

THOUGHTS
ON THE
KINGDOM
OF GOD

Thoughts on the Kingdom of God
A study of the character of God's Kingdom
in its present and its future state

© Hugo Bouter, 2016

© First English edition by Textorigen, 2016
www.textorigen.com

ISBN 978-1-326-64388-1 paperback
Printed by Lulu.com

Bible quotations are from the New King James Version

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or storage in any information retrieval system, without written permission from the editor.

Hugo Bouter

THOUGHTS
ON THE
KINGDOM
OF GOD

A study of the character of God's Kingdom
in its present and its future state

“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

James 2:5

CONTENTS

Preface	II
1. The King and His companions	
The Lord of glory	13
Poor, yet rich	15
Present and future riches	17
Heirs of the Kingdom	19
2. The Kingdom is yet to come	
The Kingdom of peace	21
Behold, your King is coming!	25
The day is at hand	32
A preview of the Kingdom	36
3. The Kingdom now and in the future	
The Kingdom in its present state	39
Inheriting the Kingdom	43

Preface

The Kingdom of God is a comprehensive subject, and we cannot enter into all the aspects of it within the framework of this study. There are various themes and questions that can be raised. The important thing for us to know is what James means when he says that God has chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him:

When did God make this promise?

Has it been fulfilled in this dispensation?

Do the heirs already enjoy their inheritance?

In other words, is the Kingdom of God realized in this day and age, or is it still future?

And secondly, what does the Kingdom look like? Is it spiritual and of a heavenly nature, or will it be earthly?

We will try to answer these and similar questions in light of the teaching of the Scriptures.

Gouda, Spring 2016

1. The King and His companions

The Lord of glory

In James 1 God is presented to us as the Father of lights, the Source of every good and perfect gift, the Giver of life. To Him we owe both the natural life and the spiritual life that is given to us in the new birth. Very soon we shall possess this life – the life of God, that is ours in Christ – in all its fullness. It will adorn us as a glorious crown, the crown of life.

In James 2, however, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is presented to us as the Lord of glory, Possessor of heaven and earth. In this quality He is the glorious Centre of the Kingdom which God has promised to those who love Him. God gives us a crown (Jas. 1:12), and we are also made heirs to the throne (Jas. 2:5). We are heirs of the Kingdom because we are joint heirs with Christ,

who is Lord of all. We find this title of our Lord Jesus Christ – the Lord of glory – in the first verse of this chapter: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (Jas. 2:1). We also come across it in Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians. Christ was crucified in weakness and He poured out His soul unto death, and yet He was “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). He had descended from glory. He was the Lord from heaven who could call everything His own, in spite of His humiliation here on earth.

But the title “Lord” refers particularly to His position after the cross and the resurrection¹. God has made Him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). God has exalted Him at His right hand, and has made Him Head over all things (Eph. 1:20-22). Therefore the risen Lord could say: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). He is King of kings and Lord of lords, He is the Lord of glory. As the eternal Son, He could claim all things to be His legitimate portion, but now He has made them His own as the Son of Man. He has

1 He is the Head of the Church and the Lord and Master of each individual believer. As Christians we do not call on Him now as our King, for He is the King of His people Israel (cf. John 1:49 and 20:28).

been glorified as the exalted Man with the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5). The secret of this wonderful name is the fact that the Lord of glory is truly a Man!

Poor, yet rich

Now what is the result for us who know this Lord of glory and are united to Him? It means that Christ will bring many sons to glory, the glory that He has won by His finished work (Heb. 2:10). He came in the likeness of men in order to share His glory with men. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, the Lord of glory became poor in order that we through His poverty might become rich. He was rich, for He lived in the glory of heaven and possessed all its treasures. But He became poor when He became a Man, and He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. He sold everything that He had in order to buy one pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46). Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25).

God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. What glad tidings! Blessed are

the poor in spirit! The poor have the Gospel preached to them (Matt. 5:3; 11:5; Luke 4:18). Although our Lord did not possess anything here on earth, not even a place where to lay His head, yet He was able to make many rich. The same is true of the apostles of Christ. According to Paul, one of the features of a servant of God is: “(...) as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:10). This is a wonderful contrast: being poor on the one hand, yet possessing all things on the other, and even being able to share these riches with others! And here is the secret: these riches are ours by faith, by believing and accepting the Word of God. They are spiritual treasures, granted to us by faith in Christ.

