

Paul preached the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God (also called the kingdom of heaven) is the realm, visible or invisible, temporal or eternal, where his will is done, and love, holiness, truth, light, peace, joy and righteousness reign.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18 AV)

- One day there will be a kingdom of God on earth. It will be visible and therefore temporal and will "cometh with observation". All the tribes of the earth shall mourn when they see the King coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30). The King will rule with a rod of iron from 'Jerusalem which is below' for a thousand years. Most of the earth's population will still prefer the devil's rule after he is loosed at the end of the thousand years. Then the visible, temporal heaven and earth will be destroyed and a new earth and heaven will be created. The earthly kingdom saints who remained loyal to the King will join him and the heavenly saints in this new earth and heaven.
- There is an invisible, eternal kingdom of God in the eternal third heaven, above all heavens. It is not in the visible heaven, which is temporal, and so "cometh not with observation" (Luke 17:20). The centre of this kingdom is 'Jerusalem which is above'. It is inhabited by beings with eternal, celestial bodies – angels and resurrected saints. A foretaste of it is experienced by the saved who are sealed into inheriting it with the Holy Spirit. The saints of this heavenly kingdom will be joined by the earthly kingdom saints in the new earth and heaven after the present earth and heaven are destroyed.

Now I ask you -
which of these two kingdoms is the more worthy of proclamation?

I should point out that I have not changed sides regarding mid-Acts dispensationalism. I am extremely grateful that I was able to believe and be saved because of certain truths that only became clear to me in the light of mid-Acts dispensationalism. But I have since come to see that in our enthusiasm to sever our apostle's gospel of the uncircumcision from the twelve's gospel of the circumcision, we have sometimes imposed differences onto the scriptures that, though convenient, are false. You will find challenges to some of these sacred cows of mid-Acts dispensationalism throughout my writing.

The good news of God's grace

Since researching the article "What was this gospel of the kingdom?" in March 2011, I have gained a better understanding of the relationship between the 'gospel of the kingdom' preached during the Lord's earthly ministry and Paul's 'gospel of grace' preached in his current mystery program. Paul's later gospel of grace should not be CONTRASTED with the earlier gospel of the kingdom because Paul also preached the kingdom of God.

"And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." (Acts 20:25 AV)

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." (Acts 28:30-31 AV)

Until John the Baptist were the law and the prophets. Since that time the kingdom of God is preached. And it is still preached today.

"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God," (Mark 1:14 AV)

"The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." (Luke 16:16 AV)

Gospel means good NEWS. The kingdom of God was not NEWS by the time Paul came along. It had been preached since John the Baptist first started preaching. It was the GRACE of God that was the good NEWS given to Paul to proclaim. The two gospels are COMPLEMENTARY. The earlier GOOD NEWS of God's kingdom proclaims that God has a kingdom in heaven and that it had "come nigh unto them (Luke 10:9)". The later GOOD NEWS of God's grace proclaims that by his sacrificial death, Jesus has made God's kingdom in heaven accessible to sinners like me who have been "made righteous (Romans 5:19)" by his obedience.

My purpose in this study is to show that the Lord's revelation of the mystery to Paul did not inhibit him from preaching the kingdom of God. He was given the revelation that one cannot enter the kingdom of God by the works of the law. To Paul it was revealed that it is by grace through faith that we are saved. We are in Christ: washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Thus washed by his blood we are able to inherit the kingdom of God.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 AV)

Immediately after the above words, Paul went on to say;

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Corinthians 6:12 AV)

Paul chose the word 'expedient' in the context of 'inheriting the kingdom of God', thus indicating that our reason for not being fornicators is not because it is unlawful, but because such behavior will stop or hinder our inheriting the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is still that which we seek first.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33 AV)

So we avoid sin, not because it is unlawful but because it is expedient to do so. If we continue to sin we are again brought under the power of sin.

"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34 AV)

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Romans 6:16 AV)

Which kingdom of God are we to seek first?

Is Paul talking only about the kingdom of God of Romans 14:17, presently experienced subjectively by believers, i.e. walking in spiritual light while still earthbound? (Stage 1 below)

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17 AV)

It would seem not. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 15:50 he is obviously speaking of a kingdom that he and the Corinthian church had not yet inherited, a kingdom that cannot be inherited by flesh and blood. The kingdom Paul was most concerned about was the kingdom inherited by those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead. (Stage 2 below)

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Corinthians 15:50 AV)

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:11-12 AV)

The kingdom of God that we should seek first, above all other considerations, is the kingdom inherited by those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14 AV)

To inherit this kingdom we will need to become 100% spiritual beings, with bodies that are not flesh and blood, but celestial bodies like those of the angels.

"But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more:

for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:35-36 AV)

"*There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.*" (1 Corinthians 15:40 AV)

"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:44 AV)

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Corinthians 15:50 AV)

The kingdom of heaven vs. the kingdom of God

You have probably heard the widely held idea among mid-Acts dispensationalists that the term 'kingdom of heaven' can only be applied to Israel's restored physical kingdom (stage 3 below) and that the term 'kingdom of God' has a broader meaning and can be applied to all the stages of the kingdom described below (stages 1 to 4 below). The obvious and uncomfortable truth is that this limited meaning for the term 'kingdom of heaven' did not come from the word of God but from the notes of a Bible scholar conveniently located within his version of the Bible. It has been slipped into the Bible from outside. Those propagating this view are hostile and uncommunicative toward any who dare to challenge its validity - a very strong clue that they have confused the words of the scholar with the word of God.

It is my understanding that the term 'kingdom of heaven' is synonymous with the term 'kingdom of God'. Wherever God is, there is heaven also. You cannot separate heaven from God. When God visits earth, wherever he is becomes holy ground (Exodus 3:5). When Jesus walked the earth the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 10:7). That the kingdom of heaven was at hand when Jesus walked the earth DOES NOT MEAN that Israel's millennial kingdom in particular was at hand. This is the error that the limited meaning applied to the term 'kingdom of heaven' has brought about. The kingdom of heaven was at hand simply because the Son of God was here. Wherever the Son of God walked - there heaven was also.

The scripture below shows that the Lord used both terms to describe the same thing. Therefore we mere humans should not try and force different meanings onto them.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."
(Matthew 19:23-24 AV)

I am extremely relieved that the above scripture exists. It is as though it was included to dispel any attempts to place different meanings on the two terms by those who love to corrupt simplicity with esoteric drivel. The Lord repeated the startling declaration - "and AGAIN I say unto you". In his first declaration he used the term kingdom of heaven and by his grace he used the term kingdom of God the second time around (with the added picture of a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle to emphasise just how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God/heaven).

I understand that God and heaven are different words and no doubt this is why some have seen fit to force different meanings onto the terms. But the most important word in both terms is KINGDOM. A kingdom is a REALM ruled by a king. So whatever name you call it by you are always referring to the realm. For a time the kingdom of King James I referred to a realm which comprised only of Scotland. During that time the terms 'kingdom of King James' and 'kingdom of Scotland' referred to exactly the same realm. His kingdom was later expanded to include England and Ireland and so the term 'kingdom of King James' became synonymous with the term 'kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland'.

In a similar way the kingdom of God/heaven is presently limited to a portion of heaven and a portion of the people on earth. Believers on earth are 'seated in heavenly places' with Christ in God (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:3). In the near future God's kingdom will be expanded to include ALL of heaven (when Satan and his angels are expelled) and ALL of earth (when the earth is cleansed of all the enemies of God). Then the terms 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven' will refer to the expanded realm of all of heaven and earth.

The kingdom of his dear Son

When King James died in 1625, his dear son Charles became king of Great Britain and Ireland. So for a time the KINGDOM of Great Britain and Ireland could also have been called 'the KINGDOM of his (James) dear son'.

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Colossians 1:12-13 AV)

Obviously the Lord's Father has not died for it is he that translated us into his Son's kingdom. God the Father is alive and well and greater than the Son

"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I." (John 14:28 AV)

But the kingdom of God or heaven cannot now be entered except by the Son, for he was manifest in the flesh and then raised above all heavens and seated at the right hand of the Father and become the sole mediator between God and men. All things have been put under the Son's feet, except he that put them there, the Father. All things are under the Son's feet but not all things are yet subdued unto him.

