

A REVELATION OF.....

3 KINGDOM AGES

OF GOD

**The progressive revelation of God's kingdom
through the Ages - and of the one to come.**

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

Penned by:

DAVID TAIT

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A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

Very often we get trapped, by taking for granted what we superficially see. So it was for me with the Bible. I saw the Old Testament and the New. "Well, that must be it," I thought. The Old Covenant followed by the New. It' s simple, it' s obvious, but it doesn' t fit in with God' s pattern, as I understand it.

For those who have read other of my writings will know that God works in threes. As He manifests Himself in three ways, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (exactly how depends on whether you are a Oneness, Two-ness or Trinitarian believer!) so He normally operates in patterns of three in His dealings with us, His people. Therefore I have always had a difficulty accepting the two Testaments as reflecting God' s pattern as such.

One day however, the Lord showed me that the Old Testament is not really a single entity, but can be split into two at an unexpected but logical place, as we will see shortly.

Today, as I was reading the Word, He started to show me many patterns reflecting the development of His kingdom through these three stages of His Word. It is helping me understand the whole in a way that I have not appreciated previously.

So let' s embark on a journey together and see what we can find out about what God has done, what He is doing, and what He will do in the future. Each step forms a logical progression in His plan that has been in existence from before time began. Through it...

May God bless you, and you bless God.

His servant and yours,

David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

DEFINITION OF TERMS

COVENANT — a contract or agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *berish* is always thus translated. *berish* is derived from a root which means “to cut,” and hence a covenant is a “cutting,” with reference to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts, and the contracting parties passing between them, in making a covenant (Gen. 15; Jer. 34:18, 19).

The corresponding word in the New Testament Greek is *diatheke*, which is, however, rendered “testament” generally in the Authorized Version. It ought to be rendered, just as the word *berish* of the Old Testament, “covenant.”

This word is used (1.) of a covenant or compact between man and man (Gen. 21:32), or between tribes or nations (1 Sam. 11:1; Josh. 9:6, 15). In entering into a covenant, Jehovah was solemnly called on to witness the transaction (Gen. 31:50), and hence it was called a “covenant of the Lord” (1 Sam. 20:8). The marriage compact is called “the covenant of God” (Prov. 2:17), because the marriage was made in God’s name. Wicked men are spoken of as acting as if they had made a “covenant with death” not to destroy them, or with hell not to devour them (Isa. 28:15, 18).

(2.) The word is used with reference to God’s revelation of himself in the way of promise or of favour to men. Thus God’s promise to Noah after the Flood is called a covenant (Gen. 9; Jer. 33:20, “my covenant”). We have an account of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17, comp. Lev. 26:42), of the covenant of the priesthood (Num. 25:12, 13; Deut. 33:9; Neh. 13:29), and of the covenant of Sinai (Ex. 34:27, 28; Lev. 26:15), which was afterwards renewed at different times in the history of Israel (Deut. 29; Josh. 24; 2 Chr. 15; 23; 29; 34; Ezra 10; Neh. 9). In conformity with human custom, God’s covenant is said to be confirmed with an oath (Deut. 4:31; Ps. 89:3), and to be accompanied by a sign (Gen. 9; 17). Hence the covenant is called God’s “counsel,” “oath,” “promise” (Ps. 89:3, 4; 105:8–11; Heb. 6:13–20; Luke 1:68–75). God’s covenant consists wholly in the bestowal of blessing (Isa. 59:21; Jer. 31:33, 34).

The term covenant is also used to designate the regular succession of day and night (Jer. 33:20), the Sabbath (Ex. 31:16), circumcision (Gen. 17:9, 10), and in general any ordinance of God (Jer. 34:13, 14).

A “covenant of salt” signifies an everlasting covenant, in the sealing or ratifying of which salt, as an emblem of perpetuity, is used (Num. 18:19; Lev. 2:13; 2 Chr. 13:5).

COVENANT OF WORKS, the constitution under which Adam was placed at his creation. In this covenant, (1.) The contracting parties were (a) God the moral Governor, and (b) Adam, a free moral agent, and representative of all his natural posterity (Rom. 5:12–19). (2.) The promise was “life” (Matt. 19:16, 17; Gal. 3:12). (3.) The condition was

perfect obedience to the law, the test in this case being abstaining from eating the fruit of the “tree of knowledge,” etc. (4.) The penalty was death (Gen. 2:16, 17).

This covenant is also called a covenant of nature, as made with man in his natural or unfallen state; a covenant of life, because “life” was the promise attached to obedience; and a legal covenant, because it demanded perfect obedience to the law.

The “tree of life” was the outward sign and seal of that life which was promised in the covenant, and hence it is usually called the seal of that covenant.

This covenant is abrogated under the gospel, inasmuch as Christ has fulfilled all its conditions in behalf of his people, and now offers salvation on the condition of faith. It is still in force, however, as it rests on the immutable justice of God, and is binding on all who have not fled to Christ and accepted his righteousness.

CONVENANT OF GRACE, the eternal plan of redemption entered into by the three persons of the Godhead, and carried out by them in its several parts. In it the Father represented the Godhead in its indivisible sovereignty, and the Son his people as their surety (John 17:4, 6, 9; Isa. 42:6; Ps. 89:3).

The conditions of this covenant were, (1.) On the part of the Father (a) all needful preparation to the Son for the accomplishment of his work (Heb. 10:5; Isa. 42:1–7); (b) support in the work (Luke 22:43); and (c) a glorious reward in the exaltation of Christ when his work was done (Phil. 2:6–11), his investiture with universal dominion (John 5:22; Ps. 110:1), his having the administration of the covenant committed into his hands (Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; 17:2; Acts 2:33), and in the final salvation of all his people (Isa. 35:10; 53:10, 11; Jer. 31:33; Titus 1:2). (2.) On the part of the Son the conditions were (a) his becoming incarnate (Gal. 4:4, 5); and (b) as the second Adam his representing all his people, assuming their place and undertaking all their obligations under the violated covenant of works; (c) obeying the law (Ps. 40:8; Isa. 42:21; John 9:4, 5), and (d) suffering its penalty (Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13), in their stead.

Christ, the mediator of, fulfils all its conditions in behalf of his people, and dispenses to them all its blessings. In Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, this title is given to Christ. (See DISPENSATION.) 1

LAW— a rule of action. (1.) The Law of Nature is the will of God as to human conduct, founded on the moral difference of things, and discoverable by natural light (Rom. 1:20; 2:14, 15). This law binds all men at all times. It is generally designated by the term conscience, or the capacity of being influenced by the moral relations of things.

(2.) The Ceremonial Law prescribes under the Old Testament the rites and ceremonies of worship. This law was obligatory only till Christ, of whom these rites were typical, had finished his work (Heb. 7:9, 11; 10:1; Eph. 2:16). It was fulfilled rather than abrogated by the gospel.

(3.) The Judicial Law, the law which directed the civil policy of the Hebrew nation.

(4.) The Moral Law is the revealed will of God as to human conduct, binding on all men to the end of time. It was promulgated at Sinai. It is perfect (Ps. 19:7), perpetual (Matt. 5:17, 18), holy (Rom. 7:12), good, spiritual (14), and exceeding broad (Ps. 119:96).

Although binding on all, we are not under it as a covenant of works (Gal. 3:17). (See COMMANDMENTS.)

(5.) Positive Laws are precepts founded only on the will of God. They are right because God commands them.

(6.) Moral positive laws are commanded by God because they are right. 1

LAW

I. In the Old Testament

a. Terminology

The term *tora* is used in some instances in the OT for law in general. In the great majority of cases it is used for commandments in the vetitive ('you shall not do this'), imperative ('do this') and jussive ('you shall do this'). It is a commandment from a person of higher authority to a lower one. It could have originated in the family circle where it refers to the education given by a mother to her children. Closely related to *tora* is *miswa*. It is usually used as a direct command from a higher authority, e.g. the Lord, the king, the father, etc. These commandments are sometimes prohibitives and in other cases positively stated (German: *heischendes Präsens*). The term *hoq* or *huqqa* is used in a great variety of meanings. *hoq* is not something pronounced like *tora* and *miswa*, but established. It points occasionally to a newly-established stipulation. In the priestly sphere of meaning it means a cultic obligation, in the royal sphere of meaning a royal pronouncement. The term *bari'm* is usually connected to the commandments of the Lord. Where law is sanctioned by the Lord, it becomes *d bari'm*. The term *mispat* has also a great variety of meanings, ranging from legal verdict to a fixed pattern of the legal community. From the meaning 'legal verdict of a judge' developed the meaning of a rule of law or customary law which becomes normative for future judges. In this sense it was used as a technical term for case or casuistic law. The term's *dat* in the legal sphere means 'admonition' and *piqqudim* 'assignment'. In later Hebrew literature from the Persian period *dat* is used to denote a royal decree or government law, but it is also used for the law of the Lord (cf., e.g., Ezr. 7:12, 14, 21). It is thus clear that the different terms originated as legal material from the pronouncement of a person in higher authority. In the religious sphere it is the Lord; in the legal sphere it might be the king, judge or elders (*z qeriim*); in the family sphere it might be the father or mother.

b. Israelite law and the ancient Near East

Discoveries of ancient Near Eastern legal material make it clear that the legal tradition, as we also have it in the OT, started well back in the 3rd millennium BC. A fragmentary code of Ur-Nammu goes back to the 3rd dynasty of Ur, 2050 Hs. It has a preamble like most of the other codes. The few readable stipulations are in the casuistic style. Another Sumerian code is that of Lipil-Ishtar of c. 1850 BC;. It has a preamble and epilogue. The oldest code in Akkadian is the one of the city of Eshnunna probably from the time of Dadusha c. 1800 BC. It also has a preamble. A. Goetze, who has published the

tablets, could in quite a few instances point to a remarkable similarity between these laws and certain laws of the Covenant code of the OT (Ex. 21-23). The first Near Eastern code to be discovered was that of Hammurapi, king of Babylon. It originated in *c.* 1700 BC, if we follow the low chronology of Albright. It has a preamble and epilogue. Some of these laws have thrown fresh light on the legal material of the OT. This is by far the largest corpus of laws we have from the ancient Near East. The Middle Assyrian Laws come from the time of Tiglath-pileser I in *c.* 1100 BC. They also have a preamble and epilogue. The main characteristics are the Draconian approach and the detailed stipulations on marriage. Only one tablet has been found of the Neo-Babylonian Laws which originated from *c.* 600 BC. The Hittite Laws come from the time of Hattusilis III in *c.* 1280 BC. It is, however, clear that the code is much older than that. The main characteristic is that a difference is made between laws that are still in force and others that are antiquated. Along with these codes we have a wealth of legal material like contracts, court procedures, *etc.* In Egypt no corpus of laws has yet been discovered, but there we also have a large amount of legal material of which the marriage-contracts are the most significant.

The style generally used in the codes is casuistic and comparable to that of a large amount of legal material in the OT. The one exception is the Neo-Babylonian Laws where relative sentences are used and only in the subsections is the casuistic style applied. When we compare the OT casuistic laws with those of the ancient Near East, the similarity of subject-matter stands out clearly. At the same time there are certain differences in smaller detail. It is obvious that the Israelites have dealt in the same tradition as that of Mesopotamia. Legal traditions were conservatively handed over from one generation to another. Some of the Israelite casuistic material has its roots way back in Mesopotamia and points to a common heritage. This ties perfectly with the biblical record of Abraham's migration from Mesopotamia. Another similarity in form is the usage of the preamble and epilogue. In Mesopotamia the codes are accompanied by the preamble and epilogue to place the laws in a definite historical and religious framework. The name of the promulgator of the laws is mentioned as well as the gods to whom the laws are dedicated. The Covenant code has a similar framework where Moses is mentioned as the receiver of the laws and the Lord as the One who sanctioned them.

c. The style of Israelite law and its origins

A. Alt has made an important contribution to the understanding of Hebrew law with the distinction of certain formal types of law and their possible origin. He has distinguished three types of law: in the first place, apodictic law which consists of positive and negative commands ('you shall. . ., you shall not'). This type of law he has regarded as Yahwistic and of pure Israelite origin. In the second place, he has discovered a type of law consisting of participle clauses in which the command is given to kill the transgressor ('one doing such and such shall be put to death'). He has regarded this kind of law as closely related to the apodictic form and thus also of Israelite origin. The third type is called casuistic ('if a man. . .'). The typical style is to start with *ki* or *im* ('if') and to give the transgression in the protasis and the legal verdict in the apodosis. The major case is

always introduced by *ki* and the subsections by *im*. This is also the general style of the laws of the ancient Near East. Alt has held that the Israelites came into contact with these laws in Palestine and borrowed them from the Canaanites.

Meanwhile this view of Alt has been scrutinized from several angles. The so-called apodictic laws were studied by E. Gerstenberger on a much wider scale. Alt's research was more or less restricted to the Covenant code. Gerstenberger has widened his scope to include this genre of literature also in Wisdom Literature and elsewhere. He has proposed new nomenclature for these laws, e.g. vetitives and prohibitives ('you shall not'). Looking for the *Sitz im Leben* (life-setting) of these laws he is more inclined to regard it as an *Ethos* and more specifically as a *Sippenethos* (clan ethics). The *Sitz im Leben* of these laws is the family circle where the father gives certain commands according to the customs of the clan to which he belongs. The next step was taken by W. Richter who does not want to restrict the *Sitz im Leben* only to the clan, but to connect these types of law with the school situation. The attitude to widen the scope of the *Sitz im Leben* is to be welcomed. The situation as we have it in the OT shows that the vetitives and prohibitives can be given by a variety of persons in authoritative positions: the Lord (cf. Ex. 20), the king, the tribal leader, the teacher, the father, etc. An important question is whether we should regard the vetitives and prohibitions as law at all, or not. In the OT they are intermixed with other types of law. This could lead us to accept that they are indeed legal stipulations. But the laws are sometimes intermixed with kerygmatic material (cf. e.g. Ex. 22:27b, 26b in MT which is of a religious nature and has nothing in common with legal material. We might, thus, regard the vetitives and prohibitives as policy. To regard the Decalogue as the Lord's policy and not as a cluster of laws is more satisfactory. It is observable that in the case of the vetitives and prohibitives no punishment is prescribed, as it is in the casuistic laws.

The latest studies have shown that the participial and relative clauses must be studied as a whole. H. Schulz has studied especially those with the death-penalty clause and has reached the conclusion that their *Sitz im Leben* is the tribal circle. In the tribal circle the tribal chief gave these kinds of death-penalty verdicts. The typification of these laws is still not settled. G. Liedke has recently suggested that these laws be called apodictic.

The casuistic material or case law is designated in the OT with *mispāt* (cf. Ex. 21:1). These laws are verdicts of judges which became legal examples to be followed by later judges. And so it became customary law. The presence of the laws in legal codes does not mean that they have originated with the promulgation of the codes, but that they were regarded as typical legal examples to be followed. Recently Liedke has given careful attention to these laws. He has held that they are case law formed from customary law which were used as examples for the solution of civil cases.

d. The different Israelite codes

1. The Covenant code. This is by far the oldest code of Hebrew law; its core goes back to the time of Moses. It is even possible that some of the casuistic material might go back to the time of the patriarchs while they were in Mesopotamia. It is also true that later material was added and that existing material was altered in later times. It is to be

expected that older legal material is continually adapted to new circumstances. In Exodus this code is placed in a definite historical framework, *viz.* the forming of the covenant at Sinai. These laws are, thus, intended as the stipulations of the covenant. The laws, however, do not cover all the possible judicial fields and show that they are merely a torso or an extract of laws. The most important characteristic of the Covenant code is that it is sanctioned by the Lord as his law for his people.

2. The Deuteronomic code. This is to be found in Dt. 12-25. Here we have the codification of old Hebrew laws in later times, possibly in the time of Josiah (c. 622 BC). It is wrong to assume that the promulgation of laws indicates the time of their origin, as we have seen. Many of the laws have an archaic character and some of them are similar to the laws in the Covenant code (*cf. e.g.* Ex. 23:15-16 and Dt. 22:23-29). It is thus quite probable that most of the stipulations of Deuteronomy may have an early date. As has been pointed out by various scholars, Deuteronomy has in some instances ancient material, but it is also probable that later material was added. This could have been the case in the time of Josiah. The old laws were then adapted to new circumstances and new laws added according to the need of later times.

3. The Holiness code. It is to be found in Lv. 17-26. This compilation of laws is called the Holiness code on account of the phrase 'for I the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy' (Lv. 21:8). The contents of this code mainly comprise stipulations in connection with the sanctuary, the priests and the covenant community. All the stipulations must be kept by the Israelites and regarded as holy and thus the property of the Lord. Although these laws could have been compiled in later times, the archaic character of some of them is obvious and they might go back to the time of the Exodus.

4. The final compilation of laws. Many of the legal compilations were not in the exact form as we have them in the Pentateuch. After the exile compilations were made, some laws were readjusted to new circumstances and other laws added. The different codes were then placed in the broad framework of the Pentateuch as we have it today. The final form of the Pentateuch was reached only in c. 450 BC, in the time of Ezra, when it was promulgated by being publicly read (*cf.* Ne. 8).

e. Types of Israelite laws

1. The lack of legal theory. One of the characteristics of Israelite law as well as the legal compilations of the ancient Near East is the lack of legal theory. It is *e.g.* difficult to find any rationale or any logical sequence in these laws. Sometimes we have a cluster of laws on a certain subject, *e.g.* the goring ox (Ex. 21:28-32, 35-36). In this case the goring ox is placed in the centre of the reasoning and not the kind of transgression. The subject matter can suddenly change from the rape of a virgin (Ex. 22:16-17) to sorcery (Ex. 22:18), to bestiality (Ex. 22:19) and to idolatry (Ex. 22:20). There might have been a rationale behind this for the Semites, but to us it is totally lost.

2. Civil and criminal law. Another distinction which we make between civil and criminal law does not seem to have been made by the Semites. Recently A. Phillips has held that the so-called apodictic material is to be regarded as criminal law, but this cannot be upheld in the light of what we have said above. What we should regard as a criminal

offence, *e.g.* theft, was regarded in Hebrew law as a civil case in which the transgressor must make amends for his deed by paying back the owner in kind. The whole rationale behind the stipulations is to redress the damage done to someone's property, *viz.* to restore the balance. Even in the case of the rape of a virgin the transgressor must pay her father the bride's price to redress his loss, because after her violation he could not ask the bride's price for his daughter.