Luke the evangelist says it a little differently. He does not use the expression “rich in faith”, but “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). So he emphasizes that we possess our spiritual riches in God Himself, whom, in Christ, we have come to know as our Father. The riches of the believer are secure in God. And nobody can rob us of the treasures that we possess by faith in the living God. In Luke the Lord also speaks about “a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys” (Luke 12:33). These riches are of a totally different na-

ture from the riches amassed here on earth, as they are eternal, heavenly blessings that we possess in God and in Christ.

This has important consequences for our practical life of faith. For where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. All our thoughts, and our desires are directed at that which we consider valuable. If our riches are on the earth, we shall also set our mind on things on the earth. But if our riches are in heaven, our heart will be there too, and we shall set our mind on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Then we shall seek the riches and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in a heavenly Christ (Col. 2:3; 3:1-4).

Present and future riches

James, however, speaks about two kinds of blessings. God has made us rich in faith now, but in the future He will give us the visible riches of the Kingdom. This is because Christ has been rejected by His own people, and He has not yet returned with power and great glory. As Christians we are united to the Lord in heaven, and God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. But we are ex-

pecting His return, and the establishment of His Kingdom. This is what James means when he says that God chose the poor of this world to be (1) rich in faith and (2) heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him.

Our present riches consist of our union with the Man in the glory and the blessings we possess in Him. Our treasures are found in a glorified Christ who has been exalted to the right hand of God. As Paul says, we were enriched in everything by Him (1 Cor. 1:5). But we share in these riches on the principle of faith. We cannot see them yet. By faith we know that we are united with Christ and we direct our eyes towards Him and the heavenly treasures that we possess in Him. In this way we can see the things that are invisible and eternal; we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and we see Him who is invisible (2 Cor. 4:17-18; Heb. 2:9; 11:27).

Heaven had to receive Him until the times of restoration of all things, about which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:21). Up there He is waiting until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet, and He can receive the Kingdom. While we are waiting with Him, we look forward to His appearing. We still have to suffer with our rejected Lord, but soon we shall

be glorified with Him. We still have to endure and to persevere, but soon we shall reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). As long as He carries, we are bearing His reproach. While following in His steps here on earth, we rejoice in the heavenly blessings that we possess in Him. Upon His return we shall also receive an earthly inheritance from His hand – the Kingdom that He is going to establish on earth. He is the Heir of all things in heaven and of all things on earth, and we shall reign with Him. Christ will share His royal power with those who suffered with Him in the time of His rejection.

Heirs of the Kingdom

Of course, this demands a closer look, and we shall concentrate mainly on the following questions:

- (1) Is this a future Kingdom?
- (2) Is it an earthly Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God is a comprehensive subject, and we cannot enter into all the aspects of it within the framework of this study. The important thing for us to know just now is

what James means when he says that God has chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him. When did God make this promise? Has it been fulfilled in this dispensation? Do the heirs already enjoy their inheritance? In other words, is the Kingdom realized in this day and age, or is it a future blessing? Secondly, what does this Kingdom look like? Is it spiritual and of a heavenly nature, or is it earthly?

2. The Kingdom is yet to come

The Kingdom of peace

We now leave the matter of inheriting the Kingdom for a while to see what the Scriptures say about the coming of the Kingdom. We have already stated that Christ as the Lord of glory is the glorious Centre of the Kingdom. And in fact, this important point decides the question concerning the coming of the Kingdom. For it is the presence of the King that determines whether the Kingdom is among us or still a future reality! We are not talking here about the government of God in general, or about theocracy as it was realized in Israel in Old Testament times, which was a foretaste of the future Kingdom. No doubt God has always ruled the world. He reigns, and in the end all things work together for the fulfilment of His plans. The “Kingdom

of God” implies a state of things where God does not reign from behind the scenes, so to speak, but where He rules in a visible and manifest way. And He does this by a Man, the Son of Man, the rightful Heir of all things, whom He has appointed to this end.