"For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:27-28 AV)

"He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" (Ephesians 4:10 AV)

"And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church," (Ephesians 1:22 AV)

"For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" (1 Timothy 2:5 AV)

This is why we now must go via the Son if we want to come to the Father. The Father is reconciling all things in heaven and earth unto himself, *BY THE SON*. All things are in God but not all things are currently reconciled to God, except those that are reconciled by the death of his Son and saved by the life of his Son – those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6 AV)

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:8-10 AV)

"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Corinthians 15:25 AV)

"And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21 AV)

"For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:19-20 AV)

Believers are *IN* the Father and *IN* the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians **which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ**: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 1:1 AV)

How are we *IN* the Lord Jesus Christ? The word declares that we are literally members of HIS BODY, of HIS FLESH, and of HIS BONES;

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." (Ephesians 5:30 AV)

and that we have the MIND OF CHRIST. It is by this mind of Christ that we increasingly experience life as he experienced it when on earth – both the suffering and the glory.

"But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." (1 Corinthians 6:17 AV)

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? **But we have the mind of Christ.**" (1 Corinthians 2:14-16 AV)

It is by this mind joined to the Spirit of Christ, that we are translated into the kingdom of his dear Son. The Spirit is a QUICKENING Spirit so the kingdom of his dear Son could also be described as a realm of quickened experience or consciousness. Even our mortal brains are quickened.

"For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them*; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will." (John 5:21 AV)

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Romans 8:11 AV)

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit." (1 Corinthians 15:45 AV)

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," (Galatians 4:19 AV)

To be seated in heavenly places is more than a positional truth. It is an EXPERIENTIAL truth. We are seated in a higher consciousness – Christ consciousness.

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2 AV)

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:" (Ephesians 1:3 AV)

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 2:6 AV)

All men are in God the Father but not all men have the Spirit of Christ. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ are 'without' the church the body of Christ but are still in God and will be judged by God.

"That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:27-28 AV)

"But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." (1 Corinthians 5:13 AV)

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9 AV)

Believing in God the Father, while remaining ashamed of his beloved Son, just will not do.

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33 AV)

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26 AV)

Does the church, the body of Christ, have a king?

It is said by some mid-Acts dispensationalists that the church, the body of Christ, has no king. They say that kingdom terminology is only relevant for Israel, not the church. The Lord is the HEAD of the body, not the king.

This is a tricky issue. Paul declared that we have been translated into the KINGDOM of his dear Son. A kingdom requires a king. Did Paul say this early on in his ministry? Is this, like water baptism and tongues-speaking, only a part of his early ministry, prior to the setting aside of Israel and the full maturity of his doctrine in his later prison epistles? Once again I am relieved that scripture comes to my rescue. Paul made this declaration in one of his later prison epistles – his letter to the Colossians.

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Colossians 1:13 AV)

Note that Paul is also still using the synonymous term 'kingdom of God' in this later prison epistle.

"And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me." (Colossians 4:11 AV)

And here again, in another prison epistle, Paul refers to the kingdom of Christ AND of God – i.e. it is also the kingdom of God.

"For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5 AV)

Paul declared us delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the KINGDOM of Christ. In the context it is clear that this is the kingdom of light and truth.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21 AV)

So we are translated into the kingdom of Christ. Is this the same thing as the body of Christ? Is the church the kingdom of Christ? Some teach this, but though the kingdom of Christ includes the church, the body of Christ, the terms are not identical in meaning. In this present age the Spirit of the King is sent to indwell all who believe on the King. Our spirits are 'married' to the Spirit of the King of the kingdom.

"What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. **But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.**" (1 Corinthians 6:16-17 AV)

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but **I speak concerning Christ and the church.**" (Ephesians 5:31-32 AV)

We are also one flesh with the Lord - our bodies have become his bodies; though with all of the bad habits that I still cling to, the Lord must find my body a hard place to dwell at times.

"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh." (1 Corinthians 6:15-16 AV)

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 AV)

The church, the body of Christ, is within the kingdom of Christ and has a special relationship with the King, but Christ's kingdom extends to "all things", for by him all things were created and by him all things consist. - he is upholding ALL THINGS by the word of his power.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. **All things were made by him;** and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3 AV)

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For **by him were all things created**, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and **by him all**

things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." (Colossians 1:13-18 AV)

"Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and **upholding all things by the word of his power**, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;" (Hebrews 1:3 AV)

It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. Only the Father is not under the Son's feet.

"For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that *God* may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:27-28 AV)

"For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:19-20 AV)

The Lord informed Pilate that 'but now' is his kingdom not from hence. Pilate inquired further "Art thou a king then?" (i.e. king of somewhere other than "from hence"). The Lord further explained that his kingship was not according to the worldly norm. He came to bear witness to the truth and every one that is of the truth hears (and hopefully obeys).

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." (John 18:36-37 AV)

"And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of *God*, and do it." (Luke 8:21 AV)

We are indwelt by the Spirit of the King of truth, the Spirit of truth, who will guide us into all truth.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (John 16:13 AV)

The King of truth was not welcome in a world run by the king of LIES. The whole fabric of human society since the fall has increasingly become a fabric of lies, propaganda and political correctness.

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in

him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44 AV)

The Lord had explained to his disciples that the Gentiles idea of kingship was not appropriate for the kingdom of God.

"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28 AV)

So the Lord is the King of light and truth in this present age but our relationship with the King is not that of his grovelling subjects, as in a typical Gentile kingdom.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." (John 15:14-15 AV)

As members of his body, filled with his Spirit and speaking the truth in love, we are joint-heirs and are growing up into the head – i.e. becoming joint kings of light and truth. We are in boot camp for trainee kings of light and truth.

"Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you." (1 Corinthians 4:8 AV)

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," (Galatians 4:19 AV)

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:" (Ephesians 4:15 AV)

We are joint heirs of his suffering and rejection, and of his glory.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:16-17 AV)

"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Corinthians 15:25 AV)

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with *him*: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us:" (2 Timothy 2:12 AV)

When (and if?) we graduate boot camp earth, the Lord will still be our King of kings. Who IS the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

"That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen." (1 Timothy 6:14-16 AV)

The combined title King of kings and Lord of lords is only used in three places in scripture. Here and in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. In Revelation the title is clearly referring to the Word of God and the Lamb of God, i.e. the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he is also "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see:" the title must include the Father and be referring to the Lord as the fulness of the Godhead bodily, for the Son is the image (the seen) of the invisible God.

"Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9 AV)

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of **Christ, who is the image of God**, should shine unto them." (2 Corinthians 4:4 AV)

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9 AV)

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20 AV)

So, does the church, the body of Christ, have a king? I believe the answer must be that all saved brothers and sisters who suffer with him, will also reign with him. We are all on the way to becoming kings and queens of truth and light, crowned with an incorruptible crown of righteousness.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." (1 Corinthians 9:24-25 AV)

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8 AV)

And we are all close friends and adopted brothers and sisters of the head of the body, the King of kings.

"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." (Romans 8:15 AV)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Ephesians 1:3-6 AV)

Where is the kingdom of heaven?

You cannot separate God from his heavenly places. God is a Spirit and his kingdom is an invisible realm to the lost, which are in spiritual darkness.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."
(John 4:24 AV)

Our spiritual eyes are gradually (sometimes suddenly) opened to it, even while we are on earth, by our hearing or reading of God's word and BELIEVING it – the hearing of faith.

"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Corinthians 2:13 AV)

"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2-5 AV)

"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*." (Hebrews 4:2 AV)

In the manifest heaven above, the physical realm of stars and planets, are heavenly places that flesh and blood could occupy if we had a fast enough spaceship. But flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God so we are unlikely to find ourselves on a planet near Betelgeuse after the rapture (though it certainly would be an exciting prospect). The physical universe is not the natural habitat of the angels, though they are free to manifest in it and walk on the earth (and any other planet no doubt). But their manifestations among men, as recorded in the Bible, are brief and for a specific purpose. We will be "the children of the resurrection and equal to the angels" (Luke 20:36), so we also should be able to manifest among men if necessary, but will no doubt be keen to get back to our spiritual heavenly realm as soon as possible.

The created physical heavens are due for demolition (not by a Vagon Constructor Fleet 😊) after the millennial kingdom so they will not be our eternal home (2 Peter 3:10). There is no guarantee that the demolition will follow directly after the millennial kingdom although it seems to do so in prophecy. After the earth is cleansed of Satan and all who joined him for his final fling, it may be that Israel's kingdom on earth will continue on for many thousands of years. God has surprised us before with an unpropheesied age of grace. He may surprise us again.

