

## What is “The end of the World?”

*“As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private and said, ‘Tell us when all this will be’, they asked, ‘and what will happen to show it is the time for your coming and the end of the age?’”*

*Matthew 24: 3 Good News New Testament*

### *The Messiah of the Jews*

**A**fter over three years association with Jesus his disciples still had a hard time understanding his “*after-death*” teachings. They had been brought up with the standard Judaism of the rabbis in the synagogues, which taught the total earthly predominance of the people of Israel “*when the Messiah comes*”. They knew about the prophecies of *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel* and other prophets about the “*last days*” when Israel would be restored to its divinely declared destiny, but they also believed that there would be a period before that “*end time*” when they would be

*“the enlightenment and ruler of nations”*, while waiting for the return of the Messiah.

The three kingdoms of Daniel’s prophetic visions—Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece —dominated these four centuries, and under their rulers the two former Israelite kingdoms of Ephraim and Judah became known as Samaria and Judea, tributary provinces to the predominating powers. At the beginning of the second century BC (198 BC), Judea was conquered by Antiochus III, *“the Great”*, and annexed to Syria. At this time, Judea was divided into five sub-provinces—Galilee, Samaria, Judea (the three collectively known as Judea), Trachonitis and Peraea.

Meanwhile, a combination of priests, scribes and *rabbis*, or *“teachers”* in the Babylon Exile, had institutionalized what had been divinely revealed to them through *Moses*, the *Psalms* and the *Prophets* by independently creating a body of literature, and a system of theological administration which effectively removed God from their lives. The body of literature was a compilation of traditional comments and interpretations given the titles of *Mishna*, *Gemara* or *Talmud*, *Midrashim* and *Qabbala*, which eventually superseded the *Law of God* and *Moses*, and excluded God casuistically by arguing that the 613 *“palings”*, or *“hedges”*, were to preserve God’s awesome unapproachable majesty. In that four hundred years between Malachi and John the Baptist the Remnant Jews returned to a much-reduced Israel in what had become known as Roman *“Palestine”* and developed observance of a religion known as *“Rabbinical Judaism”* in place of God. Judaism not only excluded God from the lives of the Jews it also excluded Jews from the lives of other people in its social isolationism<sup>8</sup>. It was unlawful for a Jew *“to associate with a Gentile or to visit him”*, and every Gentile child as soon as it was born was regarded as unclean.

Between the last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, and the first of the *New Testament* prophets, John the Baptist, there was a gap of some four centuries during which God was silent. The history of the Israelites had begun with four hundred years of divine silence, from Joseph to Moses; and it ended with the same.

In Palestine, as the first century BC drew to a close, everything

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<sup>8</sup>Acts 10:28

centred on the Judaic religion - institutions, customs, law, manners, relationships—and the expectation of the traditional Messiah. In order to attract the support of the sceptical Jewish people the unpopular Herod built a magnificent Temple modelled on Solomon's, and this structure physically dominated the city of Jerusalem and was the focus of pilgrimages by the Dispersed Jews of the world. The tax-exempt Temple treasury, generously supported by Jews everywhere, gave the Jewish religious leaders of the official Sanhedrin, or Council, in Jerusalem enormous influence through the millions of world-wide Jewry of the Diaspora, and created an uneasy balance of power between them and the Herodian political faction in Roman Palestine.

The chief beneficiaries of the post-Ezra Judaism were the rabbis, who were arbiters of all disputes, the final authority on everything pertaining to the Judaism created by their scribal ancestors. The rabbis of the institutionalized Judaism arrogated to themselves the authorities of Moses' Levitical priesthood, but with the focus on their self-serving misinterpretation of Israel's unique destiny of religion as ritual, instead of the historical prophets' interpretation of Israel's unique devotion to holiness.

The post-Babylon *Remnant-Israel* was totally confused by the appearance of the first prophet in over four hundred years, John the Baptist, and his dynamic demand for Jewish repentance and baptism in anticipation of the imminent revelation of the kingdom of God and the long-awaited Messiah. What was new about John's message was *the imminence* of the “kingdom of heaven”, distinct from their orthodox expectation of the “kingship of Israel”; the *incarnation* of a divine Messiah without kingship attributions; and the *individualizing* of the expanded kingdom of God in the person of the coming Messiah.

