted, with Michigan having the highest rate of 34%. Alcoholism was much higher than it is today. Prostitution was also higher, with New York having approximately one prostitute for every 64 men; and the mayor of Savannah estimated his city had about one in 39.
>
> "Thousands of people were moving out west and most of them had no churches to attend until years after they had settled and communities had developed. Native Americans were being forced off their lands and in some cases whole tribes were being murdered and exterminated. Thousands of Chinese were being brought into the west coast of the US to serve as forced

> laborers. When gold was discovered in regions of the West, gold rushes occurred, which produced some of the most vile and dangerous communities in the world. Many people in the West carried guns for protection because murder was commonplace. Throughout the US, women could not vote, and men could legally beat their wives as long as they did not maim or kill them. Things were not better morally, ethically or spiritually."[3]

As we can see from this quote, the moral and ethical climate was clearly much worse in years past than it is today. If we step even further back in time and survey the world around the time that Jesus came as a baby, we find that the world was even worse back then.

In those days, the Roman Empire was the dominant culture, centered in Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa. Its culture has been rightly called a moral cesspool. In Italy, approximately forty percent of the population were slaves. Within its leadership and throughout the empire, homosexuality, incest, and other forms of moral depravity were commonplace, especially between a master and slave. Most of the Roman and Greek people worshipped many gods, such as Jupiter, Juno and Neptune.

Beyond the Roman Empire, people in Africa, Asia, and Australia worshipped nature, demons, or their own dead ancestors. Cannibalism and other barbaric practices were common. In the Americas, millions worshipped blood thirsty "gods" to whom they offered human sacrifices, often numbering in the thousands in a single ceremony.

When Jesus came to Earth, only one tiny nation located in the Middle East had a revelation of the one true God and His moral standards, and even they were surrounded by nations given to child sacrifice, moral depravity, and grotesque sexual practices of god and goddess worship.[4]

In his book *The Christ Has Come,* Earnest H. Cook says of that period:

> Few people in these days have an adequate conception of the misery and degradation which were then the common lot of almost all mankind, owing to the monstrous wickedness of the times, the continual war, to the cruelties of political despotism and of everywhere-prevailing slavery[5]

Certainly many Christian preachers regularly rally the troops and motivate people to action by emphasizing the dire conditions of the world around us.

While this may be true, we must not lose site of the fact that we are gaining ground. Life on planet Earth is getting better. Jesus Christ is Lord, and the Kingdom of God is advancing.

Kris Vallotton, a well-known prophetic leader from Bethel Church in Redding, California, counters some of this belief with his "Eschatological Core Values":[6]

- I will not embrace an end-time worldview that re-empowers a disempowered devil.
- I will not accept an eschatology that takes away my children's future, and creates mindsets that undermine the mentality of leaving a legacy.
- I will not tolerate any theology that sabotages the clear command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations and the Lord's Prayer that earth would be like heaven.
- I will not allow any interpretation of the Scriptures that destroys hope for the nations and undermines our command to restore ruined cities
- I will not embrace an eschatology that changes the nature of a good God.
- I refuse to embrace any mindset that celebrates bad news as a sign of the times and a necessary requirement for the return of Jesus.
- I am opposed to any doctrinal position that pushes the promises of God into a time zone that can't be obtained in my generation and therefore takes away any responsibility I have to believe God for them in my lifetime.

How to Study Scripture

At this juncture, it is important to recognize our need to learn to accurately study Scripture, because the way we interpret it determines what we believe about our lives and our faith. The ancient Scriptures claim of themselves that they are the true inspired words of God Himself. About the importance of interpretation, the apostle Peter wrote this:

> *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB).

Likewise, the apostle Paul told his spiritual son Timothy, *"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed,*

accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 NASB).

Accurately handling the "Word of Truth" (commonly called the Bible) is essential to understanding and applying proper hermeneutics, or the principles of interpretation that we use to understand the Bible.

The strongest and most commonly accepted hermeneutics are Historical, Contextual, and Literary, which are defined as follows.

Historical: The history and culture surrounding the author is important to understand in order to aid in interpretation. The Bible was written over the course of approximately 1400 years; therefore, it is important to see the historical context in which a verse was used.

Contextual: A verse arbitrarily plucked out of context can be used to mean almost anything, including at times the opposite of the writer's original intention! We must look at who wrote, when they wrote, to whom they wrote, and the theme of the writing. This can also be called the Aerial approach, in that the student is metaphorically looking at the text from 10,000 feet in the air and trying to discern the topography of the whole section of Scripture rather than isolating one verse without context.

Literary: To read the Bible literally means to read it as literature. This means that there are different forms of speech employed, for example, Poetry, Song, Historical record, Genealogy, Allegory, Metaphor, Apocalyptic, Simile, and Hyperbole. When Jesus said to pluck out your eye (Mark 9:47), it is obvious that He was speaking in Hyperbole, but without hermeneutics, people could flatten the text and harm themselves (variations of this "flattened literalism" are taught by dispensationalism).