Although God is in heaven he is not very far away for "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Therefore the kingdom of heaven is not distant either. There is an invisible spiritual heavenly realm in which we are currently wrestling with principalities and powers. We are accessible spiritually to Satan and his angels who also inhabit the invisible realm. We need the full armour of light and the sword of the word to protect ourselves. Therefore we who are born of the Spirit and present with the Lord are already participants in the war in heaven.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:12 AV)

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12 AV)

We are already citizens of the invisible kingdom of heaven otherwise we would not be in the middle of the war in heaven. Satan and his angels are using all of their wiles and subtlety to convince us that we are unworthy and may as well throw in the towel and go back to seeking the things that are below, not the things above. They are roving opportunists and will immediately exploit our weaknesses, particularly our fear and anger, and cause chaos in our lives.

"To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:10-11 AV)

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." (Ephesians 4:26-27 AV)

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11 AV)

"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Timothy 2:25-26 AV)

The kingdom is presently only experienced by flesh and blood believers as a subjective or spiritual kingdom. I say 'only' but this is no small thing. It is the precious gem of the God-given spiritual experience that makes life worth living. As the Spirit of Christ fills us and we can say with Paul that "to live is Christ", then we are fully "in Christ". This does not mean that Christ is merely in our heads as installed scripture. And it does not mean that we "get a buzz" in a physical sense. It means that the totality of our experience is in Christ. Wherever we are is also in Christ, whether it be a crummy little room or the lounge bar of a train or a beautiful beach. To be sure some environments are more beautiful than others but he still shines through, within and without.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there."
(Psalms 139:7-8 AV)

We and our environment are imbued with Christ. "To live is Christ" means that our experience is Christ. We are "absent from the body and present with the Lord". The Spirit of Christ overshadows us and shines out through us and back toward us through every molecule of our surrounding environment.

"And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." (Acts 6:15 AV)

Stephen's face shone like that of an angel because he was as filled with the Spirit as one can be, while still flesh and blood. He was no longer concerned with the things of this world and could already see the kingdom of heaven.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God," (Acts 7:55 AV)

In such a Spirit-filled state we experience the truth that "by him all things consist".

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:16-17 AV)

The kingdom will later be experienced as both a spiritual and political reality on earth – subjective and objective. I use the term 'objective' with reservations. We always experience everything subjectively. We can conceptualise objectively but can only experience life subjectively. Only God has an objective overview and can also see everything at once from all points of view.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." (Matthew 10:29 AV)

"And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."
(Matthew 25:40 AV)

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:6 AV)

The above scriptures make it abundantly clear why the second great commandment is like unto the first. The Father is in us all and we are all in the Father.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 16:17 AV)

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40 AV)

"That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:27-28 AV)

As I will show below, the kingdom of God is infinitely vast and our experience of it will expand in increments. The kingdom of God is 'but now' not of this world.

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36 AV)

But the Lord has a kingdom in heaven and even while he is exiled from this world we who belong to him are citizens of heaven, the kingdom of heaven.

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 2:6 AV)

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 3:20 AV)

We are citizens of the invisible heavenly realm above, in which we live and move and have our being. Though for most of our time on earth we are "present with the body and absent from the Lord", as we become less concerned with the things of this world, the kingdom of God becomes more real and we can honestly say with Paul that "to die is gain". We become increasingly "absent from the body and present with the Lord" until that day our temporal 'seed' body dies and we are clothed upon with our eternal celestial body.

"*Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.*" (1 Corinthians 15:36-40 AV)

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame

thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:1-8 AV)

According to the linear manner of events as we experience them on earth, a saved believer's dead body will be in the ground until the "dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). If your dead body had any consciousness at all of the passage of time between your death and the rapture, you may be in for a long and dull wait. But dead bodies know not anything.

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." (Ecclesiastes 9:5 AV)

But the saved are already participating in eternal life before they die. We are in the Spirit, not in the flesh. We are already seated in heavenly places though still encumbered with vile flesh and blood bodies.

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" (John 11:25 AV)

" *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2 AV)

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9 AV)

"And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 2:6 AV)

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Philippians 3:21 AV)

Our glorification is declared in the past tense in the scriptures.

"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8:30 AV)

What is impossible for us is possible for God. According to scripture Abraham had already seen the Lord's day, even though Jesus was not born on earth until two thousand years after Abraham died.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56 AV)

In like fashion, the rapture may be hundreds of years in the future in our linear time but in God's eternal realm it will be less than a day away. All bets are off once we enter the eternal, heavenly kingdom of God.

"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 AV)

But I digress. The heading for this section is "Where is the kingdom of heaven?" My answer must be that it is potentially present wherever you are. Whether you are in the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of light is not determined by your geographical location or present circumstances. It is determined by the presence or not of the Spirit of God. And the presence of the Spirit of God is determined by whether or not you have believed the word of God. Paul was seated in heavenly places while in a prison cell awaiting execution.

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 2:6 AV)

And of course there is more. There is infinitely more to heaven than the most glorious earnest of it we can experience while clothed with our earthly bodies.

Is paradise some kind of interim abode for the righteous?

Because we mostly dwell in the temporal, visible realm, we are prone to think of God's eternal, invisible realm as having similar properties to this realm. This is probably why so many think that God needs some kind of 'holding pen' for the souls of the righteous dead prior to the rapture.

At this time I prefer not to confuse my imagination by making paradise a temporal, temporary abode for the souls of dead saints. Paradise is within God's invisible, eternal realm so there is nothing temporal about it. In fact I think what follows proves that paradise IS God's eternal, invisible realm – Jerusalem which is above (stage 2 below).

The eternal presence of the TREE OF LIFE identifies paradise with the PAST Garden of Eden, the PRESENT, eternal third heaven (Jerusalem which is above) and the FUTURE new earth and heaven. One should need no further evidence that paradise is an eternal realm to which our concept of linear time cannot be applied.

Surely there is only ONE tree of life. Scripture puts the tree of life in the PAST Garden of Eden.

"And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the **tree of life** also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2:9 AV)

Scripture also puts the tree of life in paradise – the PRESENT paradise that was immediately accessible to the Lord and the thief on the cross and was also immediately accessible to Paul when he was caught up to the third heaven (probably during what we call a 'near death experience').

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the **tree of life**, which is in the midst of the **paradise of God**." (Revelation 2:7 AV)

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, **To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**" (Luke 23:42-43 AV)

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one **caught up to the third heaven**. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was **caught up into paradise**, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4 AV)

But wait, there's more. Scripture also puts the tree of life in the FUTURE New Jerusalem of the new earth and heaven of Revelation 21-22.

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the **tree of life**, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2 AV)

So I have no scriptural reason to doubt that paradise is the same realm as 'Jerusalem which is above', the third heaven to which the living and dead saints will be raptured at the end of this age (stage 2 below). Because it is the eternal realm, the rapture also immediately puts us in Christ before the world began. The eternal realm is always BEFORE, DURING and AFTER this temporal, visible realm – Alpha and Omega.

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:" (Ephesians 1:4 AV)

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 AV)

Which kingdom of God was nigh when Jesus walked the earth?

The millennial kingdom (see Stage 3) is the kingdom that many mid-Acts dispensationalists are referring to when they contrast the gospel of the kingdom with the gospel of grace. Jesus had a lot to say about the kingdom of God, but he rarely spoke of the political, earthly restoration of the kingdom to Israel. He would not be drawn on when it would occur.

"And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, **is not mine to give**, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matthew 20:23 AV)

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which **the Father hath put in his own power.**" (Acts 1:6-7 AV)

Although the Lord promised his apostles that they would sit upon twelve thrones in the regeneration, he made no mention of when this was going to happen. (It is my understanding that the regeneration is also called the "times of restitution of all things (Acts 3:21)" and that it will occur after the great tribulation and set the stage for the millennial kingdom. The earth shall be miraculously returned to the beauty of its youth and all living things, including humans, will be supernaturally regenerated.)

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28 AV)

The times or seasons of Israel's restored kingdom, the millennial kingdom, are IN THE FATHER'S POWER. It will be 'nigh' when the Son of man comes in a cloud with power and great glory. Only the Father, with foreknowledge, knew that it was not nigh at the time of the Lord's earthly ministry. If the Son went around preaching that it was at hand during his earthly ministry, knowing that the times or seasons are in the Father's power, he would have been overstepping his authority. The Son would never do that.