But then Jesus had appeared and declared himself the promised Messiah, supported by the much-admired prophet, John the Baptist, and that his current purpose was to declare and initiate “*the kingdom of God*” —including every believer everywhere. Over the following three years of their discipleship his followers had difficulties in understanding the implications of his hundred-plus mentions of this

extended kingdom of God, and the additional twenty-nine parables which included blessings for other nations. When Jesus added to this the expectation of another “*second coming . . . at the end of the age*” they were completely baffled.

### *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*

John the Baptist had taken up where Daniel<sup>9</sup> and the other prophets left off, by declaring that the imminent advent of the Messiah would permanently establish the true spiritual relationship between king and kingdom, by introducing an everlasting righteousness, by sweeping away all creedal barriers, and by integrating all nations in this kingdom. As the prophets had foretold, the kingdom would be universal, holy and eternal.

The Jews at the beginning of the first century AD were incapable of understanding such a world-wide kingdom because of the rabbinical indoctrination of their self-generated Judaism. They could comprehend the historical form of the Davidic kingdom from their writings and *Traditions*, but they could not understand the spiritual substance of the kingdom because they had no longer believed in or practiced a personal relationship with the God of the kingdom. The *New Kingdom* was a mystery which, John declared, would be revealed by the advent of the divinely-ordained king among them. John prophetically proclaimed:

*“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*<sup>10</sup>(my emphasis)

At the peak of the continuing unprecedented public response to John’s preaching he was joined by his second-cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, whom John immediately proclaimed by divine revelation as the Messiah—in Isaiah’s terms, as “*Lamb of God*”<sup>11</sup>, or *Servant-Messiah* rather than the commonly expected *Ruler-Messiah*. John’s announcement of this *Sacrificial Messiah*, with the related Spirit-and-fire baptism, prepared the way for the revelation of the mystery of the new “*Spiritual Kingdom*” foretold

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<sup>9</sup>Daniel 7:13-14

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 3:11-12

<sup>11</sup>John 41:25-36

by Daniel and now preached by Jesus.

From the time when John was put in prison by Herod because of his uncompromising demand for holiness of life even from Herod, Jesus began his own distinctive public ministry – the imminence of the kingdom of God, and the need for Israel’s repentance and holiness as a prelude to the expansion of the message to the other nations of the world:

*“From that time Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near’”*<sup>12</sup>. (my emphasis)

There are a number of ways in which the importance of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ life and teachings may be assessed. In the four *Gospels* Jesus is quoted teaching about the kingdom 47 times in Matthew, 13 times in Mark, 31 times in Luke, and five times in John. A comprehensive survey of the *New Testament* shows 119 passages where the expression “*kingdom*” occurs; an analysis of which indicates that it meant comprehensively the rule of God which was manifested in and through the Church of the Messiah, initiated by Jesus but detailed by the Apostle Paul, grew in the face of opposition, and will be ultimately triumphant at the second coming of the Messiah in the new heavens and new earth.

The unique “*message of the kingdom*” presented by Jesus was in three aspects: (i) it was *present* (“*at hand*” – Matthew 4 v 17) in the person of God’s own Son, Jesus himself; (ii) it was *preached* in seven mystery parables (Matthew 13), followed later with others by Jesus, *as fulfilled in that time*; and (iii) it would be *prophetically* realized at the *second coming of the Messiah as King* as foretold by David and Daniel (Matthew 24, 25).

These three aspects of the “*kingdom of heaven*” were taught predominantly by Jesus in five distinct segments of his three-year life, each segment terminated with the expression “*When Jesus had finished, or ended . . .*” For example, (i) when he ended his “*Sermon on the Mount*” (Matt 7 v 28); (ii) when he sent the twelve disciples to preach “*to Israel*” on their own (Matt 11 v 1); (iii) when he finished recounting and explaining the seven “*mystery parables*” and turned away from Israel and his own family to “*the world*” (Matt 13); (iv) when he introduced the subject of the “*Church*” and its relation to

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<sup>12</sup>Matthew ch 4 v 17

the kingdom (Matt 19 v 1); and (v) when he provided the details of the end of the world at his second coming (Matt 24, 25)

These mentions of the kingdom of God are presented in different forms, such as “*kingdom of heaven*”, “*kingdom of the Messiah*”, “*kingdom of our Lord*”, “*kingdom of Jesus*”. Some of them, according to circumstances, customs, or subject matter, differ in presentation but not in generic substance. For example, some Jews were reluctant to use the name of “*God*” and used “*heaven*” instead. The use of “*kingdom of heaven*” at other times was related to the contrast with the “*kingdom of God*” on earth to some degree. The “*kingdom of the Messiah*” was taken to mean the *future rule* of the Messianic age. The “*kingdom of Jesus*” related to the interim living history period—“*the kingdom and patience of Jesus*”.