The first proof of this can be found in the book of Daniel, which deals with the history of the world empires after Israel’s theocracy had definitely broken down. But God’s purpose will be fulfilled, and the coming Kingdom will not be limited to the people of Israel. Christ shall have dominion to the ends of the earth. In Daniel 2 we have the history of the four world empires (the Babylonian, Medeo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires) from an external point of view, as it was made known in a dream to Nebuchadnezzar. He was the head of the first and most important empire, which marked the beginning of the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). The end of the dream shows us the last form of the fourth world empire, the Roman empire: the feet and the ten toes, partly of iron, partly of ceramic clay. In fact, this is an extra, fifth empire, in which the Romanic and Germanic elements have been mixed. It has existed in this form during the past fifteen centuries, and soon it will appear in its definite form according to proph-

ecy as a federation of ten kings, headed by the ruler of the revived Roman empire (cf. the ten horns of Daniel 7 and the ten horns of the beast in Rev. 13 and 17).

In Daniel 7, however, this same history is treated from another, an internal point of view. Here we have especially the position of the saints in relation to these empires and the coming Kingdom of God! And we find that the dream was revealed directly to Daniel, to one of these saints. In this chapter we are told that all power will be given into the hands of the Son of Man when He comes with the clouds of heaven. This is clearly not His coming into the world in humiliation, but His second coming, when He comes with power and great glory (as our Lord spoke about it Himself in the Gospels, see Matt. 24:30 and 26:64). The Son of Man, who is the same as the Stone of Daniel 2, will gain supremacy over all peoples and nations after the world empires have been judged and put aside. He will reign on behalf of the Ancient of Days and the New Testament tells us that He will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, when He has put an end to all rule and authority and power (1 Cor. 15:24).

But that which makes Daniel 7 so precious is the position of the saints in connection with

the reign of Christ. In the interpretation of the dream Daniel is expressly told that the saints will receive the Kingdom (7:18, 22). Here it is not the Son of Man – as described in the dream itself – but the saints who possess the Kingdom. This seeming contradiction is explained by the fact that we are joint heirs with Christ. He will not rule alone, the saints will reign with Him. As James puts it, we are chosen by God to be heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him (Jas. 2:5).

The book of Revelation agrees with these remarks on the reign of Christ, for there we read of the saints who have part in the first resurrection: “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them (...) And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4, 6). These heavenly saints are in the presence of their Lord and Master. They surround the King when He comes to receive His Kingdom, and they share His royal power. The Kingdom was promised to them, not because of any merit on their part, but because they were chosen by God. In giving them the Kingdom, God proves to them His loving-kindness, and that is why they are blessed (Rev. 20:6).

It goes without saying that the Kingdom in its outward form, as a replacement of the

dominion of the world empires over the earth, is still future. It was a grave mistake that the Church of Rome made when it tried to assume this power prematurely. Now is the time to suffer with Christ rather than to reign with Him. The time to reign with Him will come, not as a result of our efforts to establish the Kingdom, but as a result of a distinct intervention by Him, namely His personal and visible second coming to judge the powers of this world and to establish the Kingdom of God. It is only then that heaven can shout with joy that “the kingdoms of this world have become [the kingdoms] of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!” (Rev. 11:15-18).

Behold, your King is coming!

The Kingdom will only be introduced at the return of the King, when the saints have been raised and raptured to appear with Him in glory. This is the teaching of the Gospels and of the rest of the New Testament. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the King, preached that the Kingdom was at hand. In the beginning of His ministry the Lord Jesus used the same terminology, and in the Person of the King it was indeed

“in their midst” (Luke 17:21 NASB). But the actual arrival of the Kingdom depended on the King’s acceptance by His people, and we know what happened. Christ came to His people, meek and humble and as a Saviour, but He was rejected and ultimately crucified. Not long after He had gone to Jerusalem where the crowds had at first cried out: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”, they shouted: “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” For this reason the coming of the Kingdom in its public manifestation has been delayed until the return of the King. It was taken away from them, and given to others. Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, and the city would see the King no more.

But there is a glorious “until”, uttered by the Lord Himself immediately after His announcement of the judgment that would fall upon the beloved city: “See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” These are the very words that had been cried out when Jesus entered Jerusalem (Matt. 21:9; 23:38-39). He will come again and present Himself to His people, who will then gladly accept Him with repenting hearts. They will look on Him whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him (Zech.

12:10). But He will not only return as the Messiah, the Son of David. He comes in a far greater glory and with a dignity that exceeds His rights over Israel. He returns as the Son of Man, the Heir of all things, as we have already seen in Daniel 7. As such, the Lord will receive dominion not only over Israel, but over all the nations and all the works of God's hands, for all creation will be subjected to Him according to Psalm 8.

Our Lord prefers to use the title "Son of Man" for Himself in the Gospels. In this context, we give the following citation from the Gospel of Matthew: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (...) When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him" (Matt. 24:30; 25:31-32).