"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." (John 5:19 AV)

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30 AV)

Therefore it was not Israel's restored kingdom that was at hand (in proximity and time) during the Lord's earthly ministry. (Note the 'but now' in this scripture.)

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:36 AV)

A Christian friend has one of those large mid-Acts dispensational charts on his wall. As scriptural support that Israel's restored physical kingdom was on offer after Calvary, this chart uses Acts 1:6. But the truth is that in Acts 1:7 the Lord put the kybosh on the imminent restoration of Israel's physical kingdom by declaring that "it is not for you to know the times or the seasons". Far from supporting the offering of the physical kingdom, this scripture declares that the Father has put the time of the restoration in his own power.

*"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which **the Father hath put in his own power.**" (Acts 1:6-7 AV)*

If the times or seasons are in the Father's power then it follows that THEY ARE NOT IN THE SON'S POWER. Jesus plainly declared that the Son did not know the "day or the hour" of his second coming to restore the kingdom to Israel.

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, **neither the Son**, but the Father." (Mark 13:32 AV)

I was taught by respected mid-Acts teachers that the Lord had it within his power to offer both the spiritual and the physical kingdom to Israel during his first coming ministry. Clearly I was taught wrong.

This issue is of crucial importance. Everywhere I hear mid-Acts people contrasting the gospel of the kingdom with the gospel of grace. This contrast only works if Israel's restored physical kingdom was ever nigh or 'at hand' during the Lord's earthly ministry. I hope to convince you that it never was and that the kingdom of God/heaven preached throughout the four gospels, is the spiritual, subjective kingdom, the kingdom that is within us (Stage 1 below). This kingdom is like the TIP OF THE ICEBERG of God's eternal, heavenly kingdom (Stage 2 below) inherited by those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead. There are occasional and rare instances where Israel's restored physical kingdom on earth (Stage 3 below) is being spoken of, but the Lord made it clear that the times or seasons of this future earthly kingdom are in the Father's power and it will not be imminent until he returns in a cloud with power and great glory.

The reason this issue is critical is because a right understanding of it restores the traditional right division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments. The New Testament begins where the preaching of the kingdom of God/heaven begins with John the Baptist.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:1-2 AV)

[(I am speaking of the division of the BOOK we call the Bible. I am aware that the Old Testament as a COVENANT OF GOD did not come into effect at Genesis 1:1 but at Mount Sinai. I am also aware that the New Testament as a COVENANT OF GOD did not come into effect at Matthew 1:1 but "after the death of the testator" (Hebrews 9:16-17). But the major climax in a story requires a certain amount of 'back story' to prepare us for it - otherwise it would not be a climax. To start the Old Testament BOOK at Mount Sinai would be just plain silly. To start the New Testament BOOK with the death of Jesus would be even sillier.]

If John the Baptist's "kingdom of heaven" was referring to Israel's restored earthly kingdom (as most hyper dispensationalists teach), then he was preaching something that was NOT TRUE. With 20/20 hindsight and historical proof we KNOW that Israel's earthly kingdom was NOT restored back in the first century. On the contrary, Jerusalem was besieged and sacked by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Such a key figure as John was surely not sent by God to proclaim a false alarm.

The kingdom of heaven was at hand all right, but not Israel's temporal, earthly, millennial kingdom but God's eternal, heavenly kingdom, inherited by those who are washed by the Holy Spirit - the Holy Spirit that John said the Lord would baptise with.

"John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:" (Luke 3:16 AV)

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit **the kingdom of God**? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and **by the Spirit of our God.**" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 AV)

[Although John proclaimed the coming of the new covenant, he was also aware that it would require the "death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16-17)", i.e. the death of the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29)". The POWER of a sacrificial Lamb does not fall upon those for whom it was intended until AFTER THE DEATH of the Lamb. So although the proclamation of the new covenant began with John, it did not come into force until after the Lord "went away" (John 16:7). Our New Testament begins with Israel still under the old covenant of the law but I still believe that it begins at the right place – with the PROCLAMATION of the imminence of the new covenant and the earthly ministry of the Lamb of God - which gives us opportunity to know the person of our Saviour.]

The Lord's revelations to Paul are precisely the 'way of God more perfectly' that was expounded by Aquila and Priscilla to Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John.

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." (Acts 18:24-26 AV)

And again, when Paul encountered about twelve disciples who only knew the baptism of John, he demonstrated that his ministry was in line with and the fulfilment of John's preaching that the One which should come after him would baptise with the Holy Ghost.

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve." (Acts 19:1-7 AV)

Paul preached "the way of God more perfectly" but it was the way that began with John the Baptist. Paul preached the kingdom of God more perfectly.

"Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but

the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." (1 Corinthians 4:18-20 AV)

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he did not declare "Behold. The Son of Man has arrived in power and great glory to restore the kingdom to Israel". No. No. No. What he did in fact declare totally aligns with the Lord's later revelations to Paul.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.**" (John 1:29 AV)

The term 'kingdom of heaven' occurs 33 times in the gospel of Matthew and is not to be found in the gospels of Mark, Luke and John. This has led some Bible commentators to conclude that Matthew's gospel is particularly proclaiming the prophesied restoration of the Davidic kingdom to Israel. Yet of the 33 uses of the term there are maybe three that could be interpreted as referring to the restored, political and physical kingdom of Israel. It is nonsensical to try and attach the rod of iron rule by King Jesus in the millennial kingdom to most of the sayings.

For example;

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3 AV)

"Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10 AV)

The "poor in spirit" and "they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" are to look forward to being resurrected back on earth, in flesh and bone bodies, in a kingdom (stage 3 below) ruled with a ROD OF IRON and surrounded by potential turncoats who will rush to join Satan when he is released at the end of the millennium?

Jesus was not referring to the millennial kingdom in the above verses from Matthew. **NO WAY.** He was not referring to Jerusalem which is below but to God's eternal, heavenly Jerusalem which is above – the kingdom (stage 2 below) that poor old Lazarus inherited after a lifetime of being "poor in spirit" and "persecuted for righteousness' sake".

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." (Luke 16:22-25 AV)

How do I know that Lazarus inherited the eternal, heavenly Jerusalem which is above? Because scripture tells us that Abraham was already in that kingdom when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. So it can't be the earthly, temporal, millennial kingdom, which is yet future.

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."
(Matthew 22:30-32 AV)

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *yourselves* thrust out."
(Luke 13:28 AV)

The preceding scriptures have established the whereabouts of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so the following scripture is also referring to the eternal heavenly, resurrection kingdom (Stage 2 below), not Israel's restored earthly kingdom. It is hard to escape the interpretation that the Lord is also prophesying the setting aside of Israel and the influx of Gentiles into this kingdom at the end of this present age of grace. The centurion with "so great faith" was a Gentile.

"The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:8-12 AV)

The following scripture involves Israel's earthly kingdom and describes events that are also described in Revelation 20, after the thousand years of Israel's restored kingdom, at the great white throne judgement just prior to the destruction of the first heaven and earth.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-50 AV)

The term 'kingdom of God' occurs 55 times in the four gospels. Most references are to the spiritual kingdom:

"But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you."
(Matthew 12:28 AV)

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 AV)

You would have to be particularly dull of hearing to think that the above are referring to anything other than the spiritual kingdom, the mind of Christ (stage 1 below), the kingdom which those in darkness cannot experience and which is a foretaste of the heavenly Jerusalem which is above (stage 2 below), from which the Lord descended to be born here below in the likeness of sinful flesh.

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John 17:5 AV)

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:" (Romans 8:3 AV)

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8 AV)

Does the following saying bring to mind the restored, physical millennial kingdom, which will be forcibly installed after great tribulation? Or does it sound more like the subjective, spiritual kingdom (stage 1 below) – the kingdom of an individual's consciousness in which the word of God has been sown?

"Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." (Luke 13:18-19 AV)

And does it also compare to later statements by Paul about the form taken by those who are to be clothed upon with an house from heaven fit for Jerusalem which is above (stage 2 below)?