The Present Kingdom

A thorough survey of Scripture with proper hermeneutics will reveal that all of the provisions of the cross and the good of the Kingdom are available now, but they are pulled from the spiritual realm into the experiential realm through individual and corporate faith.

More specifically, through faith in Christ we have already passed from death into life; have already been healed by His stripes; have already been raised up with Him; and are already seated with Him in heavenly places. We already have dominion over sin, sickness and disease, and even nature itself, but we must activate those things by faith (see Ephesians 2:47; Colossians 2:11-16).

With this understanding, we can confidently and biblically assert that Christ currently reigns and that the Kingdom is now; at the same time, we also recognize that there is a continuous enlargement of its influence and manifestation that we can look forward to.

Conclusion

While some are quick to proclaim doom and gloom, the fact is that every one of the Kingdom benefits described in Scripture belongs to us now and is being progressively appropriated by faith. This is not to say we will not see troubles. I love the insight I recently heard on this subject, in answer to the question, "What about plagues, earthquakes, storms, war, and economic collapses?" Prophetic leader Johnny Enlow responded this way:

> Until the end, there will always be plagues, earthquakes, storms, wars and economic challenges. They are never intended to be a central story for those who are Kingdom advancers. Every crisis, disaster or chaotic situation will always be the greatest opportunity for Kingdom advancement. Every crisis that will ever come upon Planet Earth will have a pre-imbedded solution already placed there by our God in His rising sons and daughters. We will so understand this that it will be our custom to run to disasters and crisis and we will watch God do great things.[7]

It is not time to wallow in fear or some kind of fatalistic expectation of the darkness overtaking the light. Rather, it is time to recognize that our job is to hasten His return through fulfilling the tasks He has for us to do—restoring the Earth, advancing the Kingdom, and bringing all under the dominion of the Lordship of Christ Jesus. In fact, Jesus' parting words to His disciples were no accident; they hold great implications for this current age:

> *And 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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Now we can eagerly look forward to the Kingdom of God growing in the Earth!

Now we can eagerly look forward to the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of the prophets.

Now we can eagerly look forward to an unprecedented harvest of the Earth.

Now we can eagerly look forward to the glory of the Lord covering the Earth as the waters cover the sea.

In the next chapter, we will discuss three important events that are not part of the present Kingdom, but that will happen in the future.

Endnotes

1. Michael Maiden, *Turn The World Upside Down* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2011), pg #73

2. Johnny Enlow, *The Seven Mountain Mantle* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2009), pg #75.

3. Harold Eberle, Victorious Eschatology, 2nd edition (Yakima, WA: Worldcast Publishing; 2007), pg #87

4. Ibid, pg #89

5. Earnest Hampden Cook, *The Christ Has Come* (1895), xvi.

6. Kris Vallotton, “Eschatological Core Values,” (Jan. 27, 2002) Kris and Kathy Vallotton Ministries; www.kvministries.com/blog/2012/01/27/eschatological-core-values.

7. Johnny Enlow, http://eightm.com/2012/08/29/prophetic-word-from-johnny-enlow-regarding-this-next-season/

CHAPTER SEVEN
THREE FUTURE EVENTS

> *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 (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*

With all this talk of the Kingdom growing in the earth, the Church being victorious, and satan not taking over, this requires a major paradigm shift for many readers. Quite frequently this shift stirs the same questions to the surface in the minds of those presented with it.

I (Jonathan) am asked this same question very often: “If there is no rapture, no future Great Tribulation, and no antichrist, then do you believe in the return of Jesus Christ?”

The answer is absolutely yes! Jesus will return to Earth in the future.

I have come to understand that a lot of verses that speak of Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven are actually about the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem (I discuss this fully in my book *Raptureless)*. Yet there are still a significant number of Bible verses that speak about events in our future.

Although I believe a majority of Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, I still see three major prophetic events as remaining unfulfilled. I refer to these as The Big Three: the physical return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the Final Judgment.

This stands in total agreement, not only with the Scripture, but also with the historical creeds of the Church. The early Church leaders gathered in Nicaea in AD 325, and once they reached a consensus, they wrote the Nicene Creed. We see in the creed that they also believed in a physical, future return of Jesus to Earth, a resurrection of the dead, and a Final Judgment.

The Nicene Creed

Here's the creed in full:

> We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
>
> And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father. **And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end.**
>
> And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeded from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
>
> We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.[1]

We see three things in this one sentence that I've highlighted: He shall come again, He shall judge, and His judgment will be of the quick (living) and the dead (which refers to resurrection). These are the three things that even those in AD 325 realized were future unfulfilled events.

The Return of Christ

Although Jesus used the Hebrew phrase "coming upon clouds" in reference to the destruction that God brought on Jerusalem in AD 70, Jesus also prophesied that He would physically return one day in the future.

