

Christmas 2022

## *The Essential Messiah*

Any examination of God's covenants and His kingdom program must consider the pivotal place of Jesus Christ the Messiah in the Lord's redemptive purposes for mankind. To fully understand the role of the Messiah, one first needs a foundational understanding of the character of God and His reasons for the creation of humankind. The sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross was more than a catalyst for the redemption of man and the covering of human sins (although that is a heralded and significant aspect of His ministry). Scripture also reveals that Jesus Christ's birth as the Son of God and the Son of Man, His ministry, death, and resurrection will also be key components of God's victory in the spiritual warfare which began with the rebellion of Satan (Ezekiel 28:12-15). Through Christ, God will demonstrate with finality His dominion over all things of heaven and earth and His sovereign right to reign over the His kingdom. In fact, God has interceded to direct human history towards that ultimate victory and the redemption of His creation.

At this point, one might ask if would have been a simple matter for God to put down the rebellion of Satan at its onset or to discard the earth, heavens, and living things corrupted by the enemy and begin anew, giving His new image a heart resistant to Satan's influence? Was it even possible to create a realm of lesser beings who were truly beyond Satan's temptation

if the heavenly hosts themselves succumbed to the enemy's deceptions? God, by His nature, is holy, righteous, just, loving, gracious, forgiving, truthful, and merciful who reigns in wisdom, peace, freedom, and light---the antithesis of Satan. His kingdom is one of darkness, perpetuating corruption, rebellion, deception, self-indulgence, greed, idolatry, materialism, independence, anger, and hatred.

God's revelation of Himself reminds us of these truths: All things will happen according to God's plans and purposes (Isaiah 14:24). All things will work according to His perfect timing so we should be patient and wait on the Lord rather than fretting about the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 37:7). All God's ways are perfect (Psalm 18:30). The depth of His wisdom, as we see in the magnificent complexity of His creation, is beyond human comprehension (Isaiah 55:8-9). Most of all, we must be confident that God works all things to accomplish His purposes (Romans 8:28).

Fortunately, mankind has an eternal place in God's purposes and kingdom. He has planned a redeemed kingdom where we will become His people, and He will be our God. He will take delight in us as Scripture promises in Ezekiel 37:15-18, Jeremiah 32:41, and Deuteronomy 30:9. Though these passages are directed to the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, the book of Revelation assures us that it is God's ultimate intention to bring a multitude from all nations into His future kingdom to live in peace after the Messiah has put down all enemies, including Satan and his followers. The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant witness that God has plans to bless all nations through His special kingdom program for Israel.

Humankind does not possess God's limitless wisdom or the foreknowledge of all possible futures which God demonstrates as He intercedes in history. Therefore, we must submit to His authority and trust in His omniscience, knowing His plans for the defeat of Satan, the salvation of the saints, the redemption of His realm, and the establishment of the future eternal kingdom will proceed in God's perfect timing along His chosen path of a covenant history that culminates in the salvific ministry, sacrifice, resurrection, and second advent of the Messiah. God works all things for the good of those who love Him and who have been called to His service and salvation according to His purposes (Romans 8:28).

Because His nature is that of holiness, truth, righteousness, and justice, God cannot permanently abide or be in the presence of wickedness, much tolerate the pollution of sin in His kingdom. Biblical history recounts a cycle of kingdom corruption. Each time God has set in place a theocratic kingdom meant to reflect His glory and model His holiness as a light to the world, the interference of Satan has brought all things into rebellion against God's sovereign authority, including mankind, who was created to be God's image on earth and divinely appointed viceroys. The first rebellion of man took place in the Garden of Eden. The final rebellion will take place at the end of the future Millennial Kingdom.

Regardless of the epoch, it is God's right to rule over His realm and His creation. Why? The first reason is that God is the creator of the heavens, earth, and all things including nature, birds, animals, man, angels, cherubim, seraphim, and even the contentious and vain Lucifer, who became Satan. As Jeremiah 18 reminds us, it is the potter alone who has the right to destroy an imperfect clay vessel or preserve the piece that satisfies him. As Creator,

the Lord has the discernment to know that which is harmful to His creation and that which is pleasing and good for His kingdom and subjects. It is God's right to intervene for the preservation and protection of His creation or bring judgement upon that which is poisonous and destructive. His theocratic administrators are likewise responsible to guard the kingdom from such corruption.