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh *is* not the same flesh: but *there is one kind of* flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. *There are also* celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another." (1 Corinthians 15:36-40 AV)

There are only a few instances where the restored, physical kingdom is mentioned, or inferred, or necessary for the associated saying to make sense. For example the following saying only makes sense with regard to the prophesied tribulation and restoration of the Davidic kingdom of God.

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man

coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." (Luke 21:25-31 AV)

There is no doubt that the Lord was referring to the prophesied great tribulation, the future redemption of Israel, and the restoration of her Davidic kingdom, in the above passage from Luke. Paul also spoke of this prophecy.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26 AV)

But was the Lord suggesting that this kingdom was nigh as he spoke? NO. He was saying that it **WILL BE NIGH** when the signs of the great tribulation come to pass and when the Son of man comes in a cloud with power and great glory.

Some will say that if Israel had not rejected their Messiah then the kingdom would have been restored to Israel then and there. This is a wrong idea. The perfect sacrifice of Israel's Messiah, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, was necessary before the kingdom could be restored to Israel.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28 AV)

The Lord avoided any attempt to crown him a king in this world during his earthly ministry although he did fulfil prophecy (Zechariah 9:9) by riding into Jerusalem as her King upon an ass's colt.

"When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone." (John 6:15 AV)

"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and *that* they had done these things unto him." (John 12:12-16 AV)

It is also commonly taught that if establishment Israel had received the Holy Spirit, instead of persecuting and killing the Spirit-filled believers, then the kingdom would have been restored to Israel at that time. God had had a long relationship with Israel and in his righteousness, and because of his promises to them, they were given the opportunity to accept or reject the Holy Spirit, in spite of their having already rejected and killed their Messiah.

Peter certainly thought that the restoration of Israel's physical kingdom was on offer and that if Israel repented, the Lord would return and restore this kingdom to Israel. He rightly discerned that Joel's prophecy was upon them.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:" (Acts 2:16-20 AV)

He quite understandably expected the great tribulation and the prophesied "times of refreshing" and the restoration of Israel's earthly kingdom to follow the outpouring of the Spirit.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21 AV)

Joel 2:28-29 came to pass but the world has yet to experience Joel 2:30-31, the signs in the sun and moon. Peter could not possibly have known the "times or seasons" of the Father. There was NO PROPHECY regarding the long grace period prior to the great tribulation – a period that we must surely be getting near the end of as I write this.

"And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come." (Joel 2:30-31 AV)

The present age of grace coincides with the latter end of the ongoing "times of the Gentiles", which (according to Rev. Scofield) had begun back around 589 B.C., when the King of Babylon conquered Judah and took King Zedekiah captive. My present understanding is that the Lord's prophecy in this next passage refers to the commencement of Israel being "torn and smitten" (Hosea 6:1-2) for two days (i.e. two thousand years). Forty years after the Lord's crucifixion, in about A.D. 70, Jerusalem was besieged and subsequently sacked by the Romans. There was a brutal massacre of her inhabitants and the surviving Jews were led away as captives. We know that even worse treatment of the Jews was still occurring 1900 years later under Hitler's Third Reich. The signs in the sun and the moon, also prophesied in the above passage from Joel, are AFTER the times of the Gentiles.

"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And

there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;" (Luke 21:22-25 AV)

The signs in the sun and moon, which accompany the great tribulation, will follow the times of the Gentiles. The present age of grace is at the latter end of the times of the Gentiles and coincides with the 'blindness in part' of Israel.

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." (Romans 11:25 AV)

Peter was as yet unaware that God's hidden plan was to hold off his wrath on the world as a whole (i.e. the great tribulation accompanied by the signs in the sun and moon) for a long and unprophesied age of grace - though the Jews have been feeling his wrath for nearly two thousand years. Many claiming to be Christians have added to unbelieving Israel's suffering, but we should not forget Paul's words regarding them.

"Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." (Romans 11:31 AV)

Once the Lord had saved our apostle Paul, and set the dispensation of grace loose on earth among us Gentiles, it became clear to the apostles that the times or seasons of the great tribulation, and the restoration of Israel's kingdom, were perhaps a long way into the future and known only to God. The great falling away and the man of sin must be revealed before that day.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 AV)

The Lord clearly stated during his first coming ministry, that the earthly, physical kingdom of God would be nigh when he returned in a cloud with power and great glory. THIS WAS NOT HOW HE ARRIVED at his first coming, so the kingdom that was truly nigh at that time was not the restored, physical Davidic kingdom, but the spiritual kingdom (stage 1 below) that travelled with him subjectively and that would soon be transmitted to believers with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit after his ascension. The kingdom that is a foretaste of God's eternal heavenly kingdom (stage 2 below).

Paul's grace commission was not God's contingency plan in case Israel failed him. He KNEW Israel would fail him. He had to offer Israel the spiritual kingdom. It had to be rejected. The current mystery program, the dispensation of grace, was not an afterthought. It was planned before the world began. Paul referred to it as a mystery because there was no prophecy regarding it.

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began," (Romans 16:25 AV)

The kingdom that was truly nigh when Jesus walked the earth was the subjective kingdom of God, the kingdom that is within us (Stage 1 below).

"And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*." (Mark 12:34 AV)

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21 AV)

The kingdom of God of those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead (Stage 2 below) was also nigh in proximity and time during the Lord's first coming. Elijah and Moses appeared to Peter, James and John when the Lord was transfigured before them. Surely Elijah and Moses are resurrected from the dead and living in the same heavenly realm as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus." (Mark 9:2-4 AV)

Elijah and Moses are two of God's great prophets, and sure enough, here they are in the same realm as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *yourselves* thrust out." (Luke 13:28 AV)

And that the 'kingdom of God of those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead' (stage 2 below) is a real realm, was demonstrated most dramatically by the resurrection of the Lord himself from the dead, and his subsequent appearance to many of his followers.

"Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." (Acts 10:40-41 AV)

The Lord's ascension to heaven was the first such ascension of those resurrected from the dead. The living and sleeping saints will ascend in similar fashion at the end of this age.

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:9 AV)

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be **the firstborn among many brethren.***" (Romans 8:29 AV)

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17 AV)

And last of all, the Lord revealed the glory of his celestial body to our apostle Paul. It is too bright to look upon for us earth dwellers with mere terrestrial bodies.

"At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." (Acts 26:13-15 AV)

When we are clothed upon with bodies like his then we shall be able to see him as he is.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2 AV)

The Lord was the "firstborn from the dead" and the "firstborn of many brethren" yet prior to this 'first resurrection' the Lord had used a long past event to demonstrate that the dead are raised.

"And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err." (Mark 12:26-27 AV)

How could Abraham have been in the resurrection kingdom fifteen hundred years prior to the Lord's being the "firstborn from the dead"? This is a mystery beyond my comprehension and has something to do with the absence of linear time in God's eternal kingdom.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." (John 8:56 AV)

How can the kingdom of God be within us?

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, **the kingdom of God is within you.**" (Luke 17:20-21 AV)

Fortunately there is a piece of modern technology which serves quite well as an analogy or example of how the kingdom of God is within us. Most of us are familiar with the modern digital movie camera. They have a viewing screen attached that allows us to see what the camera sees. The camera's onboard computer processes the visual information collected by its eyes (the lens) and the audio information collected by its ears (a microphone). It then recreates what it has collected and processed and displays it on the viewing screen, simultaneously playing the audio through a small speaker.

Most people think that we are viewing or experiencing life directly, as the camera's eyes and ears do, but we are not. Our eyes and ears receive visual and audio vibrations and we (our spirits) cannot see or hear what you might call our unprocessed or 'raw' environment. (Note that the environment of our spirit includes our own body). We always experience our processed and recreated environment. What we call everyday experience of life is actually a recreation in the 'viewing screen' of our brains. Ask any user of alcohol and/or drugs if their experience of so-called reality is affected when the recreation process in their brain is affected by alcohol or drugs. Ugly women are rated by male drinkers on the basis of how much alcohol they would need to drink in order for them to become beautiful. Our everyday waking experience of life is taking place in the same realm as a vivid dream while sleeping.

So there is this realm of unprocessed or 'raw' experience which provides our senses the vibrations which our brain processes into what we actually experience. Does this mean that we, our spirits, the experiencers of our lives, are trapped inside our heads? This is where a neighbour comes in handy. True 'spirit to spirit', empathetic communication with our neighbour (true love) has the potential to elevate both us and our neighbour 'out of our heads' and into the kingdom of God. When we catch a glimpse of ourselves as our neighbour honestly sees us, we are seeing ourselves from outside of our heads.