(i) Murder and assault. It is noteworthy that in Hebrew law a difference is made between premeditated murder and unintentional manslaughter (Ex. 21:12-14). In the case of murder the penalty is death. In the case of unintentional manslaughter, which is described by the phrase 'God let him fall into his hand', or 'he met with an act of God', the person can flee to a place of asylum. Assault is also regarded as a grave offence. A distinction is made between assault on parents (Ex. 21:15), assault that leads to incapacitation (Ex. 21:18-19), assault on a pregnant woman (Ex. 21:22-25) and assault on slaves (Ex. 21:26-27). These cases are differently approached. As a result of the strong conviction of the value of family solidarity, the son who beats his parents is sentenced to death. The cases of incapacitation and of the pregnant woman are approached from the restitution angle. For the incapacitated man redress must be made for his medical expenses and for his loss of time; while in the case of the pregnant woman who has lost her foetus, a redress must be made to her husband for loss of his child, his property. Very interesting is the case of assault on one's own slaves. When a serious bodily injury is incurred, the slave receives manumission. This is a typical Hebrew law and not to be found in any legal compilation in the ancient Near East. This testifies to a unique humane approach to slaves.

(ii) Theft. This offence can broadly be viewed in three aspects: *viz.* kidnapping, theft of cattle and theft of movable property which is given in custody. Kidnapping is regarded with severity. Two proofs of guilt are mentioned, *viz.* when the thief sells the kidnapped person and when the kidnapped person is found in the possession of the thief. In this case the death penalty is prescribed (Ex. 21:16). In a nomadic and semi-nomadic society the possession of animals is regarded as very important. Theft of these animals is thus regarded as a grave offence. A good example occurs in Ex. 22:1-3. Restitution must be made by the payment of five cattle for one stolen and four sheep for one. In some cases the penalty is double payment in kind. The co-existence of these two kinds of penalty is an enigma. B. S. Jackson has held that the heavier penalty is the older one and that double restitution is a later reduction in penalty. This cannot be proved, however. Certain stipulations occur in which a depositor of movable property, like cattle, is protected against theft by the bailee. If such a theft can be proved, the bailee must pay double in kind (*cf.* Ex. 22:6-12).

(iii) Negligence and damage. Negligence is regarded all over the ancient Near East as a serious offence. In cuneiform law a technical term *egum* occurs which is absent in Hebrew law, though negligence plays an important role in Hebrew jurisprudence. A good example is the goring ox. When the owner of the ox is aware of its habit to gore, or has been warned against it, and the ox kills a free man or woman, the owner and the ox are liable. Both must be killed (Ex. 21:29). Another case of negligence is where a well is dug

and not properly covered. If an animal falls into the well, the owner of the well must compensate the owner of the animal with money.

(iv) Offences of a moral and religious nature. Under this subsection a great variety of offences can be classified. They range from cursing parents to the seduction of a virgin, combating sorcery, bestiality, idolatry, a variety of cultic prescriptions (especially in Lv.) and the ill-treatment of alien, widow and orphan. We want to single out the latter offence as example (Ex. 22:21-24). The principle of protecting a widow and orphan is a very old one. As early as the time of Urukagina (c. 2400 BC) this principle is propagated. Even in Egypt traces of this principle are present. In the case of the Hebrew commandment it is stated as the policy of the Lord for his people not to oppress widows and orphans.

(v) Family law. In the OT world the family was regarded as very important. The father was the head of the family. In a certain sense his wife and children were his property. The most important laws on the family are those on marriage and on inheritance. In the first instance laws were made to forbid marriage in certain circumstances (e.g. Lv. 18), to prescribe the levirate marriage (cf. especially Dt. 25:5-10) and to prescribe divorce (cf. Dt. 24:1-4). The laws against beating and cursing parents point in the direction of family solidarity in which the authority of the father must be accepted without any question.

(vi) Slavery. As we have seen, a unique humane approach to slaves is visible in Hebrew law. A distinction must be made between Hebrew slaves and foreign slaves. It is not always clear to which form of slavery the laws refer. According to Ex. 21:2-6 a Hebrew slave who is taken into slavery by sale, possibly as a result of his debts, must be released at the end of 6 years of service. In Ex. 21:7-11 the case of the second woman is described which is regarded as a kind of slavery. Interesting in this case is that the rights of this woman are defended by law. It is thus clear, by and large, that the excesses of slavery are neatly combated in Hebrew law.

(vii) *Lex talionis*. In the Covenant code, the oldest Hebrew corpus of laws, the law of talion (retaliation) is awkwardly brought in. The previous law treats the case of assault on a pregnant woman. It is probable that the final editor of Exodus has reasoned that he must give in addition to this case of assault a general introduction to assault and single out those cases in which the *lex talionis* can be applied (Ex. 21:23-25). *Lex talionis* is there to restrict blood-revenge to certain prescribed cases, because of its danger to the prosperity of a society. It is not a primitive form of jurisprudence, but it is made to discourage homicide and wilful acts of assault.

3. International law. A long legal history of international law existed in the ancient Near East. Scores of tablets with treaties between various nations have been discovered. Two main types of contracts occur, *viz.* parity-treaty between equals and vassal-treaties. The Israelites were well aware of both for they formed a parity-treaty with the Phoenicians and a vassal-treaty with the Gibeonites. In the OT legal material the principles for forming a vassal-treaty are given in Dt. 20:10-14. The Israelites must offer the enemy peace (*salom*) which means a peaceful co-existence in which the enemy as minor partner must have certain obligations, e.g. to serve the major partner and to pay tax

to him. We know from vassal-treaties that the major partner is also obliged to defend the minor partner when he is attacked by an enemy.

f. The religious nature of Israelite laws

It is clear from the OT laws, even from those with a purely secular character, that the Lord promulgated them in the interest of his people. In some instances the Lord is suddenly introduced in the third, second or first person to give force to the particular law (e.g. Ex. 21:13). Sometimes the kerygmatic element is clearly visible (e.g. Ex. 22:9). The laws are given to extol the mercy of the Lord. This characteristic in Hebrew law is unique in the legal tradition of the ancient Near East. It points to a direct involvement of the Lord in the laws of the covenant community. The binding of the laws to the covenant, and thus to the Major Partner of the covenant, ensures that the stipulations must be kept or else the covenant is broken and also the relationship with the Lord. The keeping of the laws is thus necessary to secure the blessing of the Lord. These laws have a twofold character: they are to promote love to the Lord and love to one's neighbour. The summary of the law given by Jesus (Mt. 22:35-40) is exactly in accordance with the twofold character as it is presented in the OT.

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II. In the New Testament

a. The meaning of the term

There is much flexibility in the use of the term 'law' (*nomos*) in the NT.

1. Frequently it is used in the canonical sense to denote the whole or part of the OT writings. In Rom. 3:19a it clearly refers to the OT in its entirety; Paul has quoted from various parts of the OT in the preceding context, and he must be understood as culling these quotations from what he calls 'the law'. But the flexibility of his use of the term is

apparent. For, when he speaks of those ‘under the law’ in the next clause, ‘law’ in this instance has a different meaning. It is likely that this broader denotation comprising the OT as a whole is the sense in Rom. 2:17-27. It is likewise apparent in the usage of our Lord on several occasions (*cf.* Mt. 5:18; Lk. 16:17; Jn. 8:17; 10:34; 15:25).

But the term is also used in a more restricted canonical sense to designate a part of the OT. In the expression ‘the law and the prophets’ it will have to be understood as comprising the whole of the OT not included in ‘the prophets’ (*cf.* Mt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Lk. 16:16; Acts 13:15; Rom. 3:21b). In a still more restricted sense it is used to denote the Pentateuch as distinct from the other two main divisions of the OT (*cf.* Lk. 24:44). There are some instances in which it is uncertain whether ‘the law of Moses’ refers merely to the Pentateuch or is used in the more inclusive sense to denote the rest of the OT not included in ‘the prophets’ (*cf.* Jn. 1:45; Acts 28:23). It is possible that, since the simple term ‘the law’ can be used in a more inclusive sense, so ‘the law of Moses’ could even be understood as embracing more than was strictly Mosaic. This again is symptomatic of the flexibility of terms in the usage of the NT, arising, in this connection, from the fact that the expression ‘the law and the prophets’ is a convenient designation of the OT in its entirety.

2. There are instances in which the term designates the Mosaic administration dispensed at Sinai. This use is particularly apparent in Paul (*cf.* Rom. 5:13, 20; Gal. 3:17, 19, 21a). Closely related to this denotation is the use by Paul of the expression ‘under the law’ (1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5, 21; *cf.* Eph. 2:15; ‘of the law’ in Rom. 4:16). This characterization, in these precise connections, means to be under the Mosaic economy or, in the case of 1 Cor. 9:20, to consider oneself as still bound by the Mosaic institutions. The Mosaic economy as an administration had divine sanction and authority during the period of its operation. This use of the term ‘under law’ must not be confused with another application of the same expression which will be dealt with later.

3. Frequently the term is used to designate the law of God as the expression of God’s will. The instances are so numerous that only a fraction can be cited (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 7:2, 5, 7, 8-9, 12, 16, 22; 8:3-4, 7; 13:8, 10; 1 Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 1:8; Jas. 1:25; 4:11). The abiding obligation and sanctity of the law as the expression of God’s such references. The obligation for men involved is expressed in terms of being ‘under law’ (1 Cor. 9:21, *ennomos*).

4. On occasion ‘law’ is used as the virtual synonym of law specially revealed in contrast with the work of the law natively inscribed on the heart of man (Rom. 2:12-14). It is to be understood that law in the other senses is law specially revealed. But in the instance cited attention is focused on this consideration because of the contrast respecting mode of revelation. There is no indication that a different law is in view. The emphasis falls upon the greater fullness and clearness of special revelation and the correlative increase of responsibility for the recipients.

5. In varying forms of expression ‘law’ is used in a depreciatory sense to denote the status of the person who looks to the law, and therefore to works of law, as the way of justification and acceptance with God. The formula ‘under law’ has this signification (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18). As indicated above, this use of the formula is not to be

confused with the same when applied to the Mosaic dispensation (*cf.* Gal. 3:23 and others cited). Interpretation of the NT, particularly of the Pauline Epistles, has been complicated by failure to recognize the distinction. The person who is 'under law' in the sense of Rom. 6:14 is in bondage to sin in its guilt, defilement and power. But this was not the consequence of being under the Mosaic economy during the period from Moses to Christ. Nor is 'under law', in this sense, to be confused with a similar term as it applies to a believer in Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). Of the same force as 'under law' in this depreciatory sense is the expression 'of the law' (Rom. 4:14; Gal. 3:18; Phil. 3:9); and the phrase 'by works of the law' (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10) refers to the same notion. 'Apart from works of law' (Rom. 3:28) expresses the opposite. Several expressions are to be interpreted in terms of this concept and of the status it denotes. When Paul says, 'the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from Law' (Rom. 3:21), he means a righteousness apart from works of law, and therefore antithetical to a works-righteousness. When he says that we have been put to death to the law and discharged from the law (Rom. 7:4, 6), he refers to the breaking of that bond that binds us to the law as the way of acceptance with God (*cf.* also Gal. 2:19). Law as law, as commandment requiring obedience and pronouncing its curse upon all transgression, does not have any potency or provision for the justification of the ungodly. The contrast between law-righteousness, which is our own righteousness, and the righteousness of God provided in Christ is the contrast between human merit and the gospel of grace (*cf.* Rom. 10:3; Gal. 2:21; 5:4; Phil. 3:9). Paul's polemic in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians is concerned with that antithesis.

6. Law is sometimes used in the sense of an operating and governing principle. In this sense Paul speaks of 'the law of faith' (Rom. 3:27, AV; RSV 'principle'), which is contrasted with the law of works. The contrast is that between the principle of faith and that of works. It is the same idea that offers the best interpretation of the word 'law' in Rom. 7:21, 23, 25b; 8:2.

There is thus great diversity in the denotation of the word 'law', and sometimes there is deep-seated difference in connotation. The result is that a meaning totally diverse from that intended by the NT speaker or writer would be imposed upon his words if we did not appreciate the differentiation which appears in the usage. There are instances, especially in Paul, where transition from one meaning to another appears in adjacent clauses. In Rom. 3:21, if we did not appreciate the two distinct senses of the word, there would be patent contradiction. In Rom. 4:14 the expression 'of the law' is exclusive of faith. However, in v. 16 'of the law' is not exclusive of faith, for those of the law are represented as having the promise made sure to them. Different senses are thus demanded. There are other classifications beyond those given above that other nuances of meaning and application would suggest. And on numerous occasions it is difficult to ascertain what the precise denotation is. In the main, however, when the distinctions given above are recognized, interpretation will be relieved of frequent distortions and needless difficulties will be resolved.

b. Law and gospel

The foregoing analysis makes it apparent how important is the question of the relation which a believer sustains to the law of God. To be 'under law' in one sense (Rom. 6:14) excludes a person from the enjoyment of the grace which the gospel imparts; to be 'under law' is the opposite of being 'under grace' and means that the person is the bondsman of the condemnation and power of sin. In this sense, therefore, it is by the gospel that we are discharged from the law (Rom. 7:6) and put to death to the law (Rom. 7:4)—'we are . . . dead to that which held us captive' (*cf.* Gal. 2:19). The gospel is annulled if the decisiveness of this discharge is not appreciated. In that event we have fallen away from grace and Christ becomes of no effect (*cf.* Gal. 5:4).

But this is not the whole account of the relation of law and gospel. Paul said also in the heart of his exposition and defence of the gospel of grace, 'Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law' (Rom. 3:31). As a believer he protests that he agrees that the law is good, that he delights in the law of God in his inmost self, that with the mind he serves the law of God (Rom. 7:16, 22, 25), and that the aim of Christ's accomplishment was that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). An example of the law he had in mind is in Rom. 7:7. And no doubt can remain that in Rom. 13:9 he provides us with concrete examples of the law which love fulfils, showing thereby that there is no incompatibility between love as the controlling motive of the believer's life and conformity to the commandments which the law of God enunciates. The conclusion is inescapable that the precepts of the Decalogue have relevance to the believer as the criteria of that manner of life which love to God and to our neighbour dictates. The same apostle uses terms which are to the same effect as that of being 'under law' when he says, 'not being without law toward God, but under the law of Christ' (1 Cor. 9:21). In respect of obligation he is not divorced from the law of God, he is not lawless in reference to God. And this is validated and exemplified in his being bound to the law of Christ.

When Paul says that 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Rom. 13:10) it is obvious that the commandments appealed to in the preceding verse are examples of the law in view. But by the words 'and any other commandment' he intimates that he has not enumerated all the commandments. The distinction is, therefore, that 'the law' is the generic term and the commandments are the specific expressions. Hence, although the apostle John does not speak in terms of fulfilling the law, the emphasis placed upon the necessity of keeping and doing the commandments (1 Jn. 2:3-4; 3:22, 24; 5:2-3) is to the same effect. And when he writes that 'whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected' (1 Jn. 2:5), he is pointing to what he elsewhere defines as that of which the love of God consists, namely, that 'we keep his commandments' (1 Jn. 5:3). The sum is that the keeping of God's commandments is the practical expression of that love apart from which we know not God and our Christian profession is a lie (*cf.* 1 Jn. 2:4; 4:8). John's teaching is the reproduction of our Lord's, and it is John who records for us Jesus' corresponding injunctions (Jn. 14:15, 21; 15:10). It is also significant that our Lord himself should enforce the necessity of keeping commandments by appealing to his own example of

keeping the Father's commandments and thus abiding in and constraining the Father's love (*cf.* Jn. 10:17-18; 15:10).

No NT writer is more jealous for the fruits that accompany and vindicate faith than James. The criterion by which these fruits are to be assessed is 'the perfect law of liberty' (Jas. 1:25). James, like other NT writers, is well aware that love is the motive power. The 'royal law' is 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Jas. 2:8). But for James also neither love nor law is conceived of apart from the concrete examples of law and expressions of love in commandments, instances of which he provides (Jas. 2:11). It is by this law that we shall be judged (Jas. 2:12); it is in this law we are to continue (Jas. 1:25); it is this law we are to keep in each of its demands (Jas. 2:10); it is this law we are to perform (Jas. 4:11).

The reason for this sustained appeal to the law of God as the norm by which the conduct of the believer is to be judged and by which his life is to be governed resides in the relation of the law to the character of God. God is holy, just and good. Likewise 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good' (Rom. 7:12). The law is, therefore, the reflection of God's own perfections. In a word, it is the transcript of God's holiness as the same comes to expression for the regulation of thought and behaviour consonant with his glory. We are to be holy in all manner of life because he who has called us is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). To be relieved of the demands which the law prescribes would contradict the relation to God which grace establishes. Salvation is salvation from sin, and 'sin is lawlessness', (1 Jn. 3:4). Salvation is, therefore, to be saved from breaking the law and thus saved to conformity unto it. Antinomian bias strikes at the nature of the gospel. It says, in effect, let us continue in sin.

A believer is re-created after the image of God. He therefore loves God and his brother also (1 Jn. 4:20-21). And because he loves God he loves what mirrors God's perfection. He delights in the law of God in his inmost self (Rom. 7:22). Obedience is his joy, disobedience the plague of his heart. The saint is destined for conformity to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29) and he is remade after the pattern of him who had no sin and could say, 'thy law is within my heart' (Ps. 40:8). 2

GRACE — (1.) Of form or person (Prov. 1:9; 3:22; Ps. 45:2). (2.) Favour, kindness, friendship (Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 2 Tim. 1:9). (3.) God's forgiving mercy (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:5). (4.) The gospel as distinguished from the law (John 1:17; Rom. 6:14; 1 Pet. 5:12). (5.) Gifts freely bestowed by God; as miracles, prophecy, tongues (Rom. 15:15; 1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:8). (6.) Christian virtues (2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Pet. 3:18). (7.) The glory hereafter to be revealed (1 Pet. 1:13). 1

GRACE, MEANS OF — an expression not used in Scripture, but employed (1) to denote those institutions ordained by God to be the ordinary channels of grace to the souls of men. These are the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer.