But, whatever aspect of the presentation, there was no doubt that the important teaching emphasis of Jesus was fundamentally concerned with the explication of the kingdom of God. In his first personal encounter with an individual—Nicodemus, a highly respected Jewish leader—he confronted the bewildered and noted Sanhedrin official with the categorical *theological odium* assertion: “*I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God*<sup>13</sup>”.

This esoteric characteristic of the kingdom of God as spiritual regeneration to a traditionalist Jew was further emphasized by Jesus’ explanation that it required being “*born by water and by the spirit*”<sup>14</sup> when, later, in selecting the Twelve Apostles, Jesus made it clear that *only they were initiates of the arcana of the “mysteries of the kingdom”* in the words: “*The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them*”. Therefore, although the general knowledge of the Messianic kingdom of God was known to all Jews through the ancient Scriptures from Abraham onwards, Jesus was emphatic that they did not know the “*mysteries*” of that kingdom. It would only be known to those who listened to and obeyed his teachings. Later, when he sent out the seventy disciples on their evangelistic missions, their principal task, he told them, was to declare, “*The kingdom of God is near.*”

Most of Jesus’ teachings were couched in the form of

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<sup>13</sup>John 3:3

<sup>14</sup>John 3:5f

"parables"—earthly stories with heavenly meanings—and, in the 29 parables Jesus used, 17 of them definitely include explicatory aspects of the kingdom of God. The other 12 parables, while not mentioning the kingdom of God *per se*, in more than half of them it is clear that the concept of the kingdom of God is paramount.

The mission of Jesus, therefore, in manifesting the kingdom of God to and through his disciples was four-fold: (i) *to delineate the New Israel* prophesied by Isaiah; (ii) *to define the New Covenant* prophesied by Jeremiah; (iii) *to deliver the New Kingdom* prophesied by Daniel; and (iv) *to declare the New Temple* prophesied by Ezekiel.

In *delineating the New Israel*, he taught that it was not Abraham's *fatherhood* of Israel that was acceptable to God, but his *faith*. In *defining the New Covenant*, he said *he would die* vicariously for sin, and not an animal, thereby delivering through redemption all who were in bondage to sin. In *delivering the New Kingdom*, he declared he would conquer Satan and confer authority to disciples to use "keys" to enable entrance through a "Church" for all Gentiles as well as Jews. In *declaring the New Temple*, he stated he would destroy the existing institution of rituals *and build a "Church" of spiritual values*. All of these would be incorporated in the eternal kingdom of God.

The *New Remnant*, *New Kingdom*, *New Temple* were all incorporated by Jesus into the *New Israel*, through a *New Covenant*. This *New Covenant*, Jesus taught, would be more comprehensive than the *Old Covenant*. It would include "a people who were not a people", be a "treasured possession" from the nations instead of a single favoured people like Israel, a "circumcision of the heart and not of the foreskin", a single body of Holy Spirit-indwelt priests instead of a tribal priesthood.

The *New Covenant* was not only confirmed by God it was also consummated by Jesus' shed blood on the cross as a sacrificial Lamb. At the Last Supper, when he instituted the "feast of remembrance" he declared: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you".<sup>15</sup>

Then there was Jesus' five-fold *New Covenant* commission to the Church : (i) "I will build my Church . . ." (Matt 16 18); (ii) "I will give you the keys of the kingdom . . ." (Matt 16 v 19; 18 v 18); (iii) "I will be present where two or three are gathered in my name . . ."

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<sup>15</sup>Matthew 26:26-28

(Matt 18 v 20); (iv) *“I will send the Comforter (Holy Spirit) to you . . .”* (John 7); and (v) *“I will prepare a place for you . . .”* (John 14 v 2).