The majority of the New Testament verses interpreted to be about Jesus' "coming" are actually about the AD 70 destruction. Keep in mind that Jews in AD 30 were much more focused on the immediate destruction of the Temple, the end of sacrifice, and the removal of the Holy City. The idea that Jesus would

return physically someday in the future was not their major focus. The early Church's thoughts were more consumed with surviving the Jewish persecution and looking forward to Christ's "coming" to punish their persecutors.

Yet, there are several passages that do speak of Jesus' future, physical return to Earth. Here are the main passages:

> *After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "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 1:9-11).*
>
> *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).*
>
> *While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).*

At His return, the following two events will occur: the resurrection of the dead and the Final Judgment.

The Resurrection of the Dead

> *Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out— those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).*

A time is coming—it is still in our future—when all graves will be emptied out and the dead will be sorted into two different categories: the good and the evil, those who will live and those who will be condemned. This is typically called the Final Judgment; I will address that more in the next section. For now, simply notice that the resurrection occurs first, then the sorting. In the next two passages, we can see more details regarding what happens to the believers when they are resurrected for the sorting.

> *Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope… For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud*

command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:13,16 NIV).

Believers have hope because they know that when the Lord speaks and blows His trumpet, the dead in Christ will rise first and the rest will follow. The apostle Paul gives us more details in this next passage:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body….

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen,

I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44,50-55).

Believers will become immortal, and we will have imperishable bodies. This is likely similar to what happened to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration or after His resurrection. The dead in Christ will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (really fast), and death will be swallowed up in victory.

Now we will look at the third event of the Big Three.

The Final Judgment

Many verses throughout the New Testament clearly teach about the Final Judgment, including these words from Jesus:

And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:27-29).

Here we can clearly see that Jesus has been given the authority to be the judge. Paul confirmed this in his speech to the people of Athens:

> *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject" (Acts 17:31-32).*

This is an affirmation that Jesus will be the judge, but it also says that the proof that Jesus is God is in the fact that He was raised from the dead.

> *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.…Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Matthew 25:31-33,46).*

Jesus "coming in His glory" is different than the Hebrew idiom "coming in clouds," which is a reference to the destruction of a nation or city. When Jesus "comes in His glory," it will be as a judge on the throne, bringing the Final Judgment.

We can find further confirmation for individual judgment in the following passage:

> *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved— even though only as one escaping through the flames* (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The Final Judgment will divide righteous people from evil people, and the evil will receive their punishment. Yet the righteous will also receive varying rewards. Christians typically don't like to talk about being rewarded, but Jesus and the early Church had no qualms about rewards. Thus, in this passage, Paul spoke of the rewarding of Christians at the Final Judgment. It seems that, according to Paul, this is something that should be on our minds.

At the Final Judgment, all humankind will be resurrected and appear before the throne of God. Then individuals are sorted out as good or evil, sheep or goats. Then the good, righteous sheep will have a further judgment, which is to examine them for reward. This is pictured as each individual having a large pile of wood, hay, and straw piled in front of them, as well as gold, silver, and jewels mixed into the pile. I picture all believers standing by piles that represent their lives; then a runner with a torch comes and begins to set fire to each person's pile. As the piles burn, all the wasted time in people's lives burns as the wood, hay, and straw. Finally the fire burns out, the pile is gone, and all that remains is a smaller pile of ash. Among the ash is gold, silver, and jewels. These represent the rewards.

There are some who teach that every sinful action in a Christian's life will be projected on a giant screen in heaven for all to see; then God will forgive that Christian, allowing admission into heaven. This is an evil and foolish teaching that promotes shame to try to stop Christians from sinning. According to the Bible, God forgives us when we repent, and He chooses to remember our sins no more (see Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). This idea of judgment comes from the Dark Ages, not from the Bible.

There is, of course, a judgment for Christians, but it is not for shame and guilt over sins that God has already forgiven and doesn't even remember. The only reason to judge Christians is to dole out the varying rewards.

> *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God* (1 Cor. 4:5).

This judgment is not a matter of salvation; it is a matter of how much praise or how little praise one will receive. As Paul wrote in another place,

> *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat…so then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God* (Romans 14:10,12).

Although there won't be much praise for some Christians who stand before His throne, this is not about shame and punishment. Of course, it would be better to live a life that God can praise and reward with gold, silver, and jewels rather than a life that will burn up leaving nothing but a pile of ash.

When most people think of the Final Judgment, this is the passage that comes to mind:

> *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.*
>
> *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).*

This is a very descriptive passage and gives more detail to the picture of judgment, while basically encapsulating the previously examined passages.

Simply stated, one day Jesus will return in glory with His angels and bring judgment based on whose names are and are not written in the Lamb's book of life. Those who are not in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. Those who are in the book of life will then have their lives burned down as wood, hay, and straw or silver, gold, and jewels. Then each Christian will receive the due praise from God. This could happen in our lifetime or it could happen a thousand years from now. The only indicator at this point is the growth of the Kingdom in the earth realm. This chapter is here because we (the authors) want you (the readers) to know that this is a final outcome of the Kingdom growth someday in the future. How we live and partner with heaven will make a huge difference as to the timing of these final three events.

