

BISHOP RAYMOND OFONMBUK

GOOD NEWS



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FOREWORD

This book presents in-depth studies of deep spiritual topics. You will need a lot of objectivity, open-mindedness and patience as you read this book. You may have to go over some of the topics more than once.

Please have a bible beside you as you read this book. Many bible references are given – don't just skim over them but take pains to look them up as they occur. You will then have a better and deeper understanding of what is being discussed.

Happy reading and God bless you!

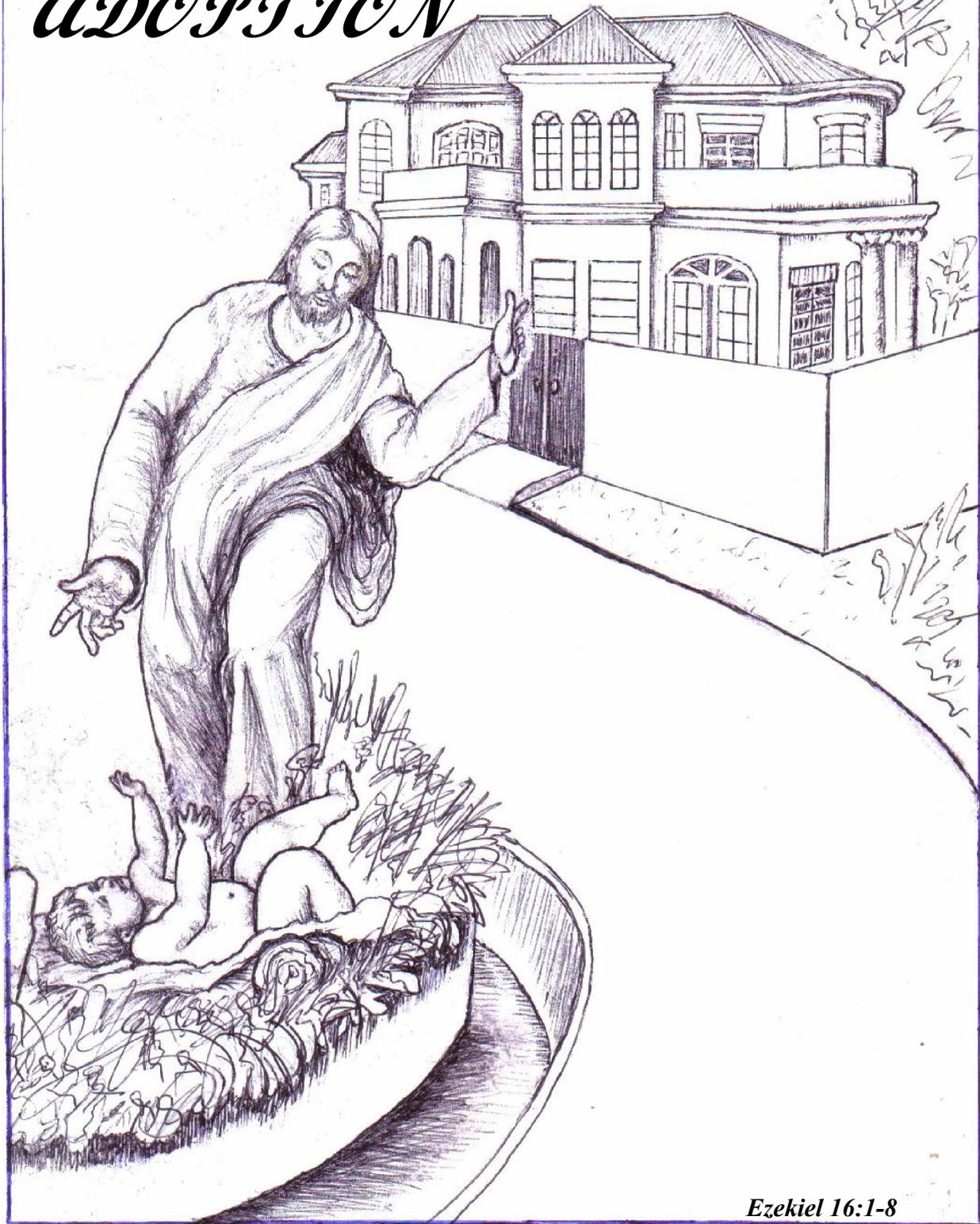
The following **abbreviations** are used herein for various Bible versions:

RSV	-	Revised Standard Version
KJV	-	King James Version
NIV	-	New International Version
NEB	-	New English Bible
DARBY	-	Holy Scriptures & New Testament Bible by J. N. Darby
KIT	-	Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures
GNB	-	Good News Bible
AMP	-	The Amplified Bible
YLT	-	Young's Literal Translation
MOUNCE	-	Mounce Reverse – Interlinear New Testament
NASB	-	New American Standard Bible
ESV	-	English Standard Version

BOOK ONE

ADOPTION

ADOPTION



Ezekiel 16:1-8

Bishop Raymond Ofonmbuk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge the courtesy I usually enjoy from the staff of the Motherless Babies Unit of the Cross River State Social Welfare Office in all my visits to the Orphanage at Uwanse, Calabar, and I'm grateful for all the information freely received concerning the situation of the inmates and the Adoption processes.

May God bless them.

ADOPTION

(Stage One)

The direct and natural way to be a member of a family is, of course, by birth. However, there are some legally recognized ways like adoption or marriage, whereby hitherto unrelated persons do become relatives-in-law.

This piece discusses adoption in the sense of taking somebody who was not one's child to become one's fully-recognized child. For instance, going to an orphanage, fulfilling all the requirements and due processes, and then taking a child home to become one's own.

Why is adoption important to us?

It concerns the issue of our being children of God. This is a very sensitive issue. God is a great king. Imagine someone who goes about town bearing the royal family name and making out that he is one of the princes. The royal household and the kingmakers would ask questions like: "Your Highness, who is this person we're hearing about? Had you any son somehow, somewhere, sometime ago?" Upon investigation, such a person could be arrested for impersonation -- an impostor who goes about embarrassing the royal family.

Everybody believes and claims that he or she is a child of God. Nobody claims to be of the devil, and anyone would take offence if referred to as such. People say: "God created me, I am his child". This idea is age-long. In Acts 17:28 we find Athenians, who were steeped in idolatry and who had never heard the gospel, claiming to be God's children. Their reasoning? -- "we are his creatures, he gives us breath and life and keeps us; thus, we are all his children". Paul saw their ignorance and need and preached Christ to them.

How did mankind come by this idea of being God's children? The Bible, in Luke 3:38, says that Adam was a son of God. God created the first human pair as his children. Indeed, our creator had intended for humans to be his very children, not just his creatures. Yes, all of us would automatically have been his children right from birth, **BUT** something happened!!

Something terrible happened when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, fell, and lost their exalted position. Things changed drastically for mankind. Man's situation now is as explained in Romans 3:23 - "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" and Psalm 51:5 - "*behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me*". We are born **sinners**. We are not born as children of God, nor are we any longer children of God by virtue of being created by him. Only Adam and Eve were children of God when created, but their fall spoiled things for the rest of us.

Please read Psalm 139:13-17 and note the fact that the same David who wrote those truths about his creation also wrote the truth of Psalm 51:5. Although God later told Prophet Samuel that David was his chosen one whom Samuel should anoint as king of Israel, yet Psalm 51:5 had been true of David.

This may sound bad to a world of modern men who have been trained to esteem themselves, but the correct picture of man given in the Bible is not that of a hero but that of a fallen creature in need of a Redeemer; a sinner in need of pardon and cleansing; a lost man in need of a Saviour; a weak man in need of God's grace.

However, our eternal loving Creator did not give up or let go of us after our fall. His original intention for men to be his children still stands and, in his infinite wisdom, he has provided the way of getting us into his family. The WAY to be a child of God now – the WAY to enter God's family now – is by **ADOPTION** through Jesus Christ.

It was through adoption that God took Israel of old as his children. In Ezekiel 16:1-8, God reminded them of their sinful beginning and of how he met them as an **abandoned baby**, pitied them, and carried them home to become his own. Romans 9:4-5 also confirms that out of all the fallen races of men, they are the one whom the sovereign God chose to **adopt** as His children under the Old Covenant so that Christ, the Son of God, would be born in flesh through their lineage (as the promised Son of Abraham, Son of David).

Just as the Bible stresses that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, it simultaneously stresses that we can become children of God only by adoption via Christ Jesus. A teaching of salvation by grace unaccompanied by the twin teaching of adoption does not give sinful man a complete picture of his condition and his need. For instance, if someone boasts that he's sinless and will make heaven by his own righteousness, even the average man in the street can tell him to leave such boasts, for nobody is perfect but we are all sinners and survive only by the grace and mercy of God. However, if someone claims that everybody is a child of God, the same man in the street will concur with him and say "yes, he created us all; we are all his children". Such is the subtle nature of this error, but the Bible says that we can become children of God only through faith in Christ Jesus – Galatians 3:26

John 1 verse **12** declares that:

*“As many as received him (Jesus), to them gave he power to
become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”.*

Notice the word “become”. If we then become children of God, it means we hadn't yet been. This scripture divides men into two sets: those who receive Jesus and those who do not. To those who accept him, Jesus then gives the **authority** to become sons of God. That

is, the right and recognition to bear that family name, having been adopted into the family by him. John 1 verse **13** explains that this sonship does not come with our natural birth, but has to be by spiritual rebirth. John 3 verse 6 confirms that what our parents gave birth to is our body and that it is only God's Spirit that can beget us as spirit children of God. John 3 verse 7 then stresses men's need for that spiritual rebirth. This is the way.

It is explained in **Ephesians 1:5** that the eternal God in his omniscience had pre-designed (or provided) adoption by Jesus Christ as the way whereby humans who had fallen from their glorious position of children of God could regain it and be accepted again among God's beloved. This is confirmed in **Romans 8:29** where we find that God intended Christ to be The Firstborn Son, and then through Christ many more children would be brought into the family to be Christ's younger brethren. It is Christ who will present unto God all those who have been made to become his children. (Hebrews 2:10-13).

Hear what **Galatians 4:4-7** says:

*“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption** of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the **Spirit** of his Son into your hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father’. **Wherefore** thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son then an **heir** of God through Christ”.*

Adoption grants **legal rights** of inheritance. There are many things one cannot now inherit from God until one is legally recognized as his child. No wonder many of the things people claim by faith do not manifest for them since they are merely assuming sonship to God by virtue of creation.

I now ask **you** a serious question: have you yet submitted to Christ and experienced all his adoption processes to truly become God's child? Or, are you still holding to the age-long belief that you're a child of God because God created you? Please, do something definite about your soul's salvation now!

God's adoption **goes beyond human adoption**. If man adopts a child, it has all legal rights and recognition as his child, but it is still not his **blood**. No matter how much the man loves and cares for it, it still does not carry his nature in it. Any DNA blood test will say it is **not** his **real** child. However, God can do what man cannot do. Hallelujah! **I John 3:1-2** tells us that believers in Christ are not only authorized to bear the name “children of God” but, in addition, **are actually** children of God now. When God adopts, he completes it and **seals** it by injecting his **seed** (Holy Spirit) into you, thereby infusing his **nature** into you. God is

Spirit. It is only when he puts that his Spirit (seed, 'semen') into you and begets you that you can truly call God "Abba, my Father".

Romans 8: 15-16 says:

*"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the **Spirit** of adoption, **whereby** we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the **children** of God"*.

Galatians 4:6 says: *"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"*. Without having been adopted and imbued with this Spirit, calling God your father and claiming to be his child are just bogus statements.

Romans 8:9b states it very directly and specifically that *"... if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"*. This is just like saying: "if the blood of Mr. Jones is not running in that child, if it wasn't the sperm of Mr. Jones that produced that baby, then it is not his real child". Can you see it?

Have you been desiring Holy Spirit baptism all these years? Maybe, you're putting the cart before the horse! Make sure you're adopted first, and you'll surely receive the Spirit as seal. (**Ephesians 1:13-14, 2Corinthians 1:21-22**).

This seal of the Holy Spirit indicates a completed adoption process. When any agreement or process is perfected and completed it is usually said to be "signed, sealed and delivered". Seal also indicates ownership. It is a branding. When a person's seal or brand appears on a product (or on cattle), it tells everybody that it is his own. A seal indicates that something is authentic. An institution's seal on a certificate shows it is genuine and not fake. A seal is a mark of authority as well as a means of security. Seals on parcels prevent and expose any attempts to tamper with the contents. Friend, without this seal your claim that you are God's child is bogus, but with the seal any spiritual 'DNA blood test' will affirm to heaven and hell that one is truly God's child.

Can a child 'gatecrash' into a certain noble home and impose itself? Which noble family would accept such? That would be just like the man in Matthew 22:1-14 who thought he could evade the proper procedure for entrance into the king's wedding feast. He had thought: "After all, we are all citizens and the king loves his subjects; I am entitled to his bounty". He had thought that there were many 'alternative ways' into the royal banquet hall.

Little did he know that those who passed through the one and only officially-provided "Door" (John 10:9, John 14:6, John 10:1), underwent some necessary due processes to make them fit to sit at table with royal family. They were cleaned up, washed and anointed; their unkempt hairs were shaved, their dirty nails clipped, their beggarly rags were cast away and

they were clothed with the unique royal wedding garment. This garment was a special one made by order of the king just for that royal occasion and could not be obtained anywhere else.

All those entrance processes translate to forgiveness of sins, cleansing by Jesus' blood, justification, sanctification and baptism in Holy Spirit. The royally-provided garment means being clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9, Isaiah 61:10, Isaiah 64:6, Revelation 3:17-18, Zechariah 3:4, Ephesians 5:26-27, Philippians 3:9, Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 3:20-26).

Our 'smart' fellow didn't experience all that, since he chose to go in through some other way or even window. He had thought he could enjoy undeserved royal delicacies without meeting the king's requirements that would grant him 'justification' for them. Maybe, he thought he had automatic natural qualification, being a citizen. Little did he know that he would easily be spotted as an odd man out.

He never believed that the very loving king who had made an open invitation to "whosoever will" would order that he be bundled and cast out to a place of darkness and tears! Let us learn a great lesson from that.

No orphanage authority would agree to the movement of an inmate who had been under its care all along, unless all the due processes for release have been satisfied. Dear friend, know very well that one cannot be free from the authority of Satan, sin, the flesh, the world and death until the adoption requirements of repentance, forgiveness, redemption, justification, etc through the blood of Christ have been satisfied. This is the only bona-fide and 'official' procedure that Satan and his kingdom recognize and submit to! (Acts 4:12, John 8:34-36; 1John 3:9; 1Peter 1:18-19, Colossians 2:14-15, Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 5:1-5, 9-10).

Have you been struggling with certain sins in your life all along? Be delivered (adopted) first by Christ. Let God inject his seed (Holy Spirit) into you. Receive the nature of God. This is the true way out.

I believe you now recognize one's need to be adopted and be in Christ. Listen to 1 Peter 2:9-10

*"9) But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10) Once you **were not a people**, but now you*

are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy". --- (NIV).

Do you realize what verse 10 is saying? Let me use human adoption to explain it.

By God's grace, I've associated with our local orphanages for many years, as part of my ministry is to visit them. If an abandoned baby is not adopted, he grows up in the orphanage without knowing who his parents are, who he really is and where he comes from. Such children are all surnamed after the incumbent State Governor: but when this is succeeded by another Governor, what relationship would they have with the former Governor whose surname they shared? None at all! See? The frequent changes rather imply that they have no fixed identity and are of no definite parentage.

They understand they are children of the government and come from the State. But who is government? It is an intangible abstract! Can you run out to meet government and government would take you up in his arms, hug you and kiss you as he comes home from work? Although government and the staff of the orphanages are taking good care of the inmates, we all know, of course, that the inmates do not experience that intimate parent-child relationship and love that we understand.

Though surnamed after the State Governor, can they compare with the Governor's own children who live with him at the Government House?

If they come from the State, which village? Which family? The 'people of XYZ', for instance, means the stock who have XYZ as their ancestral patriarch. But whose people can un-adopted inmates claim to be? They don't know! They are not the people of any certain ancestor (1 Peter 2:10). In fact, they don't have a complete identity!

