



# The Sword & The Plow

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## The Prophecy of Daniel Chapter Two

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The image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is among the most important prophecies of the Bible. In it we see the hand of God carefully guiding the progress of history to accomplish his purpose to bring Christ into the world, establish his kingdom, and save mankind. The dream's primary purpose was to serve as a timeline unto the kingdom and coming of the Messiah. The specificity of the vision and the facility with which it enables us to pinpoint the coming of Christ's kingdom makes it unique among the visions of the Old Testament. However, it was remarkable in more ways than this: the vision occurred while the Jews were in captivity and their political institutions and government were non-existent; it was given to the very Gentile king who had carried the Jews into captivity and burned God's own temple, but who later became a worshiper of the one true God; the dream

foretold events until an appointed consummation that would mark the transfer of world dominion from Gentile powers unto the Messiah and his people.

### Historical Antecedents

The Babylonians rose as an independent power when Nabopolassar ascended the throne of Babylon circa 625 B.C. upon the fall of the Assyrians of Nineveh. Taking advantage of the event, Egypt, which had been subjugated by Assyria, asserted itself and rebelled from Assyrio-Babylonian rule. All Syria came under Egyptian control under Pharaoh Necho II. "Necho led Egypt to independence upon fall of Nineveh" and "Necho: Syria came under rule of". During a campaign by Egypt against the king of Assyria (viz., the Medes and Babylonians), Josiah went forth to engage Necho and

was slain (II Kng. 23:29-30; Josephus, *Ant. X*, v, 1). Returning from battle, Necho deposed Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, whom the people had crowned, and set his brother, Eliakim, on the throne instead, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned eleven years in Jerusalem (II Kng. 23:36; "II Kng. 23:36; II Chron. 36:5). In or about the fourth year of his reign (605 B.C.), which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:1), Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish 605 B.C. (Jer. 46:2 Jer. 46:2) and proceeded to conquer Syria and Palestine. By the eighth year of Jehoiakim (601 B.C.), the holy land fell to Babylonian rule and was set under tribute. In the third year of this servitude (598 B.C.), Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, prompting the latter to return and besiege Jerusalem (II Kng. 24:1). Nebuchadnezzar took the city, slew Jehoiakim, and carried Daniel and his fellows, including Ezekiel, into captivity (Dan. 1:1-6; cf. Josephus, *Ant. X*, vi, 3 ). After the siege, word reached Nebuchadnezzar that his father, Nabopolassar, had died. Nebuchadnezzar thus hurried back to Babylon where he acceded to the sole principate as absolute monarch of the realm (Josephus, *Contra Apion*, I, ix). In the second year of his sole principate, God visited Nebuchadnezzar with a dream (Dan. 2:1).

### **The Dream and its Interpretation**

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an image in human form, whose head was gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, and its legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. He saw until a Stone cut out without hands smote the image upon its feet, reducing the whole to shards. The Stone that smote the image thus grew into a great mountain, filling all the earth. Daniel interpreted the vision, saying that the image's four divisions were four world empires that would obtain until the kingdom of God and Christ, whose dominion would supplant all other kingdoms and endure forever. The main issues presented by the vision are:

- 1) The Last Days and Coming of Christ
- 2) The identity of the four empires and their duration
- 3) The symbolism of the metals and materials comprising the image's body
- 4) The nature and timing of the kingdom

### **The Last Days and Coming of Christ**

Daniel is a book of time-lines. Chapter seven provides a time-line in the form of four beasts, which depict four world empires to the persecution under Nero (the "little horn") and the second coming of Christ and the kingdom of heaven; chapter nine provides a time-line in the form of 490 prophetic years until the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem; chapters 10-12 provides a time line from the kingdom of Persia until the rise of the Roman power, the fall of Jerusalem, and the resurrection of the dead. The present chapter is a time-line in the form or four world empires that would appear until the coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The kingdom and resurrection are joined many times in the New Testament (Matt. 16:27, 28; II Tim. 4:1) so that the mention of the kingdom here should be understood to embrace also the resurrection. And because the resurrection was tied to Christ's second coming, we may know that that Nebuchadnezzar's dream also includes this.

The idea that Nebuchadnezzar's dream reaches to the second coming is not new, but has been current in the church from at least as early as Jerome (AD 347-420), whose commentary on Daniel is one of the earliest in our possession, and the first to attempt an expository interpretation (versus a homiletic or allegorical). Jerome believed that Daniel's assignment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the "latter days" implied that the vision entailed the "end of the world":

"Now either these 'last days' are to be reckoned from the time when the dream was revealed to Daniel until the end of the world, or else at least this inference is to be drawn, that the over-all interpretation of the dream applies to that final end when the image and statue beheld is to be ground to powder."

"We would refute those who think the world will never be destroyed. For never would any days be called 'the last days' if the world were everlasting." Comments at vv. 28, 29.