Scripture tells us some viceroys (such as Abraham, the judges of Israel, and King David) would faithfully fulfill their responsibilities while others would backslide into sin and fall short (including Adam and various Davidic heirs). Corruption infused mankind and spread to the animals and the earth itself when Eve first ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil at Satan's behest. Adam failed to protect Eve as her husband and failed in God's delegated authority to protect His creation (Genesis 1-3).

God would next place mankind, now infused with Satan's wickedness and rebelliousness, under the authority of the law of conscience. He put the understanding of right from wrong onto the hearts of men and made their consciences to be their accusers and guides. Nevertheless, Satan's sinfulness still undermined God's kingdom purposes. Cain, for example, might have been the successor of his father, Adam, as theocratic administrator, but God knew Cain's heart was dangerously beset with anger and jealousy against his brother, Abel. Cain would not submit to God's rebuke of his wickedness or to the law of his own conscience. Instead, he submitted to evil and murdered Abel (Genesis 4:7-8). When God gave Eve a third son, Seth, to replace Abel and succeed Adam in authority, but the pervasive kingdom of Satan still wielded influence over God's people. Seth's descendants (the Sons of God) intermarried with the "daughters of men",

who were Cain's rebellious off-spring, enticing them to sinful ways. The ways of men deteriorated into corruption so that God declared their every thought and action to be wicked (Genesis 6:4-6). This time, however, God would exercise His sovereign right to bring judgement upon His creation. Once again, it was within God's power to wipe all men, and with them the kingdom of Satan, from the earth and begin anew with a perfect image in an uncorrupted environment. Indeed, He very nearly did destroy all life when he set the great flood upon the world—except that His kingdom purposes and the Adamic covenant He had proclaimed (which will be examined later) required His mercy. One man had found favor in God's eyes. In His grace and love for man, God relented and preserved Noah and His family along with a pair of every animal and bird in creation, from the floodwaters (Genesis 7-8).

Despite this new beginning under the theocratic administration of Noah, it was not long before the kingdom of Satan once again insinuated itself into the domain of God. This time, Noah's son, Ham, was the catalyst for Satan's return to power. Though there is theological debate on what it means for Ham to have "seen his father's nakedness", we will allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and assume a literal meaning. Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan, to servitude (Genesis 9:25).

From this start, God would set a human government in place to attempt to curb mankind's sin and lawlessness, yet their wicked ways would continue. Scripture recounts that Canaan would become the progenitor of the pagan Canaanite tribe, who would later become the enemies of God's chosen nation, Israel. Canaan's son, Nimrod, would be the founder of the cities of Babylon and Nineveh. Babylon would become the seat of Satan's

corruption. There, men were like Satan in their desire for independence from the Lord and to be as gods themselves. They would build the Tower of Babel to reach heaven, but God would put down their rebellion, again showing mercy according to His kingdom purposes by confounding their languages and scattering them across the land to multiple rather than seeking their deaths (Genesis 11:1-9).

Centuries later, God would set a new theocracy on earth, a kingdom pivotal to His redemptive plans for mankind. It would begin when God made a covenant with a man named Abraham, whom God counted righteous because of his faithfulness and obedience to the Sovereign Lord. This would be an unconditional, eternal covenant; its terms and promises would be filled by God alone and therefore would not be dependent upon predictably fallible humankind. By the covenant, God granted Abraham descendants too numerous to mention. He set aside land for these heirs (later driving out the Canaanites who had appropriated this promised land for themselves). When He gathered this multitude of descendants in the promised land generations later, God provided them with a written law and ordinances to guide their daily living and their personal and communal worship of the one true Lord. For the first time since walking with Adam and Eve in the garden, God would dwell among His created people.