In the next chapter, we will take a look at the culmination of our mission on Earth—how we get from the present and ever-increasing Kingdom to the end of time and Christ's final return.

Endnote

1. “The Nicene Creed”; http://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm (accessed December 28, 2012).

CHAPTER EIGHT
FINISHING THE APOSTOLIC MISSION

> *They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.* - Acts 1:11

What is God waiting for?

Have you ever meditated on this question?

Think about it. Why hasn't Jesus come back yet?

For nearly two thousand years, the Church has eagerly awaited the final return of Jesus Christ. Yet, as I've said before, for the same two thousand years, I believe Jesus Christ has been waiting for the Church.

Many Christians have no idea what God is waiting for. Yet if we don't understand what He is waiting for, it is impossible for us to partner with heaven in order to bring Jesus back to Earth! This has resulted in an incredible amount of theological confusion regarding the return of the Lord.

One of the most prevalent misconceptions is that Jesus could return at any moment. This teaching is present in so many Christian novels and low budget end-times films, yet it is not a sound doctrine of the Bible. When teachers lift verses out of their intended historical context, they can easily create a doctrine of Jesus' "any moment" return. Yet this is not taught anywhere in the New Testament. When a historical contextual understanding of the New Testament is put into place, the modern any-moment-return doctrine crumbles.

While many liberal theologians would say differently, John A. T. Robinson has written a masterpiece that correctly demonstrates that the entire New Testament was written before the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.[1] This context is important because it gives a foundation for interpreting the New Testament. With that truth in mind, we can understand that the backdrop to everything recorded in the New Testament was the impending doom that was about to fall upon the city

of Jerusalem. Here are a few examples:

- Why would the early disciples sell their property? (See Acts 4:32-37.) They did this because they had insider information that the city was about to be destroyed.
- What was Stephen accused of that led to his stoning? (See Acts 6:13-14.) Stephen had been declaring the impending destruction. (A false witness typically meant a bribed witness.)
- Why, instead of building large churches, did the early Church choose to meet in the temple courts and from house to house? (See Acts 2:46.) They did this because they knew their city was about to be destroyed. If you knew destruction was coming, would you start building a large church facility? Of course not! Instead, you would logically meet in homes and lecture halls (see Acts 2:46; 19:9).
- Why did James encourage his readers to take their plans lightly? (See James 4:13-17.) He did this because he knew that at any moment, the destruction of Jerusalem could begin (see James 5:1-9).

With the historical backdrop in place, we must also understand the term coming. We've already examined this subject briefly in the previous chapter, but here I would like to give a more detailed explanation. Here's the hinge point: The New Testament writers understood Jesus' coming as a reference to Jesus bringing judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. Let's look at a primary example of this, which is found in the disciples' question to Jesus in Matthew 24:3b, "…what will be the sign of your coming?"

The automatic, almost knee-jerk reaction is to think that the disciples were asking about Jesus' second coming. But if we step back and think for a moment, we will remember that the disciples had no idea that Jesus was about to die and be resurrected. It is unrealistic to think that they were asking Jesus about His second coming, which would be thousands of years away. They were still in shock about Jesus chewing out the Pharisees (in Matthew 23); they weren't suddenly asking Jesus about His second coming, but about something else very similar and closely related to the first question.

After Jesus answered their first question in great detail, He responded about the sign of His "coming":

> *And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the*

> *tribes of the earth [literally, "tribes of the land"] will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30 NASB).*

Keeping in mind that the disciples were not asking about Jesus' second coming, thousands of years later, here is a much more sensible understanding of what they were truly asking. The Bible scholar David Chilton says regarding this passage:

> In order to understand the meaning of Jesus' expressions in this passage, we need to understand the Old Testament much more than most people do today. Jesus was speaking to an audience that was intimately familiar with the most obscure details of Old Testament literature. They had heard the Old Testament read and expounded countless time throughout their lives, and had memorized lengthy passages. Biblical imagery and forms of expression had formed their culture, environment, and vocabulary from earliest infancy, and this had been true for generations. The fact is that when Jesus spoke to His disciples about the fall of Jerusalem, He used prophetic vocabulary. There was a "language" of prophecy, instantly recognizable to those familiar with the Old Testament.[2]

Knowing the Jewish culture, Jesus answered that they would see "the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). Throughout the Old Testament, when God was going to bring destruction upon a city or a nation, it was said that He would "come on clouds in the sky." In the Jewish culture, the phrase "sign of your coming" had little to do with location and arrival. It was understood to mean, "to come in judgment upon a city or nation," as we will see in the following verses.

Each of the following passages was fulfilled by the destruction of an Old Testament city or nation:

> *He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds wereunder his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning* (Psalm 18:9-12).
>
> *The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind*

(Psalm 104:2-3).