(2.) But in popular language the expression is used in a wider sense to denote those exercises in which we engage for the purpose of obtaining spiritual blessing; as hearing the gospel, reading the Word, meditation, self-examination, Christian conversation, etc. 1

KINGDOM OF GOD — (Matt. 6:33; Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43) = ‘kingdom of Christ’ (Matt. 13:41; 20:21) = ‘kingdom of Christ and of God’ (Eph. 5:5) = ‘kingdom of David’ (Mark 11:10) = ‘the kingdom’ (Matt. 8:12; 13:19) = ‘kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 13:41), all denote the same thing under different aspects, viz.: (1) Christ’s mediatorial authority, or his rule on the earth; (2) the blessings and advantages of all kinds that flow from this rule; (3) the subjects of this kingdom taken collectively, or the Church. 1

KINGDOM OF GOD, KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. The kingdom of heaven or kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ preaching, according to the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, who addresses himself to the Jews, speaks for the most part of the ‘kingdom of heaven’, Mark and Luke speak of the ‘kingdom of God’, which has the same meaning as the ‘kingdom of heaven’, but was more intelligible to non-Jews. The use of ‘kingdom of heaven’ in Matthew is certainly due to the tendency in Judaism to avoid the direct use of the name of God. In any case no distinction in sense is to be assumed between the two expressions (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Mt. 5:3 with Lk. 6:20).

I. In John the Baptist

John the Baptist first comes forward with the announcement that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt. 3:2) and Jesus takes this message over from him (Mt. 4:17). The expression ‘kingdom of heaven’ (Heb. *mal’kūt šāmayim*) originates with the late-Jewish expectation of the future in which it denoted the decisive intervention of God, ardently expected by Israel, to restore his people’s fortunes and liberate them from the power of their enemies. The coming of the kingdom is the great perspective of the future, prepared by the coming of the *Messiah, which paves the way for the kingdom of God.

By the time of Jesus the development of this eschatological hope in Judaism had taken a great variety of forms, in which now the national element and now the cosmic and apocalyptic element is prominent. This hope goes back to the proclamation in OT prophecy concerning both the restoration of David’s throne and the coming of God to renew the world. Although the OT has nothing to say of the eschatological kingdom of heaven in so many words, yet in the Psalms and prophets the future manifestation of God’s royal sovereignty belongs to the most central concepts of OT faith and hope. Here too various elements achieve prominence, as may be clearly seen from a comparison of the earlier prophets with the prophecies regarding universal world-sovereignty and the emergence of the Son of man in the book of *Daniel.

When John the Baptist and, after him, Jesus himself proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand, this proclamation involved an awakening cry of sensational and universal significance. The long-expected divine turning-point in history, the great restoration,

however it was conceived at the time, is proclaimed as being at hand. It is therefore of all the greater importance to survey the content of the NT preaching with regard to the coming of the kingdom.

In the preaching of John the Baptist prominence is given to the announcement of divine judgment as a reality which is immediately at hand. The axe is already laid to the root of the trees. God's coming as King is above all else a coming to purify, to sift, to judge. No-one can evade it. No privilege can buy exemption from it, not even the ability to claim Abraham as one's father. At the same time John the Baptist points to the coming One who is to follow him, whose forerunner he himself is. The coming One comes with the winnowing-fan in his hand. In view of his coming the people must repent and submit to baptism for the washing away of sins, so as to escape the coming wrath and participate in the salvation of the kingdom and the baptism with the Holy Spirit which will be poured out when it comes (Mt. 3:1-12).

II. In the teaching of Jesus

a. Present aspect

Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom follows word for word on John's, yet it bears a much more comprehensive character. After John the Baptist had watched Jesus' appearance for a considerable time, he began to be in doubt whether Jesus was, after all, the coming One whom he had announced (Mt. 11:2f.). Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom differs in two respects from that of the Baptist. In the first place, while it retains without qualification the announcement of judgment and the call to repentance, it is the saving significance of the kingdom that stands in the foreground. In the second place—and here is the pith and core of the matter—he announced the kingdom not just as a reality which was at hand, something which would appear in the immediate future, but as a reality which was already present, manifested in his own person and ministry. Although the places where Jesus speaks explicitly of the kingdom as being present are not numerous (see especially Mt. 12:28 and parallels), his whole preaching and ministry are marked by this dominant reality. In him the great future has already become 'present time'.

This present aspect of the kingdom manifests itself in all sorts of ways in the person and deeds of Christ. It appears palpably and visibly in the casting out of demons (*cf.* Lk. 11:20) and generally in Jesus' miraculous power. In the healing of those who are demon-possessed it becomes evident that Jesus has invaded the house of 'the strong man', has bound him fast and so is in a position to plunder his goods (Mt. 12:29). The kingdom of heaven breaks into the domain of the evil one. The power of Satan is broken. Jesus sees him fall like lightning from heaven. He possesses and bestows power to trample on the dominion of the enemy. Nothing can be impossible for those who go forth into the world, invested with Jesus' power, as witnesses of the kingdom (Lk. 10:18f.). The whole of Jesus' miraculous activity is the proof of the coming of the kingdom. What many prophets and righteous men desired in vain to see—the breaking in of the great epoch of salvation—the disciples can now see and hear (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask, 'Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for

another?‘ they were shown the wonderful works done by Jesus, in which, according to the promise of prophecy, the kingdom was already being manifested: the blind were enabled to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear; lepers were being cleansed and dead people raised to life, and the gospel was being proclaimed to the poor (Mt. 11:2ff.; Lk. 7:18ff.). Also in the last of these—the proclamation of the gospel—the breaking through of the kingdom is seen. Since salvation is announced and offered as a gift already available to the poor in spirit, the hungry and the mourners, the kingdom is theirs. So too the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, not merely as a future reality to be accomplished in heaven, nor merely as a present possibility, but as a dispensation offered today, on earth, through Jesus himself; ‘Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven; for the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins’ (see Mk. 2:1-12, *et passim*).

As appears clearly from this last-quoted word of power, all this is founded on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The kingdom has come in him and with him; he is the auto-basileia. Jesus’ self-revelation as the Messiah, the Son of man and Servant of the Lord, constitutes both the mystery and the unfolding of the whole gospel.

It is impossible to explain these sayings of Jesus about himself in a future sense, as some have wished to do, as though he referred to himself only as the future *Messiah, the Son of man who was to be expected on a coming day on the clouds of heaven. For however much this future revelation of the kingdom remains an essential element in the content of the gospel, we cannot mistake the fact that in the Gospels Jesus’ Messiahship is present here and now. Not only is he proclaimed as such at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration—as the beloved and elect One of God (plain Messianic designations)—but he is also endowed with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16) and invested with full divine authority (Mt. 21:27); the Gospel is full of his declarations of absolute authority, he is presented as the One sent by the Father, the One who has come to fulfil what the prophets foretold. In his coming and teaching the Scripture is fulfilled in the ears of those who listen to him (Lk. 4:21). He came not to destroy but to fulfil (Mt. 5:17ff.), to announce the kingdom (Mk. 1:38), to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19:10), to serve others, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). The secret of belonging to the kingdom lies in belonging to him (Mt. 7:23; 25:41). In brief, the person of Jesus as the Messiah is the centre of all that is announced in the gospel concerning the kingdom. The kingdom is concentrated in him in its present and future aspects alike.

b. Future aspect

There is a future aspect as well. For although it is clearly stated that the kingdom is manifested here and now in the gospel, so also is it shown that as yet it is manifested in this world only in a provisional manner. That is why the proclamation of its present activity in the words, ‘The blind receive their sight; the dead are raised; the poor have good news preached to them’, is followed by the warning: ‘Blessed is he who takes no offence at me’ (Mt. 11:6; Lk. 7:23). The ‘offence’ lies in the hidden character of the kingdom in this epoch. The miracles are still tokens of another order of reality than the present one; it is not yet the time when the demons will be delivered to eternal darkness (Mt. 8:29). The gospel of the kingdom is still revealed only as a seed which is being sown.

In the parables of the sower, the seed growing secretly, the tares among the wheat, the mustard seed, the leaven, it is about this hidden aspect of the kingdom that Jesus instructs his disciples. The Son of man himself, invested with all power by God, the One who is to come on the clouds of heaven, is the Sower who sows the Word of God. He is depicted as a man dependent upon others: the birds, the thorns, human beings, can partially frustrate his work. He has to wait and see what will come of his seed. Indeed, the hiddenness of the kingdom is deeper still: the King himself comes in the form of a slave. The birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man (Dn. 7:13) has no place to lay his head. In order to receive everything, he must first of all give up everything. He must give his life as a ransom; as the suffering Servant of the Lord of Is. 53, he must be numbered with the transgressors. The kingdom has come; the kingdom will come. But it comes by the way of the cross, and before the Son of man exercises his authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Mt. 4:8; 28:18) he must tread the path of obedience to his Father in order thus to fulfil all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). The manifestation of the kingdom has therefore a history in this world. It must be proclaimed to every creature. Like the wonderful seed, it must sprout and grow, no man knows how (Mk. 4:27). It has an inward power by which it makes its way through all sorts of obstacles and advances over all; for the field in which the seed is sown is the world (Mt. 13:38). The gospel of the kingdom goes forth to all nations (Mt. 28:19), for the King of the kingdom is also Lord of the Spirit. His resurrection brings in a new aeon; the preaching of the kingdom *and* the King reaches out to the ends of the earth. The decision has already come to pass; but the fulfilment still recedes into the future. What at first appears to be one and the same coming of the kingdom, what is announced as one indivisible reality, at hand and at close quarters, extends itself to cover new periods of time and far distances. For the frontiers of this kingdom are not co-terminous with Israel's boundaries or history: the kingdom embraces all nations and fills all ages until the end of the world comes.

III. Kingdom and church

The kingdom is thus related to the history of the church and of the world alike. A connection exists between kingdom and church, but they are not identical, even in the present age. The kingdom is the whole of God's redeeming activity in Christ in this world; the church is the assembly of those who belong to Jesus Christ. Perhaps one could speak in terms of two concentric circles, of which the church is the smaller and the kingdom the larger, while Christ is the centre of both. This relation of the church to the kingdom can be formulated in all kinds of ways. The church is the assembly of those who have accepted the gospel of the kingdom in faith, who participate in the salvation of the kingdom, which includes the forgiveness of sins, adoption by God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the possession of eternal life. They are also those in whose life the kingdom takes visible form, the light of the world, the salt of the earth; those who have taken on themselves the yoke of the kingdom, who live by their King's commandments and learn from him (Mt. 11:28-30). The church, as the organ of the kingdom, is called to confess Jesus as the Christ, to the missionary task of preaching the gospel in the world; she is also the community of those who wait for the coming of the kingdom in glory, the servants who

have received their Lord's talents in prospect of his return. The church receives her whole constitution from the kingdom, on all sides she is beset and directed by the revelation, the progress, the future coming of the kingdom of God, without at any time being the kingdom herself or even being identified with it.

Therefore the kingdom is not confined within the frontiers of the church. Christ's Kingship is supreme above all. Where it prevails and is acknowledged, not only is the individual human being set free, but the whole pattern of life is changed: the curse of the demons and fear of hostile powers disappears. The change which Christianity brings about among peoples dominated by nature-religions is a proof of the comprehensive, all-embracing significance of the kingdom. It works not only outwardly like a mustard seed but inwardly like leaven. It makes its way into the world with its redeeming power. The last book of the Bible, which portrays Christ's Kingship in the history of the world and its advancing momentum right to the end, especially illuminates the antithesis between the triumphant Christ-King (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Rev. 5:1ff.) and the power of Satan and anti-christ, which still survives on earth and contends against Christ and his church. However much the kingdom invades world-history with its blessing and deliverance, however much it presents itself as a saving power against the tyranny of gods and forces inimical to mankind, it is only through a final and universal crisis that the kingdom, as a visible and all-conquering reign of peace and salvation, will bring to full fruition the new heaven and the new earth.

IV. In the rest of the New Testament

The expression 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God' does not appear so frequently in the NT outside the Synoptic Gospels. This is, however, simply a matter of terminology. As the indication of the great revolution in the history of salvation which has already been inaugurated by Christ's coming, and as the expected consummation of all the acts of God, it is the central theme of the whole NT revelation of God.

V. In theological thought

As regards the conception of the kingdom of heaven in theology, this has been powerfully subjected to all kinds of influences and viewpoints during the various periods and trends of theological thought. In Roman Catholic theology a distinctive feature is the identification of the kingdom of God and the church in the earthly dispensation, an identification which is principally due to Augustine's influence. Through the ecclesiastical hierarchy Christ is actualized as King of the kingdom of God. The area of the kingdom is coterminous with the frontiers of the church's power and authority. The kingdom of heaven is extended by the mission and advance of the church in the world.

In their resistance to the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the Reformers laid chief emphasis on the spiritual and invisible significance of the kingdom and readily (and wrongly) invoked Lk. 17:20f. in support of this. The kingdom of heaven, that is to say, is a spiritual sovereignty which Christ exercises through the preaching of his word and the operation of the Holy Spirit. While the Reformation in its earliest days did not lose sight

of the kingdom's great dimensions of saving history, the kingdom of God, under the influence of the Enlightenment and pietism, came to be increasingly conceived in an individualistic sense; it is the sovereignty of grace and peace in the hearts of men. In later liberal theology this conception developed in a moralistic direction (especially under the influence of Kant): the kingdom of God is the kingdom of peace, love and righteousness. At first, even in pietism and sectarian circles, the expectation of the coming kingdom of God was maintained, without, however, making allowance for a positive significance of the kingdom for life in this world. Over against this more or less dualistic understanding of the kingdom we must distinguish the social conception of the kingdom which lays all the stress on its visible and communal significance. This conception is distinguished in some writers by a social radicalism (the 'Sermon on the Mount' Christianity of Tolstoy and others, or the 'religious-social' interpretation of, e.g., Kutter and Ragaz in Switzerland), in others by the evolutionary belief in progress (the 'social gospel' in America). The coming of the kingdom consists in the forward march of social righteousness and communal development.

In contrast to these spiritualizing, moralistic and evolutionary interpretations of the kingdom, NT scholarship is rightly laying stress again on the original significance of the kingdom in Jesus' preaching—a significance bound up with the history of salvation and eschatology. While the founders of this newer eschatological direction gave an extreme interpretation to the idea of the kingdom of heaven, so that there was no room left for the kingdom's penetration of the present world-order (Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, the so-called 'thoroughgoing' eschatology), more attention has been paid latterly to the unmistakable present significance of the kingdom, while this significance has been brought within the perspective of the history of salvation, the perspective of the progress of God's dynamic activity in history, which has the final consummation as its goal.

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PART 2: A REVELATION OF.....

3 KINGDOM AGES OF GOD

THE GAPS

FIRST GAP

Most of us know of the approximate 400-year gap between the Old and the New Testaments between c.432-5 BC.

Prior to the ' gap' the Babylonians had destroyed Israel as a nation. From then on, Israel was a minor territory in a succession of empires. The Persians followed the Babylonians. But the most significant influence was the expansion of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, who annexed Palestine in 332 BC. Greek influence remained, in various forms, until General Pompey subdued the East for Rome, taking Jerusalem in 63 BC after a 3-month siege of the Temple area. His army killed priests as they were performing their duties, and entered the Holy of Holies, an act the Jews could neither forgive nor forget.

This Greek and then Roman influence set the scene, preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus. The Greeks developed science to a more sophisticated level and with it, the powerful force of humanism we see so much in evidence today. The Romans built the world' s first extensive communications network through a magnificent roading system that enabled the message of Jesus to be taken to the known world of the time.

So this ' gap' of 400 years played a vital role in preparing the way for, and identifying the change between, the second and third ' kingdoms' .

However, not so well known, is the fact that this was not the first big gap in recorded Bible history.

SECOND GAP (First actually - in time!)

The first 400 year gap starts at the end of Genesis with the death of Joseph in Egypt and covers the period until the ministry of Moses as recorded in the book of Exodus.

⁴⁰ *Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years.*

⁴¹ *At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt. (Exodus 12:40)*

As with the period between the Testaments, this certainly wasn't a time when things stood still. It too was a preparation time for the next step in God's plan. Without it, the events that took place from the Exodus onwards would not have been possible.

For the Patriarchs were a nomadic people without a written language. History was passed on from generation to generation solely by word of mouth. Hence why a period covering 1000's of years is recorded in just the one book of 50 chapters, the book of Genesis.

During this ' gap' their population increased dramatically from 70 to maybe 4 million in just 400 years. How was this possible? As we will see later, there was a change in the definition of the family. But too, the people learned the principles of sustainable, settled, intensive agriculture from the Egyptians. So they could now feed, clothe and house a far greater number of people. As well as being introduced to a written language, they also learned the social and organisational skills that enabled them to undertake the exodus.

While we tend to look negatively upon the period of captivity, a major purpose behind it was to set up the Israelites for the next stage of their development in the fulfilment of God's plan. God continues to do that with us today. He puts us through unusual and difficult circumstances in order to prepare and equip us for what is to come.

So now we have laid the ' time' foundation upon which the ' Three Kingdoms of God' can be built.

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES OF GOD

The more usual ' 2 kingdom' approach of ' Law' to ' Grace' suffers a considerable problem. For the Law was not set out in detail until the time of the exodus from Egypt. There was no formal law as such during the nomadic period of the patriarchs although the people understood many of the principles upon which the Law was based. It would not have been possible for the Patriarchs to record it, for they had no written language. So it is clear that there was a pre-law period or ' kingdom age' . During this time God related to His people in a different than from when the time the Law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Once we understand this, recognising too that God works in threes, the Bible and God' s plan for His people throughout all the ages becomes clear. It is this plan that we are going to investigate here.

1. CREATION, TO & THROUGH THE PATRIARCHS (Beginning of time - c.1800 BC) Genesis.

Genesis can be a bit of a mystery to many of us. We would love more information. But we need to appreciate that Adam, Noah, Abraham and all, did not have laptop computers in their tents to record events in detail, as they went about their nomadic wanderings to find new feed sources for their herds. All history had to be passed down from generation to generation verbally, being retained in the mind. It is fortunate I was not one of them, or Genesis would have been very short indeed!

Because of these limitations, God too restricted what He revealed about Himself to the memory capacity of the people. Therefore we only have a very brief overview of these incredible times that provided the foundation for the world in which we now live.

As we proceed, I trust you will get a better understanding and appreciation of the life and times of our Patriarchs. For it is through them that we receive our spiritual inheritance.

2. MOSES, TO & THROUGH THE PROPHETS (c1500 BC - 432 BC) Exodus to Malachi.

Now we move into a time period about which much more is known. It has been recorded in greater detail through the written language developed during the Jews stay in Egypt. Additionally, archaeology and other recorded historical sources give us a greater understanding of the life and times of the people from Moses to Nehemiah. No need for great memory here!