This nation of Israel would have a significant role in God's plans for the restoration of all things of the world from sinfulness and rebellion as well as factor into the advent of the first advent of the Messiah. They would be governed as a theocracy, with God as their King. He delegated authority first by raising up judges and later through kings. Still, God's chosen nation was not immune to the indwelling of sin, and their fallen nature left them

vulnerable to the temptations of the surrounding pagan nations under Satan's influence. These Gentile nations would repeatedly entice the Israelites to idolatry and apostasy in the form of the worship of false gods and wooden idols. Sin would seep into the theocratic administration and judges appointed by men grew so corrupt that Israel rejected their authority and asked God for a king "such as the other nations have" (1 Samuel 8-10).

Whether they were under the reign of judges or kings, Israel remained always under God's ultimate authority. Despite His sovereignty as their God, no admonishments from the succession of God's prophets who were His messengers, would call Israel into repentance from their idolatry back into obedience to the Law of the Mosaic and Palestinian covenants. None of God's acts of divine judgement in form of brutal invasions and oppression by the Gentile nations, illnesses, or famine, could call the Israelites back into subjection to their rightful Sovereign. Most of the royal descendants of God's divinely appointed king David (whom God called a man after His own heart in 1 Samuel 13:14) could not live up to their patriarch's righteousness and devotion to the Lord, not even after the Lord had reduced their sphere of authority to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah in a nation named for the latter tribe separated from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Human appointed kings now took authority in Israel while God remained sovereign over Judah and preserved His Davidic kings. The prophets warned both nations of God's wrath and impending judgement upon both realms, but neither rebellious nation would repent and return to obedience and subjection to God. Eventually, God punished both nations, handing Israel over to exile and bondage in Assyria (740 BC) and allowing Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to seize the population of Judah in a series of invasions that culminated with

the destruction of Jerusalem and God's temple with it (586 BC). God's people would remain in bondage in Babylon for seventy years, yet His mercy still preserved a remnant.

Through this era of rebelliousness and divine judgement, the prophets would also speak hope to Israel as they prophesized the coming Messiah.

Theocratic administration would now shift to a succession of Gentile empires, though God still orchestrated their rule over His people. This epoch, known as the "times of the Gentiles" would remain in effect from the time of the exile to the future second advent of Christ the Messiah. One example is God moving the hearts of King Cyrus and Darius the Great, King Ahasuerus and King Artaxerxes in Babylon so that they would allow the remnant of Judah to return to Jerusalem and begin reconstruction of the nation (Ezra 1:1-10:14 and Ezra 4). God had previously demonstrated His authority was not limited to His people or His promised land when He hardened the heart of Pharaoh against Moses in Exodus 9:12. God's people, however, were soon to enter an extended time of God's silence. From the last written words of His prophet Malachi, four hundred years would elapse, ending with the long-awaited first advent of the Messiah.

These were the workings of the kingdom of Satan, the cycle of sin, divine discipline, repentance, and disobedience that the Messiah would bring to an end. His would be the God-given authority to end the kingdom of darkness and bring mankind permanently into redemption, justification, salvation, and right relationship with God that those who believed could experience eternal fellowship with Him and a place in the perfected eternal kingdom.



To understand how the Messiah would make this possible, there are more questions that need to be answered: Who was Jesus Christ? How can believers be certain that He is, indeed, the Messiah sent by God? How will God's Messiah save mankind from their sins? How would He overthrow Satan's kingdom according to God's redemptive plans? Scripture clearly states that God's kingdom purposes would be accomplished by the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah. Why was Jesus that perfect sacrifice?

We must return to three truths rooted in Scripture. The first is that God is holy, righteous, and without sin. His ways are just, and His nature is gracious and merciful. The second is that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) because sin is essentially rebellion against God's perfect authority and law. Sin separates mankind from God because, again, He is holy and righteous. The immediate result of sin is that it leaves us spiritually dead, separated from God's grace and light. Sin brings suffering that comes from guilt, hopelessness, anger, brokenness of heart, absence of true purpose, confusion, and disconnection from God, creation, and fellowship with the body of believers. We are as boats cast adrift without destination or purpose. We are without hope for a future beyond death. The third truth is that sin that is left unrepented and fellowship with God that is left unrestored will, after our physical deaths, leave us permanently separated from His eternal glory and irreversibly close the door to His kingdom for us. Once a man passes from this life, it is too late to repent and be restored to God and His enduring love.