Another thing we learn from Matthew is that the King will not receive the Kingdom alone, but will share it with His followers, His fellow heirs. We read just after the above-mentioned verses that the King says to those on His right hand: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the

foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Although the Kingdom is His legitimate portion, He inherits it with those who receive it as a token of the Father’s favour. They are the “sheep”, those who have heard His voice and have followed Him while He was still rejected on earth: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

As the Son of Man He will sit on the throne of His glory, and all the nations will be gathered before Him. This tribunal should be distinguished from the one in Revelation 20, the Great White Throne judgment. The former session will take place at the outset of the Kingdom of peace, but the latter will take place at its conclusion. The first session has to do with the nations that are left on the earth after the Great Tribulation, while the second deals with the “dead” who stand before the throne after the earth and the heaven have fled away from the face of Him who sits on the throne. Upon Christ’s return to establish His Kingdom, all the nations will be gathered before Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and the whole earth will be filled with His glory. His Kingdom will be unto the ends of the earth. But the sheep will get a place at His right hand, which in Scripture is always used to indicate a position of honour and

of authority. The saints will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

This truth can be found in Matthew 19 too, where we read about “the throne of His glory” that Christ will establish after His return in glory. Christ will reign together with His own, and this reign will have a distinctly earthly character, although its origin is in heaven. Heaven will reign over the earth. In this chapter Peter asked the Lord about the reward of those who had been faithful to Him in the period of His rejection. The Lord did not speak about the heavenly portion that they were going to receive in Him, the resurrected and glorified Lord, in the day of His absence. This makes us rich in God and rich in faith. It grants us a treasure in heaven, where our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). And in fact, it opens the doors of the Father’s house to us. But the Lord did not speak about these blessings. Instead, He spoke about the time when He would no longer be hidden in heaven, but present on earth. He showed Peter the reward that they would receive after His appearing in glory. He said to him: “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

Obviously, the word “regeneration” is used here in a future sense. When Christ will establish His Kingdom of peace and righteousness a complete renewal will take place. His return will result in a new order, an entirely new state of affairs. After His appearing in glory He will sit down on His glorious throne. But it is not the only throne: there will be twelve thrones for the apostles who have followed Him here below. They will reign with Him and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The parable of the minas in Luke 19 confirms that this is to be understood literally. When the Lord was on His way to Jerusalem, the disciples assumed that the Kingdom of God “would appear immediately” (v. 11). They expected the Kingdom to be established there and then, exactly as the prophets had foretold. But the Lord made it clear to them that He was going to leave the earth and return to heaven. Without a doubt, He Himself was this “nobleman”, who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return (v. 12). He was not going to establish the Kingdom of God at that time. He would go to heaven to receive a Kingdom for Himself, and then come back again. Remember, it is the Kingdom of heaven which will then be manifested on the earth. At His return, the Master calls His servants to Him,

and inquires about their service during His absence. And what do they receive? The faithful servants receive authority over a certain number of cities, whereas the wicked slave is judged because of his unfaithfulness.

Now let us conclude this paragraph with another quotation from Luke: “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near. And He spoke to them a parable: Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you, likewise, when you see these things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:27-31). So the Kingdom will be revealed at the return of the King, when He comes as the Son of Man with power and great glory. As we are watching the fig tree, a symbol of Israel, and the other trees - the other nations in the Middle East - in the process of putting forth leaves, we know that the coming of the Kingdom of peace is near.

The day is at hand

In this connection the Lord not only used the picture of summer being near, but also that of the day that is dawning. The coming of the Son of Man in His glory will put an end to the darkness that is at present enveloping the world. His return with great power and glory will mark the end of the night of His rejection. For He will arise as the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2). In His incarnation, too, Christ was the Light of the world that gave light to every man. The light shone in the darkness, in a world alienated from God and governed by spiritual and moral darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it. It rejected the true Light and the Light went away from this scene, so that we are living now in “a dark place” until the day dawns. In this present darkness we are to testify of the true Light and to reflect the light as children of light (see John 1:5; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36; Eph. 5:8, 14; Phil. 2:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 2:8).