I'm in no wise mocking them, but I'm trying to explain that if God himself compares the condition of unsaved souls to that of un-adopted inmates who had been picked up as abandoned babies, then we should be serious about getting saved.

When adopted, such people then belong to a certain family. When in Christ, lost hopeless souls then become the royal people of Almighty God the Father, his holy nation. Hallelujah!

Friend, if you are out there not yet adopted into God's family, there are many **privileges** and **intimate** things of God that you cannot experience. Of course, you're enjoying God's goodness to all his creatures, but a son is surely more than a creature! For example, all children in a State may enjoy the general benevolence of a good Governor through free education and other welfare programmes, but they cannot enjoy him and the bountiful provisions of his governorship like his very own children.

Please, don't keep on depriving yourself of good. You should now decide that you henceforth want to receive all the blessings of sonship – not just receiving the general goodness of God to all His creation, but receiving special blessings as a child.

These are days when many are meeting God anytime, anywhere. Testimonies abound from persons who read Christian literature or listened to taped Christian messages, acted on them by faith, and received miracles right where they were. The adoption process can be completed for you right now if you really desire and believe!

Please turn aside and solemnly pray as follows:

“Lord, you have spoken to my heart. I've read and understood that you yourself desire to have me properly in your family. I don't want to presume sonship any longer, but want to put things right and be very sure. I sincerely repent of my sins and ask for your forgiveness. Please complete your redemption process in me and adopt me. I now open my heart to receive your Holy Spirit. Seal and keep me. I pray sincerely and with faith. Thanks, Lord, for your work in me in Jesus name, Amen”.

Brother (or Sister) in Christ, you can now sing this popular chorus with me:

*“We are children of the Father,
We are joint-heirs with the Son,
We are people of the Kingdom,
We are family, we are one.”*

Likewise can we sing the beautiful hymn found in ‘Redemption Songs’ No. 775:

1. What **were** we when mercy found us?
Captives unto death and sin;
Clouds and darkness closed around us,
All was hopeless night within.

*We were lost, but Jesus found us,
Burst the bonds of death that bound us,
Wrapt the robe of grace around us,
And the heirs of glory crowned us.*

2. What **are** we since mercy found us?
Blameless, spotless in His sight;
Sons and saints his word has crowned us,
Called to walk with him in light.

3. What we **shall be?** That's a story
never uttered, or expressed!
We shall see Him in His glory,
And be folded to His breast.

Oh, Hallelujah!

ADOPTION

(Stage Two)

The bible also speaks about the ultimate “adoption” at the resurrection (i.e. the **redemption of our body**) wherein God’s previously sealed children will be finally taken up to live with God in heaven as his **glorified** spirit children (**Romans 8:21-23**). Jesus mentioned it in **Luke 20:36**. However, what was discussed in ‘Stage One’ is the basis and beginning of that ultimate. Without the present adoption and seal (or earnest) of the Spirit, one does not qualify to partake of the **ultimate** inheritance of the saints in glory. See **2Corinthians 5:2-5**.

In Romans chapter 8, after verses 9 and 10 have affirmed that those who **now** have the Spirit of Christ are his own and their **spirits** are alive in him, verse 11 then talks of how that His Spirit shall quicken their mortal **bodies** in **future**. Verse 13 still affirms this future promise of living. Similarly, after verses 14–16 have affirmed that those who have that Spirit have been adopted and are children of God **now**, verse 17 then talks of something (an inheritance) which is still **future** -- namely, their being glorified with Christ. Verses 18-23 go on to explain that this “glorification with Christ” is the culmination of everything, which the whole creation has been expecting and hoping for all through the ages.

This glorification with Christ is called by many names. Verse 21 calls it the deliverance from the bondage of corruption (compare 1 Corinthians 15:51-57). Verse 23 says it is the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). Verse 21 says that the liberty from corruption is a glorious one which belongs to (or is a characteristic of) **only** the “children of God”. Of course, we know that immortality is characteristic of heavenly, angelic, divine beings!

This future hope of the Christian, the deliverance from corruption, redemption of the body, assumption of divine nature and glorification with Christ is also called the ADOPTION (verse 23) and the “manifestation of the sons of God” (verse 19).

Some people mistake this manifestation to mean a time of great outpouring of God’s Spirit such that his people, by great faith, would do great signs and miracles, and it would be known who is who, and the world will taste what stuff the children of God are really made of. Some even refer to the Jewish form of ‘hulotherian’ ceremony. (The Father, of course, did perform that ceremony for His illustrious Son on the Mount of Transfiguration. Oh, glory Hallelujah!). However, the manifestation that Romans 8:19 is speaking about is the final adoption as sons on the ‘Last Day’ (Romans 8:18-23). Verse 23 defines that adoption specifically as “*the redemption of our body*” – that is, **resurrection or transformation in**

the twinkling of an eye. It is the same thing John expressed in 1 John 3:2. He explained that Christians are sons of God now, but this sonship is not yet fully apparent or manifest. The full manifestation will be seen when Christ returns and we're made to have the same body like him.

Peter also explains in 2 Peter 1:2-11 that Christians have been promised to partake of divine nature, and they should press on to finally receive it when they will be given entrance into the kingdom of heaven. This does not mean that born-again Christians do not have the nature of God now, but the specific divine nature meant is that one which mortals lack, namely immortality and refers to when Christians will be clothed with that incorruptible heavenly body.

Jesus, when speaking about this, in Luke 20:35-36, explained that people are "children of God" upon being "the children of the resurrection". That is, after being accounted worthy to obtain the new world (kingdom of Heaven), resurrection into immortality and angelic divine nature.

Angels, for example, have always been members of the family of immortal beings; they did not become so by resurrection. On the other hand, "the children of the resurrection" means the children adopted into the family of immortals via the resurrection or transformation in the twinkling of an eye.

Does Jesus then imply that his people are now not yet children of God? No! He said that those who believe him now have everlasting life (John 6:47, John 3:36). However, that born-again spirit which has been quickened, redeemed, and which has everlasting life is still abiding bound in the old, vile, earthy and unredeemed body that is under the bondage of corruption. That spirit is still groaning for the day when it shall be clothed with the wonderful imperishable body which is the same as the one Jesus resurrected with! (Romans 8:23; 2Corinthians 5:2-5; Philippians 3:20-21; 1Corinthians 15:42-57; Revelation 21:3-7).

The 'hulotherian' adoption of Christ at the Transfiguration relates to our final adoption in the sense that since He is the Firstborn Son, the pattern-son after whom all other sons must follow, God liked to display the adoption first in Him. Christ was already the Son. His adoption was to show the pattern and fulfill all righteousness just like His baptism was to fulfill all righteousness. God showed what the glorified body will look like, and showed that when Christians receive like body (Philippians 3:20-21), then will be the FULL manifestation of their sonship (1John 3:2) and adoption into the Divine Family (2Peter 1:4). God would then declare: 'these are my beloved children, my everlasting tabernacle in whom I am well pleased' (Revelation 21:3).

The final ADOPTION, then, is the taking of the redeemed mortal creatures of earth and getting them to be full-fledged members (children) of the heavenly family of immortal beings with the Divine nature. This will be the final restoration of the goal of God's age-long project: "let us make man in our image". (Genesis 1:26, Romans 8:29). That is, 'Let us create something which we will make to be like us'. Hence the term 'children of God' means 'Images' or 'Replicas' of God. That is, 'Little-Gods'.

If you do not align yourself with this divine project, what do you think God created you for? Why did God create you? What is the whole purpose, meaning and destination of your life on earth? Ponder those great questions! Are you aware of God's salvation plan? And have you yet made sure you benefit from it? Please give your life to Christ. The bible in John 3:16-18 says:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God".

If you do not meet God's plan for creating you, then what is your use? Really think about it. You simply make yourself a condemned product fit to be discarded (Hebrews 6:7-8). It is just like a reputable production factory whose perfect will is that all its products would meet the standard and be 'good' so that it would maximize profit. Yet, in the production line some products come out defective. Since the Company maintains a strict quality control so as to uphold its reputation, the defective products are inevitably rejected, while the quality products that meet standards are well-packaged for onward transmission. Our 'onward transmission' is to Heaven. Hallelujah!

Notice how Romans 8:19-22 keeps identifying humans with other created things until when they experience the adoption, and are then referred to as sons of God. This is exactly what we were explaining earlier on in the first stage of adoption, namely: human beings should not all claim to automatically be children of God simply because they are created by God. One becomes a child of God only by adoption into His family upon being born anew in Christ.

The initial experience of being born again and saved is the first stage of being adopted into God's family. Romans 8:24-25 says we're saved thus "in hope". Hope of what? Hope of

redemption from the bondage of corruption and final adoption as sons of God; hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2); hope of glory (Romans 5:1-2, Colossians 1:26-27); hope of being 'like Christ' (1 John 3:2-3); hope for inheritance (1 Peter 1:3-4, Ephesians 1:18, Hebrews 9:15). We are saved in hope of final salvation.

The bible does speak of another "salvation" yet to come that believers will experience when Christ returns (1 Peter 1:3-5, Hebrews 9:28, Romans 13:11, Hebrews 1:14, Hebrews 10:39, Luke 21:27-28, Ephesians 4:30). This final 'salvation' is the second and final stage of adoption into God's family as sons, and is salvation from the bondage of corruption, tears, sorrows and all former things.

Dear friend, anybody who is not accounted worthy to inherit this final 'salvation' will be lost forever. There'll be no use for the continued existence of those who cannot be adopted into the company of God-like immortals. They will be finally discarded as defective or dud items into the lake of fire! Read about it in Revelation 21:4-8 and Hebrews 6:7-8.

Please don't end up that way! Don't complete this lifetime without getting adopted into God's family. Jesus is the One whom the Father sent to come and get more children into His family (Hebrews 2:9-11). The good news (gospel) which Jesus brought was that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand. That is, it is now right within your reach. Believe this good news and repent (Mark 1:14-15). Grasp what Jesus offers, and obtain what is the greatest and ultimate need of all mortals, and you'll escape eternal destruction.

You, dear Christians, who have already started out on the way, always remember the admonitions of our brothers Peter and Paul to persevere to the end. In Hebrews 10:35-39, Hebrews 6:4-9 and Hebrews 4:1&11, Paul warned us against drawing back or falling away (into perdition), but urged us to press on to the "salvation of our souls", which is the end of our faith (1 Peter 1:9). Peter gave similar warning in 2Peter 2:20-21; and in 2Peter 1:5-11 advised us on things to do to make our calling and election into God's family sure and to ensure our eventual entrance into God's everlasting kingdom. Let us have the same attitude Paul had and advised us to have, as expressed in Philippians 3:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Remember, Jesus said that only those who will be able to persevere unto the end shall be "**saved**" (Matthew 24:12-13).

GOD BLESS YOU

BOOK TWO

CHRIST'S MESSAGE

JOHN THE FORERUNNER

Our lord Jesus, in speaking about the ministry of John the Baptist, in Matthew 11:9-15 said:

“9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 10. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force. 13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come. 15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”. – (KJV).

Verse 15 indicates that something deep has just been said, which requires spiritual discernment (ear) for one to understand (hear) it.

Consider verse 12: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force” (KJV). Sadly, this scripture has been used by many people to urge Christians to engage in diverse brands of materialistic aggressiveness. But what does it really mean?

The original Greek helps us a lot here. It literally says: *“From but the days of John the Baptist until right now the kingdom of the heavens is being pressed toward, and pressers forward are snatching it”.* – (KIT). What a great enlightenment! This has been variously translated as:

“But from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is the goal toward which men press, and those pressing forward are seizing it”. – (KIT)

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently, and men of violence take it by force”. – (RSV Footnote).

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it”. – (NIV)

Another source of proper understanding of Matthew 11:12 is the principle that scriptures are interpreted by other plainer scriptures. Luke records this same thing, but, fortunately, in PLAINER language. Listen to **Luke 16:16**

“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it”. – (KJV)

“The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the glad tidings of the kingdom of God are announced, and every one forces his way into it.” – (DARBY)

This Luke 16:16 is the biblical PLAIN re-wording -- and hence the only correct meaning -- of the same but SYMBOLICALLY-worded statement in Matthew 11:12. Hence, Matthew 11:12 means that right from John the Baptist’s ministry, the Kingdom of God was being more torrentially declared and advanced to the people, and those who caught the message were striving and pressing to enter it!

Look at Matthew 11:12-13. These are SAME as Luke 16:16, but, fortunately, Luke writes it in straightforward correct ORDER, whereas Matthew wrote them in reverse order. A modern rendering would have put Matthew 11:12 in brackets since it actually comes AFTER Matthew 11:13 in proper sequential narrative order as given by Luke.

With this knowledge of the correct meaning of Matthew 11:12 and the correct order of Matthew 11:12-13 as given in Luke 16:16, let us go back to the whole passage of Matthew 11:9-15. In English language usage, everyone knows when the word ‘for’ means ‘because’. For instance, when an assertion has been made, and the next statement starts with ‘for’, that ‘for’ means ‘because’, and the statement that follows is an explanation of the **reason** for the assertion that had been made.

Thus, the word “For” at the beginning of Matthew 11:13 means “**Because**”, and Matthew 11:13 gives the reason for the various assertions that had just been made. Indeed, the whole idea in Matthew 11:9-15 can be paraphrased as:

‘None of the prophets has been greater than John. Indeed, John is even more than a prophet, being the forerunner of the Messiah. However, everything in the New Covenant (even the least) surpasses and supersedes everything of the Old (John inclusive). Reason being that the Law and Prophets (Old Testament era) ended with John, but from John the New Testament Kingdom era is being powerfully proclaimed, and those who grasp the message are striving hard to enter into the kingdom’.

None other born of woman was greater than John. John was the last prophet of the Law and Prophets (Old Covenant era), plus more. He was Elijah the promised forerunner of Christ. He was also the ‘administrator’ of the ‘transitional period’, who even started introducing the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 3:1-2), prepared the way for Messiah and pointed him out. Matthew 11:11 does not mean that other prophets like Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, etc were not great men of God, nor does it mean that John is in hell.

The expression, “yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he,” is in the same tenor as many similar expressions in the bible which express the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant. Some other such expressions include:

*“For what was glorious has **no** glory now in comparison with the **surpassing** glory” – (2 Corinthians 3:10, NIV).*

*“But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is the mediator is **superior** to the old one, and it is founded on **better** promises. But calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one **obsolete**; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon **disappear**” – (Hebrew 8:6, 13. NIV).*

*“But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets: for there is verily a **disannulling** of the commandment going before for the weakness and **unprofitableness** therefore. For the Law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a **better** hope did; by which we draw nigh unto God”. – (Romans 3:21 and Hebrews 7:18-19, KJV).*

Jesus openly told the Jews who still clung to the Old Covenant, “You search the scriptures (Old Testament Law and Prophets), because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. Therefore I said to you that you would die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.” – John 5:39-40 and 8:24 (RSV & KJV).

Yes indeed, until John it was the Law and the Prophets; since then, there is the good news of the kingdom of God, and everyone forces his way in (NEB).

Moreover, the mistaken idea that Matthew 11:12 as rendered in KJV teaches aggressiveness and violence is debunked by Luke 16:16 and other renderings of Matthew 11:12.

Do not hold fast to a misinterpretation of Matthew 11:12 and feel it is a basis for you to practise extortion, manipulation, grabbing, intimidation, selfishness, meanness, strife, confrontation, blaring, bullying, thuggery, sharp practices, graft, etc in your Christian life.

It is sad to hear some gospel ministers encourage these things, and to see some churches resort to such things in their bid to achieve ‘church growth’ and dominion or in their do-or-die competition with each other.

They forget that we’re not fighting against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:10-12), and that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Even though we’re to be wise as serpents (Matthew 10:16), we must realize the distinction between devilish ‘wisdom’ and the Godly wisdom which Christians are to use (James 3:13-18).

Let me repeat, Matthew 11:12 does not teach or support ungodly aggressiveness. All who teach or practice those things are inexcusable. God shall not hold them guiltless. Such teaching or practice is no different from that of using Luke 20:25 as excuse to offer sacrifices to idols.