One could speculate, based on Scriptural understanding of God's merciful nature, that He relented from putting down Satan's rebellion so that mankind could experience and understand the true suffering and

consequences of sin (whether personally or through the study of these unrepenting biblical generations). God allows the revelation of evil that man may know its cost and choose life instead. The Scriptures present a warning, a glimpse of the conclusion of the spiritual warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan and confirms the eventual blessings for those who are saved through the Messiah and the eternal sufferings awaiting the unfaithful who will be eternally separated from God's kingdom (Revelation 20:11-15).

The Messiah's purpose is to be the Intercessor between mankind and the Lord, an advocate who will plead on man's behalf before God that man's sins will be permanently forgiven. This forgiveness is only possible because the Messiah has already paid the death penalty for the sins of all mankind who believe in Him. Christ the Son's physical death on the cross and His time in Sheol, where He was briefly tormented with the pain of spiritual death and separation from God the Father. His resurrection from the dead verifies that God alone had power over life the believer who, through genuine repentance, prayer, turning from sin, seeking God's presence, and believing in the Messiah whom God has sent, claims the Messiah's sacrifice as his or her own.

In examining more closely the cycle of sin and the succession of theocratic administrations set in place by God and His covenants with mankind, one can discern that God (in His omniscience) was carefully laying the foundation for Christ to become that perfect sacrifice for sin.

God had requirements for this perfect sacrifice. His Word established these prerequisites; His law and the messages of His prophets

foreshadowed the Messiah's sacrifice and provided signs by which His identity could be confirmed at His advent. Why? So that the faithful and the unbelievers alike would look to the Scriptures and know that Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, and there are at least 365 biblical prophecies about the Messiah which were fulfilled by Christ, with more prophecies of the biblical covenants and the book of Revelation which He shall complete in the future at His second advent. In confirming the arrival of the promised Messiah, believers can be confident anew that God is who He says He is and, as biblical history attests, that God will do all that He says He will do, be it blessing, discipline, judgement, or damnation (Hebrews 9:27-28).

The Law of Moses, found in the Mosaic Covenant and Palestinian Covenant that God presented to Israel, includes a prescribed system of personal and communal sacrifices by which His people's sins were temporarily covered (atonement). There were burnt offerings to express devotion to God. Grain offerings of the fruits of the field were given in thanksgiving and for God's provision (accompanied by a drink offering of wine). Peace offerings of animals, grains, and bread were also offerings of thanksgiving and fellowship with God. Pieces of these sacrifices were waved or lifted above the altar during the ceremony so the fat portions were burnt that the aroma would please God, and the remained was consumed by the participants to acknowledge God's provision. There was also mandatory sin offerings and trespass offerings of specific "clean", unblemished animals and birds.

The first animal sacrificed on behalf of man is documented in the book of Genesis. God killed an unspecified number of animals to provide skins,

which covered Adam and Eve's nakedness and shame. This foreshadowed the Mosaic systems of sacrifices in Israel when animals would again "cover" sinful man. The blood of the animal or bird briefly paid the death penalty required for one's sins. By confession and laying hands to transfer one's sins onto the animal, God accepted that animal as substitute for the man or woman's death. Blood was considered the life of any creature, which is why God forbade man not to consume animal blood (Leviticus 17:14; Genesis 9:4). However, these sacrifices of animals and birds provided only temporary covering of man's sins.

One reason that these atonements were temporary was that no sinner could atone for another sinner (and though some priests such as the Pharisees considered themselves to be free of sin by virtue of their divinely appointed ministry, the priests of Israel were, in fact, sinners). The death of an animal could not truly be the equivalent of the blood of a man, whom God considered much more valuable (Genesis 1:26-28, Matthew 10:29-31). Permanent forgiveness for the sins of men required the blood of Christ the Messiah.