We are happy to know that the night is far spent, and that the day is at hand. Nobody, except the Father Himself, knows exactly when the day will dawn, and so we are exhorted to watch and pray always. The morning comes, and we

are longing for the new day to dawn, like the watchmen on the city walls used to wait for the morning. We expect the Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bright and Morning Star, and His Appearing as the Sun of righteousness. The public aspect of the Second Coming of Christ, which had already been announced in the Old Testament, is of special interest to us. Our Lord will appear as the Sun of righteousness to herald a new era, the day of His public reign (Rom. 13:12; Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:6-7; Isa. 21:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 2:28; 22:16-17; 2 Tim. 4:8; Mal. 4:1-3).

As the Morning Star, Christ will come for His Church in order to rapture us and bring us into the Father's house. Thus He will give us the full enjoyment of our heavenly possessions. The morning star is seen shortly before the sun rises, just before the day dawns. It is not noticed by the world that is sound asleep. Christ will come for His Church, the bride of the Lamb. She is expecting Him and prays: "Come, Lord Jesus!" Then the day of the Lord will be revealed in judgment, and Christ will appear as the Sun of righteousness. Morning has broken then and a new day has dawned, when Christ will reign in righteousness and rule with justice. His long reign for a thousand years will be marked

by righteousness and peace and joy. But all the saints are with Him at His appearing. The righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. They derive their splendour from Christ, the true Light, when they appear with Him in glory. The term “all the saints” would include the Old Testament saints, the Church, as well as the glorified martyrs from the Great Tribulation. They live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Zech. 14:5; Matt. 13:43; Rev. 17:14; 19:14; 20:4).

The Old Testament does not teach Christ’s Coming for the Church as the Bright and Morning Star. This belongs to the mysteries that are revealed in the New Testament, mainly by Paul. He clearly teaches the Rapture, and Peter and John refer to it a few times. But the Old Testament does, of course, mention Christ’s appearing as the Sun of righteousness. This really is the great theme of prophecy: the coming of the Messiah in glory and power to take up His blessed reign. He will be the Centre of the Kingdom of peace, the Sun that gives heat and light, the Source of life and healing for all those who fear His name. On the other hand nothing can be hidden from the devouring fire of this Sun, that burns up the ungodly. In this respect, Christ is the greater Light that rules the day with perfect

justice (Gen. 1:16; Ps. 19:6; Isa. 60:1,20; Mal. 4:1-3).

King David, too, compared the coming of the Messiah to the break of day. In his last words in 2 Samuel 23:3-4, he described the coming Prince of Peace with the following words:

“He who rules over men must be just,
Ruling in the fear of God.

And He shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises,

A morning without clouds”.

When this Prince appears, great David's greater Son, a new day will dawn both for Israel and for the whole world. For the anointed King on the holy hill of Zion is none other than the Son of Man, who has dominion over all the works of God's hands. Jerusalem, the city of the great King, will be the centre of His reign, and His dominion will extend to the ends of the earth. Because this Light rules the day, the whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 2:2-5; 9:2, 6-7; 11:1-10, etc.).

A preview of the Kingdom

The disciples had a foretaste of this glorious future of the Messiah when Jesus was transfigured on the Mount, when “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). Matthew pictures Christ as the rejected King, the suffering Servant. When the Lord predicted His death and resurrection, the disciples never understood that He had to suffer and die. They expected Him to establish the Kingdom and to show His royal glory. Well, the Lord said, this is going to happen and I will give you a foretaste of My future glory. I will show you what it will be like, and this will empower you to take up the cross and follow Me now.

Both in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but also in Second Peter, the transfiguration on the mountain is the pledge of the future glory of the Son of Man. At the end of Matthew 16 we read: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom” (vv. 27-28). Immediately after these verses we have the account of the transfiguration on the mountain in chap-

ter 17. We find the same sequence of events in Mark 8 and 9: “(...) till they see the Kingdom of God present with power”, and in Luke 9: “(...) till they see the Kingdom of God”.

The transfiguration was a foretaste of the future glory of the Kingdom, and of the King who will be its radiant Centre. For the time being, He had to go the pathway of suffering, but at His Second Coming He was going to reveal His majesty and establish the Kingdom with power. Therefore, when Peter gives us an eyewitness report of the events on the Mount, he assures us that they confirmed the prophetic word that announced the Messiah and His glory. It was a testimony to the majesty of the King – who is none other than the Lord of glory – and the greatness of His Kingdom (2 Pet. 1:11-19). In fact, the transfiguration on the mountain shows us the coming Kingdom in miniature:

In the first place, there is the King Himself, appearing as the Sun of righteousness in all its glory.