THE GOOD NEWS

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life”,

So says the Holy Bible (RSV) at Proverbs 13 verse 12.

Imagine that we had long been longing for and expecting something. For many years we had believed, prayed, fasted and hoped for that thing. Take, for instance, the execution of a government project, for which we had applied and re-applied, paid all necessary fees, ensured we met every requirement, made all contacts, made necessary follow-up, put in time, energy, money and other resources so as to realize that our great hope.

Imagine that one day one of us goes to the Governor’s office and on returning shouts to us all: “Hey, come out, come out everybody, I’ve brought us glad tidings; come and hear this good news!” We all rush to him, excited, leaving whatever we had been doing and eager to hear great news about the long-awaited thing.

Then he breaks the news: “I have met the Governor today. He has assured me that, in the present circumstances, government has irrevocably deferred that project and will reconsider its execution in 70 years to come”.

(Meanwhile, most of us are adults who would no longer be alive by that time!).

Would that be good news? How would we react?

Surely, that is no good news! We would be greatly disappointed. We would frown at him, be angry with him and ask: “Is this what you made us rush out to come and hear? What is good in this your news?” We would all leave him and return to whatever we had been doing before his unwarranted vain rousing call and would warn him never again to so excite us unnecessarily.

However, if he gives the following news: “Oh, my brothers we have finally arrived. The thing is now here! Guess what? – the Governor has awarded us the contract”. Then he drops the contract documents on the table and says: “Here are the papers. See for yourself. There is the Governor’s signature”. Then again he drops a cheque on the table and says:

“See, this is a government cheque for the mobilization fee, showing that things have really started”.

That, really, would be GOOD NEWS! – the glad tidings to the ears of those who had long hoped for the project. On hearing and seeing such things, we would see the need to strive and do whatever we ought to do towards the execution of the project.



The Jews had for ages expected the coming of the Messiah. They knew that he would come with his Kingdom. They greatly desired the arrival of that Messianic Kingdom of God.

Then, when it was God’s FULLNESS OF TIME (Galatians 4:4), Jesus arrived on the scene. The first chapter of the Book of Mark writes about the beginning of the good news of Jesus (Mark 1:1) and in verses 14 and 15 writes the following about Jesus’ first messages:

“... Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and saying, The time is FULFILLED, and the kingdom of God is AT HAND: repent ye, and believe the gospel”. (Mark 1:14-15).

Gospel means ‘good news’. The message Jesus declared was the truly good news of FULFILMENT, and not some disappointing news of DEFERMENT of the expected kingdom of God. He did NOT give them the disappointing news that he, the Messiah, could not set up his Kingdom at that time but would set it up when he would come again some thousand years in future. He gave them the good news that right then the time was FULFILLED and that right then the Kingdom of God was AT HAND.

Indeed, he was saying: ‘The time you’ve long waited for has arrived. I, the Messiah, have come. I’ve brought my kingdom. It is here now, brought near to you. You can access it. Repent and enter it’

Jesus also produced the ‘cheque’ to show that ‘things had really begun’. He said that his very works, his total dominion over the elements and over all diseases and demons and death was proof that the kingdom of God had overtaken them (Luke 11:20). If the kingdom of God were merely “near” but had not arrived, how could it as at then HAVE OVERTAKEN them?

When Mark wrote his first chapter on the beginning of the good news, he started from John the Baptist’s ministry. Indeed, John had preached: *“repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2).* Jesus himself confirmed that even from the time of John the Baptist the kingdom of God was being declared by John and people were pressing to enter it (Luke 16:16). Those who were quick to grasp the message, who believed the kingdom was

then accessible and that God was inviting them to enter, strove and pressed to enter it. They did not press by violence and aggressiveness but by trying their best to do what they were told was the method of entry. Various sets of people went to John and asked what to do, and he advised them on things to change from (and possibly make restitution), (Luke 3:10-14). They did so and also submitted to his baptism. When the Pharisees and Sadducees who did not fully believe (Matthew 21:32) came to be baptized, John refused and told them to go and repent first (Matthew 3:7-8). Jesus confirmed that those who could believe -- and repented -- had entered the kingdom of God before them (Matthew 21:31-32).

In Mark 9:1, Jesus, speaking of The Transfiguration, told his disciples that some of them IN THAT THEIR LIFETIME would “see”:

“...the kingdom of God **having come** in power” – (YLT, MOUNCE)

“...the kingdom of God **already come** in power” – (KIT)

“...the kingdom of God **present** in power” – (Gideon’s International, 1982)

“...the kingdom of God **has come** with power” – (RSV)

“...the kingdom of God **after it has come** with power” – (NASB, ESV)

“...the kingdom of God **arrive** in great power” – (NLT)

“...the kingdom of God **come** with power” – (KJV, NIV, AMP, DARBY)

“...the kingdom of God **coming** in virtue” – (Vulgate, Wycliffe).

In Luke 9:27, he said some of them IN THAT THEIR LIFETIME would “see”:

“... the kingdom of God” – (All versions)

In Matthew 16:28, he said some of them IN THAT THEIR LIFETIME would “see”:

“... the Son of man coming in his kingdom”- (All versions).

Six days after making the above statement, Jesus took Peter, James and John to a mountain and made them see His transfigured self in power, honour and glory (2 Peter 1:16-17). What they saw was NOT about a FUTURE coming of Christ in glory but was about that present time because Moses and Elijah were discussing with Him His decease that He was then about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).

Hence, according to Christ, the kingdom of God had then come in power! He had brought his kingdom.

KINGDOM CITIZENSHIP

Jesus knew that many people would find it hard to accept that the kingdom of God had there and then been brought to them. Thus, after declaring the good news he had to also urge them to repent and be able to believe his good news (Mark 1:15).

Indeed, the people themselves did go to him and express their doubts: ‘How long will you keep confusing us? Are you truly our long-awaited Messiah? If so, then when will you start setting up the kingdom? You keep saying the kingdom is here, but we are yet to see any semblance of a kingdom!’ (John 10:24, Luke 17:20).

What did Jesus answer them? He said: ‘I have been telling you what I have to tell about my kingdom; the problem is that you just can’t believe my good news. It is not what your ears have been trained to hear! (John 10:25). The kingdom of God is not the type you have been imagining and expecting. It is not like the physical worldly kingdoms of which you can say, “here is the capital city, here is the presidential villa, there are the senate chambers, so-and-so is the deputy governor, here is the Navy, there are the Police barracks, etc”; but the kingdom of God is WITHIN you’ (Luke 17:20-21). That is, ‘the kingdom of God is about the inner spirit-man that is within you’.

The kingdom of God is entered into when one hears the gospel, believes, and in a contrite spirit comes to God confessing and repenting; he is then forgiven, cleansed and redeemed and the Spirit of God begets his inner spirit-man as a new child into God’s family and descends and indwells that inner spirit-man, thus sealing it as a child of God. At that moment, that newborn member of God’s family is registered as a citizen of God’s kingdom (John 3:5). Colossians 1:13-14 confirms that he is then translated into the kingdom of Christ. Notice it does not say ‘will translate in future’ but says “hath translated.”

From then on, such a person, though still living IN the world, is no longer OF the world (John 15:19, John 17:14, 16). He is of another kingdom. His citizenship (country of birth) is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20, NIV, NEB, KIT). He is merely a sojourner, stranger and pilgrim here on earth. Heaven recognizes all such persons as its citizens while they are still here on earth, and grants them citizenship rights and privileges.

Consider the fact that the keys of the kingdom have been given to them so that what they bind on earth is bound in heaven and what they loose is loosed in confirmation (Matthew 16:18-19), and that whatever two of them are agreed upon on earth, heaven will do that for them (Matthew 18:19). Wonderful! That is full-scale recognition! They are given power above all powers of the enemy (Luke 10:19-20). When they bind Satan and demons and cast them out, they are exercising kingdom authority. When they lay hands on the sick

and the sick recover, what is that? It is the power of the Kingdom (Holy Spirit) that is flowing through them to perform. When they pray and raise the dead back to life, what is that? Is that ordinary? No! They are already exercising the powers of the kingdom here on earth. Hallelujah!

In fact, the bible goes as far as disclosing that they are not just mean or third-class citizens but **ambassadors** (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is not a citizen of the country where he resides, he is from somewhere else. He resides there as a representative of his home country. An ambassador cannot let himself be overwhelmed and carried away by the life in the foreign country such that he forgets his home (1 John 2:15-17). He is there to protect and further the interests of his home country, as well as promote its culture (Philippians 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:12). An ambassador cannot stay in a foreign land and formulate and follow his own policies; he is to carry out his country's foreign policy. An ambassador cannot fail to maintain contact with his Foreign Affairs Minister and his President. He must always brief his home-country of developments as well as receive directives from home (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 19; Romans 8:14). Therefore, dear Christians, realize this truth; know who you **already** are and how you should live while still sojourning in this world.

Wake up and accept the fact. Repent from the erroneous idea of the deferment or postponement of the arrival of the kingdom of God to a future time. Believe the good news of Jesus that the time was fulfilled and that he, the Messiah, had brought the kingdom of God and opened the way for men to enter it. It is our non-acceptance of Jesus' good news that is crippling us. Satan is so happy with this state of ignorance, unbelief, error and deferment.

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

Some people believe that it will be at Christ's return that the kingdom of God will begin and they will then enter the kingdom. That idea, though somehow 'correct', reflects an ignorance of spiritual truth. It is correct only in the sense that at that time the kingdom will be fully manifest when old things will pass away and the new heavens and new earth will appear, the devil and his cohorts will be cast into the lake of fire, the dead will rise and corruption will put on incorruption and mortality put on immortality.

However, that does not mean the kingdom had not existed all along. That will not be the time to enter the kingdom -- no longer a time of grace, mercy and forgiveness, but a time of judgment. That will not be the time to write one's name in the book of life. Anybody

whose name had not already been written will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). It will be like the days of Noah. All those who rushed to enter the Ark when the flood had started could not enter. It was then too late! God had locked the door. The right time had been all those years when Noah was preaching repentance and the judgment to come.

Now is the time for us to become citizens of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is right now at hand. It has been brought to our doorsteps; it is within our reach; the gates are wide open now; the bells are ringing, inviting us. Now is the time of grace. Today is the day of salvation. If you don't enter the kingdom of God now in your lifetime, then you'll never enter it again – not at any future time! There is no repentance in the grave (Hebrew 9:27).

Some people also believe that it will be at Christ's return that they will receive everlasting life. On the contrary, Jesus said:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”. (John 5:24)

Notice he did not say ‘will have (in future)’, but he said “hath”. God is Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God – the life of God – which is everlasting. Immediately God's Spirit comes and indwells a human spirit that has been quickened and born again into God's family, then that human spirit receives everlasting life.

Remember, the kingdom of God concerns that inner spirit-man that is within you! The bible declares very plainly that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1Corinthians 15:50). This flesh is corruptible. Flesh and blood will surely die one day and dust will return to the dust, and ashes to ashes, but that spirit that had been redeemed and given everlasting life will go to meet its God (Ecclesiastes 12:7, Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8) and continue in the everlasting life that had already “began here below”.

Death then becomes a mere transition into the spiritual realm where that spirit “will be no stranger there”, but will meet and be welcomed by those heavenly beings whom he had already been seeing, hearing and working with while in the world. (Examples: 1 Corinthians 12:1-4, Acts 27:23, Acts 12:7-11, Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:20-21, Matthew 2:13, 14, 19, 20; Genesis 28:12-17, Genesis 31:11-13, Genesis 32:1,2,30. etc.). In fact, they are the ones who would escort him to that place (Luke 16:22).

When you believe these you are NOT believing the lie of satan of Genesis 3:4 or some mystical teaching; you are believing the truth that Jesus Christ repeatedly stated (John 5:24, John 11:26, John 6:47, John 3:36).

THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Right from the time of John the Baptist, the good news of the kingdom of God was preached and believers pressed into the kingdom (Luke 16:16). John had preached: “*Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:1-2).

Then came Jesus, also preaching and showing (demonstrating) the glad tidings of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, Luke 8:1). Jesus preached: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15, Matthew 4:17).

When Jesus sent out his disciples, he told them to “*preach the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:2), to “*preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 10:7), and to say unto the people, “*the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you*” (Luke 10:9).

When Christ was leaving, he gave his people the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach “the gospel” (Mark 16:15); and he had earlier told them that:

“*This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*” – (Matthew 24:14).

“This gospel of the kingdom”. Which gospel of the kingdom? This very one which I proclaim, which you’ve been hearing from my lips, which same one John also had proclaimed -- not another one or any other different teaching.

“This gospel of the kingdom”. This *what* of the kingdom? *Gospel* of the kingdom. *Good news* of the kingdom. Is it the disappointing bad news of its deferment or postponement to future millennia? No; but the good news of fulfillment, arrival and accessibility!

“This gospel of the kingdom”. This gospel of *what*? Of the *kingdom*. Is it that of earthly success motivation? No! Is it that of prosperity? No!

The bible says, “for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11). No wonder it is boldly pronounced that “if any one preach any other gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8-9). If anyone comes to lay another foundation and teach the deferment of the Messiah’s kingdom to a future era, let him not forget Galatians 1:8-9. If anyone keeps presenting earthly success motivation as being **the** good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, let him remember Galatians 1:8-9.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. We say we yearn for that Great Day, yet we forsake the preaching of “that” gospel and are busily propagating other brands of ‘gospels’ (so-called). May God have mercy on us!

A GOOD ADVICE

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

--(Hebrews 9:27)

Do you think the end of the world is the time people will enter the kingdom of heaven? If you wait for that time, the crafty Old Serpent may get the better of you. He may lull you into an attitude of relaxation and procrastination. You may no longer be as watchful as necessary. Remember the five foolish virgins of Matthew 25:1-13. The bible says that with the passage of time, people will eventually have the attitude recorded in 2 Peter 3:3-4, “that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”.

Hence, I would like to give you the PRACTICAL advice that you should not worry about the final end of the whole world but be more concerned about your personal ‘end of the world’, that is, the end of the world for you as an individual.

The general end of the world is in God’s hands; leave that to him. It will come when God decides that it is time; whether today, tomorrow or thousand years to come! The order and details of events at the end of the world are not what we should split hairs about. They will happen in the way and manner God has ordained, regardless of what we believe or teach. In any event, whatever will take place you’ll be fine if you had done what God had expected of you.

What we should be concerned with and prepared for is the ‘end of the world’ for us as individuals. WHEN YOU BREATHE YOUR LAST, THE WORLD HAS ENDED FOR YOU AS AN INDIVIDUAL!! Everyday, this ‘end of the world’ is coming upon people the world over unexpectedly ‘as a thief in the night’. It happens to the young or old, rich or poor, sick or healthy, educated or illiterate, white or black, etc. Who knows his exact moment? I don’t know mine, you don’t know yours. We had better make sure we are always ready.

Little kids may leave for kindergarten in the morning, but in the afternoon the pathetic news may be heard that they had lost their lives in some accident at school or on the way. Who would have thought that the end would come so soon for them? Everybody knew they still had many years ahead of them; but, alas, the world ‘ended’ for them. You may converse with a friend now, but in the next hour some mishap claims her life and that is her own ‘end of the world’. Someone may go to bed hale and hearty, but in the morning can’t wake up again. That person’s ‘end of the world’ had arrived. I am neither a pessimist nor am I

wishing anybody evil, but we have to face the fact that these things are happening everyday even though we don't wish for them and are positively trying to prevent them.

In a popular Negro Spiritual titled *'Do You Believe?'*, a Christian is asked whether he believes in that great glorious day when the trump shall sound and Christ shall come again to take home you and me; and He'll sit as King and judge the world and all men's works shall be tried and deeds be rewarded; and satan shall be bound, and heaven and earth shall pass away? The Christian answers: "Yes, I believe, so I'm making up my dying day".

All the questions refer to events at the final end of the whole world, but the Christian who believes that that end of the world shall come rather 'makes up his dying day', which, of course, will be the 'end of the world' for him as an individual.