> *A prophecy against Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear* (Isaiah 19:1).

> *Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come* (Joel 2:1-2).

> *The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness* (Zephaniah 1:14-15).

> *The LORD is slow to anger but great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet* (Nahum 1:3).

Now that we have some of the Hebraic cultural context, we can understand that: 1) the disciples were asking about when Jesus would "come" in judgment upon Jerusalem, and 2) Jesus responded with many signs that would lead up to verse 30, where He would finally "come on clouds" and bring judgment.[3]

The "Any-Moment" Doctrine

When the New Testament refers to Jesus' "coming," it is a clear reference to the impending judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. Once we understand that, we can shine light upon the passages that are used to teach the any-moment return of Christ:

> *Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming* (Matthew 24:42).

> *Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour* (Matthew 25:13).

> *Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come* (Mark 13:33).

But let us be alert and sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6b).

The first century Christians had to be prepared for and watchful of the impending judgment. We are informed through the historical record that not one Christian died in the destruction of Jerusalem. To put that in context, 1.1 million Jews were killed in the slaughter, but every Christian of the first century understood that the prophecy of Matthew 24 was about their generation, and they literally kept watch and ran for the mountains of Pella to escape the destruction.

In Matthew 24:15-18, Jesus was giving very practical advice to His followers about how to stay alive during the AD 70 destruction. We can tell from this passage that Jesus was speaking of a local destruction (flee Judea) and a historical setting (not on a Sabbath). The natural tendency upon seeing an approaching army would have been to flee into Jerusalem for safety. Jesus told them to fight their natural instincts and flee the city.

Because of Jesus' command to flee, His followers were protected. In fact, as George Peter Holford says in his account of the AD 70 destruction ".history does not record that even one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem."[4]

This is confirmed by other well-known commentaries. For example:

> It is said that there is reason to believe that not one Christian perished in the destruction of that city, God having in various ways secured their escape, so that they fled to Pella, where they dwelt when the city was destroyed. —Albert Barnes[5]

> …it is remarked by several interpreters, and which Josephus takes notice of with surprise, that Cestius Gallus having advanced with his army to Jerusalem, and besieged it, on a sudden without any cause, raised the siege, and withdrew his army, when the city might have been easily taken; by which means a signal was made, and an opportunity given to the Christians, to make their escape: which they accordingly did, and went over to Jordan, as Eusebius says, to a place called Pella; so that when Titus came a few months after, there was not a Christian in the city. —John Gill[6]

It was important for the first generation church to be alert and watchful so that they wouldn't die in the AD 70 destruction. These verses applied to them, but they do not apply to us.

We are not called to live on the edge of our seats believing that Jesus could come

at any moment. We are called to pray that it would be “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We are to occupy until He comes, not be preoccupied with His coming!

Rightious Thinking is Long Term Thinking

One of the “Seven Core Values” that guides my (Jonathan’s) ministry is investing. Here is how I have stated it for my team:

> Investing is long-term thinking. This impacts every aspect of life. Although it may cost more, buying quality only hurts you once. It is better to do something right the first time rather than to do it twice.
>
> We believe that time is an un-renewable resource. There is always more money, but there is not more time. Operating in long-term thinking is kingly thinking, whereas short-term thinking is poverty thinking.

Let’s focus on that last sentence: Operating in long-term thinking is kingly thinking. The Bible gives us the stories of two very different kings, one who thought long-term and one who thought short-term.

King David stored up vast resources and wealth for his son Solomon to reign and build a temple unto the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 22). He was thinking of future generations, and he prepared for a temple he would never live to see.

Later in Israel’s history, King Hezekiah came into power. When Isaiah the prophet told King Hezekiah that he would have a peaceful reign but that after him the kingdom would fall into utter ruin and captivity, Hezekiah didn’t care (see Isaiah 39). King Hezekiah operated in a poverty mindset. He cared only about himself and his own life and generation.

We learn from King Solomon, who wrote the Book of Proverbs, that *“A righteous man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children”* (Proverbs 13:22).

It is amazing to ponder that Solomon was able to write this proverb because he witnessed his father, King David, living as a righteous man and thinking of his children’s children. This proverb is not simply a wise saying, but it is something that Solomon observed and appreciated about his father, the righteous King David.

The larger context of the Bible teaches that the righteous think long term. Yet

much of modern Christianity has been infected with short-term thinking. Consider the following quote from *The Days of Vengeance:*[7]

> First, have you ever wondered why Christians in the United States are clearly in the majority, and always have been, yet they have so little cultural influence?
>
> Here are three good reasons: (1) They have no plan; (2) they have little or no personal incentive; (3) they see no long-run hope of success.[7]

I believe that this quote has said volumes. It is a statement worth pondering until we (1) have a plan; (2) understand what motivates us to pursue it; and (3) understand that we are called to build the Kingdom of Heaven in the Earth and think long-term!