This is why Bob Dylan said;

I wish that for just one time, you could stand inside my shoes
And just for that one moment I could be you
Yes, I wish that for just one time, you could stand inside my shoes
You'd know what a drag it is to see you

And why the second commandment is like the first.

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31 AV)

And why our apostle said:

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Galatians 5:14 AV)

So the law has the potential to translate us into the kingdom of God, otherwise the Lord would not have told the scribe (that understood the importance of the two great commandments,) that he was "not far from the kingdom of God".

"And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him *any question*." (Mark 12:34 AV)

But we were unable to fulfil the law because our spirits were dead in trespasses and sins. We became so adept at our lies of blaming others, self-pity and self-justification, and so blind and defensive regarding our own selfishness and wickedness, that our defenses became impenetrable to the light of truth – the light of seeing ourselves from our neighbor's point of view. So the law couldn't save us. The terrible power of darkness in our lives could only be penetrated by an even greater power – the power unleashed by God when we believed the gospel of our salvation.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (1 Thessalonians 1:5 AV)

Our experience of so-called reality can now be greatly affected by the Word and Spirit of God. Experience of life in which God not only exists but is sovereign, and where "all things work together for good to them that love God", is very different to the experience of a life in which there is no God and it is all a matter of 'survival of the fittest', or a life in which the devil rules and hell doesn't sound that bad anyway.

When we "believe God" and "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ", the Spirit of God begins to have a direct bearing on our experience of life. Our processed internal experience of life, our personal, subjective movie on our internal 'viewing screen', is transformed. We are translated into the kingdom of his dear Son – i.e. our personal experience of life becomes like that of the man Jesus Christ. If we have the mind of Christ then our everyday waking experience of life is like his.

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:14-16 AV)

As we "grow up into the head" of the body of Christ we become detached from sensory experience (though still aware of it) and we can say with Paul that "it is better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord". Our spirit is quickened and risen with the Spirit of Christ, a Spirit that is also present in all other believers.

"For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed," (1 Corinthians 5:3 AV)

There is no physical distance between our spirit and theirs because we are all in the Spirit.

"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3 AV)

How can this be if our flesh and blood bodies are not yet in their coffins? Colossians 3:3 only makes sense when we realize that when our spirits are quickened with his

Spirit, we are as dead as we are ever going to be. We are hid with Christ who is already beyond the grave.

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" (John 11:25 AV)

The kingdom of God is incremental and has at least four stages, all of which involve the saints of this present age.

'Incremental' is an unsatisfactory word to describe the progress of the kingdom of God, but I will keep using it until I think of a better word. The kingdom of God is the realm, visible or invisible, temporal or eternal, where his will is done and love, holiness, truth, light, peace, joy and righteousness reign. God gave the angels and humans free will and therefore the potential to disobey him - to rebel. We know Satan and his angels first rebelled, which in turn brought about the rebellion of man and the sin-cursed earth.

So the progress of the kingdom of God is the progressive retaking of the realms which are in rebellion. To my present understanding about a third of the angelic host are with Satan. This means that a large portion of the invisible heavenly realm is under Satan's control. He and his angels are ruling the present world system from this realm. His ministers were hypocrites and nests of vipers in the first century (e.g. Matthew 23:29-33) but in these times they are likely to win the Nobel peace prize. Satan is transformed into an 'angel of light' and his ministers 'ministers of righteousness' (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) - shining beacons of peace, love and tolerance that patronize the scriptures and preach Jesus Christ as a great spiritual teacher, but just a man.

God's strategy appears to be in stages, the first of which is the recruiting and accumulation of a living and sleeping army of saints which will be gathered into the heavenly realm at the end of this age.

Stage two involves the recapture of the rebellious heavenly realm by God's angels under Michael and the casting down of Satan and his angels to earth. It is my present understanding that the rapture of God's army of saints into the heavenly realm precedes this and is necessary for its success.

Stage three is the recapture and refreshing of all the earth and the restoration of Israel's earthly kingdom. My present understanding is that the Lord's heavenly army of saints will return with him and are necessary to accomplish this process.

Stage four is the destruction of all of God's enemies, the destruction of the first heaven and earth and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. The climax of God's absolute victory and reconciliation of all things to himself is the coming down of his holy city, "Jerusalem which is above", to the new earth, and God dwelling with men.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:2 AV)

Stage 1 – The present subjective, spiritual kingdom of God. Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

This is the present, spiritual kingdom that Paul preached - the kingdom within us that can be experienced immediately. Righteousness, peace and joy are experienced subjectively by those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul preached this kingdom as being preferable to being drunk with wine. In other words, being filled with the Spirit is a better route to peace and joy than getting drunk with wine. Drinking wine or beer has its moments to be sure, but in many of us it leads to excess and dreadful calamity.

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Romans 14:17 AV)

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;" (Ephesians 5:18 AV)

The spiritual kingdom of God (i.e. being filled with the Spirit,) is a current reality for believers. We are not waiting for it. It is here.

It is a subjective, experiential kingdom. If you haven't figured it out yet, I can assure you that all things you experience are in your mind – from the end of your nose to the furthest star you can see on a clear night. The QUALITY of your experience of all things depends upon the QUALITY of your motives and deeds. You cannot walk in the light if your motives and deeds cannot also WALK IN THE LIGHT.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19 AV)

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21 AV)

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

The kingdom of God is the MIND OF CHRIST – the mind of a man without sin; a man whose motives and deeds are PERFECT, the PERFECT love of God that died for us when we were enemies.

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Romans 5:10 AV)

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? **But we have the mind of Christ.**" (1 Corinthians 2:14-16 AV)

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8 AV)

"Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casteth out fear:** because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." (1 John 4:17-18 AV)

We are citizens of heaven residing in a Satanic world system. The children of the kingdom living among the children of the wicked one. Those born of the Spirit living among those born only of the flesh.

"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*;" (Matthew 13:38 AV)

"But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now." (Galatians 4:29 AV)

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 3:20 AV)

It is also the kingdom that subjectively travelled with Jesus and his disciples on earth, so that he could instruct the twelve and the seventy to say to those in the towns they visited that the kingdom of God was at hand, or nigh, in proximity (in Jesus and his disciples) and in time (on the day of Pentecost in the near future).

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 10:7 AV)

"And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Luke 10:9 AV)

The Spirit is the Spirit of truth so the kingdom is the kingdom of spiritual light and truth.

"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14:17 AV)

Stage 1 is the earnest (pledge and foretaste) of Stage 2 - when we shall be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.

"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the

selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:2-8 AV)

Stage 2 – The eternal heavenly kingdom of God. The heavenly realm that the saints of this age will inherit at the end of this age.

But Paul also used the term in a future and greater sense. The kingdom of God is also the kingdom the saints will inherit at the coming of the Lord for his own – at the rapture.

This kingdom was referred to as "that world" by the Lord during his earthly ministry.

"But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain **that world**, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:35-36 AV)

It is the Father's house in which he is preparing a place for us.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3 AV)

It is the hope of all members of the body of Christ - both Jew and Gentile.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved in heaven for you**, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5 AV)

The flesh and blood of our current bodies is corrupt.

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." (Philippians 3:21 AV)

The kingdom of God in the next scripture cannot be inherited by flesh and blood. Therefore it is a kingdom we have not yet inherited. It is our hope for the future.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we

shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:50-53 AV)

Corruption cannot inherit incorruption. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore it is not the kingdom of God we can presently experience. It is the heavenly kingdom that we will not inherit until our vile bodies have been made like unto the Lord's glorious body.

When our bodies are LIKE his body then we shall see him AS HE IS.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, **when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**" (1 John 3:2 AV)

The kingdom of God that we inherit when we meet the Lord in the air, will be our eternal home.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:17 AV)

Our present corruptible flesh and blood bodies have a similar relationship to our glorified bodies that seeds have to plants and trees. So we can look forward to an extraordinary transformation.

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." (1 Corinthians 15:36-38 AV)

The eternal heavenly kingdom of God is also known as "Jerusalem which is above".

"But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Galatians 4:26 AV)

If we are to seek those things which are above then it is helpful to have some idea of what they are. In Jerusalem which is above, Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. .