Do not take this practical advice to mean that I don't believe Jesus could return in our lifetime. On the contrary, I do. It could happen in a moment, Jesus Christ could come in our lifetime, and the general end of the world would come upon us. My advice rather implies that instead of being overly focused on details of end-time/Last Day events, we should be preoccupied with leading good Christian lives, daily walking in God's perfect will and doing what He expects of us so that we would be accounted ready anytime, anyhow anything would happen.

Have you yourself repented and made peace with your Creator and straightened your ways? Have you made ready? Don't forget the uncertainty and brevity of human life. Be wise.

I, please, urge you to repent and believe Christ's good news that the time had been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is right now at hand, brought near to you. Please try and be among those who understand this truth and are pressing to enter it. Make sure you are registered and recognized as a citizen of the kingdom in your lifetime. Then live as a kingdom citizen while still in this world. When the time comes you'll just move on and continue the life in its more glorious form.

GOD BLESS YOU

BOOK THREE

THE

THOUSAND YEARS

THAT ARE AS

ONE DAY

(AND VICE VERSA)

Chapter One

THE CONTEXT

In the Scriptures, we find an interesting statement in the second epistle of Peter, chapter three, verse eight.

“But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”- 2 Peter 3:8

A great spiritual truth is expressed in this verse. What is that truth?

Many people simply consider that this verse portrays the eternity of God in which a thousand years is merely like one day or a fleeting moment gone by. Well, that idea is not wrong and agrees with Psalm 90:4, but it does not capture the whole meaning of 2 Peter 3:8, because the converse statement that “one day is as a thousand years” would then mean eternity is very short as compared to our earthly days. Of course, we know that is not true.

Many proffer the suggestion that the converse statement means the things that would take men a thousand years to do, God can accomplish in one day or even in the twinkling of an eye. This too is not wrong but still does not capture the true meaning of 2Peter 3:8.

The correct meaning does not even involve the separation into two parts but takes the verse as one whole. It is right inside the Bible.

To get the true meaning, we must recall the general principles that verses of scripture should never be quoted out of context and that scripture is interpreted by other scriptures.

The whole third chapter of Second Peter talks about people misinterpreting the long patience of God, taking undue advantage of it and thereby not repenting until the Day of Judgment meets them unexpectedly. The long patience of God is, of course, intended to give men ample time to come to salvation. 2Peter3:9, which immediately follows verse 8, states this: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”*. Verse15 repeats it: *“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you”*.

Bear this context in mind as we go on, because our understanding of verse 8 should not go out of the context of the whole chapter three.

Chapter Two

THE ONE DAY

Let us now go on to the fact that scriptures are interpreted by other plain scriptures. The scriptures that speak about that One Day are in Hebrews from chapter three verse seven to chapter four verse eleven, **Heb 3:7 – 4:11** (which make reference to Psalm 95:6-11), and in **2Corinthians 6:1-2** (which makes reference to Isaiah 49:8)

Specifically, Hebrews 4 verse 7 says:

“Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, Today, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”

-Hebrews 4:7

“A certain day” (one day), called “Today” (one day)! What is this One Day? Is it 24hours? What is the One Day about? Hebrews 4:7 answers: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts”, and **Hebrews 3:13** concurs: *“But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”*. It is crystal-clear that the One Day, “Today”, is a time wherein men are still given the chance to repent and should not harden their hearts or spurn the gracious opportunity!

The context or theme of Hebrews 3:13 to 4:11 merges with that of 2Peter 3 in which God is, by grace, exercising very long patience and giving men ample opportunities to come to salvation. See?

The One Day is not 24-hour duration. It is a long indefinite period comparable to “while the Ark was a preparing” and Noah was calling on men to repent before the Flood would come upon them unexpectedly “as a thief in the night”.

God himself calls this one day “Today”. Why not yesterday or tomorrow? It means it is an ongoing period, not one already past or yet to arrive. 2Corinthians 6:1-2 confirms that **NOW** is the day of salvation! Now is the long indefinite period given for souls to be saved. Now is that Day when men should not let the grace that God is showing them to be “in vain” or scoff at God’s longsuffering.

It is not until a certain future time. It has already been on for long and will continue till God decides that it is time for Christ to return, just like he decided when the Flood should start.

Chapter Three

THE THOUSAND YEARS

The scripture that speaks about the one thousand years is **Revelation Chapter 20**.

It is extremely important to realize that the book of Revelation is not literal, but is a book of visions given in “sign” language or imagery. We must not stay in Revelation and jump to conclusions or build a doctrine, but must understand Revelation using other scriptures written in plain language.

Let us examine that Revelation 20.

3.1 The First Resurrection

The thousand years is the time between two resurrections. Only some people experience the first resurrection and reign with Christ in the thousand years. However, all and sundry experience the second resurrection whereupon people face judgment and the unsaved experience second death in the lake of fire.

Is there any other scripture written in plain language that talks about two resurrections? Yes! Our Lord Jesus himself describes, plainly, two resurrections in **John 5:24-29**. His statement in verse 25 and his statement in verses 28-29 are not the same. It is a pity that majority of people overlook such differences. Jesus was never unduly repetitive or verbose. Anytime he seemed to be repeating himself, examine closely and you’ll discover he was actually **ADDING** a new truth. (Just like John 3:3 and John 3:5). The **FIRST** resurrection of John 5:25 is different from the **SECOND** resurrection of John 5:28-29!

John 5:25 is part of verses 24-26, while John 5:28 is part of verses 27-29. In that of verse 25, not everybody experiences this resurrection; only those who heed the voice of the Son of God are passed from death unto life. Judgment is not performed, but it is only mentioned how the Son has power to give life.

Contrariwise, in that of verse 28, **ALL** and sundry – both good and bad – resurrect and “come out of graves” to face the judgment executed by the Son; with the good going into life while the bad resurrect into eternal damnation. Notice, however, that coming out of “graves” or “tombs” was not mentioned in that of verse 25.

One very important difference to note is that in verse 25 Jesus made the statement “**AND NOW IS**”, while he did not say such a thing in verse 28. Indeed, he couldn’t because he knew what he meant, and was above blunder! Thus, right then as Jesus was speaking, the

time for the first resurrection of verse 25 was already on, while the second resurrection of verse 28 was still future.

The first resurrection does not involve coming out of graves or tombs, nor the “sea, death, and hades giving up the dead who were in them”. It is spiritual as the first death is spiritual.

Everybody rightly knows that the second death is final damnation in the lake of fire. However, many people wrongly think the first death is the physical death every mortal experiences at the end of his lifetime. NO! It is rather the spiritual death which we all died in Adam (Romans 5:12). God told Adam that the very day he sinned he would die (Genesis 2:17). Yet Adam did not drop dead when he ate the forbidden fruit. Was God a liar? No! Adam died spiritually right then, even though his bodily death occurred at age 930 years.

The first death is the spiritual one in which all of us are “born in sin” (Psalm 51:5), “fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and are “dead in sins and trespasses” (**Ephesians 2:1**). It is a kind of death while the person concerned is still bodily alive. (1 Timothy 5:6).

Only some people experience the first spiritual resurrection from the first spiritual death – only those who believe the Son and heed his voice (John 5:24-25, **21**). The first resurrection means to be BORN AGAIN!! Only those who hear the voice of Christ, believe him, repent, are born again and live for him have experienced this resurrection. The rest of the dead live not (Revelation 20:5). Un-repenting unbelievers who haven’t been born again are still dead in sins and trespasses.

In John 11:24, when Martha expressed her hope of the FUTURE resurrection at the last day, Jesus pointed out to her a PRESENT resurrection also (verses 25,26) wherein the dead (in sin) who believe in him, live (resurrect), and when they thus live and continue to believe and obey him to the end, shall not forever die (i.e. second death, lake of fire).

Do the epistles of the Apostles confirm this? Yes, in many places. For instance, Ephesians 2:4-5 says:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)”. –

Ephesians 2:4-5

This refers to a death in sins, and a quickening (resurrection) which means SALVATION by grace through the great love and rich mercy of God. It uses the word “hath”, which is not future tense, but implies what has been done and so abides.

Colossians 2:13 says: *“And you, being dead in your sins and the un-circumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses”*. This again refers to a death in sins, and a quickening (resurrection) which is through the faith of the believer in God’s power (verse 12) and involves the forgiveness of his sins. This means SALVATION. We all know that the second resurrection is not through anybody’s faith (even avowed atheists will be raised); and that will not be a time for forgiveness of any sins!

In Ephesians 5:14, men are called to awake and **ARISE FROM THE DEAD**, and Christ shall give them light. This is a call to repentance and salvation, and the light is what Jesus spoke of in John 8:12 thus: *“I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but have the LIGHT of LIFE”*.

Christ’s resurrection experience is spoken of in Roman 6: 9-10, verse 11 tells born-again Christians to reckon that they also **HAVE HAD** a comparable experience, and in verse 13 they are told to walk in newness of life as those that are **“ALIVE FROM THE DEAD”**.

The above are the **PLAIN** words of Jesus and the Apostles. It is with such knowledge that we should try to understand the **SYMBOLIC** language of Revelation 20.

3.2 Reigning With Christ

If the first resurrection means being quickened from death in sin to life in Christ, are true Christians now reigning with Christ as is stated in Revelation 20:6? Yes, they are reigning with Christ **NOW!** **Ephesians 2:5-6** says:

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved ;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.

This speaks about those saved by grace, and says they have been made (NOT shall be made) to sit in the heavenlies in Christ. This “heavenlies” is far above all principality and power (Ephesians 1:20-21).

1 Peter 2:5 and 9 say: *“ye also as lively stones ARE built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Ye ARE a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”*. This refers to those who have come to Christ the Living Stone and have, through his graciousness, become newborn and been taken out of darkness into light. It says that they are **NOW** (not until future) priests of God.

What acceptable spiritual sacrifices are they offering NOW? – Praise and thanksgiving (Hebrews 13:15); charitable giving (Hebrews 13: 16 & Philippians 4:18); prayer and intercession (James 5:14-16 & 1Timothy 2:1 & Ephesians 6:18, Revelation 5:8, Revelation 8:4); self-sacrifice in godly living (Romans 12:1-2). This self sacrifice in holy living is the self-beheading of Revelation 20:4, which we shall discuss later.

In the introductory stages of Revelation, John greeted all the brethren in Asia Minor in plain direct language and told them in Revelation 1:6 that Christ “*hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father*”. That was BEFORE Christ’s coming which followed in verse 7.

Do these true Christians (priests) NOW reign with Christ? Please patiently read all these portions in your bible:- Mark 16:17-18, Matthew 16:18-19, Matthew 18:18-19, Luke 10:19, Matthew 10:7-8, Matthew 21:21-22, John 14:12, John 14:14, John 15:7, John 20:23, 2 Corinthians 2:10, Acts 1:8, 2 Corinthians 10:4-6, James 4:7, 1 John 4:4, Romans 6:14, 1 John 5:18, Romans 8:31 and 37, Colossians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16, James 5:14-18, Psalm 82:6-7, Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 6:5, 1John 5:4-5; 1John 2:14.

If all the above PLAIN words of Jesus and the Apostles don’t mean that true Christians now reign with Christ, tell me what else they can ever mean! The above portions are not few but many, showing that the New Testament is REplete with the fact that true Christians reign with Christ NOW.

What is your idea of reigning with Christ? Is it your sitting on a golden throne (in future), wearing a royal robe and golden crown, holding a golden scepter, and the peoples trooping before you to do obeisance and worship? Ha! Ha! It is high time you re-examined such idea. What is its operational functionality?

Indeed, from the Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures (KIT), the **literal** meaning of the Greek of Revelation 5:10 is:

“And you made them to the God of us kingdom and priests, and they are reigning upon the earth”.

Have you noticed that it says those priests ARE REIGNING upon the earth? **Present continuous tense!** Westcott-Hort Greek-English Interlinear NT (1894) gives this literal meaning of the Greek in the **present tense** as “*they rule*”. J. Etheridge’s Syriac-Aramaic New Testament (1849) renders Revelation 5:10 as:

*“And thou hast made them to our God kings and priests,
and reigning upon the earth.”*

Murdock’s Peshitta-Aramaic New Testament (1852) renders it as:

*“and thou hast made them kings and priests
to our God; and they reign upon the earth”.*

The American Standard Version, ASV (1901) renders it as:

*“and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom
and priests; and they reign upon earth.”*

It is thus very baffling when other translations (including the KIT) render it in future tense as “they will reign” or “we shall reign” or “they are to rule”. Is that justified? Where did they get the future tense from? Quite baffling and misleading! Jamieson, Fausset & Brown (1871) in their Critical and Explanatory Bible Commentary tried to offer the lame and curious apology that “*they reign*’ is the prophetic present for the future”. However, even they still could not escape proclaiming the truth that “*the saints do spiritually reign now*”.

By the way, is Christ himself reigning now? Many people have the idea that Christ shall only start to rule at his second coming when he shall set up a certain millennial kingdom.

Contrary to that, Christ said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Not ‘will be given’ at a future crowning date, but “has been given”. In John 18:33-37, Jesus plainly told Pilate that he was right then king of a spiritual kingdom. Acts 2:36 says that Jesus has been made Lord and Christ. Not ‘will be made’ but “has been made”. Jesus is now enthroned at the Father’s right hand (Mark 16:19; 1Peter 3:22), above every principality and power and dominion and name, with all things under his feet (Ephesians 1:20-22), and every heavenly, earthly and infernal knee bowing at his name! (Philippians 2:9-11). As our High Priest now, he is not only a priest (like Aaron) but is also a king (Melchizedek). He is the priest-king of righteousness, priest-king of peace (Hebrews 6:20 to 7:3).

All these things are not waiting until a future time, they are all happening now (1Corinthians 15:25). The Lord Jesus Christ is reigning! Colossians 1:15-19 and Hebrews 1 further describe his current and abiding status as a highly exalted ruler.

The above-stated scriptures do not portray Christ as a potential king-in-waiting, but say that he is actively reigning. What about his kingdom? Right when Jesus stood before Pilate, he told him he had a kingdom, only that it was not the worldly type (John 18:36). This is where people stumble. In their physical and materialistic ideas, they consider that it will be only when Jesus returns and sets up a worldly political government in Jerusalem in Israel that Jesus would have a kingdom and start his reign.

This wrong idea is like saying that because a Christian does not belong to a certain country's army, then he's not soldier. Or, because he does not use pistols, rifles, grenades, nuclear missile and atomic bombs then he does not have weapons. And that even if he has, his weapons are not effective. But we all know the Christian's weapons (Ephesians 6:13-18) which are mightily effective in his spiritual-type warfare (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

Right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was calling people to repent, believe and accept the good news that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:14-15). He said that even from John the Baptist's ministry, the kingdom of God was being more torrentially declared and advanced to the people and those who caught the message were striving and pressing to enter it. (Luke 16:16). Could people then enter into a kingdom that did not then exist?

In Colossians 1:13-14, the Christians in Paul's era were affirmed to have been translated into Jesus' kingdom, having been redeemed through his blood. Right then, not until a future era! Could they be translated into an inexistent kingdom?

The bible does not say in any place that Christ's return will be the time he will 'set up' his kingdom and then 'start' his reign. Instead, the bible says plainly that on his return he will be handing over the kingdom to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:21-26). Will he be presenting the Father with a kingdom that hadn't been in existence?

Jesus said in Matthew 13:40-43 that at the end of the world (i.e. at his coming), his adversaries will be gathered out of his ALREADY EXISTING kingdom and cast into the furnace of fire.

This truth is stated in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Most people who study the prophecies of Daniel overlook a great truth plainly stated in Daniel 2:44,

*“And **in the days of these kings**, the God of heaven shall **set up** a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to another people. It shall crush and destroy all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”*

When does Daniel say God will SET UP the kingdom that would never be destroyed? At Christ's second coming? No! Only after “these” kingdoms will have been totally crushed and finally brought to an end? No! It says, “**IN THE DAYS OF THESE KINGS**”. Right during the times of “these” kingdoms shall Christ's everlasting kingdom be SET UP!

Daniel, our beloved and much-quoted authority on world history and end time events, himself disclosed this!