Although there are moments in time, such as AD 70, when God gave a warning and told the early Christians to keep watch, this is not the posture of all Christians for all time. We are not called to live on the edge of our seats and bite our nails hoping for (or fearing) the rapture.

Actually, for much of Church history, Christian leaders have taught and believed that we are called to think and live long-term. Take, for example, the Book of Common Prayer. Considering the fact that the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer provided tables for finding Holy Days all the way through AD 8400, we can see that they clearly were digging in for the long haul and did not expect an imminent rapture of the Church.[8]

This is just one example from a multitude throughout history that the idea of thinking long-term and building the Kingdom of God in the Earth realm until the final return of Christ has been the predominant view of the Church in history. For example, Consider also the words of the following leaders: **John Wesley**

> All unprejudiced persons may see with their eyes, that He is already renewing the face of the earth: And we have strong reason to hope that the work He hath begun He will carry on unto the day of the Lord Jesus; that He will never intermit this blessed work of His Spirit until He has fulfilled all His promises, until He hath put a period to sin and misery, and infirmity, and death; and re-established universal holiness and happiness, and caused all the inhabitants of the earth to sing together “Hallelujah.”[9]

Jonathan Edwards

> The visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown, and the Kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it, everywhere throughout the whole habitable globe.[10]

Charles Spurgeon

> I myself believe that King Jesus will reign, and the idols be utterly abolished; but I expect the same power which turned the world upside down once, will still continue to do it. The Holy Ghost would never suffer the imputation to rest upon His holy name that He was not able to convert the world.[11]

Long-term thinking is not only seen in the writings of great leaders, but also even in something as mundane as Church architecture. For example, if a leader believes that the Church is called to think long-term and establish the Kingdom of God upon the Earth, then it is easy to commission the building of a church of stone that will take a hundred years to complete. Even though that leader will not live to see the completion, he is intentionally planning toward a future generation. The massive stone churches across Europe are a testament of leaders that thought long-term.

Once we settle into the fact that the Kingdom has been here since the manger in Bethlehem and is growing and being established more and more through the Church in the Earth, we can begin to understand our calling. The Church no longer needs to live on the edge of her seat, as if she will float away any second! She no longer has to wait with an identity crisis— "Why won't my groom come back for me?" Instead, she can get on with her calling to build the Kingdom of God upon the Earth.

For this reason, it is vitally and profoundly important that the Church abandon the any-moment-return doctrine and embrace the long-term thinking of the righteous man (see Proverbs 13:22).

Completing the Apostolic Mission

Let's review. So far in this book we have established that Jesus came to Earth as the King over all creation. He established His Kingdom, and it began to grow from the first century through to the present day. The Church as the Bride of Christ is God's ambassador to further establish His Kingdom in the Earth. I refer to the Church's calling as the Apostolic Mission.

At this point, we will examine this Apostolic Mission more closely.

> The word apostle in the New Testament means "sent one." Apostle was originally a secular term used by both the Greeks and the Romans to refer

> to the leader of a special envoy. That leader had the job of establishing the culture of the empire he represented into the daily lives of the citizens the empire conquered. Leaders had discovered that the citizens of conquered lands went back to their previous way of life rather quickly without transforming influence. It was extremely frustrating to see no change result in a conquered nation, which nullified the purpose of the conquest. For this reason, they came up with a strategy to transform the culture of a conquered city so that when the empire's leaders visited, it would feel the same as home. The position of apostle was created in response to this need.
>
> Jesus adopted the term to reveal His intentions. His apostles lead a special envoy of people who have the job of establishing the culture of the empire of heaven into the daily lives of the citizens they serve.[12]

As citizens of heaven (see Philippians 3:20) and as ambassadors of heaven (see 2 Corinthians 5:20), we are here with a mission. Jesus is not coming back until we finish the Apostolic Mission—the mission of the apostolos to implement the culture of heaven into the culture of the Earth.

Yes, someday the Church will have completed this mission. Sons and daughters of King Jesus will know who they are and will live out their identity as righteous people. Suffering will be brought to a minimum in the Earth realm. Sin will have been massively decreased. The sex industry will have collapsed, and broken families will be restored. People will live longer, healthier, and more joy-filled lives. There will be no more orphans, no more starvation, and sickness will be rare.

All the enemies of God will bow under Jesus' feet until finally death is put under His feet as the last foe (see 1 Corinthians 5:26). All other foes will be subdued as we put them under our feet (see Romans 16:20).

The day will come when the culturing of the apostolos has completed the Apostolic Mission. On that day, Jesus will be able to touch His toe to Earth in physical form and finally say, as the Roman Emperors did in days past, "This place feels a lot like home!"

Endnotes 1. John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (SCM Press) 2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Dallas, GA: Dominion Press, 1987), 497.

3. Much of this material about the meaning of "coming" is taken from Jonathan Welton, *Raptureless* (Rochester, NY: Welton Acadamy, 2012), pg 79-82. Raptureless gives simple and detailed explanations to the prophetic passages of Daniel, Matthew, 1 John, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

4. George Peter Holford, *The Destruction of Jerusalem* (1805); http://www. bible.ca/pre-destruction70AD-george-holford-1805AD.htm (accessed December 29, 2012).

5. Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (1832), Matthew 24; http://barnes.biblecommenter.com/matthew/24.htm (accessed December 29, 2012).

6. John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition on the Entire Bible* (1908), Matthew 24; http://gill.biblecommenter.com/matthew/24.htm (accessed December 29, 2012).

7. *David Chilton, The Days of Vengeance, xvi.*

8. "Tables for Finding Holy Days," *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662), lx-lxv; http://rechurch.org/Txtpdf/BCPComplete75.pdf (accessed December 29, 2012).

9. *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, Volume 2, 1985), 499.

10. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 488.

11. Henry Davenport Northrop, *Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Chicago: Monarch Book Company, 1890), 4:210. Available at http://www. whatsaiththescripture.com/Voice/Life.and.Works.of.Spurgeon/Life.and. Works.1.html.

12. Bill Johnson and Randy Clark, *The Essential Guide to Healing* (Bloomington, Minn: Chosen Books, 2011), 116-117.

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ABOUT JIM WIES

Jim Wies serves in prophetic ministry as an itinerate speaker and trainer. His previous experiences include serving as a pastor, author, teacher, and itinerant who has spoken at revival meetings, seminars, conferences, and churches throughout the USA and Canada, providing training and mentoring on a number of topics including personal prophecy, revelatory gifts, healing seminars, and ministry training.

Jim can be contacted through **www.xpministries.com.**



ABOUT JONATHAN WELTON

In 2009, Jonathan released his first book, The School of the Seers, A Practical Guide to Seeing into the Unseen, which has become a runaway bestseller. Then in 2011 he released Normal Christianity, If Jesus is Normal, what is the Church? which is a powerful book still growing in momentum. Not intending to slow down, in the spring of 2012, Jonathan released Eyes of Honor, Training for Righteousness and Purity, which is already being heralded as one of the best books ever written about sexual purity.

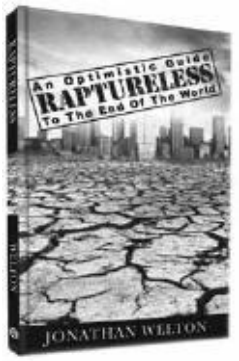
While he continues to write more manuscripts and travels full-time, Jonathan also writes a weekly blog at: RogueTheologian.com. Jonathan believes that he can change lives and impact the world through his writing and travels.

Additional information about Jonathan and his books and resources can be found at **www.jonwelton.com.**

Additional material by Jonathan Welton

Raptureless by Jonathan Welton

An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World



What others have said…

Jonathan Welton is a voice to the rising Church. We need his teaching gift stirring the Body of Christ to action. Here in Raptureless, Jonathan has revealed his scholarship and ability to communicate on issues pertinent to the issues facing today's Church. **~ Harold Eberle,**

Jonathan Welton has taken a bold step in confronting one of the greatest "sacred cows" of our day: end time theology! The fear created by the expectation of a coming antichrist and a great tribulation are keeping many believers in bondage. Many believe that defeat is the future destiny of the Church. In his easy to read presentation, Jonathan dismantles many of the popular ideas in the Church about the end times.

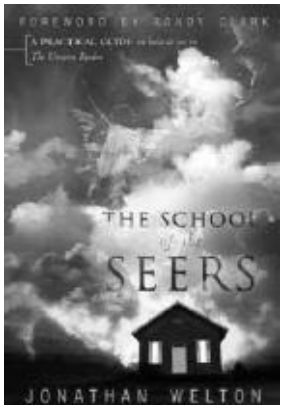
~ Joe McIntyre

Jonathan Welton's new book, Raptureless, is a must read. His insights on various passages of Scripture are powerfully presented. In addition, Jonathan provides fresh historical background for a number of the historical sources that he has quoted, such as Flavius Josephus. **~ George Kouri,**

Book TWO in the series

1. The Advancing Kingdom
2. Raptureless
3. Revelation Simplified (future release)

The School of the Seers by Jonathan Welton



Your how-to guide into the spirit realm!

The School of the Seers is more than a compilation of anecdotal stories it is the how-to guide for seeing into the spirit realm.

The fresh, profound, and new concepts taught in this book, take a mystical subject (seers and the spirit realm) and make them relevant for everyday life.This book takes some of the difficult material presented in other seer books and makes it easy to understand, removes the spookiness, and provides practical application of a dimension that is biblically based and scripturally sound. Get ready to enter the world of a seer! In this groundbreaking and revelatory book, Jonathan Welton describes his unique journey about how God opened his spiritual eyes. He shares how you too can activate this gift in your life.