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1 AV)

Jerusalem which is above must be the same place as the city of the living God and the Sion from which the Deliverer shall come. So there is an innumerable company of angels there too.

"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels," (Hebrews 12:22 AV)

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26 AV)

The saints of God which are already resurrected must also be in the kingdom of God situated in the third heaven. Scripture tells us that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets are presently living in the kingdom of God.

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22:31-32 AV)

"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see **Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God**, and you *yourselves* thrust out." (Luke 13:28 AV)

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." (Luke 16:22-23 AV)

Jerusalem which is above will descend to the new earth and become the New Jerusalem when God dwells among men again – as he has done before in the Garden of Eden and during the Lord's first coming ministry.

"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:8 AV)

"*That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." (John 1:9-10 AV)

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Revelation 21:3 AV)

So the descriptions of the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem give us further information about the things in "Jerusalem which is above" that we are to seek.

"And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; **the tree of life** also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads." (Genesis 2:9-10 AV)

"And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, **the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God**, Having the glory of God: and her light *was* like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; And had a wall great and high, *and* had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates." (Revelation 21:10-13 AV)

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there the tree of life*, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations."
(Revelation 22:1-2 AV)

Because "Jerusalem which is above" contains the tree of life then it is also the realm called paradise.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of **the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.**" (Revelation 2:7 AV)

When Paul was caught up to the third heaven he also described himself as "caught up into paradise". So "Jerusalem which is above", or paradise, is in the third heaven.

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one **caught up to the third heaven**. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was **caught up into paradise**, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4 AV)

My earlier understanding was that we would only remain in Stage 2 for the seven years of Daniel's seventieth week - the period between the rapture and the Lord's return to earth in glory with all his saints (the period that includes the great tribulation), but my understanding has progressed to seeing that we will operate from this kingdom of God forever because it is the eternal realm of God and the innumerable company of angels (Hebrews 12:22). It is the only realm that will survive the destruction of the present physical heavens and earth by fire (2 Peter 3:7-12). I believe we will have angelic-like roles to play on earth during the millennial kingdom, for after our translation (of Thessalonians 4:17 above) there will be no going back to being flesh and blood. It is my present understanding that the new earth and heaven of Revelation 21:1 will be made of the same eternal stuff as the third heaven and will not require an inter-dimensional journey such as celestial beings visiting the present earth must make (Genesis 28:12).

The lead up to the great tribulation of this world should begin immediately after the rapture, because the Holy Spirit's role on earth will end for a time with the departure of the church. In one fell swoop the Lord gathers all of the dead and living members of the body of Christ and translates them into the eternal heavenly kingdom. Assuming that Satan has millions of angels then it may be that the Lord requires millions of translated saints to replace them. A great changing of the guard in heaven. Surely it is at this time that we shall judge angels.

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:3 AV)

This should also be the time of intensified war in heaven and the casting down of Satan's angels to earth. Michael and his angels will deal with Satan.

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the

dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelation 12:7-9 AV)

Perhaps the glorified saints will do the judging and Michael and his angels will do the casting out. It is my present understanding that Satan's angels have dominion over this present world system. They must be operating from heaven for it is from heaven that they will be cast out. They are the rulers of the darkness of this world and every nation is in darkness to a greater or lesser extent. Because Satan is masquerading as an angel of light, doubtless his whole team is doing likewise. So watch out for those ministers of righteousness in your country. You may have to judge them one day.

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Corinthians 11:14-15 AV)

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*." (Ephesians 6:12 AV)

Stage 3 – The millennial kingdom of God on earth. The earthly kingdom of King Jesus. Israel's restored kingdom on earth.

The physical kingdom of heaven on earth is best described as the millennial kingdom or Israel's restored kingdom. It is physical in that it will be the last 1000 years of the existence of the earth created in Genesis 1:1 and the last 1000 years of sin-cursed human flesh and blood. Although Satan will be bound and the earth refreshed and regenerated to a land of milk and honey, a vast host of the earth's population will still be seduced by Satan after the 1000 years are up (Revelation 20:7-8).

The Second Coming of the Son of man will be the most extraordinary event that the world has ever seen.

"Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, *he is* in the secret chambers; believe *it* not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:26-27 AV)

It is my understanding that the salvation of Paul on the road to Damascus was a type of the salvation of all Israel. Hard-hearted religious Pharisee Paul required a supernatural visitation from the Lord himself in order to be saved. So it will be with all Israel. All the tribes of the earth shall mourn.

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30 AV)

The Lord will return from the heavenly realm of Stage 2 (Sion) with all of his saints.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26 AV)

" When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:4 AV)

"To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." (1 Thessalonians 3:13 AV)

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints," (Jude 1:14 AV)

If all *means* ALL then the Lord will return with all of his saints since the world began – both Jew and Gentile. Satan will be bound for a thousand years. The earth will be ruled with an iron rod by King Jesus and the twelve tribes.

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28 AV)

"And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Revelation 19:15 AV)

The Gentile nations will finally be enriched by Israel's fulness - the fulness of God's holy nation of priests. Never mind that you would be hard pressed to find thousands of representatives of each tribe of Israel today. With God this is possible.

"Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; **how much more their fulness?**" (Romans 11:12 AV)

And here is how it is possible with God. "These slain" of the whole house of Israel shall be resurrected to EARTH for the duration of the millennium. As the Lord walked the earth for forty days in FLESH AND BONE after his resurrection and prior to his ascension and glorification;

"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not **flesh and bones**, as ye see me have." (Luke 24:39 AV)

"To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them **forty days**, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:" (Acts 1:3 AV)

so "these slain" of the WHOLE HOUSE OF ISRAEL shall be resurrected and returned to their earthly promised land for the duration of the millennium. Sounds a bit spooky and zombie-like, but here it is in the word of God.

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophecy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon **these slain**, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the **whole house of Israel**: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD." (Ezekiel 37:1-14 AV)

The resurrected "these slain" of the "whole house of Israel" (not ALL dead Israelites but slain Israelites from all twelve tribes) shall be brought into the land of Israel. This aligns with Job's hope that he would see God in his flesh.

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:" (Job 19:25-26 AV)

Paul speaks of the "receiving of them" as "life from the dead".

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but **life from the dead**?" (Romans 11:15 AV)

It seems that Paul is not speaking of a literal resurrection of physically dead Israelites but of all Israel being "born of the Spirit". It could be that Ezekiel is also speaking of the spiritual birth of living Israelites in the above passage. At this time I favour the interpretation that Ezekiel is speaking of a literal resurrection of the physical bodies of slain Israelites because the Lord will need to beef up the numbers of certain tribes which have been scattered and lost over the centuries. For the valley of bones shown to Ezekiel to fully represent the "whole house of Israel" then they would most likely be from a glorious era of Israel's history when all twelve tribes were one God-fearing nation. That all Israel shall be born of the Spirit, i.e. saved, is not in doubt.

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:" (Romans 11:26 AV)

The 'latter day' of these events must be prior to the millennial kingdom and probably coincides with the first resurrection of Revelation.

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in **the first resurrection**: on such the **second death hath no power**, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:6 AV)

I understand the "second death" to be the eternal death in the lake of fire so the 'flesh and bone' resurrected of Israel should ascend and be glorified after the millennium and prior to the destruction of this earth

There are Old Testament prophecies that declare that the kingdom shall stand forever or unto a thousand generations. I believe that these prophets are seeing the everlasting kingdom of the new earth and heaven (stage 4 below) as a continuation of the millennial kingdom.

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." (Psalms 105:8 AV)

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." (Daniel 2:44 AV)

The Bible says it will happen and I believe it will happen. But I can't for the life of me come to anything like a coherent understanding of what FORM the Son of Man, and all of the glorified saints he returns with, will take for the 1000 years.

The resurrected Lord and all of his saints are clothed with celestial, angelic bodies which are too bright for terrestrial beings to look upon. So what form will they take upon returning to this terrestrial environment?

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." (Matthew 17:1-2 AV)

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." (Matthew 22:30 AV)

"At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me." (Acts 26:13 AV)

"*There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.*" (1 Corinthians 15:40 AV)

Resurrected saints with glorified, spiritual bodies will neither marry nor be given in marriage. But are we to understand that beings that are not flesh and blood still eat and drink?

"That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:30 AV)

"Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25 AV)

Perhaps one day I will get a better understanding of these things. For now I have more questions than answers.