In the second place, the voice of the Father is heard, giving honour and glory to the Son. Thus it will be in the world to come, when it will be clear to everyone that Christ receives the Kingdom from the hands of His Father who puts all things under Him.

In the third place, we see the saints grouped around the King. Although He is the great Centre of the Kingdom, His own appear with Him in glory. Moses and Elijah are a figure of the heavenly saints, the disciples represent the saints here on earth, but everybody's attention is focussed on the glory of the King and His finished work. His departure, His exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, was the subject of their conversation and their worship (Luke 9:31).

3. The Kingdom now and in the future

The Kingdom in its present state

Although the Kingdom will not be realized until the coming of the King with power and great glory, this does not mean that we have nothing to do with it right now. It would be a big mistake to think in that way. The Kingdom of God is also a present reality, even in the time of the King's absence. Although He has been rejected by the world and does not yet claim His rights publicly, we as Christians are very much involved in His Kingdom because we recognize His authority as our Lord and Master. We are living in a transitional period till He appears in glory.

We should clearly understand that the Kingdom at present has a hidden character, and may be viewed under the following three aspects:

(1) The present form of the Kingdom was hidden in Old Testament times.

(2) In our day, we do not see its previously announced public appearance but its spiritual character in the midst of believers.

(3) This is because of the absence of the King Himself, who is “hidden in God”, as Paul intimates in his letter to the Colossians (Col. 3:3-4).

Therefore the Lord Jesus employed several parables in which He explained the mysteries of the Kingdom (see particularly Matthew 13). He started by saying that the Kingdom of heaven was like a sower who went out to sow, or that it might be compared to a sower etc. (NASB). Since He had been rejected as Israel’s Messiah, the appearance of the Kingdom was changing, and its visible establishment was to be delayed until His Second Coming. That is the reason why He did not compare Himself to a King, but rather to a Sower who went out to sow the Word of God everywhere (Matt. 13:3ff.). The field is the world, it is not limited to Israel anymore. This work of sowing the glad tidings is being continued by His servants until this very day.

Sad to say, the evil one is also active, sowing tares among the wheat. Therefore the wheat and the tares – the sons of the Kingdom and the sons of the evil one – grow together until the harvest. They will not be separated entirely until the end of the age, until Christ's return. Upon His appearing in glory He will send out His angels to gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and those who practise lawlessness. By His power He will then put an end to the present form of the Kingdom, where good and evil, true confessors of Christ and nominal professors are still mixed. It will not be long before He shall slay the wicked with the breath of His lips, and will use the sword of His mouth to strike the nations (Isa. 11:4; 2 Thess. 1:8; 2:8; Rev. 19:15).

But in the present time Christ is reigning in a spiritual way. He is the absent King who rules by His Word and His Spirit. He reigns where His authority is recognized, and where people submit to the Word of God. And He does not hinder evil from entering the Kingdom of heaven. This implies that the characteristics of the Kingdom that will soon be revealed publicly should be known and enjoyed in a spiritual way even now. Is the Kingdom of peace going to be a kingdom of justice, peace and happiness? There is no doubt about it. But the Kingdom is

marked by these same characteristics in our day and age, “for the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Note that it says righteousness and peace and joy “in the Holy Spirit”. In the present time, the blessings of the Kingdom are of a spiritual nature. They result from the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer. There is as yet no peace on earth, no true righteousness, no true joy. But the peace of God fills the hearts of those who bow to the authority of the Lord Jesus and submit to God’s Word. Our hearts are full of joy, and our behaviour is characterized by righteousness and peace. Thus we serve Christ in all these things and are acceptable to God and approved by men (Rom. 14:18). So we are to walk properly, “as in the day” (Rom. 13:13). The day of the Kingdom of peace will dawn, and the Sun of righteousness will arise. But as children of light and sons of the day, we are to walk in the light of the coming Kingdom. We do not belong to the world that has fallen asleep, but to the people who walk in the light of the risen Lord (Eph. 5:8-14; 1 Thess. 5:4-8).

Inheriting the Kingdom

Still, there is another important distinction between the Kingdom in its present form and its future manifestation. The fact that the Kingdom is now hidden and will soon be revealed publicly is not the only difference; another point that comes up for discussion now is the fact that at the present time, we are subjects in the Kingdom, while in the future we shall be its heirs.