The assumption that the end of the world implies the end of the cosmos has created immense confusion in the church down through the centuries. But the end of the world and end of the universe are not the same thing. We agree with Jerome that the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream portrays the end of the

world. We disagree that this implied an end of the cosmos. Rather, the point of the imagery is that the world that was under dominion of the Gentile powers would come under the dominion of Christ, as indeed it has. The correct view is that the “latter days” signified the closing days of the era preceding the kingdom of Christ, and was marked by the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

*“The Old Testament prophets contemplated the appearance of the Messiah and the going forth of the new word of Jehovah as occurring ‘in the end of the days’ – that is, the last days of the eon or dispensation under which they were living...This ‘end of the times’ belongs, not to the era of the new dispensation, but to the concluding days of the old...It is a serious error, therefore, when learned exegetes persist in assuming that the phrase ‘the last days,’ as employed in the Scriptures, means the period of the new Christian dispensation.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is not new. Several church fathers saw distinctly that the “latter days” were tied to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Eusebius of Caesarea is probably the most famous:

*“For we must understand by ‘the end of the days’ [viz., ‘the last days,’ LXX] the end of the national existence of the Jews. What, then, did he say they must look for? The cessation of the rule of Judah, the destruction of their whole race, the failing and ceasing of their governors, and the abolition of the dominant kingly position of the*

<sup>1</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, (1898, reprinted Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1999), p. 361. “Daniel’s prophecies of the latter days concern the future history of Israel down to AD 70, and do not directly deal with the gospel era (except as general principles). The same is true of Zechariah 9-14. Arguably every instance of ‘last days’ and ‘last hour’ in the New Testament also refers to the end of Israel’s history down to AD 70.” (James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall* (American Vision, Powder Springs, GA, 2007), p. 20) Jordan makes the common mistake of interpreting the latter days in overly narrow terms, applying them exclusively to Israel. The vision here and in chapter seven concern the succession of *world empires* from Babylon to Rome and make no mention of Israel at all; likewise, Balaam’s prophecy of the last days also involved Rome, Moab, and Asshur (Num. 24:14, 24), and Jeremiah speaks of God’s gathering the captivity of Elam, Moab, and Ammon in the last days through the gospel (Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 39). Hence, although the last days would mark the end of the Jewish nation and it is to this that the phrase often refers, the latter days were not Israel-specific.

*tribe of Judah, and the rule and kingdom of Christ, not over Israel but over all nations, according to the word, ‘This is the expectation of the nations.’”<sup>2</sup>*

### The Identity of the Four Empires and their Duration

The identity of the Four Empires is not greatly in dispute. Liberals try to impugn the authenticity of Daniel by charging that it is a pseudo-epigraphical forgery, written during the period of the Greeks shortly after the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes and describes the valor and victory of the brothers Maccabee. This view has been completely discredited long, long ago, so we will not stop to address it here.<sup>3</sup> Daniel provided the starting point for identifying the succession of empires when he stated that the image’s head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. With this information in hand, it is a simple matter to identify the succession of world empires. The four world empires preceding the kingdom and coming of Christ were:

Babylonian		598-539 BC
Mede-Persian		539-330 BC
Greco-Macedonia		330-188 BC
Roman		188 BC – AD 70
Total =		668 years

Babylon fell to the Medes and Persian in 539 BC during a siege of the capital city led by Cyrus the Great, who diverted the city’s water courses, allowing his soldiers to gain access and take the city by surprise while it was feasting and carrying on as if it were impervious to defeat. Taken from the sole accession of Nebuchadnezzar, the period assigned to Babylon would represent 59 years, a length proportioned to the size of the head as against the rest of the body.

The Mede-Persian Empire suffered defeat to Alexander the Great. Alexander crossed the

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, VIII, ccclxxv; Ferrar ed.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Chandler, Lord Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, *A Vindication of the Defense of Christianity from Prophecies of the Old Testament* (1728).

Hellespont in 334 BC and in 330 BC took the Persian capital of Persepolis, which he burned to the ground. The chest and arms would thus represent a period of 209 years.

The Greco-Macedonia Empire yielded to the power of Rome about 188 BC, at the treaty of Ampaneia, following the defeat of Antiochus III the Great at Thermopylae (191 BC) and Magnesia (190 BC), or at latest, the third Macedonian war with Perseus (168 B.C.). This would assign a period of about 142 years to Greek domination.

The Roman Empire did not fall until 476 AD, but the vision is unconcerned with events beyond AD 70. The point of the imagery is not when the empires ceased totally to exist, but *when their dominion was surrendered to a greater power*. Babylon did not cease to exist when conquered by Cyrus in 539 BC. Indeed, it continued until Alexander's time and beyond. So with the rest of the empires mentioned. It is dominion that is at issue, and after AD 70 world dominion belonged firmly to Christ. Thus, the period represented by the legs and feet would be from approximately 188 BC to AD 70, or about 258 years.