God too, as society developed, revealed more of Himself. For Moses and others, could now write His revelations and instructions down. Fortunately, not all had to be written on stone tablets!

Seeing how this ' kingdom age' developed from that of the Patriarchs increases our understanding and appreciation of God' s plan for us today.

3. JESUS' BIRTH UNTIL HIS RETURN (c.5 BC - ?) Matthew to Revelation

This is the kingdom age we are most familiar with, as it' s the one we are living in right now. We are hugely blessed to have the example of Jesus, the record of the New Testament and the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit, to reveal layers of meaning to us. We also have historical records, expositions and interpretations galore to help us in our understanding of the kingdom of God.

Having communication channels that started with the Roman roads, then the printing press and today, with our plethora of communication media, we are well able to take the message of Jesus to the world.

Through understanding this progression through the three ages, and with the increasing revelations of God Himself, we gain an increased appreciation of how blessed we are to live in this third kingdom age.

THE PROMISED KINGDOM TO COME

The return of Jesus and the establishment of His final kingdom, is the time every truly convicted Christian eagerly looks forward to. We get but a small inkling of its glory throughout the Bible, but particularly in its final 17 chapters. Just to whet our appetite!

So let' s look forward then with eager anticipation to the discoveries we are about to make about the progressive revelation of God and His purposes throughout the three kingdom ages.

METHOD OF STUDY

We are going to take twelve themes from Scripture and trace their development, step by step through the three kingdom ages.

As we proceed we will build a Summary Table, listing each theme with a brief description of its progressive revelation through the three stages.

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>			
<i>REACHING</i>			
<i>SALVATION</i>			

The first theme we will consider is how society was organised during each of the three ages.

Then we' ll take a look at the people to whom each age related.

This will be followed by a consideration of the means of salvation, of how a relationship with God was to be obtained, within each age. And so on.

By the time we get to the end of the study we should both understand a lot more about God' s plan for your life and mine. I' m looking forward to it very much! You too?

SOCIETIES OF THE KINGDOM AGES

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental

It hugely helps our understanding of each kingdom age to be aware of the basis upon which society operated. For God doesn't work in isolation. He operates within the structure of society that exists at the time. For example, it would have been impossible for the patriarchs to take God's word to Europe. They were unaware of its existence. Their world was centred round finding food for their animals. It wasn't until the Romans built a network of roads throughout their empire that the spread of God's word internationally, became logistically feasible. Hence, the time was then right for Jesus to come and give the Great Commission, to take the Word to a needy world.

1. **NOMADIC SOCIETY**

The role of Adam and Eve was to look after the Garden of Eden. This was designed by God to be a relatively easy task. No conflict, no weeds and perfect health! Everything in nature was in harmony.

³¹ *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31) 1*

¹⁵ *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)*

Unfortunately they blew it! As a former farmer, I really understand the penalty in working the land. And all mothers know about childbirth!

1. All scriptures are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984 unless otherwise specified.

¹⁶ To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” ¹⁷ To Adam he said, Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3:16-19)

Adam and Eve produced two sons, who specialized in different areas.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. (Genesis 4:2b)

Division came between them as a result of jealousy resulting in the first of many murders in the Bible. This continues today!

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:8)

Society continued to degrade until, by the time of Noah, God had had enough and made a new start.

⁹ This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. (Genesis 4:9-12)

The flood came and went but man’ s nature did not improve. This was reflected in people’ s attempt to get to heaven in their own strength, through building the Tower of Babel. God once again had enough, instituting language barriers and spreading the people far and wide.

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:8-9)

The Nomadic Age commenced. People lived a travelling lifestyle, very similar to that still found in a few places today.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. ⁹ Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev. (Genesis 12:8-9)

By the time of Abraham, in the later stages of the Bronze Age, some settlements existed. But the primary emphasis remained upon seeking out and exploiting natural food sources, rather than producing crops through sustainable agricultural methods. Abraham however, would stop in an area over the winter period when there was sufficient rainfall to make the grass grow for his animals, to grow some basic crops, perhaps of barley.

Family groups had to split up as growth in the numbers of people and animals put too much pressure on the available food supplies in an area.

⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, 'Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.'"(Genesis 13:5-9)

Abraham was unusual in his day, in that he was a monotheist, believing in one god, as opposed to the polytheism of his forbears. A relationship which was personal rather than formal, as we will see later.

³³ *Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. (Genesis 21:33)*

As this form of society was mobile and without a written language, their ability to retain history was limited to the capacity of their memories. Similarly their experience of God had to be a personal one, for there was no practical way to codify a 'religious' system.

The secret of Abraham's success however was no different to that required today! He believed God in faith and acted upon God's instructions.

⁴ *Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:4-6)*

Well, most of the time! He too had his moments of questioning, proving he was human.

¹⁷ *Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (Genesis 17:17)*

So throughout this Nomadic period there was little formal religious structure or organization, particularly in regard to the kingdom of Yahweh. God revealed Himself in a personal way to His limited, chosen people, the direct descendants of Abraham. A group of only 70 by the time the Jacobs family arrived in Egypt.

²⁶ *All those who went to Egypt with Jacob—those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives—numbered sixty-six persons.*

²⁷ *With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all.
(Genesis 46:26-7)*

It was a kingdom based on personal revelation and faith, experienced by a small group of people, all the direct descendants of Abraham.

THE FIRST GAP in recorded Bible history followed as the separator between the first and second kingdom ages. God was about to do a new thing!

Abraham had had a taste of the more developed Egyptian society when he was forced to go there during a time of famine.

¹⁰ *Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.
(Genesis 12:10)*

Egypt had a settled agrarian society based upon the fertile river plains of the River Nile. Its year round water flows provided irrigation for growing crops during the long hot dry season. Hence why Abraham traveled there at the time. A foretaste of what was to come later.

Because of this ability to grow crops the Egyptians could stay in the one place and develop cities, a written language, cultural activities, formalized religious activities, etc. The pyramids are a classic example of what they were able to achieve.

These agricultural and community skills were absorbed by the Israelites during their time there. Now instead of just a single family of 70 people, all the extended families, cousins, uncles and aunts, were physically able to live in the one area, and together

become God' s chosen people. And breed! To grow to a likely population of around 2 million people at the time of the Exodus.

2. AGRARIAN SOCIETY

By the time the Jews left Egypt they had developed the social, organisational and farming skills necessary to become an independent nation.

So the scene was now set for God to reveal more of Himself to His people, to become the God of a nation. He communicated His requirements for worship, personal and societal behaviour to Moses on Mount Sinai. According to Jewish tradition there are 613 written commandments in the Torah, although no two lists are the same. The Ten Commandments today though, are accepted as being the most important. Of course, these are the ones written by God' s hand, even though it had to be done twice! The rest were written down by Moses or Joshua, or possibly dictated to scribes to do so.

‘These are the laws you are to set before them: (Exodus 21:1)

Jewish law, then and now also developed a strong oral tradition. But there is dispute over whether these edicts are of God or man.

The Law naturally reflected aspects of God' s character. This was most dramatically revealed in His instructions for worship. This revelation fell into two principle areas.

Firstly, the Tabernacle of Moses. The Tabernacle was God' s first church. A church wasn' t necessary in Abraham and the other Patriarchs' days, for God revealed himself only to a small family group. Their tents were their church! Now however, His chosen people were a nation, and He needed to provide a focus for their worship.

⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth

*is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’
These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”
(Exodus 19:5-6)*

Interestingly, He didn't just pluck the design of the Tabernacle from some heavenly vault, where it had been waiting for this day. Rather, the design was somewhat similar to those used by the surrounding people. But through this incredible structure God was able to reveal not only His character but also proscribe the form of His Church for all time. Truly amazing! Not only was it a place of worship for the people, but the very presence of God dwelled there too. Its layout was summarised in the New Testament book of Hebrews.

*Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. ² A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, ⁴ which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.
(Hebrews 9:1-5)*

Secondly, the Feasts of the Lord. Through the pattern of the celebrations of the Religious Year, God further revealed His nature to His people. Through the feasts too, we can see the pattern and process of God's plan of redemption for His people, through the ages to come. The Feasts were, in our parlance, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

*¹⁴ ‘Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me.
(Exodus 23:14)*

The understanding of God's nature and plan was further enhanced through His ongoing communication with His chosen nation of Israel. Through the Judges and Kings, Prophets and Priests, over a period of

1000 years until the end of the Old Testament, some 400 years before Christ.

After the people served their sentence for disobedience, 40 years in the desert, they progressively came into their promised inheritance, the state of Israel. The means to conquer and run their country was made possible by the written language, plus organisational and agricultural skills they had learned from the Egyptians during their time there.

When the people were obedient God was with them. Sometimes He acted supernaturally, but most of the time the Jews, as do we today, had to inherit the kingdom step by step, through hard work and sacrifice. Wars were fought, cities were built and fortified, administrations set up. Society had changed from being a wandering nomadic family group to a highly organised, settled, agrarian one. One to which God was able, in practical ways, to reveal more of His nature and character.

Unfortunately, through disobedience, the Promised Land was lost, piece by piece. By the end of the Old Testament, even though some had returned to the land from captivity, the Jews lived in subjection to the newer super powers that had risen up and conquered their lands. Only the dream remained.

THE SECOND GAP of 400 years, separating the ministry of Nehemiah from that of Christ, was one of ferment and change. After relatively brief Babylonian and Persian periods of dominance, the Middle Eastern cultural tradition was crushed and replaced by the internationalist one of the new European invaders, the Greeks, then the Romans.

Without doubt, of all the ancient empires, Greek culture has had the greatest impact upon the modern world. They were the first to make gods in their own image. By 'humanizing' their gods, it logically led to the next step of secular humanism, the belief effectively, that man is god. Roman culture was predominantly a

continuation of the Greek, with a few differences reflecting the nature and background of the people.

The Greeks placed a huge emphasis on education and sport. Our education structures today are still based on Greek principles and of course, we have reintroduced the Olympic Games. Such Greek ideals as democracy, human rights, capitalism, classical art and architecture, absence of morality and tolerance for abnormal behavior, continue to live on in our society.

Alexander the Great dreamed of a world united by the Greek language and culture, one that he and his successors implemented through a process known as Hellenization.

Apart from the aristocracy, most of the Jews retained their dreams and religion, so this period became one of great but futile heroics as their rebellions were brutally thwarted by the all-powerful European invaders.

However the people' s outlook inevitably widened as they came into contact with the wider world. It was into this milieu of change, both physical and intellectual, that Jesus was born.

3. DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIETY

God organized the times prior to the introduction of His Son Jesus into the world. Humanists, in line with Greek thought, take the opposing view. The one that Jesus was an intelligent, spiritual man who simply responded to the ferment of new ideas to proclaim an updated set of religious principles based as a response to the ' new world' in which he lived. An impasse! The classic chicken and egg problem!

But I trust you will see, just as the hand of God was present in placing the Jews into Egypt, so it is present here in preparing a society and world to be ready for the radical, worldview of Jesus. As we saw in the case of the Tabernacle, God uses the history and culture of all people for His own purposes.

So at the time of Jesus, we have a society slowly changing its focus. There was the contrast of the societal conservatism of the Pharisees, who desired to retain the societal status quo while modifying the oral religious tradition to suit the times. Too, the societal liberalism of the Sadducees who only accepted the written law of the Torah.

It became a developmental society! Development which has continued unabated at an ever increasing pace, (with the notable exception of the Dark Ages) for the 2,500 years or so since the rise of the Greek Empire. Today, we live in a society that has evolved progressively through the experiences of the Agricultural, Industrial and now, Knowledge Revolutions.

Jesus came then, as the final, living revelation of a living God.

*¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation
(Colossians 1:15)*

To learn and act upon the knowledge of the truth.

³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

Jesus is a further revelation of the God revealed to the Patriarchs and the Jews, to further enlighten us about the character and nature of the Father.

² Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:2)

As part of our walk with Jesus we are instructed to deepen our knowledge of Him.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to

godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.
(2 Peter 1:5-9)

We have literally had made available to us the knowledge of the kingdom.

¹¹ He replied, *“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. (Matthew 13:11)*

And warned of the consequences of ignoring the knowledge given.

¹² *Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. (Matthew 13:12)*

Instructing us that there is but the one way to find God.

⁶ *Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’ (John 14:6-7)*

Jesus accused the Pharisees of preventing people from gaining knowledge!

⁵² *‘Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.’ (Luke 11:52)*

The former Pharisee Paul explained to the Jews that, even though they were zealous, they were missing out because they did not have the

knowledge of God revealed through Jesus. They were not prepared to accept the new revelation of the kingdom.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)

Of course, knowledge is not an end in itself but must be applied, to be useful. We can be very knowledgeable about God without truly knowing Him and living for Him.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1)

But if we have this knowledge and ignore it, the consequences are dire!

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Hebrews 10:26-7)

We are both blessed and challenged to be living in these days of the third and final revelation of God through Jesus. Blessed to be able to know Him better than those of millennia past. And challenged, to avoid the pitfalls of a world where knowledge is considered a replacement for God. Are we ready to live up to the challenge?

THE KINGDOM' S REACH

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World

A FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

Throughout the book of Genesis, God worked through families. This is not surprising, as the family was the basic social group of organisation amongst early societies and indeed remains so amongst nomadic people today.

God created the world' s first marriage in Adam and Eve. Perfect - for a while!

²³ The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.' ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:23-4)

And they did what most couples do. Produce a family.

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.' ² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:1-2)

Sadly, like most families, they had problems with their children. Normal life, then as now! Although murder was a more extreme problem than most of us have to face up to!

When it came time for God to regenerate mankind, he chose to do it through a family. The family of Noah, that was. And God gave them the

same basic task he had Adam and Eve. To procreate - produce still more families!

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

But they too had their family problems. We are not sure what had happened to Mrs Noah, but Noah got into big problems after getting drunk.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said, 'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.' (Genesis 9:24)

It is when we come to the Patriarchs though, that we see the special way God worked through the family during this era. It was a perfect blend of the natural with the spiritual. In the natural, when the family group got too big for the animals to be able to find food within range of the camp, the group had to split. As we see with Abraham and Lot.

⁵ Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. ⁶ But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. ⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. ⁸ So Abram said to Lot, 'Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.' (Genesis 13:5-9)

This was the way the godly inheritance worked too. The inheritance would only be passed down through the one Son, one of God' s choosing. Starting with Abraham, much to his surprise and sadness, Ishmael, the elder son, would lose the inheritance, but still be blessed. Something we need to remember, as Ishmael is of the Moslem line.

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!' ¹⁹ Then God said, 'Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. (Genesis 17:17-19)

The same thing happened in the next generation. Isaac' s favorite, and the oldest son, Esau, missed out on the inheritance, which was passed down through Jacob' s line.

²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.' ²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. (Genesis 25:21-26)

As a result of this single line inheritance, by the time it came for the chosen line of Jacob to go to Egypt, there were but 70 in the family.

²⁷ With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all. (Genesis 46:27)

Here we see a perfect blend of the natural and the spiritual.

NEXT THE NATION

In the 400 or so years of the ' Gap' the population of the God' s chosen nation increased dramatically. From 70 to around two million!

³⁷ *The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.* ³⁸ *Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. (Exodus 12:37-38)*

As the people settled in the Goshen area of Egypt, learning the skills required for many people to sustainably live in close proximity to each other from the Egyptians, the chosen people of God increased from a family to a community. When it came time to celebrate the Passover,

⁴⁷ *The whole community of Israel must celebrate it. (Exodus 12:47)*

A community that was to become a nation, as had been promised to Abraham 700 years earlier.

The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’ ² ‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’ ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ (Genesis 12:1-3)

The community effectively became a nation as they crossed the River Jordan under Joshua's leadership, to commence possession of the Promised Land of Israel.

¹⁷ *The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground. (Joshua 3:17)*

The reality though, was that after the conquests under Joshua, throughout the time of the Judges, the nation was more a grouping of tribes than a united nation. It was not until part way through the reign of King David that the 12 tribes effectively united as one.

⁴ David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. ⁵ In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.
(2 Samuel 5:2-5)

The nation' s unity would continue, through the reign of Solomon, although latter on, with cracks starting to show again.

Once Solomon' s son Rehoboam succeeded his father, the situation quickly deteriorated.

⁴³ Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king. Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all the Israelites had gone there to make him king. ² When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. ³ So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: ⁴ 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.'
(1 Kings 11:43-12:4)

Rehoboam, with the misplaced confidence of youth, would not take good advice. Very quickly, the Kingdom of Israel split into two.

¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: 'What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse' s son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!' So the Israelites went home. ¹⁷ But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them. ¹⁸ King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. ¹⁹ So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. ²⁰ When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah (Plus Benjamin) remained loyal to the house of David. (1 Kings 12:16-20)

After a succession of some good, but more bad, kings, the Northern Kingdom of the 10 tribes of Israel were taken into captivity and the elite deported by the Assyrians in 722BC.

⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. ⁷ All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods ⁸ and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. (2 Kings 16:6-8)

The southern kingdom of Judah lasted a further 136 years, until Jerusalem finally succumbed to the army of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar on 14 August, 586BC.

²⁰ Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹ There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her land. (2Kings 25:20-21)

After a period of exile a remnant of the people returned to rebuild Jerusalem under Zerubbabel in 538BC, a second group under Ezra in 458BC. A final group under Nehemiah arrived from Babylon in 432BC, the time at which the Old Testament ends.

The reality of the nation had disappeared as Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks, and then Romans controlled the Promised Land. But the dream of the kingdom lived on. As it still does in Israel today.

AND NOW THE WORLD

The focus of the ministry of Jesus moved away from the Jewish nation to the world. Of course, He spoke mainly to the Jews and was highly critical of the religious system that had developed in Israel.

A system leading people away from, rather than into, the kingdom.

¹³ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (Matthew 23:13)”

The people were warned about the results of the system.

⁶ “Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:6)

He was introducing a far different view of the kingdom than them.

²⁰ For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

A kingdom based on actions rather than words.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. (Matthew 23:1)

And he took His message of the kingdom to anyone who would listen, irrespective of race.

*⁸ The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, **“I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that many will***

come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 8:7-11)

He confirmed that there was indeed a change in kingdoms from the nation of Israel to believers worldwide.

¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:12)

He ministered to the Samaritan woman, looked down upon and hated by the Jews as half-castes (from intermarrying, mainly through the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom)) and an immoral one at that!