Why then does evil continue in the world now if Jesus reigns? That is no problem. Jesus was to reign right with his enemies still around! Read Psalm 110. Its second verse

directly says: “*Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies*”. This fact was confirmed on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:31-36. It is again confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26, whose verse 25 directly says: “*For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet*”.

The last enemy to be abolished is physical (bodily) death for his people. He had already overcome it concerning himself and rose again after three days and nights, but will do same for his people at his coming – in the second resurrection wherein they will be raised incorruptible and the bodies of living Christians be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, into imperishable spiritual bodies. Then will it be that physical death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

So, my dear friend, the fact that evil still exists now does not mean that Jesus has not yet started his reign.

3.3 Satan Bound

It is natural to ask: ‘If Christ is now reigning with his saints, what about the fact that Satan had to be bound?’ (Revelation 20:1-3). ‘Why is evil present in the world?’

Yes, Satan has been bound! What causes confusion is that people hold fast to human ideas and expectations concerning how Satan is bound, instead of realizing and accepting what the bible has said about it. People think it means that Satan should be inactive, immobile, powerless and dumb; and, hence, there shouldn’t be any sin, suffering, strife and wickedness in the world, but universal peace and righteousness. However, the Bible has not said so, nor made any of those promises. Fortunately, the Bible is not silent on this issue. In Revelation 20:1-3, it is clearly stated that Satan was bound “... SO THAT HE SHOULD DECEIVE THE NATIONS NO MORE ...” Here we find the Bible’s own definition, specification and explanation of the way in which Satan has been bound. He is bound in the sense of being prevented from having the ability to deceive the whole world during these ‘thousand’ years. Satan still has some power, is still active and is still deceiving various people at various times, but he cannot yet deceive the whole world to rise as ONE to stamp out everything **truly** Christian.

Consider the fact that in Matthew 12:28-29 Jesus said, “*But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first **BIND** the strong man? And then he will spoil his house*”. His very ministry demonstrated he had bound Satan. If not, how could the seventy (mere mortals) have the testimony recorded in Luke 10:17-19. Verse 18 records plainly that Satan was cast down from his exalted place.

When it was about time for Jesus to accomplish his final sacrifice and victory, he said: *“Now is the judgment of this world; Now shall the prince of this world be cast out”* (John 12:31). Right then when Jesus was speaking, not until future!

Jesus also said that after his victory in death, resurrection and ascension, the Comforter will come and demonstrate it to the world that Satan **has been** judged (John 16:8-11).

Dear friend, really believe that Christ, in his death and resurrection, DID bruise the head of the serpent. Listen to Colossians 2:15, *“And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it”*. Hebrews 2:14-15 says that, through his death, Jesus would **“render ineffective”** the one who had the power of death, that is, the Devil. Satan now stands defeated and bound. Bound in the sense that he no longer holds sway and has been deprived of certain rights and dominions he held before; he is greatly hampered and prevented from doing some things he would want to do. His wings have been greatly clipped. He now prevails mostly through the ignorance or unbelief of people. He is like an animal that a lioness has seriously maimed and left to her cubs to use and learn hunting and mastery! That is why James 4:7 and Romans 6:14 are possible.

Now, Satan’s accusations and condemnation are being nullified by the blood of Christ for repentant sinners everywhere.

Now, sickness is being cured by the stripes of Christ.

Now, mere mortals are binding and casting out Satan and his devils by the authority of Christ.

Now, souls are being delivered day by day from Satan’s grip into the kingdom of light of the dear Son of God (Colossians 1:13-14).

Now, the spread of glorious gospel truth into all nations is breaking the bonds of Satan’s DECEPTION and error around the world.

It is said that no one knows where the shoe pinches like the wearer. Hence, Satan really knows the devastating defeat and curtailment he has suffered by the sacrifice and victory of Jesus Christ!

This curtailment by which Satan is bound is plainly confirmed in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, which says ‘Something’ is NOW preventing him from full exercise of his wishes. He is limited (bound). It is only when, in future, that ‘Preventer’ decides to allow him (i.e. loose his bonds) that he will be able to exercise his full power to deceive the world of unbelievers (Gog and Magog) and they will all meet their doom in the fire at Christ’s coming.

If Satan were not bound, do you think we would have to wait all this long before Armageddon happens? Believe me, the greatest desire of Satan is the elimination of everything truly Christian. And that is precisely what he will deceive and muster the whole world (Gog and Magog) to try to achieve in the “little season” he would feel he has chance to achieve it! (Revelation 20:7-8) [And, remember, Armageddon is a spiritual conflict in which God reacts when Satan and his hosts make a final concerted effort to wipe out everything truly Christian. Hence, we should not expect its physical manifestation only in the form of a nuclear attack on Israel with global consequences and ignore other possibilities. Satan’s final onslaught can also manifest in error and false teachings finally totally supplanting the original true gospel. It can even manifest in a universal agreement suspending the ‘stumbling block’ of all moral codes and religions, so that an amoral and irreligious new world order could fully emerge. There are many possibilities].

Can you compare 2 Thessalonians 2:6-12 with Revelation 20:7-10 and start seeing when the thousand years are?

3.4 Souls Beheaded

Let us now examine the fact that those who reign with Christ in the thousand years are those who “were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and the word of God”, as recorded in Revelation 20:4.

First of all, let us get the exact statement that was made. The literal translation of the original Greek of the last sentence in Revelation 20:4 and Revelation 20:5 states: *“And they lived and they reigned with the Christ thousand years. The leftover (ones) of the dead (ones) not lived until should be ended the thousand years. This the resurrection the first”*. – (KIT)

Notice that the word “again” does not appear at all in the Greek, and that the Greek says “lived” rather than “came back to life”. Hence, the correct tidied translation of the Greek is: “and they lived and reigned with the Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years would be ended. This is the first resurrection”.

Any other thing like: “they came back to life again and reigned with Christ...” is an interpolation and paraphrasing which men shouldn’t take the liberty of making, for it can be very dangerous and misleading.

The point is: those “beheaded” souls had not physically died; they were still living. The beheading is not a literal execution but a symbolic language for the self-martyrdom of devoted and true Christians, which is beautifully expressed by Paul in **Galatians 2:20**,

*“I am **crucified** with Christ: nevertheless I **live**; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I **now** live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.*

Notice Paul did not say “I came to life again”, he said “I live”.

It is a loving and **willing self-crucifixion** resulting from receiving the **word of God** and letting it permeate and govern one’s whole life so that it manifests in a life that is a great **witness** of true faithfulness to **Jesus** (Revelation 20:4). The person is no longer carnally minded; his mind does not accept or succumb to the value-system of this world. His mentality is not controlled by the desires, expectations, demands and standards of the world. He has refused to accept the mark (branding) of the beast on his forehead. Also, the works of his hands, his behavior and actions are not as pleases the world. He does not live according to the dictates of the present world-system. The “**forehead**” represents mind, mentality and thoughts, while the “**hand**” represents works, actions and deeds – Both of them not branded by the world! (Revelation 20:4).

Crucified (“mortified”, “beheaded”, “buried”) with Christ, yet living. Not having physically bodily died. What has been willingly killed or emasculated (Matthew 19:12) is the ‘flesh’, the ‘old man’. Yet, that same person still alive but actually a new creation living in newness of life with Christ Jesus. This **self-crucified living sacrifice (Galatians 2:20, Romans 12:1-2) or self-beheaded one who still lives (Revelation 20:4)** results from a very great love for the Redeemer and Master (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, 17).

Please patiently check the following PLAIN scriptures for further confirmation: Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 5:24, Galatians 6:14; Colossians 3:1-10; Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 4:11; “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31); 1 Peter 2:24; Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Peter 4:1-2; “dying, yet we live” (2 Corinthians 6:9).

This fact that the ‘beheaded’ souls had not literally died may not be readily grasped by some people. Hence, let me explain it a bit further for those who may desire. When referring to those who had ACTUALLY died and then come back to life, derivatives of the words ‘*anastasis*’ (resurrection), ‘*egeiromai*’ (rise) and ‘*egerthe*’ (raised) are always used. This can be seen in the Greek text of portions like Matthew 28: 6-7, Mark 5:41-42, Luke 7:14, Luke 8:54-55, Acts 9:40; 1 Corinthians 15:42,45; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, etc.

However, in reference to persons who are STILL living, but who are portrayed as having risen from death FIGURATIVELY, derivatives of the root word ‘*zoen*’ (life) are always used. Such derivatives include *zon*, *zontanos* (alive, living), *ezesan* (they lived), *epizese* (survived) and many others. The only Person who has derivatives of *zoen* applied

sometimes to His life after ACTUAL death is Jesus Christ – and this is done when it is intended to convey that he is ‘He that liveth’, the Ever-living One.

Examples are:

- (i) The word *ezesan* (they lived) used in Revelation 20:4 for the beheaded souls is the same word used in Revelation 13:14 for the beast that was mortally or fatally wounded but marvelously survived in a way comparable to rising from death. Truth is: the beast had not actually died.
- (ii) When Paul spoke of figuratively being crucified with Christ, yet living, the word ‘*zo*’ (I live) was used, not a derivative of *anastasis* or *egeiromai*. (Galatians 2:19-20).
- (iii) When Romans 7:8-9 speaks about the figurative but not literal death of sin and its revival, it uses the word *anezesen* (lived again).
- (iv) In Luke 15:32, *ezesen* (he lives) was used when the father spoke figuratively of the death and subsequent life of his son. Truth is: the prodigal son had not actually physically died but was still alive.
- (v) In Romans 6:13, when the Bible speaks figuratively of Christians as those alive from the dead, it uses the word *zontas* (living); but in earlier verses in the same chapter it used derivatives of *egerthe* or *anastasis* when speaking of Christ’s resurrection from actual death.
- (vi) In John 5:29 when Christ spoke of the future second resurrection in which people who had actually died will rise out of their graves, he used the word *anastasin*; but in verse 25 when he referred to people who are currently only figuratively dead in sin but heed his voice, repent and start living, he used the word *zesousin* (will live).
- (vii) In John 11:23, when Jesus spoke of Lazarus rising from actual death that very day, he used the word *anastesetai* (he will rise again). In verse 24, when Martha spoke of Lazarus rising from actual death in the resurrection on the Last Day, she used the word *anastesetai* (he will rise again). However, in verse 25, when Jesus spoke about people who were figuratively dead in sin, then believe on Him and live, He changed and used the word *zesetai* (he will live).

Hence, when the word *ezesan* (they lived) is used for the ‘beheaded’ souls in Revelation 20:4, we should realize that it refers to those who had NOT literally died!

Greek is a very rich and exact language. What we are having here is similar to the fact that Greek does not use *eros* or *philo* when the intention is to convey *agape*, although English uses the same word ‘love’ for all of them. Bible translators would do well to translate the original Greek faithfully. Though paraphrasing and

modernizing are intended to ease understanding, a disadvantage is that they have been obscuring many truths. That is why literal interlinear translations are very helpful.

This fact that the beheaded souls had not literally died but are living devout Christians, should lead us to a serious rethink about the time of the thousand years during which they reign with Christ.

3.5 The Coming of the Lord

It is important to notice that in Revelation 20, the removal of restrictions upon Satan which then allowed him the ability to deceive the whole world of unbelievers (Gog and Magog) into battle occurs at the expiration of the 1000 years – not before its beginning.

Also, the coming of the Lord is NOT mentioned or implied at all at the beginning of the 1000 years, but only AFTER its expiration.

The bible NOWHERE talks about any two-stage second coming of Christ. Such theory is only men's fanciful invention to fit their misinterpretation of scripture. There is only one Coming of the Lord – not two second comings!

This is confirmed by the PLAIN statements of **2 Thessalonians 2:2-12** in which Paul STRESSED that Christ will never come before the great deception of the whole world of unbelievers (Gog and Magog) that would end in their final damnation.

Moreover, the believers are still around during the deception and apostasy since the battle is being waged against them, their camp being surrounded with intention to annihilate them, whereupon the Lord would come from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance upon the unbelieving adversaries (Revelation 20:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 further confirms it. Paul explains “by the word of the Lord” that Christians will be “caught up” only AFTER the resurrection (second and final) of the dead. NO GROUP OF LIVING CHRISTIANS WILL PRECEDE DECEASED CHRISTIANS IN BEING CAUGHT UP, but the living Christians will be caught up “TOGETHER WITH” the resurrected ones. Can it ever be plainer than this?

It says very plainly that there will NOT be any rapture (secret or open) of anybody BEFORE the second, general and final resurrection. All who will ever be with the Lord will be raptured together as one group after the dead in Christ have arisen, NOT two groups or two stages!!

The Bible does NOT teach that very good and well-prepared Christians will go up in a secret first rapture to “escape” tribulation and Antichrist, while lukewarm and not-so-ready Christians would go in a ‘second-chance’ rapture at the end of the world if they would make

it. No! The only rapture plainly taught in the Bible is found in 1Thessalonians 4:15-17. There, when Paul said “WE who are alive and remain till the coming of the Lord”, he included **himself** in that “we” (and, quite naturally, Peter, John, Luke, Timothy, Mark, Philip, Barnabas and other Christians alive by then). Paul neither believed nor hinted that he or they would go up before the final resurrection on the Last Day. He did not reserve that one for lukewarm unready Christians, but included **himself** in it! Paul **stressed** in 2Thessalonians 2:1-8 that we should NOT let anybody, no matter his qualifications, popularity or miracles, make us to believe that Christ will come and we will ‘gather together to meet him’ (i.e. be raptured) any time before the full manifestation and activities of the “man of sin”, the Antichrist. It is really baffling how Christians today believe this very thing that Paul stressed we should NOT believe. Christ will come only when the time is fully up and Antichrist has to be destroyed.

If you think you will go up before God’s appointed time, with which body will you go up? Our vile flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and cannot even defy the law of gravity! Only the glorified body will transcend physical laws. And, God has said very PLAINLY that living Christians will receive that body in a split-second transformation only after the dead have arisen. Please read 1Corinthians 15: 50-54, 1Thessalonians 4:15-17, Matthew 24:29-31 and Philippians 3:20-21. (The last of all “things” that will be “subdued” is physical death for His people). The only way you’d be able to “escape” when you choose to is if you can create the glorified body for yourself. However, if you cannot, then better start accepting the fact that you’ll have to wait till the time God has ordained to give it to us in the twinkling of an eye on the resurrection day!

Do Paul and John dovetail with Jesus on this? Yes! Please follow **Matthew 24:15-31** in orderly manner. Jesus said that the abomination that causes desolation will appear and, as prophesied by Daniel, will DECEIVE the world, do miracles, cause many to FALL (apostasy), exalt and show himself to be God or Christ, greatly persecute God’s elect and try to annihilate them. Jesus said God’s very ELECT (not lukewarm or backslidden Christians but the elect, the bride) will be PRESENT during the great tribulation, and it is FOR THEIR SAKES that it will be shortened!! “AFTER” this, will the Son of man come – never secretly before; and at that his coming will his “ELECT” be gathered from the four winds (RAPTURED) at the last trumpet sound – never secretly before. Verse 30 plainly says ALL tribes shall SEE Christ at that His coming!

(Matthew 24:21-22 is corroborated by Revelation 7:9-17, whose verse 14 confirms that the Bride of the Lamb who are ever before his throne in his temple, passed through GREAT TRIBULATION!)

The bible does not teach that Christ will set up a millennial Kingdom at his coming! Instead, it teaches that Christ had been reigning with his saints (priests) a thousand years **before** his coming – before the resurrection of all humans who had died. What Christ does at his coming is rather handing over the kingdom to the Father, upon his abolition of the **LAST** enemy which is his annulment of bodily death for his people via resurrection and acquiring of incorruptible bodies in the twinkling of an eye (**1 CORINTHIANS 15:54**). Then the end: no other enemy remaining to be abolished anytime later. I admit that in 1 Corinthians 15:24 the Greek word for ‘then’ is *eita* not *tote*, but if there is a lag between what is stated in 1 Corinthians 15:26 and what had been done in 1 Corinthians 15:23, it surely is NOT a 1000-year period for Christ to physically set up his kingdom in Jerusalem and start to reign. It is rather a part of that unspecified length of time called the Day of the Lord, that Great Day or the Dreadful Day of God Almighty. Once those who are of Christ have imperishable bodies, death is finally abolished. There remain no other persons for whom to abolish death any time later: everybody not of Christ will go to the lake of fire. This still confirms 1 Corinthians 15:51-55. See also Philippians 3:20-21.