### ***The Kingdom Principles***

In Jesus’ presentation of the *New Kingdom* nothing and no-one was excluded from attaining to it—if its conditions were observed. His abiding passion was the restoration of the lost kingdom forfeited by Old Israel, under the *Old Covenant*, and its replacement by the *New Kingdom* based on the *New Covenant*.

Jesus made a clear historical division relating to the kingdom of God when he said *“the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached and every one is forcing his way into it”*.<sup>16</sup> The condition for entrance into the kingdom of God, as was noted earlier in Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, was *“unless a man is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter”*. Jesus went on to emphasize the distinction with the words, *“flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”*. An individual could not be born into the kingdom of God through family, fortune or favour, but only by faith in the provision of God. An individual had to forcefully suppress all natural claims, and equally forcefully lay hold on God’s prerequisite of the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God.

### ***Reward and Inheritance***

The important distinction of proportionate *rewards* for particular spiritual qualities, and the associated *inheritance* of the kingdom of God for identifying with the Messiah, was further articulated by Jesus when he was emphasizing the nature of the inheritance of the kingdom:

*“Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 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.”*<sup>17</sup> (my emphasis)

Both of these categories of *reward* and *inheritance*—*“least”* and

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<sup>16</sup>Luke 16:16

<sup>17</sup>Matthew 5:19-20

“great”—were in the kingdom: the former, those who “break the least commandment” and “teach men so”, were “least” in the kingdom; and the latter, “those who practise these commands” and “teach others”, were “great in the kingdom”. It was also stated by Jesus that there was a righteousness practiced by the professional religionists that had to be surpassed before anyone could enter the kingdom of God.

Once it was clear to Jesus that his disciples understood the kingdom, and after Peter had acknowledged him as the Messiah, Jesus concentrated his teaching on the catastrophic personal and universal consequences—first for himself, and then for those who chose to follow him:

*“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day raised to life . . .*

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’.”<sup>18</sup>*

### ***Jesus and the Church***

With the disciples’ understanding of the truth of the *New Kingdom* established, Jesus immediately introduced for the first time a completely new universal concept (“my Church”), and new mediation principle (“I will give you the keys of the kingdom”), as part of the *New Covenant* and *New Remnant Israel*.

*“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”<sup>19</sup> (my emphasis)*

The Scriptures immediately record a new emphasis from the previous almost three years of teachings about the *New Kingdom*, to the remaining few months’ impending of his death and resurrection: *“From that time forth Jesus began to show to his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem . . . and be killed . . . and be raised the third day”*

At the time Jesus was unquestionably addressing Peter alone as “the rock”—but a perceptive, visionary Peter, and not just because he

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<sup>18</sup>Matthew 16:21-24

<sup>19</sup>Matthew 16:18-19

had an onomatopoeic name—*petros*, “a stone”; and *petra*, “a rock”. There was no indication either that the function or authority were transferable to others by any means other than divine approval. What is of greater significance than Peter’s mediating function was that Jesus placed his statement regarding “my Church” in immediate proximity with the kingdom of God—twice—and in opposition to the kingdom of Satan (“the gates of Hades will not overcome it”). The clear implication of Jesus’ words was that the “Church” was a spiritual entity, militantly active, and was triumphant over Satan.

*What it was not was a universal entity distinct from the people of Israel.* Jesus, a Jew, went on to declare to both Jews and Gentiles that his Church would have a two-fold function in time and among all nations on earth: (i) the gates of hell would not prevail in the inevitable confrontations; and (ii) that initially by Peter, and then through all associated charismatically with the Church, entrance to the kingdom of God would be effected and divinely approved.<sup>20</sup>

Following on his initial declaration about the Church, Jesus addressed his disciples corporately as a body, a church. The word for “church” which Jesus used was a common Greek word, *ekklesia*, meaning “an assembly of people called together for a special purpose”. It had been used in the *Old Testament Scriptures* to denote the people of Israel as a religious unit, or congregation, so the term was familiar to all Jews. It was Jesus’ use of the word to designate a personal and universal entity within the kingdom of God incorporating both Jews and Gentiles, which was new.