¹⁷ ‘I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” (John 4:17-18)

Jesus taught of a kingdom not just for the Jews but for all those who believe, in Spirit and in truth.

¹⁹ ‘Sir,” the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” ²⁵ The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah” (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” ²⁶ Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he.” (John 4:19-26)

He dramatically and forcefully confirmed this message of hope of a kingdom, open for all those who will believe, in the last words he uttered before His return to Heaven. We call it the Great Commission. The fulfillment of which is the duty of every believer.

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:16-20)

Yes, Jesus ushered in the final kingdom, open to all those who will believe.

SALVATION - ENTERING THE KINGDOM

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace

REIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

From creation through to the end of the Patriarchs, personal righteousness was the characteristic that gained God' s favour. There was no formal religion. God sought out and rewarded those who had a heart for Him, proven by righteous living.

1. CREATION

Adam and Eve were the founder members of the world' s first family. They were the created by God. In the good times, before the fall, Adam, Eve and God fellowshiped together, personally and intimately.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

After the fall, their family was beset by all too common jealousies amongst their siblings. The first one though, was as serious as they can get. Resulting in murder!

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Genesis 4:8)

The first righteous line was snuffed out by satan almost as soon as it started! But Adam and Eve went on to have other children and the population increased.

2. NOAH

All did not go well and God got fed up with the sin of the people.

⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷ So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.' (Genesis 6:6-7)

Except for Noah, who was living a righteous (although not perfect) life.

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (Genesis 6:8-9)

Noah and his family were saved through Noah' s righteousness.

The LORD then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. (Genesis 7:1)

3. THE PATRIARCHS

The next major character we come to is Abraham, who again found favour with God through his righteous living.

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

God persisted with the succeeding generations. Some that were less than righteous, but God trained them as they went, all because of His promise to Abraham. Jacob was a classic example, resulting in a name change from supplanter to, effectively, ' chosen one' . (David' s translation)

²⁸ Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.’ ²⁹ Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’ But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’ (Genesis 32:28-30)

Yes, the first kingdom age was based upon personal righteousness.

RULE OF LAW

The first nation state of Israel was based on the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai, shortly after the Jews escaped from Egypt. Today' s State of Israel is still based on ' law' , although not entirely God' s Law! That day is promised to come. Another story for another time!

We will join Moses and the people in the Sinai Desert.

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. ² After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. ³ Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, ‘This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”
(Exodus 19:1-6)

The people needed to keep the Law that Moses was about to be given in order to receive God' s covenantal promises. Obedience is a requirement of all the Covenants, including ours today.

Moses was first given the 10 Commandments, the law in outline.

And God spoke all these words: ² 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ 'You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ 'You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ 'You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. ⁸ 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² 'Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ 'You shall not murder. ¹⁴ 'You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ 'You shall not steal. ¹⁶ 'You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. ¹⁷ 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.'"
(Exodus 20:1-17)

Followed by the law in detail.

'These are the laws you are to set before them: (Exodus 21:1)

The remainder of the Old Testament is largely about the people's efforts in keeping, or not keeping, 'The Law'. Benefits were received for obedience, highlighted by the occupation of the Promised Land. And the ultimate consequence of disobedience was the eventual loss of the same.

The kingdom prospered under the leadership of the obedient King David.

21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' (Acts 13:21-2)

But during and after the reign of David' s son Solomon, disobedience and rebellion appeared and spread until finally, the Promised Land was lost to the Assyrians and Babylonians.

10 'When you tell these people all this and they ask you, 'Why has the LORD decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the LORD our God?' 11 then say to them, 'It is because your fathers forsook me,' declares the LORD, 'and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. 12 But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me. 13 So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.' (Jeremiah 16:10-13)

The Law proved impossible to keep. For it wasn' t enough to simply enough know the Law. It had to be obeyed.

13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.
(Romans 2:13)

The Jews found the Law impossible to keep all the time, and paid the cost. The Land was lost.

25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. (Romans 2:25)

A new way was needed to inherit the kingdom. The third kingdom age was about to begin.

AGE OF GRACE

Jesus came with a new way. This caused huge problems for the Jews, who were used to the kingdom of The Law.

But Paul explained the ' new' concept of ' grace' to them.

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 11:1-6)

The change from Law to grace is indirectly beautifully described after Joseph and Mary returned home, having fulfilled their obligations under the Law to have Jesus circumcised. The grace of God was upon Him.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:39-40)

Interestingly, Jesus never mentioned the word ' grace' in the gospel accounts of His life. But John described it in the introduction to his gospel.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was

given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:14-18)

Paul too, confirmed the change from the Age of Law to the Age of Grace.

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹ Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Romans 3:21-30)

As was prophesied by Jeremiah and confirmed in Hebrews.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." ¹³ By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:10-13)

Paul states that God's grace in sending Jesus to die, as a substitute for our sinfulness, is not an excuse for disobeying the Law, as many today would like to believe.

⁹ *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)*

In this Age of Grace, the 'rules' for entering the kingdom have been turned upside down.

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'" ² He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³ And he said: **'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 1-4)***

And where is this kingdom found?

²⁰ *Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, **'The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, ²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.'** (Luke 17:20-21)*

The first qualification to enter is to be 'born again' .

³ *In reply Jesus declared, **'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'** ⁴ 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' ⁵ Jesus answered, **'I tell you the truth, no***

*one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.
6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 1:3-6)*

This is to give us the desire to live a holy life, through God' s grace.

*8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,
9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10)*

The Age of Grace has a finite end. At the end of the current ' Age of the Gentiles' , God will also extend His grace to the Jews.

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Romans 11:25-27)

We are a blessed people to live in the Age of Grace. May we not abuse our blessing!

KINGDOM PRIESTHOODS

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus

PRIESTHOOD OF MELCHIZEDEK

We know very little about the first priesthood, that of the mysterious figure of Melchizedek. Ironically, he is mentioned more in the New Testament than the Old! It shows that his priesthood is of importance in God' s programme. All we know directly about his ministry is covered in but 3 verses of Genesis.

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem (likely was Jerusalem) brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20)

There is considerable speculation about who he might have been, ranging from, in Jewish tradition, Shem the son of Noah to, by many today, a preincarnation of Jesus.

"Melchizedek was a Canaanitish prince, a worshipper of the true God, and in his peculiar history and character an instructive type of our Lord, the great High Priest (Heb. 5:6, 7; 6:20). One of the Amarna tablets (Letters sent to the Egyptian Pharaohs Amenophis III and his son Akhenaten around the middle of the 14th century B.C. The correspondents were kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Hatti and Mitanni, minor kings and rulers of the Near East at that time, and vassals of the Egyptian Empire.) is from Ebed-

Tob, king of Jerusalem, the successor of Melchizedek, in which he claims the very attributes and dignity given to Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews." 2

The ministry of Jesus is linked to that of Melchizedek through the line of David, in the only other Old Testament reference to him.

⁴ *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'* (Psalm 110:4)

His relationship to Jesus in the New Testament is summed up as:

⁵ *So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'* ⁶ *And he says in another place, 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'* (Hebrews 5:5)

Chapter 7 of Hebrews details the relationship. Easton here summarizes it.

"The typical significance of his history is set forth in detail in the Epistle to the Hebrews, ch. 7. The apostle there points out the superiority of his priesthood to that of Aaron in these several respects,

- (1) Even Abraham paid him tithes;
- (2) he blessed Abraham;
- (3) he is the type of a Priest who lives for ever;`
- (4) Levi, yet unborn, paid him tithes in the person of Abraham;
- (5) the permanence of his priesthood in Christ implied the abrogation of the Levitical system;
- (6) he was made priest not without an oath; and
- (7) his priesthood can neither be transmitted nor interrupted by death: "this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood." 2

2 Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

One day, all our questions will be answered! But there is no doubt that Melchizedek was the king/priest of the first kingdom age.

AARONIC PRIESTHOOD

During the second kingdom age, the priesthood and kingship functions were separated. Moses and his brother Aaron were from the tribe of Levi, those set aside by God to be his ministers during this period.

Joshua, then the Judges, first fulfilled the administrative role. Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim. The judges came from various tribes and were only recognized by the tribes that appointed them. There was little unity in the nation. So the situation administratively, in a human sense, was confusing. The people asked for a king, which God agreed to, reluctantly. The first king was Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. King David, from Judah, replaced him. When the Northern and Southern Kingdoms split, the Northern to be known as Israel, with 10 tribes, with Judah comprising of the remaining two, Benjamin and Judah. Most of the Levites also settled in Judah. Therefore the lines of kings and priests were preserved right through until the time of Jesus, their successor. Nothing is by chance in God.

Moses, the prophet, was the Old Testament type of Jesus.

⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Hebrews 3:5-6)

Aaron was to become the spokesman for Moses.

¹⁰ Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." ¹¹ The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." ¹³ But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

¹⁴ Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. (Exodus 4:10-16)

At God' s request, Moses instituted Aaron as the High Priest.

⁵ Moses said to the assembly, 'This is what the LORD has commanded to be done.' ⁶ Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. ⁷ He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him. He also tied the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband; so it was fastened on him. ⁸ He placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. ⁹ Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front of it, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Leviticus 8:5-9)

And Aaron' s sons as Priests - temporarily for two of the four!

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. ² So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored. Aaron remained silent. (Leviticus 10:1-3)

But Eleazar, who succeeded his father, reigned as High Priest for 20 years, and Ithamar, continued to serve in the Tabernacle. The family line of the Aaronic Priesthood was established.

By the time of Jesus however, the position had been corrupted and became an annual, politically elected one.

*¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.
(John 18:12-13)*

The Aaronic Priesthood was therefore, implicated in sending their successor Jesus, to die upon the Cross! This move backfired when Jesus overcame death. The last vestiges of the Aaronic Priesthood effectively disappeared with the destruction of the Temple in 70AD. Jesus replaced the Temple!

EVERLASTING PRIESTHOOD OF JESUS

Jesus came as the fulfillment of the 3 offices of prophet, priest and king as confirmed by Easton.

KINGLY OFFICE OF CHRIST — one of the three special relations in which Christ stands to his people. Christ's office as mediator comprehends three different functions, viz., those of a prophet, priest, and king. These are not three distinct offices, but three functions of the one office of mediator. 3

Jesus, as priest, was the successor to Aaron.

¹¹ If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law. (Hebrews 7:11-12)

And too, the rightful successor through the line of Melchizedek.

¹⁵ And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, ¹⁶ one who has become a priest not on the basis of a

3 Easton, M. G., M. A. D. D., *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1996.

regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 7:15-17)

He replaced the Levitical priesthood with a better hope, one of perfection, which the former could never provide.

¹⁸ The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7:18-19)

He was appointed by the Father Himself to bring the new and final covenant available to us who live in the third kingdom age.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, ²¹ but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’”

²² Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. (Hebrews 7:20-22)

A permanent priesthood! Yes, one that will never be changed or replaced.

²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:23-5)

He made the one final sacrifice.

²⁶ Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men

who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:26-8)

And He intercedes with the Father on our behalf in the heavenly tabernacle itself.

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,² and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. (Hebrews 8:1-2)

He is the mediator of a new covenant, infinitely superior to the previous one the people disobeyed.

⁷ For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. (Hebrews 8:7-9)

A personal covenant, available to all those who will believe, to replace those available firstly, to the patriarchal families, then to the nation of Israel.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” ¹³ By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:10:13)

He made the ultimate sacrifice of His life, spilling His blood so that our relationship to the Father might be restored.

¹¹ When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!
(Hebrews 9:11-14)

He died so that we might receive eternal life.

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15)

To live in the third kingdom age under the New Covenant is a huge privilege for us. May we not abuse it!

MEASUREMENT OF SUCCESS

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> c1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice

PROMISE OF LIFE

God created the earth as a place of habitation for the human race. For you and me to live in and look after.

²⁶ Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-7)

Obviously, Adam and Eve couldn't do this all by themselves, so the emphasis of the first kingdom age was upon reproduction, on life itself, upon filling the earth with people.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ (Genesis 1:28)

After dealing with the fall of man in Genesis Chapter 3, this historical record concentrates upon the reproduction of the human race. Starting with Adam and Eve's family.

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, ‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.’² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:1-2)

Then, moving on in the next chapter, through the family tree from Adam to Noah.

This is the written account of Adam’s line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.² He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man.’³ When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.⁴ After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.⁵ Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died..... (Genesis 5:1-5...)

After dealing once again with sin through the Flood, God reiterated His promise of life.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

Mankind' s family tree was disturbed again by God' s dealing with sin in the story of the Tower of Babel. This time however, instead of destroying the people as during the Flood, God dispersed them to new areas.

⁹That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Genesis 11:9)

The family tree extended from Shem to Abram. Abraham, as he was to become, received (after Adam and Eve) the greatest promise of life as the literal father of the nation Israel, and the spiritual father of the gentiles.

The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. ² ‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:1-2)

The story of Abraham is all about life. Life that he and Sarah were unable to produce by themselves in the natural, (in spite of trying to do it their way, with Ishmael) but which God promised them supernaturally (an old man and a post menopausal woman) in the person of Isaac.

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, ‘Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?’ ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’ ¹⁹ Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. (Genesis 17:17-19)

So, after another battle with sin in Sodom and Gomorrah, resulting in their destruction, Isaac was born.

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. (Genesis 21:1-3)

After proving his obedience through the aborted sacrifice of his son and heir, through whom the promise of life had to be fulfilled, God confirmed the undertaking He had given.

¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time ¹⁶ and said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, ¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.’ (Genesis 22:15-18)

The story of life, transmitted through the family line of the Patriarchs, the seed of Abraham, continues right to the end of Genesis. The book comes towards a close as Jacob blesses his sons, immediately prior to his death in Egypt.

Then Jacob called for his sons and said: 'Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.'² 'Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel. (Genesis 49:1-2)

A kingdom age oriented around life, life through the family, life centered upon reproduction, in order to "fill the earth."

PROMISE OF PROSPERITY

The second kingdom age is based round the ups and downs of the nation state of Israel. The 'state of the nation' depended upon the Jews obedience to God's instructions. When obedient, God promised prosperity.

⁹ The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰ Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. ¹¹ The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. ¹² The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. (Deuteronomy 28:9-12)

But for disobedience, curses would prevail.

¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ¹⁷ Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. ¹⁸ The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of

your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ¹⁹ You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. (Deuteronomy 28:15-19)

In essence then, the nation of Israel would inherit the Promised Land, with its attendant riches, as long as they honored God and did things His way. But for forgetting God, by worshipping idols and trying to succeed in human strength, the punishment would be oppression, poverty and exile. The books of Exodus to Malachi tell of the peoples successes and failures. From the glory of Solomon to the despair of exile to Babylon, we read of the ebbs and flows of Jewish experience during a period of 1000+ years in their history, from round 1500BC to 432BC.

We learn of the initial success of conquest under Joshua, then the ups and downs of the Judge' s times. Through difficulties under the human approach of King Saul, more conquests by King David, and topped off by the ultimate glory of Solomon. However the reign of Solomon sowed the seeds of destruction for the decline that was to follow. We see the splitting of the land into two, Israel and Judah. A succession of kings, mostly bad, was punctuated by a few who honored God. This resulted in the elimination of Israel by the Assyrians, followed 164 years later by the fall of Jerusalem and the final exile of Judah to Babylon. The story ends with the return of a remnant to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas after 70 years of exile, there to live in, what was often miserable subjection, to a series of conquerors. Yes, it is a sad story of the physical destruction of the Promised Land through the people' s disobedience.

HEIGHT OF THE KINGDOM

The extent and wealth of Israel under Solomon are legendary. As the major regional power its influence also extended over a wide area outside of its borders. In these days the King was the epitome of the nation. So the glory of Solomon represented the strength of the nation.

²⁰ The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. ²¹ And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as

the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. ²² *Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal,* ²³ *ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl.* ²⁴ *For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River, from Tiphseh to Gaza, and had peace on all sides.* ²⁵ *During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.* ²⁶ *Solomon had four thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses.* ²⁷ *The district officers, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking.* ²⁸ *They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses. (1 Kings 4:20-28)*

His glory was highlighted by the visit of the Queen of Sheba. Her report and reaction follows.

⁶ She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. ⁷ But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. ⁸ How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness." ¹⁰ And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. (1 Kings 10:6-10)

This prosperity too, was reflected in the glory of the Temple. Both the building and its furnishings reflected the wealth of the kingdom.

⁴⁸ Solomon also made all the furnishings that were in the LORD's temple: the golden altar; the golden table on which was the bread of the Presence; ⁴⁹ the lampstands of pure gold (five on the right and five on the

left, in front of the inner sanctuary); the gold floral work and lamps and tongs; ⁵⁰ the pure gold basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and censers; and the gold sockets for the doors of the innermost room, the Most Holy Place, and also for the doors of the main hall of the temple. ⁵¹ When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of the LORD’s temple. (1 Kings 7:48-51)

Worship reflected the kingdom' s prosperity as well, illustrated by the sacrifices made at the dedication of the Temple.

⁶² Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the LORD. ⁶³ Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the LORD: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the LORD. (1 Kings 8:62-3)

SEEDS OF ITS DESTRUCTION

But the kingdom' s prosperity also contained the seeds of its destruction. The Lord warned Solomon about this after he had completed his two major building projects, the Temple and his palace.

⁶ ‘But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ⁸ And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ ⁹ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.’”(1 Kings 9:6-9)

In fact, in spite of all his wisdom, the first indication of Solomon's true priorities can be seen in the time spent building his palace as opposed to the Temple.

³⁸ In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace. (1 Kings 6:38-7:1)

There is a well-known saying that the 3 ' G ' s ' of ' girls, gold and glory ' lead men astray. And so it was. The temptations of the flesh proved to be irresistible to Solomon too and he turned away from God.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. ³ He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. ⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. ⁵ He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. ⁷ On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁸ He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. (1 Kings 11:1-8)

So the country had to pay the consequences, not in his generation but in the ones to follow.

⁹ The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

¹⁰ Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did

not keep the LORD's command. ¹¹ So the LORD said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. ¹² Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.'"(1 Kings 11:9-13)

The second kingdom age, one based on prosperity, ended in destruction, poverty, and subjection to foreign powers. A new way was needed.

PROMISE OF SACRIFICE

Jesus came as the final sacrifice to replace the ongoing sin sacrifices required by the Law.

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'"⁸ First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:1-10)

He came offering a new and better covenant of reconciliation with the Father.

¹⁵ *For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:15)*

In our turn, we are to sacrifice our lives through Him.

¹⁵ *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)*

Jesus himself requires it of us.

³³ *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)*

As Jesus did for us, so we are to sacrifice ourselves for others.