In Romans 14:17 we have seen a description of the Kingdom in its present form. It is marked by certain moral characteristics that in the Kingdom of peace will be fully developed and universally adopted. But if we look at the context of this verse we shall note how often the word “Lord” is used in this passage (please read from verse 4 all the way through to verse 18). When we live in accordance with the principles of the Kingdom, we are servants of Christ. He is Lord of all, and we are His servants and slaves of God. In the Kingdom in its present form we are subject to Christ’s rule. We do not yet reign as kings (1 Cor. 4:8). This situation will profoundly change in the future, when we shall reign with Him and inherit the Kingdom. This is what James means when he calls us “heirs of the Kingdom” (Jas. 2:5). It is a future blessing,

although it has important practical consequences today.

This is confirmed by other scriptures that refer to inheriting the Kingdom, such as:

(1) “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

(2) “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God?” (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

(3) “(...) just as I told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

(4) “No unclean person (...) has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5).

We have already dealt with the first scripture. When the King appears in His glory He will sit down on His glorious throne. But He will not reign alone, the saints will reign with Him. They inherit the Kingdom that had been laid up for them according to God’s promise. Christ is the Heir, but they are joint heirs

with Him. The other scriptures, too, mention the Kingdom as something still future. In this respect, 1 Corinthians 15 is also very illuminating, for this chapter plainly states that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). We will only enter the Kingdom after the resurrection, and, as we have already seen, after our appearing with Christ in glory.

At this point, we could cite more scriptures that speak about the heirs or the inheritance (like Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:10-14; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; Rev. 21:7). Although the inheritance is not always seen in connection with Kingdom truth, these scriptures do confirm the idea of future possessions. We are indeed “heirs” as well as “kings” even now, but this does not mean that we have already received our inheritance or are already exercising royal power. While possessing royal dignity, we are not exercising the power that goes with it. Christ Himself is waiting at the right hand of God till His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 10:13), and so we are waiting with Him until He publicly assumes His royal power.

God’s purpose is to have Christ as Head over all things in heaven and on earth, but it is not yet manifest. It will be manifested in a future day, the dispensation of the fullness of the times,

when heaven and earth will be in close contact and harmony, when God's will will indeed be done on earth as it is in heaven. All things will be gathered together in one in Christ, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. And the Spirit of promise is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession (Eph. 1:10-14).

The last book of the Bible shows us that Christ will take possession of His inheritance by means of several series of judgments. The inheritance has to be wrested from the power of the adversary, the prince of this world. Christ only, the victorious Lamb, is worthy to do this as He has obtained the title to the inheritance. He has paid the ransom - at the price of His own blood - and He is the One who is going to bring creation back to God. When this has happened His own will reign with Him, as is shown in Revelation 20. Christ, who is Head over all things, will share His inheritance with His own, the joint heirs. He is the Head, but the Church is the body of the Head, and inseparably united with Him (Eph. 1:20-23).

Among the other heirs of the Kingdom the Church will hold a special position². The Church enjoys special privileges as it is one with Christ, who will be the radiant Centre of the Kingdom. It is the body of Christ, and the bride of the Lamb, and consists of a family of heavenly saints. As the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church will serve as the seat of government for God and the Lamb. It belongs to the heavenly sphere of Christ's reign, whereas Zion on earth will be the central point of the earthly sphere of the Kingdom. It is not easy to say anything in detail about the relationship between these spheres, nor about the way in which the various families of saints will share in the coming Kingdom. We can confidently leave that to the King's wisdom, who will give everyone his appointed lot. The main point here is that there will be perfect harmony between heaven and earth, and that heaven will directly exercise its blessed rule over the earth.

2 Apart from the Church there will be several other families of saints to inherit the Kingdom, such as: (1) the Old Testament saints, who will also have part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6); (2) the great multitude coming out of the Great Tribulation (assuming that they belong to the martyrs mentioned in Rev. 20:4); (3) and the earthly saints from the people of Israel and from the nations who will enter the Kingdom at Christ's appearing (Matt. 25:31-46).

At the end of the millennium, Christ will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, that God may be “all in all”. From that moment on, the mediating reign of Christ shall no longer be necessary, and we shall no longer reign publicly with Him (1 Cor. 15:24-28). In the eternal state righteousness no longer reigns but dwells in the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13), and God will then dwell with men (Rev. 21:3).

“Do not fear, little flock,
for it is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the Kingdom”.

Luke 12:32