The twelve apostles of the circumcision have been promised twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

"That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:30 AV)

The saints of the uncircumcision have been informed by the apostle of the Gentiles that we shall judge the world.

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" (1 Corinthians 6:2 AV)

How this is all going to work is way beyond my wildest imagination but I would not be alone in thinking that the saints (Jew and Gentile) will have angelic bodies and powers when they return with the Lord. Because we will be "equal to the angels" it seems reasonable to assume that we will take over the principalities that Satan's angels currently occupy. There is a type of this process in the Old Testament when Joshua and the tribes of Israel captured and inhabited existing cities in Canaan, built by the Baal-worshipping prior occupants.

"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Daniel 7:27 AV)

If this is the case then we must presume that Satan currently has an angelic body in heaven (he is a cherub) and yet somehow also manifests through humans here on earth. If we are to take over Satan's principalities then we may find ourselves clothed with celestial bodies and seated in heavenly places, yet manifesting on earth through individuals, as Satan is currently able to. (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 14:12-14, Matthew 16:22-23). Satan, as the prince of this current world system, has millions of powerful individuals in high and powerful places.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12 AV)

I think the political system of the millennium has been foreshadowed by the rule of Israel's judges and the reign of king David. There will likely be a combination of these two systems of rule. King Jesus as the overall ruler on earth, ruling through a network of millions of judges – the Jewish and Gentile saints.

"And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city." (Isaiah 1:26 AV)

"Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." (Daniel 7:22 AV)

As Satan's angels remain invisible yet control through individuals on earth, so it is likely that the Lord's judging saints will remain in heaven but control through powerful judges on earth.

There are already millions of the Lord's people on earth as I write this - as he had much people in Corinth, even prior to the establishment of a church there.

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10 AV)

The saints should also be able to manifest on earth as supernatural beings should they be required to - as Satan's angels did in Genesis 6 and as other angels and the Lord himself (as THE angel of the Lord) have manifested on earth throughout the Bible. .

So Paul also had in mind the prophesied, political, earthly, physical, restored kingdom of Israel when he spoke of the kingdom of God. How can we judge the world and the fallen angels if we are not to be involved in the war in heaven and Israel's millennial kingdom?

Stage 4 – The kingdom of God in the dispensation of the fulness of times

The final stage of the kingdom of God will be the merging of the heavenly kingdom of stage 2 with the earthly kingdom of stage 3. This merging will occur once God has created the new heavens and the new earth. The heavenly kingdom of stage 2 will be merged with the glorified earthly kingdom of stage 3. The saints of the earthly kingdom of stage 3 shall be gathered together with the saints of the heavenly kingdom of stage 2.

"For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:27-28 AV)

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: **That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:**" (Ephesians 1:9-10 AV)

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:19-20 AV)

Sometime after the millennium, all flesh and blood of the earth, that still prefer Satan's rule, will be destroyed by fire from heaven. Then those of the second resurrection not found written in the book of life, along with death, hell and Satan, will be cast into the lake of fire.

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:5-15 AV)

My understanding of these things is developing on a daily basis so I obviously don't have all the answers, and I doubt that any human being has. If the dispensation of the fulness of times is all about reconciling all things unto himself, things which are in heaven and on earth, then it must be that the cleansing of the earthly saints occurs prior to the destruction of the present physical heavens and earth. I cannot say if this is referring to a brief process of cleansing after the millennial kingdom or to many thousands of years of the kingdom of Israel on earth. If it is to be understood that God's covenant with Israel on this PRESENT earth is to a thousand generations, then the destruction of the present physical heavens and earth will still be a long way off, and Israel's restored and cleansed kingdom will have many thousands of years yet to run after the removal of sin from the planet.

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." (Psalms 105:8 AV)

Either way the grace age saints remain as heavenly, angelic people while all the surviving people of earth come into the restored kingdom of Israel. All things, in heaven and earth, are being gathered together in Christ. It seems to me that this process is complete after the white throne judgment and the casting of Satan, all of his followers and death and hell into the lake of fire. No more death and hell means

that the earth is cleansed completely of sin and that all of her inhabitants have eternal life.

"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:"
(Ephesians 1:10 AV)

"And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."
(Colossians 1:20 AV)

Although as yet I have found no specific reference to it, the earthly kingdom saints will most likely ascend to the third heaven prior to the destruction of this present heaven and earth. Peter was given this word regarding the destruction of this present heaven and earth

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 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. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Peter 3:7-12 AV)

Paul also declares that the present earth and heavens shall perish and be changed.

"And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." (Hebrews 1:10-12 AV)

Then comes that which is to my present understanding the final increment of the kingdom of God, the new heaven and the new earth and the holy city coming down from God out of heaven.

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." (Isaiah 65:17 AV)

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain." (Isaiah 66:22 AV)

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13 AV)

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is new Jerusalem*, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him my new name.*" (Revelation 3:11-12 AV)

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be their God.*" (Revelation 21:1-3 AV)

John calls the city "new Jerusalem" but I don't think this implies that God had just made it. I believe this to be the eternal dwelling place of God, "Jerusalem which is above". It will be new in relation to the old holy city - the temporal Jerusalem that presently exists on this temporal earth. That the holy city from the third heaven can come down to the new earth is a great clue that the new heaven and earth will be made of the same eternal stuff as God's eternal dwelling place.

In summary

A new dispensation of God was introduced through the apostle Paul mid-way through the historical book of Acts. Critics of mid-Acts dispensationalism point out that you have to "read between the lines" in the book of Acts to come to such a conclusion. No you don't. You just need the tiniest little bit of common sense. Paul told us that the dispensation of the grace of God was given to him, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, to pass on to us Gentiles. Paul was saved in Acts 9 so the dispensation of the grace of God CANNOT HAVE BEGUN PRIOR TO ACTS 9.

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:11-12 AV)

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words," (Ephesians 3:1-3 AV)

Mid-Acts dispensationalism is so true that we do not need to bolster it with any false teachings. One such false teaching is that Jesus was proclaiming that Israel's restored kingdom on earth was 'nigh' during his first coming ministry. The effect that this teaching was no doubt intended to have was to make the division between Israel and the Church more glaring and obvious - i.e. Israel is all about the kingdom and the Church is all about the body. But well-intentioned error is still error.

This particular error has lead mid-Acts people to conclude that the New Testament did not start with John the Baptist because the coming kingdom he proclaimed is of no interest to us now. WRONG!!! Inheriting the kingdom of God of those who are resurrected from the dead is PRIORITY NUMBER ONE from John the Baptist to Paul.

John preached the coming of the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. To Paul was revealed the full implications of being baptized with the Holy Spirit - that by the Spirit we are baptized into (or spiritually identified with) the Lord's accomplishments at Calvary and his subsequent ascension and glorification. By the Spirit we are washed, sanctified and justified and made fit to share in his inheritance (1 Corinthians 6:11). He was the firstborn from the dead - the first 'man' to ascend to the kingdom of those who are resurrected from the dead. "The Son of God became the Son of man so that the sons of men could become the sons of God."

The Lord plainly stated that the kingdom of God, preached first by John the Baptist, and lastly by our apostle Paul, cometh not with observation, but is within us. We enter this kingdom by the hearing of faith; that he suffered and died on a cross, then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, to make this possible for us.

The kingdom within us is a foretaste of God's eternal heavenly kingdom, which is not on other planets out in space, but is more like another dimension, outside of space and time. This is the kingdom of God and the angels, and the resurrected saints will become "as the angels in heaven" when they enter this kingdom. This realm is not exclusive to the Gentile saints of this age because Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets are already in it.

Christ will return in a cloud with power and great glory to restore Israel's kingdom on earth after great tribulation. This is a temporary, earthly kingdom, and is in effect God's 'mopping up' operation on earth. He is fulfilling his promises to Israel, bringing about the "fulness of Israel" by resurrecting and saving them, and giving billions more people of this world the opportunity to be saved. Israel's apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The saints will "judge the world". This arrangement will be like a combination of the Judges period of Israel with the reign of King David. Only the king will be King Jesus and the judges will be the Jewish and Gentile saints.

The history of the present heaven and earth, as created in Genesis 1:1, will end with its destruction by fire, as written in 2 Peter 3. God will then create a new heaven and a new earth in which all of his people will dwell in his presence forever.