Jesus came as the Son of Man, made flesh like us so that the blood of a man could perfectly atone for the blood of men. The crucial difference is that Jesus was without sin (Hebrews 10:1-5). Though He lived as man and was subjected to the same temptations, oppressions, and brutality from the kingdom of Satan, Christ did not yield to sin. He walked in man's sorrows and shared in our joys, griefs, and pain, but He did not yield to sin. He was obedient to all aspects of God's Law and to the Father Himself. Being without sin, Jesus was blameless before God, a "clean" sacrifice, an

“unblemished lamb” whose blood would permanently atone for the sins of men.

Christ the Messiah was also the perfect sacrifice was that He came as the Son of God. The Lord is a triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and He is without sin. As the Son of God, Christ was High Priest, the only priest without sin and therefore the only priest who could offer a sacrifice of permanent atonement (Hebrews 10:12). As the divine Son, Christ now intercedes on mankind's behalf from the throne next to His Father. Jesus' blood of life was given for us that we may have hope of eternal life rather than the hopelessness of sin (Romans 6:23). When one receives Jesus's sacrifice in repentance and faith, he is justified before God, which means he is declared free of guilt and the penalty of death for his sins).

With an understanding of the Messiah as the perfect sacrifice, one can survey the covenant history of the Old Testament and better understand God's long-suffering in delaying punishment for man's rebellion and casting down the kingdom of Satan in final defeat. Though it seemed that Satan was thwarting God's efforts to establish a perfect kingdom, each successive theocratic administration and every covenant with man established a historical line leading to the Messiah and set the precedents for redemption that He would fulfill. These covenants and God's redemptive program continue to this day to direct history towards the eschatological time when Christ will end Satan's rebellion and open the eternal kingdom of God to mankind.

The Adamic Covenant marked the first stage of God's revelation of the Messiah and establishment of His line. After the serpent deceived Eve into

eating of the forbidden tree, the Lord made this pronouncement: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman (Eve), and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The offspring of Eve would be the Messiah; the serpent was Satan in disguise. Crushing “Satan’s head”, then, refers to Christ’s eschatological victory over Satan as depicted in the book of Revelation (as well as hinting that Christ would defeat sin, the poison that comes from the mouth of Satan the serpent). Christ’s victory will come at the price of suffering, indicated by the serpent striking His heel. This passage also reveals the necessity of God preserving descendants of Eve (thus His preservation of her favored descendant Noah from the great flood). The Messiah would descend from Eve, therefore man must not be completely annihilated until the appointed hour of Satan’s fall. For God to have started creation anew at any point in history would mean that the Messiah would not descend from Eve and nullified God’s Word. God’s Word is eternal; what He speaks will come to pass (Psalm 119:89).

The Noahic Covenant demonstrates God’s grace and mercy, and indicates that He will elect people who will be saved from His wrath, both in these floodwaters and in the Day of Lord when the time comes that Christ will judge the righteous from the wicked. Again, God is also preserving descendants of Eve, including the promised Messiah. This covenant also contains God’s admonishment that blood is life and must not be consumed.

In the Abrahamic Covenant, Abraham is promised a countless numbers of descendants, including kings, and that God would make a nation of his offspring and provide land for that kingdom nation. The Messiah would prove to be one of those kings. God’s covenant includes a son through

Abraham's wife, Sarah, who would be progenitor of this future nation of descendants. This son was Isaac. His son was Jacob, the one given the blessing of the firstborn. He would be the father of twelve sons who, in turn, were the patriarchs of the tribes of the promised nation of Israel. Jacob would prophesize that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" (Genesis 49:10). The Messiah is this prophesized ruler. In this covenant, God outlines His kingdom purposes for mankind. God is repeatedly referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, indicating this is the specific lineage of the Messiah (and then from the tribe of Judah). Hebrews 11:8 states that Abraham by faith obeyed God. He was counted righteous for believing God's promises (Galatians 2:6) This foreshadows faith and obedience like Abraham's as prerequisites to enter the eternal kingdom of God.

The Messiah is also foreshadowed in Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek. Melchizedek was the pagan king of Salem (which would become the city of Jerusalem in Israel) and High Priest of the Lord centuries before God established an order of priesthood in Israel. In Psalm 110:4, Christ is declared a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Like Melchizedek, Jesus would be both a King and a Priest. Hebrews 7:11-12 indicated that the Levitical priests who would serve in Israel could not help the people attain the perfection required of God. A priest of a better, eternal priesthood was required to save man from their sins. The Messiah's priesthood would be eternal.