1 Corinthians 15:23 says that this raising of Christ’s own – not just a first bridal set or a leftover second set but ALL of Christ’s own – will take place at His coming, as is also confirmed in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. This coming of the Lord, says 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, is also the day God’s adversaries will be destroyed everlastingly in flaming fire from heaven. (Compare Revelation 20:9). In Revelation 16, we also see in verses 13-14 that it is after the kings and peoples of the whole world have been successfully deceived by Satan the dragon & Co to fight the Armageddon battle, that is when Christ unexpectedly returns (verse 15). How strikingly similar this is to Revelation 20:7-9 and to 2Thessalonians 2:8-10! Many people make the great mistake of thinking that Revelation was written as one long continuous chronological account of events to come, not realizing that it was rather given in groups of ‘sevens’. Hence, certain events are recorded under more than one of these ‘series of sevens’. For instance, information concerning the final battle between the Lord and Satan, under the 7 trumpet series, is also recorded under the 7 vial series and in the 19th and 20th chapters.

(Many people misinterpret 2Peter 3:8 and say, “The bible says one day equals one thousand years”, and then they use that and do some mathematics and try to figure out the

Day of the Lord. They claim that the 6 days of creation means that God created the universe in 6000 years (of evolution), and that the earth will last for 6 dispensations of 6000 years and the 7th day (dispensation) will be the Sabbath of 1000-year millennial rest in Christ's kingdom. They calculate and pronounce when Christ will return.

But all such predictions and pronouncements have always failed. This repeated failure demonstrates the folly of those misinterpretations and theories, which are based on human constructions instead of on the PLAIN words of scripture! When Christ fails to appear or the world fails to end in the specified years, some even resort to saying that he had actually come but only "spiritually" and "secretly", and they are not ashamed to adjust predictions and fix yet another time for the Lord's Appearing).

Chapter Four

SUMMARY

In the preceding Chapter, we had been examining the various issues in Revelation 20 that would naturally provoke some questions in the minds of readers. It is possible that the lengthy examination may have made some readers lose track of the main course of the discussion, namely the ‘One Day’ and the ‘Thousand Years’ that are equivalent. Hence, in this final section we shall gather up the various pieces of what we’ve been discussing so far.

Now, of the things that we’ve been discussing, this is the sum. Jesus said that right when he was uttering John 5: 24-25, the hour for the first resurrection already “then was”. And it has been going on since then! Dear friend, all over the world today various peoples are hearing the voice of the Son of God by heeding the gospel, believing on Christ and repenting; and are being born anew. Many souls are being translated from death into life, and from darkness into the kingdom of light of the dear Son of God. Day by day, souls are being quickened (resurrected) from death in sins and trespasses, and made to sit in heavenly places in Christ. Many souls are being redeemed from every tribe and nation by the blood of Christ and made to be kings and priests unto God. They are reigning with Christ, by faith exercising the powers of the kingdom and having victory and dominion over all the powers of the enemy. The thousand years are here and now!

The 1000 YEARS is TODAY, this long indefinite DAY of SALVATION, when the longsuffering of God is giving room for more and more souls to take part in the first resurrection and thus escape the second death that awaits all unrepentant unbelievers at Christ’s coming.

Dear reader, have you seen how the scriptures dovetail – how David, Jesus, Paul, John, Peter, Matthew, Luke and James all perfectly agree? I’m sure you just can’t miss it!

The long indefinite period which God calls one day in some places, he calls same period a thousand years in another place. This is how, “with the Lord”, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. He calls it by two different names, but is CAREFUL to tell us that by the two names he’s referring to the same period, and also stresses that we should not be ignorant of that big fact! 2 Peter 3:8 does NOT give any formula for interpreting bible prophecies by taking one day to represent 1000 years. For one, that conflicts with Ezekiel 4:5-6 which is also used as formula to interpret bible prophecies by taking one day to represent one year. Secondly, the various predictions that have been

made based on the formula have been failing, thus proving that those calculations were based on a wrong (or inexistent) formula.

We don't need to use human ideas to interpret Revelation, or we may come up with many erroneous doctrines and speculations. God did not leave the field open for speculations as to how 'with him' or in his consideration, or in his manner of allegorical speaking, "one day" is IDENTICAL with "a thousand years". He has given the explanation in many other plain statements right in His word.

Dear friend, don't you love to share in the blessedness of all those who experience the first resurrection? Repent and give your life to Christ. You will be made holy by the blood of Christ and your righteousness will be of the Lord (Isaiah 54:17). You will then be imbued with power from on high (Holy Spirit) and, in Christ, you'll be able live a life of dominion and victory over sin, the flesh, the world and the devil. You'll be among the many "priests" who are now offering spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God. You'll have no business at all with the lake of fire (John 5:24).

Dear Christian, please heed the call of Christ to you (Mark 1:14-15) to repent from unbelief, error and 'postponement theory', and to believe his good news that the time is FULFILLED and the kingdom of God is at hand. It is the doubting of this good news of Christ, and the acceptance of a theory that postpones everything to a so-called future millennial kingdom that have resulted in a spineless church bereft of all the practical demonstrations found in the Acts of the Apostles.

I do realize that some of the material in this piece would be hotly debated in some circles. Hence, I refer the reader to the good practical advice I had given in the concluding part of the previous piece titled '*Christ's Message*'.

Finally, let me invite you to read more about related matters in the next piece titled '*The New Jerusalem*'

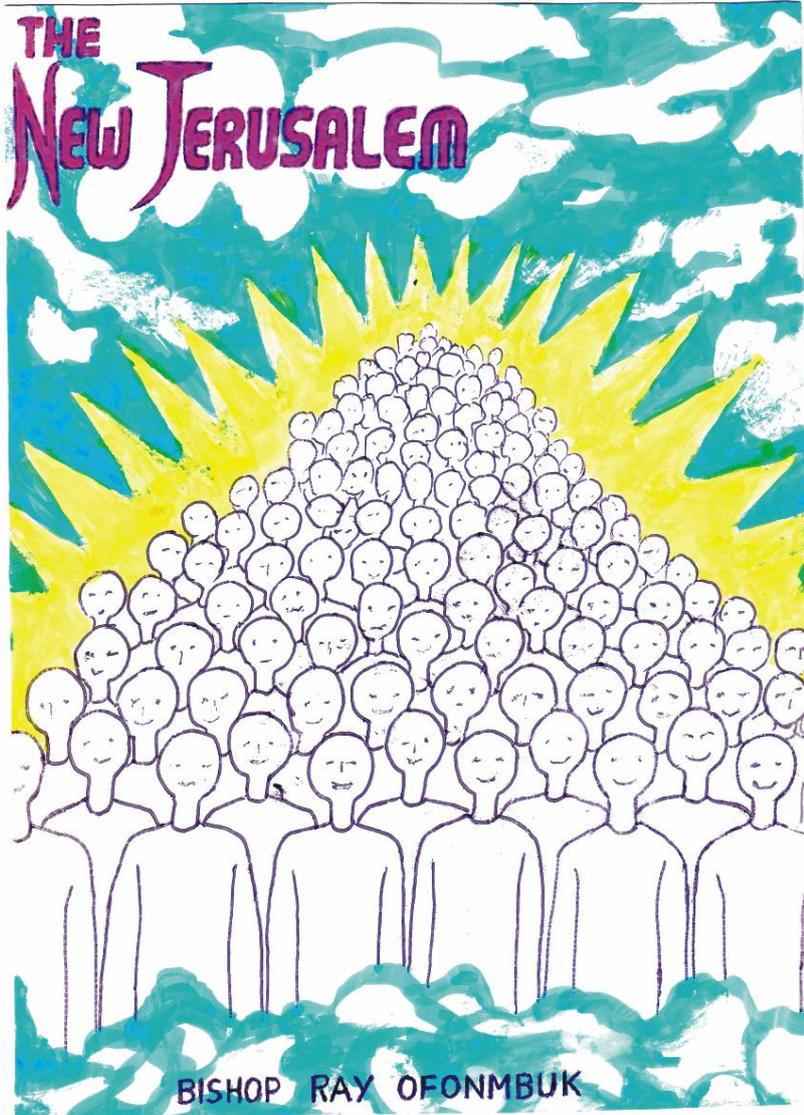
GOD BLESS YOU.

Suggested further reading:

1. "*The Millennium*" by Harry R. Miller,
obtainable FREE from People of the Living God, Rt. 2, Box 423, McMinnville, TN. 37110, USA.
2. "*The Testimony of Truth*", Number 567, February 2011 Issue. (Pages 2 – 15).
Obtainable FREE from People of the Living God, 366 Cove Creek Road, McMinnville, TN 37110
9512, USA.

BOOK FOUR

**THE
NEW JERUSALEM**



GOD IS SPIRIT

The fact that God is a spirit is known by all and sundry. Jesus confirmed this in his statement in John 4:24.

“God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth”.

– NIV

What is the nature, generally, of spirits and, specifically, of God as the Holy Spirit?

Men have been interacting with various spirits all through the ages, and the Bible as well as intimate communion with the Holy Spirit gives us knowledge of the nature of God. Among the things known about God are His love, mercy, faithfulness, holiness, infinity, eternity, invisibility, omnipotence, omniscience, justice, etc.

Indeed, it is beyond humans to know **everything** about God. Only God the Son, Jesus Christ, had such knowledge as a human. (John 1:1, 2, 14, 18. John 8:55, John 10:15, John 3:34).

Of what shape is God?

From the statements in Genesis 1:26-27, some people imagine that God looks like a man. However, the “image” in those verses should not so be taken to mean the physical one because of the known fact that spirits can and do usually assume any shape they like. The same spirit can appear as a baby, an old man, a beautiful girl, a snake, a stone, a lion, fire, tree, bird, light, piece of cloth, etc.

Concerning the nature of spirits, let us consider the following. Angels usually glide through space and can travel at speed of light when they wish to (Hebrews 1:7, Judges 13:19-20). Do they then really need horses, chariots, streets, cars, ships, jets, etc? Spirits can go through solid objects (John 20:19, 26; Acts 12:6-10). Can human-type walls, gates and keys then make any sense to them? Does God need electricity or golden chandeliers for light for Him to see? (Psalm 139:12, John 8:12, Revelation 21:23). Do spirits eat as we do? And do they need fuel, cookers and ovens as we do? (Judges 13:15-16, Psalm 50:13-14, Judges 6:18-21).

Even our human spirits have no need of physical food for their nourishment. The physical body lives by bread, but what of the actual spirit-man? The bible says “*man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4), and also “*like newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 2:2). In John 6:48-60, we read of how the materially-minded Jews were so baffled when Jesus told them that He, the Word, is the Bread which the spirit-man needs to

feed on in order to live. To a deeply materialistic mind, it is incomprehensible how ‘mere’ words can be food. However, man’s spirit is not of the material realm, and Jesus explained that His words are spirit and life (John 6:63).

Should we then imagine that angels need to plant literal vineyards and fruitful orchards or fields with nice golden wheat? Or that we would literally be sitting every man under his vine and his fig tree in the kingdom?

Even in the physical realm, there are vast differences in kinds of needs. For example, fishes in the sea do not wear all the apparatus that human divers need to wear! During ‘soul travel’, do human souls need rockets and all the paraphernalia that human astronauts always wear? Even if there exist ‘beings’ on Mars and Venus, should we feel that they must have the same body that we have, be visible as we are and need the same houses and other physical things that we need?

I have asked many rhetorical questions, the answers to which are, of course, obvious. This is aimed at beginning the process of disabusing readers of some illusions about what is called the ‘kingdom of heaven’ and the conditions in that kingdom.

Very many errors have come up through men’s acts of trying to inject the concepts and needs of our gross material realm into the realities of the spirit realm.

Indeed, a conception of God or spiritual things in terms of our material experiences is very limited and misleading. Nevertheless, the only way to portray or convey things of the spiritual realm to ordinary man is to present them as, or compare them to, the physical things man is familiar with.

That was why, in teaching about the spiritual kingdom of God, Jesus made comparison in parables involving everyday things like wheat, tares, sheep, goats, masters, stewards, vineyards, coins weddings, journeys, debtors, watchfulness, prodigality, importunity, mercy, forgiveness, faithfulness, etc.

Prophets and visioners like Ezekiel, Daniel and John also used comparisons in trying to describe what they saw in the spiritual realm. They tried to describe things that looked like wheels, chariots, eyes, horns or wings; sounds that sounded like thunder, trumpet blasts, mighty waves or voice of multitudes; creatures with various faces like of lion, eagle, man or ox; cities that had walls of jasper and streets of gold.

Those descriptions were replete with the words: “was like unto”, “seemed”, “resembled” or “as it were”. Yet, at times, there was no physical thing to compare with a being that was seen, and the being was simply referred to as “one”, “living creature” or “beast”.

It is, thus, surprising to see that those who know very well that the parables of Jesus do not mean that the kingdom of God is literally a mustard seed, a dragnet, some yeast, etc, are the very people who take some figurative things in the book of Revelation to be quite literal.

Let us now proceed to consider another related issue.

A HOUSE FOR GOD

What house can contain an unbounded Spirit? And what would he need a house for? God Himself asks the question in Isaiah 66:1-2 (a)

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD.”

God’s statement through Isaiah is reiterated through Stephen in Acts 7:44-50. In Acts 7:48, it is said plainly that God needs not physical structure for residence.

God had also expressed his lack of interest in physical structures when David wanted to build him one (2 Samuel 7:5-7).

As human beings, our concept and need of a house is that of a place of abode as well as a shelter – a shelter from the elements as well as a place that provides security, especially at night. However, does the spirit, God, need protection from the elements? Does God ever slumber or sleep? (Psalm 121:4).

Indeed, God’s concept of and purpose for a ‘house’ is completely different from man’s. Let us study this from two of God’s ‘houses’ – one built directly by Him and the second built by man according to His specifications.

The God-built House

God created man in his own image. We know that the actual man is the inner spirit-man, while his **body** is his spirit’s house. When his spirit finally leaves, the body dies. This death had been called by Jesus the “destroying of his temple” (John 2:19-21) and by Paul the “dissolving of his tabernacle” (2 Corinthians 5:1, 4).

This house which God provided for the spirit-man is not made of non-living materials but is a living house, a self-regenerative house, a mobile house, an intelligent house; a house that can see, hear, speak, taste and feel.

It is a “house” wherein and whereby each invisible spirit-man can express himself in the physical world to other similarly invisible spirit-men. It is via this house that the inner man can express his joy, fear, love, hatred, desires, satisfaction, ideas, adoration, hunger, wisdom, folly, pride, mercy, strength, weakness, and indeed his whole nature and attributes. It is a “house” whereby the invisible man could be ‘seen’ and known for who he is (Mathew 12:33-35, Matthew 7:20, Mark 7:20-23).

How wonderful a house! Which architect, engineer or scientist can build such a house? Which imperial palace even though equipped and adorned with gold, diamond, emerald, pearl, jasper, platinum, sardonyx, etc can compare with it? It is a house that fallen angels admire so much that legions of them are content to live in just one of it if granted the slightest privilege! (Mark 5:8-13, Luke 11:24-26).

If God could give man whom He created (in His image) such an amazingly functional house, do you think God Himself would deserve or desire a less living and less functional “house”?

Man-made House of God

We shall consider two of these.

The first was the Tabernacle in the wilderness which God instructed Moses to build.

Note that it was called the “Tabernacle of Witness” (Acts 7:44), the “Tent of Meeting” (Exodus 29:42-45, Numbers 10:3) and the “Tent of the Testimony” (Numbers 9:15).

God gave Moses specific details concerning its pattern and everything that would be done in it, and stressed that Moses should strictly adhere to all that he was shown. Hebrews 9:1-10, 23-24 explains that, even then, the tabernacle and all its services were still ‘types’ and ‘shadows’ that were intended to lead us to the knowledge of the ‘real’.