¹⁶ *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 John 3:16)*

This was literally true for 10 out of the 11 remaining Disciples. All except John were martyred! And he ended up banished to the Island of Patmos. Certainly no holiday resort!

I was blessed to visit the site where doubting Thomas, who had by then had lost his doubts, first ministered, in the west of India. There was a Roman Catholic Church on the site and a real presence of God' s Spirit pervaded the area. Thomas was martyred on the Eastern side of the continent, near Chennai, formerly Madras. He sacrificed his life for his Lord.

Jesus promised us trouble in this life. Which can be overcome through Him.

³³ 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'
(John 16:33)

Paul too, shares his experience of this.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

He reminisces about his life, but ends up, as always, with a statement of victory in Jesus.

²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² In

*Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. ³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.
(2 Corinthians 11:23-33)*

The early believers too, suffered persecution and hardships.

³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Hebrews 10:32-36)

Through John, Jesus spoke to the church in Smyrna about suffering, one of only 2 of the 7 churches He didn' t directly criticize.

⁸ To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:8-10)

Paul summed it up beautifully in Philippians.

⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in

appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:4-11)

If we wish to be those who have the power to overcome satan, sacrifice ' unto death' (Natural and/or spiritual) is required.

¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11)

Yes, today we moved from the Old Testament promise of prosperity to the New Covenant promise of sacrifice. The word ' prosperity' and its derivatives, (Prosper, prospers, prosperous) appear 80 times in the NIV translation, 79 times in the Old Testament and only once in the New. (Acts 13:17) And this verse too, refers to the Old Testament! Surely a persuasive indication that the promise has changed, is it not?

Are we prepared to make the sacrifice?

THE PRINCIPLE OF SACRIFICE

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus

NEED FOR SACRIFICE

There is a single principle of God that forms the very foundation of all that happens after Adam and Eve succumbed to sin. We may not understand it. We may not like it. But it is the necessary requirement and condition for our restoration to God. It is the principle of sacrifice - one of, ' a life for a life' . It was introduced through the Patriarchs, confirmed in the Nation and fulfilled in Jesus.

The principle is clearly set out in the book of the law, Leviticus.

¹¹ For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. (Leviticus 17:11)

And reiterated three verses later.

¹⁴ because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off." (Leviticus 17:14)

You hear lots of talk amongst believers about ' the power of the blood' . To an unbeliever it can sound more like a pagan ritual than a good Christian principle. The New Testament states it too.

²² In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22)

But the important thing is not the blood itself, but what the blood represents. My wife Kathy ran the Blood Donor' s clinic at her hospital for a number of years. They took blood from a healthy person to give life to another. She now works in the Operating Theatre, using the donated blood she used to collect, to give life.

The principle of ' life for life' , or capital punishment as we call it, is reiterated throughout the Law. For example:

¹⁷ "If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. ¹⁸ Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life. (Leviticus 24:17-18)

This is not the place to enter the argument over whether the principle of Grace has superceded it in the natural, but in the spiritual, the application has never changed.

Let' s see how.

THE PATRIARCHS: SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

The first mention of the word ' sacrifice' in the Bible is at the beginning of the story of Abraham and Isaac' s test of obedience.

*Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"
'Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."
(Genesis 22:1-2)*

However, it would appear the principle was already established by Isaac' s comments.

*“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, ‘but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’⁸ Abraham answered, ‘God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ And the two of them went on together.
(Genesis 22:7-8)*

The altar was built and Isaac, a strapping young lad with a 120-year-old father, agreed to be the sacrifice.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (Genesis 22:9-10)

Their obedience was acknowledged and a substitute supplied.

¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ¹² ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’ ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (Genesis 22:11-13)

Here we have the first picture of the sacrifice of Jesus, the ' *Lamb of God*' (John 1:35) being sacrificed on the cross - for you and me. Abraham was also being prophetic in his naming of the place.

*¹⁴ So Abraham called that place *The LORD Will Provide*. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’
(Genesis 22:14)*

Yes, the Lord has indeed provided, through the final sacrifice of Jesus.

THE NATION' S SACRIFICE

The religious life of the Jewish nation was centered upon animal sacrifice. This was a graphic application to the people of the time of the reality of God' s requirement of a life for a life. The Brazen Altar upon which sacrifices were made was the focal point of daily Jewish worship.

TWIN DAILY SACRIFICES

Each morning and evening a lamb was sacrificed upon the Brazen Altar, as a Guilt Offering for the sins of the people.

⁸ The LORD said to Moses: ⁹ ‘Give Aaron and his sons this command: ‘These are the regulations for the burnt offering: The burnt offering is to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar. ¹⁰ The priest shall then put on his linen clothes, with linen undergarments next to his body, and shall remove the ashes of the burnt offering that the fire has consumed on the altar and place them beside the altar. ¹¹ Then he is to take off these clothes and put on others, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a place that is ceremonially clean. ¹² The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. ¹³ The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out. (Leviticus 6:8-13)

This daily ritual of sacrifice was a type of what was yet to come in the death of Jesus.

PERSONAL SACRIFICE

The Jews were not expected to sin deliberately. Nor are we! Now that' s a radical idea to many Christians today! But all make mistakes, and so a special Sin Sacrifice was available for individuals to make their peace with God at these times.

The LORD said to Moses, ² ‘Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD' s

commands— ³ *“If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. (Leviticus 4:1-3)*

For deliberate sin the punishment was dire!

³⁰ *“But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people. ³¹ Because he has despised the LORD’s word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.”*
(Numbers 15:30-31)

DAY OF ATONEMENT

Each year, one day, the holiest in the Religious Calendar, was set aside so that the sins of all the people might be forgiven.

³⁴ *“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.” And it was done, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Leviticus 16:34)*

The observance of this Day was compulsory.

²⁶ *The LORD said to Moses, ²⁷ “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. ²⁸ Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. ²⁹ Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. ³⁰ I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. ³¹ You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. ³² It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.” (Leviticus 23:26-32)*

It involved a series of sacrifices.

⁷ *“On the tenth day of this seventh month hold a sacred assembly. You must deny yourselves and do no work. ⁸ Present as an aroma pleasing to the LORD a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. ⁹ With the bull prepare a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, two-tenths; ¹⁰ and with each of the seven lambs, one-tenth. ¹¹ Include one male goat as a sin offering, in addition to the sin offering for atonement and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings. (Numbers 29:7-11)*

A further picture of the 'once only' sacrifice yet to come.

JESUS: THE FINAL SACRIFICE

The coming of Jesus as the final sacrifice is succinctly summarized in the book of Hebrews. We see the change from the Law of the nation of Israel kingdom age, requiring ongoing sacrifices, to our current age of Grace, where the final sacrifice of Jesus has already been made. Hallelujah!

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’” ⁸ First he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’ (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’” He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:1-10)

Jesus was the final atonement, the final sacrifice, for our sins.

¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)*

Not only for you and me, but also for all.

² *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)*

Provided we individually accept it!

³⁹ *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. (Hebrews 10:39)*

Jesus too, confirmed it.

⁴⁵ *It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (John 6:45-7)*

Thomas, in character, already expressing doubts prior to the crucifixion, asked of Jesus.

⁵ *Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'" (John 14:5)*

And he got the answer!

⁶ *Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'" (John 14:6-7)*

Others also believed. Even amongst the despised ' half-castes' , the Samaritans.

³⁹ *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.'* ⁴⁰ *So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.* ⁴¹ *And because of his words many more became believers.* ⁴² *They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'* (John 4:39-42)

Do you believe? I do.

COVENANTAL PROMISES: FORETELLING THE FUTURE

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cvt.	New Covenant

WHAT IS A COVENANT?

A covenant is a binding agreement given by God to man. When broken by man, God, in His grace, has chosen to replace them with others reflecting the new situation. All the covenants point towards the eventual coming of Jesus as the final perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

The nearest comparison we have in the world is a contract. A contract is similar in form, but different in terms of negotiation. The parties involved agree upon a contract, while God stipulates the terms of a covenant.

However, both are made up of 3 parts:

1. **THE PROMISE** of the covenant is equivalent to the stated **PURPOSE** of a contract.
2. **THE SACRIFICE** of the covenant relates to the **CONSIDERATION/COST** of a contract.
3. **THE SEAL** of the covenant is similar to the **SIGNATURE** on a contract. While both parties sign a contract, signaling negotiation and agreement, a covenant is nonnegotiable, therefore requiring only God' s seal. Obviously God doesn' t take out a pen and write His signature on a parchment! However, there is always a physical sign that He provides

as the seal, to remind His people of the covenantal guarantees He has given.

When we are buying or selling a house, we make a contract agreeing to buy/sell the property (purpose) for a specific price (consideration). Then both parties sign the document (signature) to make it legally binding.

If it were a 'house sale covenant', God would offer a specific 'God House' to us, He would set the price and apply His signature to confirm the covenant. God makes the price affordable to all, so cost is not a barrier. However we don't have to take Him up on the 'deal'. We have the choice, called free will, not too. But in spite of many trying, we cannot renegotiate the deal! A covenant is final and nonnegotiable until God chooses to change the terms by replacing it with another.

SEVEN MAJOR COVENANTS

There are seven major covenants in the Bible, each of which points towards the future. In summary these are.

1ST KINGDOM AGE

1. **EDENIC:** (Genesis 1-2) dealing with man before sin. (fruit eating)
2. **ADAMIC:** (Genesis 3) man after sin. (plant eating)
3. **NOAHIC:** (Genesis 9) new race through Noah. (meat eating)
4. **ABRAHAMIC:** (Genesis 17) c.2000BC, birth of a holy nation.

2ND KINGDOM AGE

5. **MOSAIC:** (Exodus 3) c.1500BC, giving of the Law.
6. **DAVIDIC:** (2 Samuel 7) c.1000BC, eternal throne and dominion
7. **NEW: PROPHETIC:** (Jeremiah 31:31-4) c.600BC, Jesus to come.

3RD KINGDOM AGE

7. **NEW: FULFILLED:** (Various New Testament) in Jesus.

It is not the purpose of this study to look at the Covenants in detail, but merely to outline them so we can obtain a better understanding of the 3

primary kingdom age promises of God. The specific promises upon which the next kingdom age would be built.

PROMISE FOR THE 1ST KINGDOM AGE

Obviously, limited by time as we are, it is not possible to begin before the beginning - or is it? Another study here! So the promise for the first kingdom age is found in the very first, Edenic Covenant.

The promise was one of perfect creation and life, in which humans were to become like God through obedience and testing.

God created us in His image.

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-7)

To be proven through trial and testing:

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.' (Genesis 2:16-17)

We all know how Adam and Eve failed the test.

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:6)

And so God made a new (Adamic) covenant, for sinful people could no longer meet the conditions of the first, Edenic one.

The principle though, of the people of the first kingdom age being proven through trial and testing, still applied. Let's have a look at a few.

NOAH

Noah lived during a time when the behavior of the people had declined to such an extent that God decided to do something about it.

⁵ The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷ So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.' (Genesis 6:5-7)

But Noah had proved himself to be the exception to the rule.

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (Genesis 6:8-9)

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC

God tested Abraham, and by implication Isaac, for there was no way physically, his father could have forced him to become the sacrifice.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Genesis 22:1-2)

They passed the test!

¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he

said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.'
(Genesis 22:10-12)

JACOB

As the accurate meaning of his name 'supplanter' suggests, he displayed characteristics of deception and cunning, particularly in his dealings with Esau. However, the lengths he went to claim the godly inheritance at his brother's expense, indicates he did have a heart for God.

This was proven some time later when his commitment was tested in a wrestling match! Not the sort of testing we would normally expect! A little like WWF? Maybe not!

²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' ²⁷ The man asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. (Genesis 32:24-7)

And his display of tenacity was rewarded, as he had proved himself before God.

²⁸ Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.'
(Genesis 32:28)

JOSEPH

Joseph experienced a greatest reward during his lifetime than Abraham, in finally becoming the 'Prime Minister' of Egypt. Abraham's reward was longer term. So Joseph faced great testing.

After having been sold by his brothers, things looked up and he became pivotal in running his master, Potiphar's house. The time for his test had come!

¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house. (Genesis 39:11-12)

Taking the revenge of a woman spurned, Joseph ended up in prison.

²⁰ Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. (Genesis 39:20a)

The Lord looked after him there, as a reward for his righteousness.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, ²¹ the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. ²² So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. ²³ The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.
(Genesis 39:20b-23)

But he had ongoing trials as well. At one time it looked like he might get out after interpreting some other' s dreams. But it was not to be.

²³ The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.
(Genesis 40:23)

A further 2 years of waiting passed before Joseph was asked to interpret the Pharaoh' s dream. This time he had his key to freedom

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.' ⁴¹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.'
(Genesis 41:39-41)

Yes, the godliness of the Patriarchs was surely proven through severe trials and testings!

PROMISE FOR THE 2ND KINGDOM AGE

The promises for each of the 2nd and 3rd kingdom ages are given in the final covenant initiated during the previous age. For God plans everything in advance. Nothing is by chance in God. So the Edenic, Adamic and Noahic Covenants were all fulfilled during patriarchal times, while the promise for the second age was given in the final patriarchal, Abrahamic Covenant.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. ² I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.' (Genesis 17:1-8)

This covenant has lots of implications, but we will keep it simple here, considering only those relating to these times. Let' s have a look at the 3 parts of the Abrahamic Covenant.

THE PROMISE

1. The physical land of Canaan.

⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.' (Genesis 17:8).

Known as the Promised Land (from this covenant' s promise) this was the region that became Israel under the leadership of Joshua, King David and the others.

2. Father of the Jewish Nation.

‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. (Genesis 17:4).

For a wandering nomad this was quite a promise! He was used to living in a small family group that split up once it got too big for the land to support their livestock. A nation would have been a strange concept to him.

THE SACRIFICE

We need to move on to the journey with Isaac to see the sacrifice for this covenant.

⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. ¹² ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’ ¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (Genesis 22:9-13)

Isaac, the seed of the nation, was to be sacrificed! Without Isaac, Abraham' s line could not have continued. God' s promise could not have been fulfilled. Yet they both remained obedient to God.

The ram substituted for Isaac represented the land of Israel itself. For once the nation was established, twice-daily offerings of sheep were required as the basis of the Tabernacle, then Temple, worship system.

THE SEAL

The sign or seal of this covenant was the painful surgery of circumcision. A very intimate reminder of God' s Covenant with Abraham.

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”(Genesis 17:9-14)

Here in the Abrahamic Covenant, over 500 years before the nation of Israel existed, we have the principles of the 2nd kingdom age clearly laid out.

PROMISE FOR THE 3rd KINGDOM AGE

Likewise, the covenant upon which the third kingdom age was to be based was prophesied through Jeremiah, 600 years before the age began.

As in the previous age, the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants applied during the nation period. But the final New Covenant, as did the earlier Abrahamic one, relates to the age to come.

³¹ “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will a man teach his

neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.' (Jeremiah 31:31-4)

What an amazing 3-part PROMISE!

1. *I will put the laws in their minds* (Our mind)
2. *and write it on their hearts* (Our emotions)
3. *I will be their God, and they will be my people.* (Our will)

So the foundation was set for the coming of Jesus. A time when we could again individually can have a personal relationship with God the Father, lost when Adam and Eve went their own way and ate the forbidden fruit. It is now available through the SACRIFICE of Jesus on the cross.

¹³ *The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.* ¹⁴ *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*
(Hebrews 9:13-14)

How do we know it for sure? Through the SEAL of the Holy Spirit, promised by the Father, through Jesus.

⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

A promise given again after the resurrection.

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

(Acts 1:4-5)

One first fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

It was a deposit, guaranteeing our ultimate inheritance of eternal life with God.

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

SUMMARY

We can now see how these three covenants effectively bridged, or linked, the ages, as per the diagram below.

PATRIARCHS	!	PROPHETS	!	PEOPLE
	!		!	
Edenic		Abrahamic		New (Prophesied)
	!		!	
Adamic, Noahic	!	Mosaic, Davidic	!	New (Fulfilled)

What a marvelous God we have!

CENTRAL KINGDOM CHARACTERS

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cov.	New Covenant
<i>PERSONIFIED</i>	Abraham (Seed)	Moses (Guide)	Jesus (The Way)

Each of the three kingdom ages has featured an individual who has characterized and personified the message of the age. God has used each of the three to be His mouthpiece and example for bringing His ongoing revelation of Himself to the people of the times.

ABRAHAM - *THE SEED* - FATHER OF THE NATIONS

Abram (exalted father) was chosen by God to become Abraham (father of a multitude), the physical father of the Jews and our spiritual father today, through the chosen line of Isaac. Incidentally, he is also the spiritual father of the Moslems, through Ishmael!

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (Genesis 17:3-7)

As we have already seen, the ' promise' of the ' Promised Land' of Canaan, the nation of the second kingdom age, was given to Abraham.

⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”(Genesis 17:8)

But God reiterated once again, that all His promises are conditional upon obedience. In this case, obedience was to be shown through the painful, physical process of circumcision. For at this time there was no formal Law, either in written form or placed upon the heart, as existed in the two next kingdom ages.

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”(Genesis 17:9-14)

Abraham was the example to those of his own and succeeding generations. For God blessed him physically, with huge flocks and wealth, and spiritually, as the father of the nations to come.

Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. (Genesis 24:1)

The Jews looked back, and still do, upon Abraham as being both their father and God' s friend.

⁷ *O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? (2 Chronicles 20:7)*

They still keep hold of the promise of God through Isaiah.

⁸ *‘But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:8-10)*

Jesus too, acknowledged the special place of Abraham in the Jewish inheritance.

⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” (Luke 19:9-10)*

Indeed, Abraham was God' s foremost representative during the first kingdom age.

MOSES - THE GUIDE - COMMUNICATOR OF THE LAW

Moses was God' s messenger, conveying the Law and God' s other desires, to the people.

⁹ *The LORD said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.’ Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said. (Exodus 19:9)*

Moses met with the Lord in the Tent of Meeting.

⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the 'tent of meeting.' Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. ¹¹ The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.
(Exodus 33:7-11)

The anointing of God rested upon him so strongly, that others could not bear to look at him after he had been in God' s presence.

³³ When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD. (Exodus 34:33-35)

He was regarded as the first amongst all the prophets in the Old Testament.

¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.
(Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

In the New Testament he is referred to as the representative of the Law and as a type of Christ.

¹⁷ *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)*

Moses too, was the only human to whom Jesus likened himself.