This “Church of the Messiah” would be the centre of moral authority and spiritual power. This was enshrined in its manifesto: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The divine principles practiced in daily living in the world, and the discipline associated with their breach, would be the responsibilities of appropriate spiritual people in the Church, and not the chartist proclamations of an institution and enforced by committee. The spiritual power would be evident in the presence of the Messiah in even small gatherings (“For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them”); and in the perceptions of spiritual decisions of spiritual people (“If two of you on

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<sup>20</sup>Matthew 18:18

*earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven*"). Finally, Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was being removed from *Old Israel* and given to people who would practice its principles: *"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."*<sup>21</sup> (my emphasis)

With the initiation of the *Church of the Messiah* the responsibilities of the kingdom of God were transferred to a new theocracy, which would be more different and more glorious than David's theocratic nation was to Saul's democratic failure. It would be Daniel's prophesied *"The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey Him."*

This Jewish term *"end of the age"* is more accurate than *"the end of the world"* because prophetically they knew from the former prophets of Israel that world would be catastrophically purged but not ended at the divine Apocalypse—when there would be initiated *"a new heaven and new earth"*. In his fifth Olivet Discourse Jesus set out to meet their concerns with a dramatic description of *"what will happen and what will be the signs"* of his prophetic "after-death" second coming:

*"Many will come in my name claiming, 'I am the Christ', and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows . . ."*

Jesus went to enlarge these *"beginning of sorrows"* into another three successive categories: *"tribulation . . . great tribulation . . . and day of the Lord's (or God's) wrath"*. These he divided up into fifteen episodes and related consequences, each beginning with the significant and sequential prophetic term *"Then"*, listed as follows:

*"Then they will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death"*<sup>22</sup>

*"Then many will backslide, betray, hate, deceive . . . but many will stand firm . . . gospel preached . . ."*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Matthew 21:43, 24:1, 28:1, 27:19

<sup>22</sup>Matthew 24:9

<sup>23</sup>Matthew 24:10

*"Then shall the end come."* <sup>24</sup>

*"Then let them in Judea flee."* <sup>25</sup>

*"Then shall be great tribulation"* <sup>26</sup>

*"Then shall arise false Christs, signs, wonders, deceits . . ."* <sup>27</sup>

*"Then the Son of Man will return with power and great glory to gather the elect . . ."* <sup>28</sup>

*"Then you see all these things and know that the end is near . . . then shall the coming of the Son of Man be"* <sup>28</sup>

*"Then there shall two in bed . . . one taken the other left . . ."* <sup>30</sup>

*"Then the kingdom of heaven is like the ten virgins . . . five wise and five foolish"* <sup>31</sup>

*"Then he that had five talents traded . . . likewise he with two talents . . ."* <sup>32</sup>

*"Then the Son of Man will sit upon the throne judging all nations . . . separating sheep from goats . . ."* <sup>33</sup>

*"Then shall the king say, 'Come, you blessed, inherit the kingdom . . .'"* <sup>34</sup>

*"Then shall the king say (to those on his right hand) . . . 'Inasmuch as you have done it to the least . . . you have done it to me . . .'"* <sup>35</sup>

*"Then shall the king say to those on his left hand 'Depart into everlasting fire' . . ."* <sup>36</sup>

Several of the prophecies were fulfilled within that and the following century in Jewish history, but these and the remainder of the prophecies were equally valid for "*the end of the age*", as will be seen in the latter stages of this book. I have recorded them here as the literal words of Jesus regarding what was to happen after his death, the deaths of the listening disciples, and the potential deaths of future readers of the Scriptures. They are a record of what the only person who claimed to be God said, one who would rise from death himself to demonstrate what would happen after his death and the deaths of all others.

He prophesies not only what is going to happen in the immediate after-math of the followers' death experience, but also what was likely to happen to those who rejected his words, in two metaphorical categories of people—sheep and goats, wheat and tares, wise and foolish, rulers and servants, good and bad—otherwise *believers* and *unbelievers* in God. Death is not the end of the individual in a nirvana of nothingness, but rather the introduction to

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<sup>24-30</sup>Matthew 24:14—24:40

<sup>31-36</sup>Matthew 25:9—1-43

a limitless after-death experience of self-chosen eternal bliss or eternal damnation

I had made my personal choice to follow Jesus with total commitment so my expectation was the "eternal bliss" but the closer I came to the start of that my interest was in the many events listed in the Scriptures with tantalising infrequency. What I wanted to know now were the details to be expected in the after-death experience, the specified "*rewards and inheritances*" of the parables and statements of Jesus for those who had performed a life commitment to his service.



Chapter -5 -  
will be available on this site on the 1st October 2008