The Mosaic and Palestine Covenants established Abraham's descendants as the nation of Israel. The mere fact that God had redeemed

them from bondage in Egypt through His omnipotence over man and nature foreshadowed how the Messiah would one day lead all people out of bondage to sin and wickedness and the kingdom of Satan. There were set apart to be priests and servants to God and to model the holiness of His ways so that Gentile nations would be drawn to the Lord and be saved. This is further revelation of God's kingdom purposes. In giving His people the Law, God is revealing a hidden truth: Man has need of a Messiah to save us if for no other reason than no man could fulfill the law apart from God. As previously noted, this law established the system of sacrifices for sin; the Messiah would be the final sacrifice required by God's law as ultimate atonement for man's sins. The Law prescribes the daily life of God's people in personal and national, civic and secular spheres. The requirements herein foreshadow daily living in the eschatological millennial kingdom.

It was previously noted that Israel's demand for a king was superficially rebellion against God's authority and a victory for Satan. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God had already promised that kings would be among Abraham's descendants. He is omniscient to know the hearts of His people long before they are born into the world. In the Davidic Covenant, this promised line of kings and the throne of Israel is finally established according to God's purposes, not Satan's. David, the descendant of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, is God's anointed king. God promises to make a house for David and that, as long as there is a throne in Israel it will be his descendants on that throne.

It is important to note that the exile of Judah and Israel and subsequent theological administration of the Gentiles would cause an interruption in the royal governance of Israel, but that does not mean God's covenant with



David has been nullified or His kingdom purposes abandoned. The Davidic covenant is God's promise that David's descendant will be Ruler of all that governs how man shall live and would save man from sin and judgement because of those sins. The exile of the Hebrew people into the pagan nations was not God's judgement but His discipline of His people, as He promised through His prophets that they would be regathered to the land of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Messiah would arrive and take His place on the Davidic throne. He would establish the Millennial Kingdom, which He would rule from that throne. This was the kingdom which God covenanted with Israel. It would precede the eternal kingdom of God.

Moses alluded to the New Covenant in one of his final addresses to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. The New Covenant would be a time when God gave men hearts to understand and eyes and ears to see and hear. "The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love Him with all your heart and with all your soul and live" (Deuteronomy 10:6-8). Jeremiah prophesied the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-33) as a time when God would put His law on people's minds and hearts. Ezekiel 36:26-27 promises that God will also put a new Spirit in men that will move them to obey God's decrees and follow His law. The covenant promises Israel blessings, fruitfulness, and peace in their own promised land (Ezekiel 36:28-30). The Law and the Old Covenants had fulfilled their purposes; a better covenant was in place (Hebrews 7:22) based on the perfect sacrifice of Christ and the salvation through faith in His blood, death, and resurrection.

The first advent of the Messiah had afforded Israel the opportunity to have their covenant kingdom under Jesus. The genealogy of Christ linked

Him to King David, both through His mother, Mary, and his stepfather, Joseph (Matthew 1). In fact, the lineage of Jesus could be traced back through David, Judah, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, and Seth to Eve (as God prophesied). This proved Christ's right to the Davidic throne in terms that the priests of Israel could not dispute. At the baptism of Jesus, God had personally attested to Jesus as His Son, the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him to further verify Jesus' identity (Matthew 3:13-17). From that time, both John the Baptist and Jesus preached repentance because the covenant kingdom was at hand. The miracles of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit further validated His God given authority over all things of heaven, earth, and over the kingdom of Satan.