From all this, we see that God’s concept of the tabernacle was not that of residence or shelter but a means through which his people could **meet** with him, **hear** from him, receive his laws, **know** his likes and dislikes, **see** his glory, **learn** of the pattern of things in heaven and of how he should be approached and of his salvation plan; and it was a means through

which he would be **with** (or among) his people. In short, for God the tabernacle was an avenue for **expressing himself** to his people.

(Recall what we had noted earlier that the house (body) which God has given to man is the means whereby the invisible inner spirit-man can express itself).

The second man-made house of God was the temple built by Solomon.

In 2Samuel 7:1-17 we find King David reasoning from the human concept of house and concluding that the old goat-skin tent was too inferior for God. He thus planned to erect a magnificent “befitting habitation” for the Almighty.

What did God say?

His words in verses 5-7 show that our kind of house or temple is not really the kind necessary, important or desirable to God. Then in verses 12-14(a), God promised that the ‘Son of David’ whose kingdom is everlasting would build Him the house which He desires. God disclosed that this ‘Builder’ will also be ‘Son of God’.

David’s son, Solomon, did build a splendid world-famous temple for God. However, after its dedication, God warned that sin could make Him despise that temple and leave it to be ruined (1 Kings 9:6-9). God later warned the Israelites that they were having an overblown view of that temple (Jeremiah 7:3-4), and God finally let the Babylonians to plunder the temple and burn it down (2 Chronicles 36:18-19) due to sin.

Moreover, Solomon’s kingdom did not last forever. At his death, it was torn from him and only two tribes were left. Later on, the divided kingdoms (Northern and Southern) were totally destroyed and the people taken captive to Babylon.

All this shows that the promised ‘Son of David’ was not Solomon but Christ who reigns forever (Acts 2:30) and that the promised house was not Solomon’s resplendent temple but the one which Christ is building.

God’s Chosen Temple

We had earlier read God’s great question in Isaiah 66:1-2(a) but stopped short of its answer. God himself answered his own question in the second part of verse 2, thus:

“This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2b, NIV).

God plainly answers that the house he prefers is a humble, contrite, and God-fearing spirit. This is the dwelling place he desires, deserves, chooses and regards; not temples of gold, splendid cathedrals or mansions with jasper walls. This is confirmed by other scriptures

like 1 Corinthians 6:19, John 14:23 and Ephesians 2:20-22. This is the house that God delights in.

He had the greatest delight living in such house in the body of Jesus Christ while on earth, and openly declared so: *“This is my beloved Son, **in** whom I have found my delight”* (Luke 3:22, Matthew 3:17 – DARBY). When the Word became flesh and was ‘tabernacled’ amongst us, God then had his most delightful means of manifesting his attributes. In Christ, God had his highest and most comprehensive self-expression (John 1:14,18; Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15,19; Colossians 2:9, John 14:7-10, John 10:30).

In Psalm 132, David recounted his desire to build God a house and God’s promises to him. Then in verses 13 and 14 he disclosed something that had not been recorded in 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Obviously, the God who had told him that a house of cedar was not essentially better than a goat-skin tabernacle had also told him of the house that He chose. It is something having the spiritual name “Zion”, where the crown of the “Horn of David” (God’s Messiah) shall flourish. We shall come to that later.

When Christ – God’s promised temple-builder – came, what temple did he build?

He did not erect any structure, but went about his mission of saving souls.

When his disciples admired the stones of Herod’s Temple, he told them that all would be destroyed (Luke 21:5-6). He told the woman of Samaria that it was not the temple in Jerusalem or in Mt. Samaria that was God’s special place of worship, but that God is Spirit and desires worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-26). He also said that wherever two or three meet in his name, he is there in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

Everywhere was pulpit for Jesus – the synagogues, the hills, the seashore, a boat, a banquet, the streets, the fields, etc. The **presence of God** was always with **him**.

When he finally left, he promised and sent the indwelling Holy Spirit to come and be with his people always, even unto the end of the world.

The Apostles, after Jesus, built no structure, but, being persecuted, went everywhere, God working **in them** miraculously as they fellowshiped at brethren’s residences (Acts 12:12, Acts 28:30-31; 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15), at seashores (Acts 16:13) or even in prison (Acts 16:25) as well as in synagogues (Acts 18:4, Acts 2:46).

In Acts chapter 7, the Apostle Stephen made a great speech before the Council. He was then so full of the Spirit that his face shone like an angel’s (Acts 6:15) and he even saw heavens open and Christ standing at God’s right hand (Acts 7:55-56).

In that Spirit-filled speech, he spoke about God’s temples in verses 44-51: from the tabernacle of witness to Solomon’s temple, then made the great comment in verse 48, and

quoted God's statement in Isaiah 66:1-2(a). Then in verse 51, he suddenly made an indictment – but a great revelation!

At first, that verse 51 may seem a surprising break from the trend of his long narrative, but it is not. God was still pointing out his chosen temple as he had done in Isaiah 66:2(b). God was saying: 'You Jews built for me the goatskin tent and Solomon's temple, and cherished those; yet you are stiff-necked and denying me room in my truly desired temple which is your hearts!'

The true chosen temple is a loving and yielding heart (or spirit) in which God desires to dwell as Holy Spirit! This is a temple not built by human hands.

(It's a pity that God can indict our generation similarly, because while the number of churches is increasing, yet society keeps getting even worse. It shows that we are busy multiplying denominations and erecting structures but have not let the Holy Spirit live in us and bear His fruit and manifest His attributes)

God himself is building his people individually and collectively as a house for himself (Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-5, Hebrews 3:4-6; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17.). This house is a masterpiece comprising numberless units. There are many mansions in one house (John 14:2). Each unit, though complete in itself, is still essential to the whole, which is one integrated and perfectly functioning system. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:4, 5, 6, 12, 16; Ephesians 5:29-30).

It is really a masterpiece. One unit, complete and functional in itself, may be in an office at New York, another in a farm in Kenya, another in a coal mine in Russia, another in a ship on the Atlantic, etc, yet all of them are parts of the one house indwelt by God SIMULTANEOUSLY.

Which earthly monarch or genius could enjoy that? Can any mortal sleep simultaneously inside two separate houses?

I learn that Bill Gates, the computer giant, has applied his knowledge of computers in his house such that most things in the house are automated and can be monitored and operated by remote control. Think, then, of the kind of superb house that the all-wise Creator would design for himself!

If humans have been ingenious enough to develop the worldwide web and the internet wherein individual computers (complete and functional in themselves) at various places in world simultaneously belong to one integrated global computer information system, imagine then how much more our Creator God can achieve!

The heart or spirit of every born-again Christian is a temple of Christ. The collection of all such persons constitutes the “church” of Christ, his ‘house’ or ‘temple’. This house is also called his ‘body’.

Let us examine whether this house agrees with the God-concept or need of ‘house’ as a medium for displaying the attributes of the invisible dweller. Ephesians 3:9-10 says it plainly. I quote verse 10: *“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold **wisdom of God should be made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”* (NIV). Also, 1 Peter 2:9,12. I quote verse 9: *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may **declare the praises of him** who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”* (NIV). This truth is also implicit in other scriptures like Ephesians 4:23-24, John 15:4 and 8, John 14:12, Matthew 5:44-48. As the Christian bears the fruit of the Spirit, he displays God’s attributes of love, mercy, kindness, patience, faithfulness, etc, because of the indwelling Spirit. As the Christian does the same works as Christ did, he is manifesting the power and love of the Father, who is thereby glorified.

THE CITY OF GOD

The fact that God has always been King over all and will ever be King is indisputable (Psalm 47:2, 7-9; Psalm 145:11-13; Psalm 90:2, Psalm 99:1-4). He rules as the sovereign Lord over all his creation, including the physical and spiritual universes.

However, from the ministries of John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles (throughout the New Testament), God’s kingdom is more emphatically taught, and men now see it as a place to look for and strive to enter. However, even this view and desire is not new – Abraham and the other patriarchs knew about the City of heaven and strove to enter it! (See Hebrews 11: 9, 10, 13-16).

God has called this his City by various names at various times. Some of the names are: Jerusalem (New or Heavenly), Zion, Mount Zion, the Mountain of the Lord, My Holy Hill, the Holy City, a Holy Nation, the People of the Living God, Israel of God, Bride of the Lamb, Mother of many children, etc. (Psalm 48, Psalm 132:13-18, Revelation 21:1-3, Galatians 4:25-27, Psalm 87:1-3, Hebrews 12:22).

A Great Enlightenment

In Revelation 21, God gives us an outstanding revelation about the City of God, the New Jerusalem. This truth, shown by God himself, resolves the issue for us. In verse 9, an angel told John to come and be shown “*the Bride, the wife of the Lamb*”. And what did he actually show John? Answer: “*the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God*”. (Verse 10). Wow! **The New Jerusalem is the Bride of Christ and the Bride of Christ is the New Jerusalem!**

Verses 11 to 27 go on to describe the superlative qualities of this bride in figurative terms of a resplendent dream-city.

There is no doubt, of course, about who the bride of Christ is. We all know it is the Church. (Ephesians 5:23-32, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7-9, Isaiah 54:5, John 3:28-29, Matthew 9:14-15, Matthew 25:1-13).

Note that this does not mean a certain denomination or physical building or every church-goer. The word ‘church’ is from the Greek ‘Ekklesia’ which means “the called-out” ones. This refers to those people whom God called and they responded, repented, were redeemed and born-again, sanctified and sealed with God’s Spirit; they forsook their former sinful lifestyles and live for Christ and his service. (Romans 8:30, John 3:3-7; 1 Corinthians 1:2, John 15:16, 19; Galatians 5:24, Ephesians 5:25-27, Acts 2: 41-47). The collection of all such people of all races and all ages is the Church of Jesus Christ. These are the prepared and ready people whom Christ will take as his bride at his return.

Revelation 21:11-27 describes the beauty of the perfected bride of Christ, comparing her to a city built with rare precious gems and metals. Yet, we know of course that Christ will not marry walls of jasper and streets of gold as his bride of whom he’s the husband, nor are walls of jasper and streets of gold his body of which he’s the head. In fact, if you are a good poet, you can write beautiful verses in which you describe the beauty of the kingdom of God in terms of the beautiful qualities of beautiful and pleasant-smelling flowers. Yet, we wouldn’t claim that the kingdom of God is a garden of flowers. Many have compared aspects of God’s love to the deep, boundless, rolling oceans. Yet we know that God’s love is neither water nor sea waves.

But, has the company of all true people of God ever previously been called the names Mount Zion, Jerusalem, Holy Hill, City of God, etc?

Yes. In Psalm 125:1-2, they that trust in the lord are called Mt. Zion and Jerusalem. Psalm 133 refers to God’s blessing bestowed on a united brotherhood as dew falling on Mt.

Zion. Psalm 15 says only the righteous can be on God's holy hill, and they are the ones who cannot be shaken, as is also stated in Psalm 125:1. In 1 Peter 2:4-7 it is explained that Christ is the chief corner stone in his building which is called Zion, and 1 Peter 2:9 calls the people of Christ a Holy Nation. In Revelation 5:9-10, we find that all redeemed people are called a KINGDOM (Greek: "*Basileian*"), and likewise in Revelation 1:6.

Physical Versus Spiritual

Galatians 3:16 explains that God's true promised Seed of Abraham was not really Isaac but Christ. Romans 9:6-8 cum Galatians 3:7,9, 26-29 explain that the people of Christ are the true children of Abraham; Romans 2:28-29 states that they are the true "Jews", and Galatians 6:14 – 16 explains that they are the "Israel" of God.

Thus, when it is said, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), it could well mean the same as "Everyone who trusts in the Lord and calls on his name will be saved" (Romans 10:11-13).

Indeed, Galatians 4:22-31 explains that the present city of Jerusalem in the Middle-East and her people (unbelieving Jews) are in slavery and will NOT share in the inheritance with the people of Christ (who are the heavenly Jerusalem). Just think about that! In Revelation 11:8, the present city of Jerusalem is not called 'Holy' by God, but is spiritually called by the bad names "Sodom" and "Egypt".

I am by no means an anti-Semite, but I am categorically pointing out that many teachings and practices of modern Christian Zionism have no true basis in Scripture – especially in the light of what the new Jerusalem truly is!

Let me here digress and say a little on this. In Romans 15:25-26 the word "saints" (Greek: *hagios* = holy ones) is used, and the pronouns *auton* (of them) and *autois* (to them) are used in verse 27 in reference to those saints. Note that the Greek does not mention the word 'Jews' at all in verse 27. Hence, any bible version that writes "Jews" in place of those pronouns is NOT presenting a faithful translation but an interpretation injected by the translators. Who were those saints? In all of Paul's epistles, he always uses 'saints' in reference to believers in Christ. Would he then change on this single occasion and use it to refer to unbelieving anti-christian Jews? NO!

Even if he meant Jews, it could NOT be antagonistic unbelieving Jews but Jewish Christians like Apostle James, Apostle Peter and many others who were at Jerusalem. National unbelieving Jews could not be the ones who preached salvation by grace through faith in Christ to the Macedonians and Achaians, thus making them partake of the "spiritual

things” of the gospel. Concerning the intended journey to Jerusalem, Paul, in verses 30-31, even requested prayer for God to protect him from the unbelievers in Judea, while also requesting prayer that the gift and his service would be well-pleasing to the saints. Here Paul himself makes a distinction between those he called “saints” and the unbelievers (including unbelieving Jews). Can we refute this?

In 1Corinthians 9:11, Paul also uses the same language as in Romans 15:27. He says, “we” who have sown “spiritual things” to you are entitled to reap “material things” from you. By “we” he does not mean ‘Jews’ but himself and Barnabas; and the “others” in verse 12 does not mean ‘Jews’ but Cephas, the brothers of the Lord and other apostles as mentioned earlier in the chapter. The “spiritual things” they sowed was none other than the ministration of the gospel as is clearly evident in verses 14-18. Let the pronouns and the “spiritual things” in the Scripture in Romans 15:27 be interpreted by other Scriptures like Romans 15:30-31, 1Corinthians 9:11, 1Timothy 5:17-18 and Galatians 6:6 instead of being interpreted by human sentiments. Romans 15:24-27 is saying things similar to things expressed in 1Corinthians 16:1-7, 15-18 and 2Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.

Moreover, if we replace “them” by “Jews” in Romans 15:27, we would be making the wrong claim that there were no gentiles among the poor Christian brethren living in Jerusalem!

When Jesus came as the Messiah with His spiritual mission of opening the way to soul-salvation and everlasting life, Satan seriously tempted Him to deviate from that and become a political and economic messiah. His refusal to be such a messiah made the Jews reject Him, hate Him and eventually get Him killed. After Him, the Jews still strove hard to persecute and prevent His disciples from preaching and spreading His gospel. Today, that same Satan has tempted the Church to deviate into politico-military programmes of Zionism. Can we say we are not falling already?

I am not anti-semitic. I am not against Israel receiving political, economic, military, technological, educational, egalitarian and other forms of support. After all, the various nations of the world are enjoying various forms of cooperation and support. Why should Israel be an exception? She should enjoy hers too! What I am stressing is that we should leave it at that secular level. It is WRONG to try to give it a Scriptural garb and make it appear as if it is an obligatory **New Testament** doctrine that Christians are indebted to Jews and should support Zionism. That might even imply a kind of subjugation of Christianity to Judaism. Neither should Scripture be misinterpreted nor Truth be sacrificed on the altar of inter-faith relations.

Although this piece is not about Christian Zionism, one cannot completely avoid Zionism when talking about a new Jerusalem. However, I wouldn't here like to go into other teachings of modern Christian Zionism. Let me now end the digression and return to our main discourse.

All who will ever be saved will be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God's anointed Saviour of the world (John 14:6, John 3:16, 18). The saints in Old Testament era looked forward to that Lamb of God who was to come, and we in this New Testament era look back to that Lamb of God who has already come. There is no favouritism, partiality or respect of persons with God. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, black nor white, slave nor freeborn (Romans 10:12-13, Galatians 3:28). Any Jew who repents and believes in Christ will be saved (2 Corinthians 3:15-16, Romans 11:23), but any Jew who rejects Christ to the end will perish. Jesus himself said so (John 8:24, John 5:39-40, Romans 9:27, John 3:36).