⁴⁵ 'But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?' (John 5:45-7)

The writer of Hebrews also made this comparison, with Jesus being pictured as a greater Moses.

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. ³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Hebrews 3:1-6)

Yes, Moses was the outstanding character bestriding the second kingdom age.

JESUS - THE WAY - THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

Few would argue with the thesis that Jesus was the dominant figure of the third kingdom age. As reflected in the New Testament by Jesus himself.

⁶ Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.' (John 14:6-7)

And attested to by many others. Christ is the successor to the Law, represented by Moses.

⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

Christ is the head of the church.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. (Ephesians 5:23)

Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant that replaces the Law.

¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews 9:14)

And Christ is the same, past, present and future.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Today, Christ lives in believers. A message Paul delivered as God's servant, often through pain and hardship.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:24)

As people of His church, we are to become like Jesus.

*⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
(1 John 1:7)*

Jesus took on the nature of a servant, and we are to do so too.

*⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:5-11)*

Jesus is our example, not only the giant character of the third kingdom age in which we live, but also as Savior of the world!

CONCLUSION

Jesus linked Himself with Abraham and Moses in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. In so doing He linked the leading characters of the three kingdom ages.

*²⁷ ‘He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ ‘Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ³⁰ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ ³¹ ‘He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”
(Luke 16:23-31)*

GOVERNING THE KINGDOM

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cov.	New Covenant
<i>PERSONIFIED</i>	Abraham (Seed)	Moses (Guide)	Jesus (The Way)
<i>GOVERNED</i>	Patriarchal	Authoritarian	Relational

For each of the kingdom ages, we see God provide a different form of governance for the people. A balance between what God required and the people desired.

THE FAMILY TREE

The Patriarchal age was based around the family, a patriarch being, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the ' father and ruler of family or tribe.'

The patriarchal system was extremely important to the Jews. And still is today. Hence the great emphasis they place on genealogy, which those of us with a western mindset struggle to appreciate or value. For under the patriarchal system, the family you come from and live in, has a huge influence upon your life.

So from the families of Adam and Noah, to those of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the book of Genesis places a huge emphasis upon family and family inheritance.

Interestingly, the original relationship between Adam and Eve was a relational, rather than a patriarchal one.

²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man.' ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:22-24)

God is a relational God and this is how He would have preferred it to remain. But sin brings the dominance of one over another, both within families and in society in general. Unfortunately though, sin brought an end to this.

¹⁶ To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'(Genesis 3:16)

The patriarchal system commenced. The spiritual fortune of the family became largely determined by the behavior of the husband. Noah' s family was saved from drowning through Noah' s righteousness.

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (Genesis 6:8-9)

Abraham had authority over his nephew Lot, although unusually, he didn' t enforce it. Rather, Abraham gave Lot the option of where to go once he had determined the need to separate because of population pressures on resources.

⁸ So Abram said to Lot, 'Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.'(Genesis 13:8-9)

The patriarchal inheritance was passed down from the father, theoretically to the oldest son. But as in Abraham' s line, this was also the spiritual inheritance, God intervened to ensure that the inheritance was received by the one with a heart for Him. For He was not bound by the system - this or any other! So we had the problem between the twins, Esau and Jacob. A problem the Lord informed Rebekah about before they were even born!

²³ *The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'* (Genesis 25:23)

Jacob tricked Esau into giving him his birthright.

²⁹ *Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!'* (That is why he was also called Edom.) ³¹ *Jacob replied, 'First sell me your birthright.'* ³² *'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?'* ³³ *But Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.'* *So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:29-24)*

And Rebekah manipulated the normal situation of the oldest son' s blessing so that God' s will would be done.

Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷ 'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.' ⁸ *Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: ⁹ Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. ¹⁰ Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.'* (Genesis 27:5-8)

Rebekah arranged for Jacob to be covered with skins to become hairy and smell like his hunter brother. In spite of Isaac' s doubts, Jacob received the blessing.

²⁷ So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. ²⁸ May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine. ²⁹ May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”
(Genesis 27:27-29)

Isaac was not pleased when Esau returned, but he could do nothing about it. God had had His way.

³⁶ Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?” ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”(Genesis 27:36-37)

For the blessing of the physical and spiritual inheritance had already been given. An unwelcome blessing of servitude to Jacob was given to Esau.

³⁸ Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud. ³⁹ His father Isaac answered him, “Your dwelling will be away from the earth’s richness, away from the dew of heaven above. ⁴⁰ You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”(Genesis 27:38-40)

In spite of his personality flaws, Jacob did have a heart for God. God will always have His way.

JOSHUA, JUDGES, KINGS, PROPHETS AND PRIESTS

As Jewish society changed from a wandering nomadic, to a settled agrarian lifestyle in Egypt and then Canaan, their structures of governance developed. Although not necessarily in line with God' s will!

God raised up Moses and Joshua as leaders, to unite the people and organize their escape from the captivity in Egypt in the case of Moses, and in the initial possession of their own, Promised Land, under Joshua.

Coming as they did from a nomadic, family oriented background, there was considerable difficulty in getting the tribes (families of Jacob' s sons) to work together. However, both Moses and Joshua managed to unite the people sufficiently to achieve the first stage of their promise.

Both Moses and Joshua were close to God. Both too, can be viewed as types of Jesus. Moses had the greater intimacy with God while Joshua was skilled in the strategy of war and general leadership. Both again, the right men in the right place at the right time, as God purposed.

Once Joshua died, national leadership dissipated, and the nation became a loose informal grouping of tribes. Family feuds festered. The Lord raised up ' Judges' who had authority within their own tribe and amongst those others who recognized their leadership. Generally this recognition only happened in times of hardship and external threat.

Finally, God lifted up the prophet Samuel to unite the country after a period of particularly severe persecution by the old enemy, the Philistines. It is amazing how external threats unite both families and nations! Under Samuel' s leadership the Philistine threat was overcome and Jewish society was reformed.

However, Samuel had an unruly family. He placed his sons in judicial authority. The people were unhappy with this and demanded a king instead. This displeased both Samuel and God.

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." ⁶ But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷ And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸ As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹ Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do." (1 Samuel 8:4-9)

The people were warned of the dangers of instituting an authoritarian governmental structure, headed by a king. But the people persisted and God gave them their desire.

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." ²¹ When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. ²² The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." (1 Samuel 8:19-22)

Saul was chosen. He was the best human candidate for the position. Tall, well built, handsome, and a successful warrior. But with accompanying, very human, character flaws. King Saul was disobedient to the Lord's will, as had been predicted, and God finally rejected him choosing David in his place.

The LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' (1 Samuel 16:1)

For David, in spite of his weaknesses, had a real heart for God.

²² *After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'* (Acts 13:22)

Under David' s leadership, approved by both man and God, the nation grew in strength to become a major regional power, by the time of his death. Unfortunately however, his son Solomon, although starting out well, was seduced by the usual vices of men, ' girls, gold and glory.' And in a big way! For he could afford it! Wisdom was insufficient to rescue him. He lacked godliness, a true heart for God.

After Solomon' s death, as a result of his actions, and his son Rehoboam' s signaled intention to further increase the hardship on the people, the country split into two.

¹² *Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, 'Come back to me in three days.'* ¹³ *The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders,* ¹⁴ *he followed the advice of the young men and said, 'My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'* ¹⁵ *So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.* ¹⁶ *When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king: 'What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!'* *So the Israelites went home.* ¹⁷ *But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.* ¹⁸ *King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem.* ¹⁹ *So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day. (1 Kings 12:12-19)*

The downward spiral continued, eventually leading to the downfall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 722BC, and Judah to Babylon, in

586BC. An unsuccessful and costly error of judgement, going against the Lord' s will and instituting a human based, authoritarian, governmental system based on man rather than God.

JESUS AND THE CHURCH

Jesus came with a new and better way.

¹⁰ This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'
(Hebrews 8:10-12)

A ' relational' form of governance in which we have the ability, through Jesus, to have restored a direct relationship with God, our Father lost when Adam and Eve began mankind' s rebellion by eating the fascinating, forbidden fruit.

Jesus came as the second Adam, to restore spiritually, that which was lost in the natural.

⁴⁵ So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.'
(1 Corinthians 15:45-9)

As Adam and could physically walk with God ' in the garden in the cool of the day' (Genesis 3:8) so can we again be as one with the Father in Spirit, through Jesus.

¹⁸ *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*
(Ephesians 2:18)

We are able to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

²³ *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.* ²⁴ *God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:23-24)

The Father is found only through Jesus. The Bible says it, not David Tait!

³⁵ *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.* ³⁶ *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*(John 3:35-6)

Jesus is an exact representation of the Father

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* ³ *The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* ⁴ *So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (Hebrews 1:1-4)*

And we can only restore this relationship with the father through Jesus.

⁶ *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* ⁷ *If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*
(John 14:6)

Jesus is the head of the church.

¹⁸ *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. (Colossians 1:18)*

Jesus and the church are to be one, as in the examples of the body and marriage.

²⁹ *After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—* ³⁰ *for we are members of his body.* ³¹ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”* ³² *This is a profound mystery— but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:29-32)*

Problems arise however, when people, in their natural minds, take the authoritarian governance structure of the second kingdom age and apply it once again to the church. Effectively placing the intermediary of a pastor or priest between man and God. In the natural, the leaders concerned like this, for it gives them status and power. Many believers like it also, for it supposedly absolves them of the effort of building a personal relationship with Jesus. Nothing however could be further from the truth, for pastor, priest or parishioner! We have moved into a new and different kingdom age, one again of personal relationship with our Lord. Regaining in the spiritual, what Adam and Eve had in the natural, before they sinned. Therefore the role of leadership is to train the saints, not to rule over them.

¹¹ *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,* ¹² *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

The key then, is to prepare God' s people in order to bring them to maturity, so each one of us may become representations of Christ to the world through a deeper and deeper personal relationship with Him. May we all learn to live in the ' relational' truth of today' s kingdom. age

THE ' OTHER' SIDE

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cov.	New Covenant
<i>PERSONIFIED</i>	Abraham (Seed)	Moses (Guide)	Jesus (The Way)
<i>GOVERNED</i>	Patriarchal	Authoritarian	Relational
<i>TEMPTATION</i>	Serpent	Other Nations	Humanism

CHOICE IS ESSENTIAL TO FREEWILL

In order to exercise freewill, there must be a choice between alternatives. So in Christianity, we have the choice between good and evil, between following God, or following satan. Satan is not simply a rebellious angel. His fall from God' s grace was a necessary part of God' s plan, in providing an alternative, so that we might be able to exercise freewill.

Satan, the devil, the evil one, whatever name you prefer, encourages us to walk away from God. He is much too cunning to appear in person. Anyway, he can only be in one place at one time! He adapts his plan of attack to the times, setting up a counterfeit system of the one God is using to relate to His chosen people at the time. Hence satan takes a different form and approach during each kingdom age.

THE SERPENT

In the Garden of Eden before the fall, God, in some form or presence, physically walked with Adam and Eve, for they had no sin in them.

⁸ *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, (Genesis 3:8a)*

So satan too, needed to appear in a physical form, for that is what Adam and Eve were used to and understood. He didn' t appear as himself, for they would have seen through that straight away. Ever the deceiver, he took the form of and inhabited, the crafty serpent, in order to tempt them away from God. And of course, he worked through deception rather than outright lies.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”(Genesis 3:1)

He was successful.

⁶ *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:6)*

And was punished for it.

¹⁴ *So the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, ‘Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.’”*
(Genesis 3:14-15)

No longer could Adam and Eve come into God' s presence.

⁹ *But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.’”(Genesis 3:9-10)*

From then on, humans were restricted to seeing God spiritually, for sin cannot exist in the presence of God. Not even Moses could see Him fully!

¹⁸ *Then Moses said, ‘Now show me your glory.’* ¹⁹ *And the LORD said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’* ²⁰ *But,” he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.’*
(Exodus 33:18-20)

The effects of the serpent's actions, and mankind's response to them, were illustrated through the actions of men and woman during the remainder of the first kingdom age. The wickedness of the people of Noah's time...

⁵ *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.* ⁶ *The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.* ⁷ *So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.’* (Genesis 6:5-7)

...and the evils of Sodom and Gomorrah are two prime examples.

²⁰ *Then the LORD said, ‘The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous* ²¹ *that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.’*
(Genesis 18:20-21)

' GRASS IS GREENER' SYNDROME

The focus during the second kingdom age was on the nation state of Israel, that of possessing the Promised Land. Therefore it is not surprising that the alternative now, is the temptation of other nations.

The story of the exodus starts with the promised delivery from captivity in Egypt, as God said to Moses:

⁷ *The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.*
(Exodus 3:7-8)

The ups and downs of the claiming, occupation and loss of the Promised Land, is what most of the Old Testament is about. Ending of course in hope, with a partial resettlement, although under foreign domination.

The focus of the nation' s religious life, and God' s presence, was firstly upon Moses Tabernacle, then Solomon' s Temple. The Temple was finally destroyed by the Babylonians and rebuilt, less grandly, by the returning remnant.

⁸ *‘Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.*
⁹ *Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. (Exodus 25:3)*

The nation itself was to be holy, set apart to God, by following His instructions.

⁵ *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5)*

In light of this focus upon the nation, it is not surprising that satan used other nations to seduce the people away from their inheritance, by using ' the grass is greener on the other side of the fence' syndrome. One which is still alive and well today! The actions and state of the nation were patterned on and determined by those of their leaders. The leaders almost totally represented the nation in a way not seen today.

After Joshua, through the eras of the Judges and the Kings, the leadership and the people were constantly tempted to intermarry and adopt the lifestyles of the surrounding nations.

Samson was an example of a Judge who finally paid for his sin with his life. His parents realized he was doing wrong, but like many of us, he wouldn't listen.

Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman.² When he returned, he said to his father and mother, 'I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.'³ His father and mother replied, 'Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me. She's the right one for me.'⁴ (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.) (Judges 14:1-4)

And the most infamous of all was King Solomon, whose actions ended up splitting the nation into two under his son, the precursor to the final destruction of the divided nations by the Assyrians and Babylonians

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.³ He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.⁵ He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.⁶ So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.⁷ On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites.⁸ He did the same for all

his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

⁹ *The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.*

¹⁰ *Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. ¹¹ So the LORD said to Solomon, 'Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. ¹² Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. ¹³ Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.'* (1 Kings 11:1-13)

Even the returning exiles made the disastrous mistakes of their forbears. Until Ezra realized what was happening and challenged them to put the situation right.

While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. ² Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, 'We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. ³ Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.' (Ezra 10:1-4)

The other ongoing temptation was that of foreign religions. Early on in the possession of the Promised Land Joshua warned the people about this.

¹⁹ *Joshua said to the people, 'You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and*

bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”(Joshua 24:19-20)

Jeremiah summed up the situation of Israel forsaking God, really well.

²³ *‘How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel running here and there, ²⁴ a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving—in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her. ²⁵ Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.’ (Jeremiah 2"23-5)*

And in the end God used other nations to punish Israel for abandoning Him as a nation. The Assyrians overran the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

⁵ *The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:5-6)*

God used King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian nation to capture the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

⁸ *Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words, ⁹ I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. ¹⁰ I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jeremiah 25:8-11)*

But Babylon too, would finally be punished for her sins. And a remnant of Jews would return.

¹² ‘But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,’ declares the LORD, ‘and will make it desolate forever. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. ¹⁴ They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.’
(Jeremiah 25:12-14)

Yes, during the second kingdom age, the both the physical and spiritual battles were waged between nation states.

THE SEDUCTIVENESS OF HUMANISM

The Greeks introduced Humanism, a system based upon human interests, into worldly thought, during the intertestamental period. Greek thought continues to dominate worldly philosophies through to this day.

It is the third kingdom age counterculture to the personal relationship to the Father, made available to us through the death of Jesus.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Through Jesus, a personal relationship is required, so satan' s counterculture also moves to a personal level. He attacks like with a counterfeit like, as we have seen with the serpent during the first kingdom age and the nations in the second.

Satan set the scene for what was to come by tempting Jesus in the desert at the start of His ministry, offering Him all the good things of the world, if only He would worship Him.

¹⁰ *Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” (Matthew 4:10)*

There is now a direct battle for the lives of each and every individual between Jesus and satan.

²⁵ *Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶ If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷ And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸ But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12:25-28)*

An example was when Peter, in his enthusiastic humanity, denied the necessity for the cross.

²² *Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:22-23)*

It is based upon lies and deceit, the putting of ones self first, as shown in the example of Ananias and Sapphira.

³ *Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

⁵ *When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. (Acts 5:3-5)*

Humanism can appear very good to us. After all, this was the basic choice Adam and Eve made when they ate the forbidden fruit. So we can easily be misled into believing the deception, if we are not careful. We need to test everything and everyone in the light of Scripture, even within the church.

¹³ *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)*

Timothy summed up today' s humanistic world accurately when he wrote:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

However, as believers, we are to take on the nature of Jesus by developing the ' fruit of the Spirit' in our lives. To crucify our old self-centered life and become like Jesus.

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Galatians 5:22-26)*

May we not be deceived!

NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cov.	New Covenant
<i>PERSONIFIED</i>	Abraham (Seed)	Moses (Guide)	Jesus (The Way)
<i>GOVERNED</i>	Patriarchal	Authoritarian	Relational
<i>TEMPTATION</i>	Serpent	Other Nations	Humanism
<i>THE TRIAD</i>	Hope	Faith	Love

The New Testament triad of ' hope, faith and love' is found jointly and separately throughout all scripture. For the three have always been at the heart of belief in God. The three are intertwined, but also detailed separately as being the dominant characteristic throughout one of the three kingdom ages.

HOPE OF A NATION

The first kingdom age, as recorded in Genesis is, in the overall picture, primarily a hope for the future. Hope is ' believing although not seeing or possessing.' This sums up the life of the patriarchs.

Adam, the ' head' of the human family, was given an amazing promise to fill the earth and rule over it.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

(Genesis 1:28)

It was a huge hope for a couple with, at the time, no family! From their perspective, looking to the horizon in each direction, this promise would have seemed extremely difficult to fulfil. Nor did Cain aid population growth by killing Abel!

Of course, had they not sinned, the hope of their promise would have finally been fulfilled, as all would have lived forever. A population explosion! The world would have been entirely different. Death was, and remains, a consequence of sin.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”(Genesis 3:19)

So God' s promise to Adam and Eve remained as a hope, unfulfilled in their lifetime.

Noah too, was given a similar promise of fruitfulness.

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. (Genesis 9:1)

He was also given comfort that the fate that befell Adam' s progeny would not befall his.

¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”(Genesis 9:11)

While some progress would have been made during the remaining 350 years of his 950year life, the promise of filling the earth remained a hope rather than reality.

Moving on to the times of Abraham, God' s promise of a nation as numerous as the stars in the sky was an unbelievable promise, particularly as he and Sarah had had no children, after a lifetime of trying.

⁵ He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ (Genesis 15:5)

Yet Abraham believed, had hope in the promise, and was rewarded for it.

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Isaac and Jacob retained their father' s hope, even though in 4 generations, the total population of the family, the nation to be, had only become 70 people!

²⁶ All those who went to Egypt with Jacob—those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives—numbered sixty-six persons. ²⁷ With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all. (Genesis 46:26-27)

Yet the hope of the promise to Abraham remained through the generations, even though its fulfillment remained well in the future. The first kingdom age indeed, was based on hope.

FAITH OF THE NATION

The story of the second kingdom age, the rise and fall of Israel, is one of faith - and the lack of it!

During the 430 years in Egypt the ' hope' of population increase had been realized. Their ' faith' too, was built up through the reality of the miraculous escape through the Red Sea. And would have grown as God' s physical presence dwelled over the Atonement Cover of the Ark of the Covenant in

the Tabernacle and could be seen in the pillars of fire and cloud that guided them during their desert experience.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷ but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. ³⁸ So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels. (Exodus 40:34-38)

Yet their faith wavered when the men returned from spying out the Promised Land. The people refused to enter, as the opposition appeared too strong. They paid for their lack of faith when experiencing the harsh, hot desert climate for up to 40 years, being excluded from their promised inheritance.

²⁶ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: ²⁷ ‘How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. ²⁸ So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: ²⁹ In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. ³⁰ Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. (Numbers 14:26-30)

The hope of the Patriarchs was now to be fulfilled by the next generation. They were prepared to take the necessary steps of faith to claim the Promised Land. Undoubtedly it would have seemed preferable to spending more time in the desert! But imagine the faith it took to walk round Jericho for six days without anything happening! What a stupid thing to do!

² Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³ March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴ Have seven priests

carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵ When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in.”(Joshua 6:2-5)

Yet it worked on the seventh! And the people' s faith levels would have increased.

²⁰ When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. ²¹ They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys. (Joshua 6:20-21)

But, as the whole story of the nation shows, the people' s faith ebbed and flowed.

¹⁵ When they went to Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasse—they said to them : ¹⁶ ‘The whole assembly of the LORD says: ‘How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? ¹⁷ Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the LORD! ¹⁸ And are you now turning away from the LORD? (Joshua 22:15-18)

And so, as we have already seen, the people' s ongoing disobedience and lack of faith resulted in them losing their inheritance, their nation.

¹⁰ Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? ¹¹ Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² As for the man who does this,

whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty. (Malachi 2:10-12)

This was a kingdom age where the ebb and flow of faith determined the course of the nation.

THE POWER OF LOVE

Jesus came with basically the same message found in the Law, but expressed in a radically different way and with a new emphasis. A message of love! Of God' s love for us.

⁶ ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

And in return, how we are to love Him and others.

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ ³⁷ Jesus replied: ” ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matthew 22:34-39)

While it sounded radical at the time, it wasn' t really. It simply summed up what the Law had always said, and the Prophets expressed.

⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:40)

However Jesus was love personified. Firstly, in His actions during His life. An example was after he heard about the beheading of his cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus naturally, was extremely upset. So He withdrew from public

view to grieve. Coming back to land, He immediately put his sorrow to one side and healed the sick.

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:13-14)

He set the example that we are to show to others. Love is an action word, not merely a theoretical principle! We are to copy Jesus.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:16-24)

And our love is to extend to all. Even our enemies!

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Jesus was indeed the true servant whom we are to copy.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be

grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:5-7)

Through love, He paid the highest price possible.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8)

And we are to follow His example, by laying down our life for others.

*⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.
¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.
(John 15:9-17)*

Love is indeed the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, wonderfully expressed through the life and death of Jesus.

We are hugely privileged to live in this day of the full expression of hope, faith and love. How do we know this? The bible tells us we are living in the greatest era of the three.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)

"Thank you Lord, for the privilege of living in the third kingdom age. May we truly reflect your love for us, to others. Thank you again, Lord."

SPIRITUAL PATTERN OF THE AGES

THE THREE KINGDOM AGES

THEME	<u>PATRIARCHS</u> Creation - c.1800BC	<u>PROPHETS</u> C1500BC - c.432BC	<u>PEOPLE</u> c.5BC - Jesus Return
<i>SOCIETY</i>	Nomadic	Agrarian	Developmental
<i>REACHING</i>	Family	Nation	World
<i>SALVATION</i>	Righteousness	Law	Grace
<i>PRIESTHOOD</i>	Melchizedek	Aaron	Jesus
<i>SUCCESS BY</i>	Reproduction	Prosperity	Sacrifice
<i>SACRIFICE</i>	Isaac	Animals	Jesus
<i>PROMISE</i>	Edenic Covenant	Abrahamic Cov.	New Covenant
<i>PERSONIFIED</i>	Abraham (Seed)	Moses (Guide)	Jesus (The Way)
<i>GOVERNED</i>	Patriarchal	Authoritarian	Relational
<i>TEMPTATION</i>	Serpent	Other Nations	Humanism
<i>THE TRIAD</i>	Hope	Faith	Love
<i>PATTERN</i>	Creation	Temple	Cross

Each kingdom age includes a spiritual highlight, a response, and a further promise for the age ahead. Let' s see how God works.

FIRST KINGDOM AGE

1. HIGHLIGHT: CREATION

The spiritual highlight of the first kingdom age was the creation.

Without it, none of what subsequently happened could have occurred.

We simply would not exist! This remains true whether you understand the story of Genesis literally or spiritually. A beginning is necessary.

³¹ *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)*

So good in fact that He rested satisfied, on the seventh day and blessed it, for all He had done.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:1-3)

Man and women were created....

²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.’”(Genesis 2:22-23)

....to look after God' s creation.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

2. RESPONSE: REBELLION OF SINFULNESS

The response to God' s wonderful work was rebellion. Firstly, by Adam and Eve.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” ¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” ¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”” (Genesis 3:8-13)

They were to be followed by many others. So many, that God wished he had not made man to look after His creation!

⁵ *The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:5-6)*

The Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, to mention just two examples, followed. Yes, we humans decided to go our own way.

3. PROMISE: BLESSING OF ABRAHAM' S SEED

Despite of all the problems God had with us, His creation, He persisted! His "*mercy triumphs over judgement!*" (*James 2:13b*) So a new blessing was again promised through the line of the loyal, godly, Abraham.

The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' (Genesis 12:1-3)

A promise literally filled through the nation of Israel, but which also applies spiritually, to us today. The promise was remembered by succeeding generations of patriarchs. Here we have Isaac' s blessing to Jacob.

⁴ *May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.*" (Genesis 28:4)

The spiritual blessing was to be fulfilled in the Promised Land.

SECOND KINGDOM AGE

1. HIGHLIGHT: THE TEMPLE

Remembering that the focus and understanding of this age was primarily in the physical realm, so the spiritual highlight of God' s physical presence was seen firstly in Moses Tabernacle. But then, as the nation became established and wealthy, the focus shifted to Solomon' s magnificent temple. God' s Temple actually! David had wanted to build it, but God put the project in the hands of Solomon.

³ 'You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the LORD his God until the LORD put his enemies under his feet. ⁴ But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. ⁵ I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the LORD my God, as the LORD told my father David, when he said, 'Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.' (1 Kings 5:3-5)

God did warn him that his spiritual motivation needed to be godly, a warning neither he, nor the people, heeded for long.

¹¹ The word of the LORD came to Solomon: ¹² "As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, carry out my regulations and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. ¹³ And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel." (1 Kings 6:11-13)

It took seven years to build.

³⁷ The foundation of the temple of the LORD was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv. ³⁸ In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. (1 Kings 6:37-8)

This magnificent temple was filled with the Lord' s glory.

¹⁰ When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. ¹¹ And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. ¹² Then Solomon said, ‘The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; ¹³ I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.’ (1 Kings 28:10-13)

The Queen of Sheba was impressed too!

⁴ When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. (1 Kings 10:4-5)

The glory of Solomon' s Temple has been legendary throughout history. It truly was, for a time, the visible spiritual highlight of the second kingdom age.

2. RESPONSE: REBELLION OF IDOL WORSHIP

The spiritual state of the nation throughout the remainder of the second kingdom age was reflected in what happened in and to, the Temple.

Sadly, God departed and its glory was gradually lost as succeeding kings neglected, even desecrated it, while invaders looted its treasures and finally destroyed it, all because the people rebelled and followed foreign religions.

Here is a small selection from amongst many examples. Under many kings the Temple was neglected.

⁸ In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, to purify the land and the temple, he sent Shaphan son of Azaliah and Maaseiah the ruler of the city, with Joah son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the temple of the LORD his God. ⁹ They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought into the temple of God, which the Levites

who were the doorkeepers had collected from the people of Manasseh, Ephraim and the entire remnant of Israel and from all the people of Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ Then they entrusted it to the men appointed to supervise the work on the LORD's temple. These men paid the workers who repaired and restored the temple. ¹¹ They also gave money to the carpenters and builders to purchase dressed stone, and timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin. (2 Chronicles 34:8-11)

The Temple had also been desecrated through idol worship and even used for male prostitution.

⁴ The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the LORD all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. ⁵ He did away with the pagan priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. ⁷ He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes, which were in the temple of the LORD and where women did weaving for Asherah. (2 Kings 23:4-7)

Foreign invaders too, looted the Temple.

¹³ However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. ¹⁴ He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. (Ezra 5:13-14)

And finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586B.C.

⁸ *On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹ He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. ¹⁰ The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. ¹¹ Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. ¹² But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields. ¹³ The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the LORD and they carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴ They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. ¹⁵ The commander of the imperial guard took away the censers and sprinkling bowls—all that were made of pure gold or silver. ¹⁶ The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the movable stands, which Solomon had made for the temple of the LORD, was more than could be weighed. ¹⁷ Each pillar was twenty-seven feet high. The bronze capital on top of one pillar was four and a half feet high and was decorated with a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. The other pillar, with its network, was similar.*
(2 Kings 25:8-17)

The occupation of the Promised Land had ended and the glorious Temple had been destroyed. All because the people rebelled against God.

3. PROMISE: A NEW HOUSE, IN THE HEART

It is hard to imagine the full despair of the exiles in Babylon. Both their land and their Temple had been destroyed. Even when a remnant was allowed to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, the replacement was a disappointment to those who remembered the glory of the former Temple.

³ *‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? (Haggai 2:3)*

But God encouraged them by promising a new greater house, a house of peace. One that would have sounded particularly attractive to a conquered people, who even in their approved reconstruction efforts, still faced considerable opposition.

⁶ *‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ⁸ ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ⁹ ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.’”(Haggai 2:6-9)*

But the form of this new ' house' was to be different to the old. For the spiritual blessing would become an internal experience instead of an external building. It would again be through the line of David, as Solomon' s Temple had been.

¹⁴ *”The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵”In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land.¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.’ (Jeremiah 33:14-16)*

A house built inside the hearts of people.

³³ *“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No*

longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.' (Jeremiah 31:33-4)

God gave the promise of a new, third kingdom age to come, the age of Jesus.

THIRD KINGDOM AGE

1. HIGHLIGHT: THE CROSS

The undoubted highlight of the New Testament age in which we now live is the Cross of Jesus. It was hugely hard for Jesus!

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:36-39)

But without the cross, we could not and would not have been reconciled to the Father.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:20)

It is the death of Jesus, the one sacrificed on the cross in our place, that is to be our inspiration for living, the motivator of our life.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Yes, the Cross was and remains, at the very heart of the Christian' s faith.

2. RESPONSE: THE CHOICE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT

The third kingdom age requires an individual response to accept or reject what Jesus did for us on the Cross. No longer does God' s grace extend through a family group or nation. Each one must make his or her individual choice. Through the cross, Jesus has made the way for each one to approach the Father.

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

But the choice of whether or not to believe is an individual one.

God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism. (Romans 2:6-11)

But all will have to face God' s judgement for the decision made.

¹²All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) ¹⁶This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (Romans 2:12-16)

3. PROMISE: MESSIANIC KINGDOM AGE TO COME

Of course, the New Covenant (Testament) is the final offer of God to man. Jesus came as the last sacrifice for sin, to enable a full and final reconciliation between man and God. So how can there be another promise? Surely we have it all now! Or do we? As we finish our study, we will take a glimpse at the glorious kingdom age yet to come.

⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

Let' s take a closer look, shall we.

THE KINGDOM FULFILLED

Right back in the second kingdom age of the Old Testament, with God speaking through the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, we find the promise of the kingdom yet to come. Take, for example, this message from the Lord through Isaiah.

¹⁷ ‘Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. (Isaiah 65:17-19)

Interestingly, but unsurprisingly, there are considerable similarities between this kingdom and the Garden of Eden, where God walked with his creation. One of the more interesting comparisons, mentioned in different places, is that the current conflict between animals, and animals and man, will disappear.

⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Another is in the provision of fruit, as food to eat. In the Garden of Eden:

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; (Genesis 2:16)

And in the final chapter of Revelation:

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:2b)

Jesus spoke of His return:

²² Then he said to his disciples, 'The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. ²³ Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. ²⁴ For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. ²⁵ But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ 'Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ 'It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹ But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰ 'It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. (Luke 17:22-30)

The disciples too, were looking forward to the return of Jesus. Here Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Ephesians.

¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:18-21)

But the description of the kingdom to come, and the spiritual battles involved, is most clearly set out in the final 19 chapters of the Bible, in Revelation chapters four to twenty-two.

The first three chapters offer very practical advice to the seven churches in the province of Asia (modern day Turkey). After this, the description of the coming kingdom and the spiritual battles involved in its establishment, are expressed in an allegorical way. One that theologians, and non-theologians for that matter, have discussed and interpreted in varying ways over the nearly 2000 years since the book was penned by John on the Island of Patmos.

Allegorical, with the exception (in my opinion that is) of Chapter 20, which again appears to be literal. For it states in a straightforward way what will happen at the time of, and after the return of Jesus.

Satan will be defeated and his power extinguished for 1000 years.

*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
(Revelation 20:1-3)*

The martyrs will reign with Jesus for 1000 years.

*⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.
(Revelation 20:4-5)*

Along with those who have spiritually died to their own nature and submitted themselves fully to God' s will in their lives.

³¹ *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.* ³² *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:31-32)*

If we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves now, we too can take part in the first resurrection.

⁶ *Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)*

At the end of the 1000 years the final battle with satan, the beast and the false prophet (the counterfeit godhead) will be waged and won.

⁷ *When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison* ⁸ *and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.* ⁹ *They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.* ¹⁰ *And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:7-10)*

After the 1000 years too, the rest of the dead will be resurrected and judged.

¹¹ *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.* ¹² *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.* ¹³ *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 he had done.* ¹⁴ *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The*

lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11-15)

The major question then, we need to consider for ourselves, is how to become one of those able to overcome satan and take part in the first resurrection. Fortunately the book of Revelation answers this question as well. It is summed up in one short but key verse, Revelation 12:11. Of course, we still have the responsibility to put it into practice!

First we need to set the scene.

⁷ And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. (Revelation 12:7-10)

This introduction is followed by the key verse in the Bible in explaining how we are to win the battle over satan. The verse upon which Walking With Jesus Ministries is based.

¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.
(Revelation 12:11)

A three-part process of martyrdom, physical or spiritual, involving Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father identifies the qualification for participating in the First Resurrection. It is the process of attaining spiritual maturity, the goal of which is to overcome satan. The 3 stages in the process are:

1. JESUS: "the blood of the Lamb"

Jesus is the Lamb of God. John the Baptist declared it. It was the first act in the public ministry of Jesus.

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29)

And it was prophesied in picture and type way back in the first kingdom age. For in Jewish understanding, prophecy has an ongoing, as well as an initial, fulfillment.

⁸ Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together. (Genesis 22:8)

This is seen in the Passover story where the lamb and the blood are beautifully combined to prevent God' s judgement upon the house.

⁷ Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. (Exodus 12:7)

And the relationship of Jesus to the forgiveness of sin through the blood is confirmed again in Revelation:

and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, (Revelation 1:5)

Jesus gave His perfect life for our sinful life, in fulfillment of God' s basic principle of a ' life for a life' .

¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

The first step then on our journey to maturity, towards overcoming satan, is to accept Jesus as our Savior, through the sacrifice of His life, the shedding of His blood, on the Cross.

However, contrary to the belief of many, this is not the end but the beginning of our walk to maturity, towards overcoming satan in our life.

2. HOLY SPIRIT: "the word of their testimony"

The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide who trains us in God' s way.

²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

He places in our heart good things, to replace the bad things of our former life. We speak this good work of the Holy Spirit through our mouth, through our testimony.

⁴⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

As we open our lives up to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to teach, train, change and guide us, we become more like Jesus. The angel acknowledges the input of the Holy Spirit through the spiritual gift of prophecy, when talking about those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

⁹ Then the angel said to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.' ¹⁰ At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' (Revelation 19:9-10)

However, again contrary to the belief of many, our Christian walk to maturity does not stop simply by adding Holy Spirit input to that of Jesus. For it is no mistake that all three elements of the godhead are

included in the above invitation to the wedding supper. *Worship God!*
(The Father) *For the testimony of Jesus* (Jesus) *is the spirit of prophecy.*
(Holy Spirit)

3. THE FATHER: "they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

Obedience to the will of God the Father is the third, and most challenging, key in our walk to spiritual maturity, of our progress towards overcoming satan.

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

The ultimate choice we make, on a daily basis, is to set aside our own will and desires in order to do the will of the Father in our life. We become holy through obeying the Father.

⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. (Hebrews 10:9-10)

We are called upon to die to our old human nature and put on the godly nature, as taught to us by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. ⁵ For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. ⁶ But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:4-6)

Jesus set the ultimate example of personal sacrifice to the will of the Father when He went to the cross, out of obedience, not desire. In the Garden of Gethsemene He prayed:

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.' (Matthew 26:42)

And we are required to do the same.

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:14)

As we come to this final place of the submission that Jesus reached, so we will be able to overcome satan through....

the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11)

And be prepared, be able, to participate in the Kingdom fulfilled. To join with Jesus and join in the First Resurrection.

⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:6)

Amen. (So be it.)