Yet, the kingdom of Satan still wielded power over men's heart. In particular, the Pharisees' hearts were hardened against the ministry of Jesus and His identity as the Son of God, the Messiah. They cited one particular miracle of the Holy Spirit—Jesus' casting out demons from a possessed man—to dispute Jesus' claims, attributing the work to the power of Satan. This was a sin Jesus called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, a sin for which there was no forgiveness. God had witnessed Christ's identity as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had witnessed Christ's identity as the Messiah. Jesus had identified Himself as the Messiah (Luke 4:17-31). If Pharisees still would not believe, and there would be no remaining witnesses after the Trinity and no chance for the blasphemers to come to redemptive faith. Worse, that generation of Israel followed the Pharisees as sheep in condemning Jesus to death and rejecting His identity as the Messiah. From that moment of rejection, the onset of the covenant kingdom was postponed until the second advent of Christ. The message of Jesus and His apostles

no longer promised that the kingdom was at hand, but rather a message of repentance and salvific faith in the Messiah who saves men from their sins by His perfect sacrifice on the cross. With the death of Jesus on the cross and His burial, that generation of Israel fell under divine judgement (sharing as a nation the sin of its leaders the Pharisees in blaspheming the Holy Spirit), which would come in AD 70, when Titus the Roman destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.

Yet, God's covenants were still at work fulfilling His kingdom purposes. With the covenant kingdom of Israel delayed, the nation would still remain under the theocratic authority of the Gentiles in civil and religious settings (with political leaders and priests in authority over their respective areas) as well as the household and the work place. However, the door of salvation had been opened to the Gentile nations through the Son of David of Israel. Jesus' atoning death made possible the redemption of the faithful outside of Israel, who could repent of their sins, believe on the Messiah, and seek wholeheartedly after the Lord. By their faith, they would be adopted as "descendants" of Abraham and the door to the millennial and eternal kingdoms of God was open to them. This was verified to the Apostle Peter when God said: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean". In a special revelation, Christ appointed Saul (who became Paul) as an Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-22), who helped establish the Church of Christ, which carries the gospel message of salvation to this day. Israel had become a blessing to all nations, as God promised Abraham by the sacrifice and ministry of the Davidic King.

The final victory of Christ over Satan and the arrival of the promised Millennial and eternal kingdoms are prophesied in the book of Revelation. At

this time, God's kingdom program and His covenant program will be completed in Christ. Revelation prophesies a Tribulation period during which Satan's kingdom will briefly be established on earth. He will send a false messiah revealed only as "the beast" who will rise to international power. He will create a one-world government, economy, and religion not by military might but rather by peaceful consensus of the people. Coinciding with His rise to power will be a second deceiver called the false prophet, who be empowered by Satan to perform false miracles meant to lure people of all religions into worshipping the beast as a false god. The beast will eventually make Jerusalem his temporary seat of world power.

Under the reign of the beast, persecution of Israel will reach unprecedented brutality. Satan will seek the death of every descendant of Abraham to prevent the advent of the Millennial Kingdom. Gentiles will shelter the remnant of Israel during the rampage. God will send Israelites to preach the last chance for redemption among Gentiles and Hebrews alike, turning many hearts to Christ for salvation. God will also intervene for Israel, bringing the seven-year Tribulation to an abrupt end with the second coming of the Messiah. This will mark the last stand of the kingdom of darkness and the culmination of God's promises for mankind's redemption from sin, Israel's return to the promised land for the reign of peace, and Christ's ascension to the throne of David. Christ will bring the righteous from the living and the resurrected saints and martyrs from among all nations into the Millennial Kingdom. He will bind Satan in Sheol for one thousand years and cast his deceptive beast and the false prophet into a lake of fire. At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, Satan will lead one last rebellion. Some from the Millennial Kingdom will join him and perish when God destroys Satan's

kingdom and casts him, his followers, and the resurrected wicked into the lake of fire, the final victory of a war that began before creation. God will have fulfilled His redemptive plan according to His timetable.

With Scripture witnessing how God has worked the flow of history according to His timetable and plans and seeing His plans for the future of His kingdoms should call us to remember to keep our hearts and minds set on the Lord, to be persistent in our confession and prayer, and to fulfill our call as Christians to spread His gospel of salvation. As the parables teach, we do not know the appointed hour of the return of our Messiah, who is unquestionably Christ the Lord. Happily, we can be confident in the promises He had made for our redemption and forgiveness and the eternal kingdom awaiting us.

For one more word of hope, let's look to the encouragement Jesus provided His Apostles before the Ascension: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20)

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