True Christians (the bride of Christ) are now the Elect of God – not the State of Israel (Colossians 3:11-12; 1 Peter 1:1-2, Romans 11:7, Romans 8:29-34; 2 Timothy 2:8 -10, Mathew 24:31). God has not rejected Israel but has ordained that any Israeli who will accept Christ (a remnant) will be saved just like any Gentile who accepts Christ.

What, then, of all the clamour, pilgrimage, prophecies, teachings, etc. about Jerusalem and the Middle-East?

They are based on men's misconceptions. People are still looking for that material kingdom which the Israelites of old thought the Messiah would bring (Acts 1:6, Luke 19:11, Luke 24:21). Jesus did tell them he had actually brought a kingdom (Mark 1:14-15, Luke 11:20), but made them know that his kingdom was not the worldly or human type of kingdom (John 18: 36-37) but rather had to do with their inward spirit-man (Luke 17:20-21).

With the benefit of hindsight, we now know he didn't come to set up such expected kingdom. However, instead of dropping the idea altogether, we now say he will set it up at his second coming. Jesus said his kingdom would not be a geographical affair whose location one could pin-point (Luke 17:20-21); but men now say that when he comes he will set up his world kingdom with headquarters in the present city of Jerusalem in the Middle-East, where he will literally sit on a restored material throne of David! The bible says that when he returns he will then be handing over his kingdom to his Father (1 Corinthians 15:22-28); but men say that that is when he will start setting up his kingdom. The bible says that the present heavens and earth shall be burnt up in fervent heat (2 Peter 3:7-13); but men say this current earth will abide forever, and some are even importing figs from the land of Palestine

(Canaan) to plant in their yards so that they will have each man his fig tree under which to sit in that golden era, (ref. Micah 4:4).

The symbolic prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation have been repeatedly misinterpreted in purely materialistic and human terms, and various scenarios have been painted. Various persons at various times have been declared to be the final anti-Christ with number 666; but they passed away and neither the rapture nor the end came.

For instance, many things were said about the former Soviet Union (USSR) – that it was the “great beast”, it would divide the world into two camps, it would fight the USA and cause a 3rd world war whose nuclear conflagration would wipe out the earth and make Christ return.

The Soviet Union later disintegrated, with none of those predictions having come to pass.

Next came Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Interpretations of bible prophecies were then adjusted to suit Iraqi conditions. Saddam was declared the new 666, a direct descendant of Nebuchadnezzar whose developmental projects were a rebuilding of ancient Babylon with ultimate intention of launching a nuclear attack on Israel, hence starting a 3rd world war that would usher in the rapture and the end.

Later, Saddam was overcome, arrested, tried and hanged; and a democracy now exists in Iraq. None of all the prophetic scenarios had come to pass!

Who will be next? Maybe, President Obama and his health care programme?

When will the regular unabashed adjustments in the interpretations given to biblical end-time prophecies cease? When will the masses stop believing them and stop buying those sensational “best-selling” books and movies laden with beautifully-woven theories and speculations? (Sad to say, the end-times and the rapture have been made into commercial gold mines, mind-control tools and even political determinants).

Transposing human materialistic ideas into scriptures has misled us very much from the real spiritual truth. The City of God should NOT be viewed in territorial terms as a certain territory or country of God at a certain physical or spiritual location. Nor should it be viewed in terms of built-up structures: pearly gates, jasper walls, golden streets and foursquare dream-cities.

It is a kingdom of **people**. The term ‘City of God’ actually means “**The people of God**”. But is God wrong in calling these people his “city”? No! Physically speaking, a city is a large and important cluster of many houses, shops, offices and other buildings where people live and work (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). Spiritually speaking, every

true Christian is a “temple” or “house” of God. Is it then out-of-place to call the collection of these “houses” the city of God? Most people would rather view them as the citizens of the city, but God says they themselves **are** the city.

God can call them his Peculiar Possession or Inheritance (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9, Psalm 74:2, Malachi 3:17); his Bride whom he has won, redeemed and prepared for himself (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 21:2, Revelation 19:7-8); his City which he has built for himself to dwell in (Revelation 21:2-3, Hebrews 11: 10,16; Ephesians 2:19-22, Hebrews 3:6); his Holy Nation (1 Peter 2:9); etc.

Come to think of it, what makes us feel that the “new heavens and new earth” will be like the present ones? For one, we know that there will no longer be mortal humans living in flesh and blood, but there will be spirits with glorified, incorruptible spiritual bodies, no longer having the present physical needs. Moreover, the facts that there’ll be no need of sunlight or moonlight and there’ll be no night or sea (Revelation 21:1, 5, 23, 25; Revelation 22: 5) suggest that “new heavens and new earth” may not be a system of planets, suns, moons, stars, galaxies, etc. It may be very different from what people have been imagining.

Jesus said He is the Vine, yet he’s not a literal plant. Should we then expect there must be a literal tree bearing twelve kinds of fruits in the middle of New Jerusalem? Jesus gives thirsty people living water that will spring from their hearts and flow as rivers of living water (John 4:14, John 7:38). However, the bible explains that it is the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Should we then expect to have a literal crystal-clear river flowing through the middle of New Jerusalem?

A Necessary Explanation

Are we saying that the Church is the New Jerusalem?

Yes – (even though still in-the-making).

This, of course, provokes many questions considering the discrepancy between the terrible condition of the Church and the perfect conditions that the bible teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven. For instance, what about the fact that there would be no more sorrow, weeping, tears, sickness, pain and death in the New Jerusalem? What about the various sins, division, hatred and other evils abounding in churches today?

Before we go on, the reader is reminded that “Church” does not mean a denomination, building or church-goers, but the Church of Jesus Christ is the collection of all redeemed souls of all ages. Please have that in mind as we go on.

Two scriptures are of great help here, namely **1 Corinthians 15:49-53**, and **Hebrews 12:18, 22-23**. I here quote from 1 Corinthians 15:50 in particular that “... *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...*”

Now, while the bride of Christ is still on the earth, its members are still in flesh and blood.

When someone believes the gospel, repents and yields his life to Christ, he is born anew by God’s Spirit as a child into God’s family. However, what is thus born anew is the inner spirit-man. He is the one who receives everlasting life (John 5:24). The body is still the old body begotten by the parents (John 3:6). The transformed spirit still lives in his old non-transformed house (body).

God’s communion and link with the person is with his spirit-man. The Holy Spirit indwells that human spirit. The revelations of God and gifts of God’s Spirit are received by that inner spirit-man, and he can do in the spiritual realms many great works and miracles which the individual never performs here physically.

On the other hand, the body is still the same one and subject to the desires and weaknesses of the flesh, as well as to the bondage of corruption.

The Christian has the responsibility of using God’s Spirit to mortify the deeds of the members of his body (Romans 8:12-13, Colossians 3:5-6), otherwise if he keeps yielding to its sinful propensities, it will drag him back into a life of sin. The flesh is in constant conflict with the spirit (Romans 7:22-23, Galatians 5:17) and it is only through the power of God’s Holy Spirit that one can gain the mastery (Galatians 5:16, Romans 7:24-25(a), Galatians 5:24).

That redeemed spirit thus dwells, groaning in eager expectation of that Great Day when it shall be finally delivered from the old corruption and be given the new incorruptible spiritual body – that glorified building not made with hands (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2-3). The prayer, “thy kingdom come”, can be seen as one more expression of this groaning in eager expectation.

At present, since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, is it wrong to say that Christians still living are in the kingdom of God? It is not altogether wrong (see Colossians 1:13). In human terms, we can say that the church on earth is the City of God ‘**potentially**’ or ‘**in-the-making**’.

There is always a two-stage development in God’s great dealings with mankind – whether we consider redemption, salvation, adoption, sonship to God, receiving of

everlasting life or entering into the kingdom of God.*

These all have their final realization and manifestation upon the Resurrection on the Last Day at Christ's second coming (Luke 21:28; 1 Peter 1:5, Romans 8:23, Luke 20:36, Romans 8:19, Luke 18:29-30; 1 John 2:25, Daniel 12:2, James 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:18, Matthew 25:34, Jude 21).

However, the bible does not present the ongoing (first) stages of these things in a 'weak', 'doubtful' or 'partial' way, but unequivocally presents them as well-established current realities (Galatians 3:13, Romans 3:24, Ephesians 2:5-6, Romans 8:14-16, Galatians 4:4-7, Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1-2, John 5:24, John 6:54, Colossians 1:13-14, Matthew 16:19, Luke 11:20).**

We realize that we are considering the words of the eternal God who in his eternity, omniscience, and foreknowledge always has everything before him, and can easily "call those things that are not as though they were" (Romans 4:17). But we must also take cognizance of the fact that God is Spirit and, thus, once something has occurred in the spirit realm with the spirit-man, God judges that very important because, after all, "the things that are seen are temporal but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Hence, we see that the bible speaks in present tense of the bride of Christ, even while still in flesh and blood, as being of the New Jerusalem (albeit potentially or in-the-making). (Galatians 4:26&31). But flesh and blood with all its weaknesses and corruption cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Then, the bible also speaks in future tense about the coming glorious City of God where all will be perfection.

However, men greatly **err** where they regard the future glorious City as another thing quite different from the present Church. Yet the truth is being displayed before us everyday in nature:- the beautiful butterfly is not a new different thing out of the blue that is unconnected with the ugly caterpillar; it is the final development and perfection of that same caterpillar! The vibrant, flying butterfly is the ultimate glorious form of the dormant thing that was in a cocoon! The future City is envisaged by men in terms of locations, structures, environmental conditions, tribes, etc. But you may rest assured that saved souls having everlasting life will not get reduced to inanimate structures, walls, gates, locations, streets, etc!

Footnotes:

*1. Please see the earlier piece on 'ADOPTION' (both Stage One & Stage Two)

**2. See the other piece titled 'THE THOUSAND YEARS THAT ARE AS ONE DAY (AND VICE VERSA)'.

With this, let us now examine the second scripture passage, **Hebrews 12:18 and 22-23**:

“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched, but you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God; and to myriads of angels in full assembly; and to the church of The Firstborn, written in heaven; and to God the judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect;” - (NIV, KJV, RSV, DARBY, Original Greek).

It says that Mt. Zion is a spiritual affair, not a physical one (that could be touched) like Mt. Sinai of old. It also gives some alternative names of Mt. Zion, to wit the “Heavenly Jerusalem”, the “City of the living God” and the “Church of the Firstborn”. Christ is the one and only Firstborn. All Christians are his younger brethren (Colossians 1:15, 18; Revelation 1:5, Romans 8:29). The word ‘firstborn’ should usually be started with a capital letter as one of the titles of Christ. The church of the Firstborn means the church of Jesus Christ. The names of all members of this church of Jesus Christ are written in heaven, in the Lamb’s Book of life. (Revelation 21:27, Philippians 4:3, Revelation 20:15, Revelation 3:5).

This heavenly congregation is also said to be **“the spirits of just men made perfect”**. This is what true Christians have come to and will come to.

Not just a church of mortals in flesh and blood with its weaknesses, but a church of “spirits” who have been perfected. True Christians will be made a glorious church without spot or wrinkle – a masterpiece, the completed workmanship of Christ. This will be the presentable and befitting Bride of Christ, which is also called Mt. Zion, New Jerusalem, Holy City, etc. (see also Revelation 21:2-3).

It is the tabernacle God had desired and had been building for himself all along – the people God always promised would be his people and he would be their God and would dwell in them forever.

The mansions of John 14:2 are not mansions of gold, sapphire and emerald, but are the glorified, incorruptible and imperishable bodies that true people of God will inherit (1 Peter 1:3-4) – the everlasting ‘houses’ that the born-again spirits of true Christians will indwell or be clothed with (2 Corinthians 5: 2-4) when Christ returns and takes his own to be with him where he is (John 14:3) and to be like him (1 John 3:2). This is the body that Christ is preparing for every Christian, and which Paul said is ready and waiting for him (2 Corinthians 5:1). The collection of all these individual imperishable mansions constitute the Father’s house (John 14:2) – His everlasting Tabernacle.

The Father committed all things concerning this project unto the Son (Colossians 1:15-20, John 3:35, John 5:22). The Son had to buy and redeem them with his shed blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1Peter 1:18-20, Acts 20:28); he has to keep them (John 10:27 – 28, Jude 24; 2 Timothy 4:18); he has to groom them to perfection (Ephesians 4:11-13, Ephesians 5:26-27, Acts 20:32); he is to resurrect and transform them (John 6:38-39, Matthew 24:30-31) and finally present them to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24, Matthew 10:32-33, Revelation 3:5).

Remember, Christ, when he arose, presented himself to the Father (John 20:17). He was “the firstborn from among the dead” (Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5), the “first fruits of resurrection” (1 Corinthians 15:23).

Similarly, he will present all his resurrected and transformed people to the Father after the Resurrection on the Last Day. That presentation can safely be called the grandest event of all time and has been portrayed in many ways in the bible.

1 Corinthians 15:23-26 calls that presentation the “delivering up of the kingdom” by Christ to God the Father. This should not be seen in terms of handing over of office or duties, but rather a formal presentation of a finished work, at which point the joyous declaration would be made that “behold the tabernacle of God is with men” (Revelation 21:3).

Romans 8:19, 23 say the presentation will be the final manifestation of the sons adopted into the divine family, at which occasion Christ, the Firstborn Son who had to bring more sons into the family, would present them to the Father and say: ‘Behold, I and the children thou hast given me (Hebrew 2:10-14), none of whom I have lost (John 6:39), but am now finally adopting them as the children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36) into our divine family of immortals’.

Revelation 19:6-9 and Revelation 21:2 portray it as the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, at which the adorned, glorified and perfected bride will be finally completely united with her Lord in everlasting oneness. She is seen radiating God’s glory because her members then have glorified spiritual bodies and God is tabernacled in her and displaying His attributes (Revelation 21:9-11).

The City is seen descending out of heaven from God because she is God’s workmanship (Ephesians 2:10; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 5:1) and had all along been hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3-4); God would then be displaying the end-product of his age-long project.

No longer saved souls sojourning in bodies of flesh and blood with all its limitations, but now perfected spirits with the glorified incorruptible spiritual bodies. God’s heritage. His Holy City – the final cluster of all his individual “houses”. His people. A ‘city’ of people, not

of structures. A spiritual 'city', not a materialistic worldly-type city. The heavenly Church of Christ the Firstborn. His everlasting Tabernacle. His Bride. His glorified saints. **THE NEW JERUSALEM IS THE COLLECTION OF THE PERFECTED SPIRITS OF ALL THE JUST MEN OF ALL THE AGES! (Each, of course, with glorified body).** These people are also called a kingdom (Revelation 5: 10, Revelation 1:6; 1 Corinthians 15:23 -26).

Will you belong there? Then you need to be among the redeemed and faithful (the bride of Christ) now, here, in your lifetime. (Revelation 21: 27)

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS
BE WITH YOU ALL. AMEN

Dear friend, if this book has been a blessing to you, then own a copy for reference; and, please, do the good work of helping your friends and others get copies of this liberating truth. May God bless you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, an erstwhile university lecturer in Mathematics and Statistics, has been a full-time gospel minister for the past two and a half decades, and is now a bishop in Mount Olive Church of Christ, Nigeria – a full-gospel evangelical and deliverance ministry. He is married to Maddie, a co-minister, and they have five children.

NOTE TO THE PUBLISHERS

The three illustrations are by the author. However, the publisher is free to reject them or use them or improve upon them.

The first one tries to portray people exhilarated by reception of good news. The greater the exhilaration portrayed the better. The people are not drawings or paintings but photographs so as to portray actuality. The words GOOD NEWS are deliberately brought down near the rejoicing people.

The second is, of course, obvious and portrays Christ picking up an abandoned baby to take home to be his.

The concept of the third is that of glorified hosts dressed in sparkling white robes and radiating great light among the clouds, descending.

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