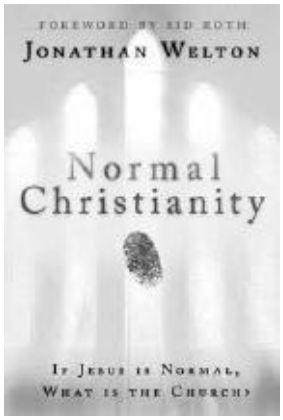
Discover the keys from Scripture that will help you:

- See with your spiritual eyes.
- Use the four keys to greater experiences.

- Recognize what may be hindering your discernment.
- Learn about the four spirits.
- Access divine secrets and steward heavenly revelation.
- Learn how to really worship in Spirit and in Truth.
- Understand meditation, impartation and so much more…

Normal Christianity by Jonathan Welton

If Jesus is Normal, what is the Church?



Jesus and the Book of Acts are the standard of Normal Christianity.

Remember the fad a few years ago when people wore bracelets reminding them, What Would Jesus Do? Christians state that Jesus is the example of how to live, yet this has been limited in many cases to how we view our moral character.

When Christians tell me that they want to live like Jesus, I like to ask if they have multiplied food, healed the sick, walked on water, raised the dead, paid their taxes with fish money, calmed storms, and so forth. I typically receive bewildered looks, but that s what it is like to live like Jesus!

Perhaps we are ignoring a large portion of what living like Jesus really includes. Many Christians believe that they can live like Jesus without ever operating in the supernatural. After reading in the Bible about all of the miracles He performed, does that sound right to you? (Excerpt from book)

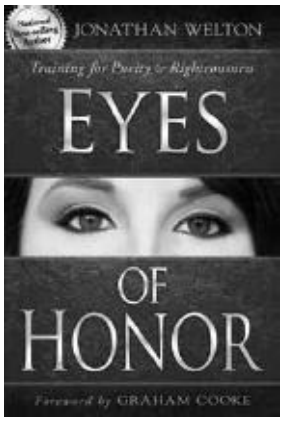
What others have said

I believe before Jesus returns there will be two churches. One will be religious

and the other will be normal. This book of Jonathan Welton s will help restore your childlike faith, and you will become normal!

- Sid Roth, Host of It's Supernatural! Television Program

Eyes of Honor by Jonathan Welton
Training for Purity and Righteousness



After struggling with sexual temptation for years, author Jonathan Welton devoted himself to finding a way to be completely free from sexual sin. He read books, attended 12-step groups, and participated in counseling—with no success.

Spurred on by countless friends and acquaintances who shared a similar broken struggle and longed for freedom, the author searched Scripture—there he found the answer and shares it with you in a compassionate, nonjudgmental way.

Eyes of Honor helps you understand how to live a life of purity by realizing:

- Your personal identity
- How to view the opposite sex correctly
- Who your enemies are

Eyes of Honor is honest and refreshing, offering hope and complete freedom and deliverance from sexual sin. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and your salvation guarantee rescue from the appetite of sin. Your true identity empowers you to stop agreeing with lies of the enemy that ensnare you.

"This book is stunningly profound. He got my attention and kept it." **- Dr. John Roddam,** St. Luke's Episcopal

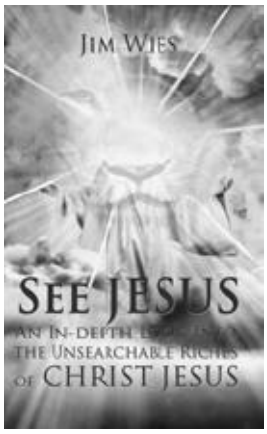
"Jonathan has written one of the best books on being free from bondage by dealing with the root issues of sin. I highly recommend reading this book.

- Dr. Che Ahn, Chancellor Wagner Leadership

Additional material by the Jim Wies

See Jesus by Jim Wies

An In-depth Look into the Unsearchable Riches of Christ Jesus



Paul, the first century apostle, made a statement referring to Jesus as an “indescribable gift.” In another place he mentioned “the unsearchable riches of Christ;” and in another place declared his wish that we may “know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.” How do we begin to describe an “indescribable gift”, or plumb the depths of “unsearchable riches”, or know that which surpasses knowledge?

What is this indescribable gift that is so comprehensive that the deepest theologians can plumb its depths for centuries and never fully comprehend all its implications; while also simple enough that a child can comprehend to the receiving of this gift by faith, for the saving of their soul? It is, of course, none other than God’s gift of His Son Jesus Christ.

To know the real Jesus is absolutely critical to our lives and eternal destiny. A thorough examination of Scriptures will reveal that there are many more facets to who He is and what He has done for us than most people realize. To place our confidence in some false representation of Jesus will only grant our adversary, the devil, opportunity to deceive and eventually destroy us. Jesus Himself warned that in the last days there would arise false christs and false prophets. It is our job to reveal the true Jesus, so that those who hear might believe in Him.

This book is exactly that; an in-depth look into the multi-faceted person of Jesus Christ. It will inspire you, quite possibly surprise you, and ultimately build

you up in your faith in the God who is the creator of all things.