With AD 70 as our terminus and the monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar as the beginning, the whole period of the image would be 598 BC – AD 70, or 668 years. We feel that the overall proportion of the image's members to the length of the empires they represent bear an overall and important correlation that corroborates this interpretation. Those who attempt to extend the toes down to our modern era find themselves with toes which represent a period approximately four times that of the rest of the body combined. As this would destroy all proportion in the image, it argues against attempts to extend the vision beyond AD 70.

### **The Symbolism of the Metals**

In his book *The Prophecies of Daniel 2*, my friend John Evans argues that the materials in the image bear an actual, historical relation to the kingdoms they represent. Thus, Babylon was known as the golden city; Persian, he asserts, was known for the silver coinage with which it paid its army; Greece for the bronze prow of its war ships used to ram enemy vessels, and Rome for its use of iron. The clay in the feet and toes, he argues represents the Jews from the time of Roman dominion in Palestine. However, we do not feel John has made his case for historical identity of the materials with the kingdoms they represent. This is particularly true of his assignment

of clay for the Jews, for here there is no historical association at all. Rather, he builds his case upon an asserted *Biblical* association.

Jeremiah 18:1-10 contains a parable in which God sent the prophet to the potter. When the pot he was making was marred in the potter's hands, he made it into a new vessel as seemed best to the potter. The incident became an object lesson for Judah that the nation was an earthen vessel in God's hands. Having become marred or ruined by their rebellion and sin, God would remake or destroy Judah as seemed best to him. On this basis, John concludes that the Jews represent the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Obviously, this is not an historical association, but a Biblical one, and therefore incongruent with the hypothesis. More importantly, however, is the fact that the clay in the parable did not represent the Jews to the exclusion of earth's other people and nations. Jeremiah is very clear that the clay in the parable stood for all humanity and the nations of the world in God's hands:

*At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jer. 18:7, 8)*

Thus, the parable is applicable with equal force to all nations, not just the Jews; there is no historical or Biblical association to support the idea that the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents the Jews. But if there is no historical association of clay with any particular nation, then we feel the argument as to the metals is equally invalid. For the rule by which we interpret one we must interpret all. If the historical association does not explain one, it does not explain any. To our mind, the better view is that the metals were chosen for the universal symbolism associated with their glory and value, and that these in turn reflect the nature and quality of the kingdoms these represent.

Gold is the most precious metal. It is a universal symbol of prosperity and wealth. Gold is incorruptible; it does not rust or tarnish. It is used in ornamentation of buildings, art, and the body. Gold is universally sought and accepted as a store of value and a medium of exchange. Silver is more common than gold and is next in value. It too is a symbol of wealth, and is universally employed as a store of

value and medium of exchange. Brass has some of the beauty of gold and silver and has been used in coinage, but is of vastly lesser value. Its qualities and appearance are such that it is employed in common instruments and usages where men want to combine both beauty with utility and strength. Iron is the most common metal. It possesses strength and utility, but lacks beauty and other qualities normally associated with glory and splendor. Because iron is easily corrupted and overly abundant, it is a poor store of value and is therefore unsuitable as a medium of exchange. Clay is the stuff of common utensils. It is easily molded and formed, and just as easily broken. It possesses the least strength and is the least stable and enduring material, being the most susceptible to spoiling and breakage.

Thus, the image is composed of metals that decline in value and glory even as they descend from the head to the feet. They also decline in permanence and incorruptibility as they increase in abundance and grow more common. Gold is the most esteemed and desired, iron and clay the least of all.

In construction of the tabernacle and temple, this same declension is seen. The nearer to God and the Holy of Holies, the more precious metal was employed. The further from God, the more common metals were used. Thus, gold adorned the ark of the covenant and overlay the cherubim of glory. A golden censor was used for the golden altar of incense just outside the Holy of Holies (Ex. 37:1-9; II Chron 3:3-11; Heb. 9:4). Silver was used for the lamp stands and tables (I Chron. 28:15-17); brass was used for the altar of burnt offering and the brazen sea in the court yard (II Chron. 4:1-5); but the doors and joinings of the outer gates were of iron (I Chron. 22:3). Obviously, this arrangement was based upon the symbolic associations of the metals, so that what was best was placed nearest to God.

Applied to the image, we would suggest that metals and corresponding body parts portray the character and political constitutions of the kingdoms and that they were 1) precious and valued as they gave glory to God, but base and disesteemed as they resisted and opposed him; and 2) glorious and noble the nearer they approximated the absolute monarchy of God and Christ, but inglorious and ignoble as they declined there from.

#### **Monarchy, Aristocracy, Republics, & Democracies: Political Constitutions of the Four World Kingdoms**

In our commentary on Daniel, we take the view that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon served as something of a foreshadow and type of the sole monarchy of Christ, in the manner Solomon's golden reign did before him. Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar "king of kings" even as John calls Christ "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Dan. 2:37; Rev. 19:16). God gave Nebuchadnezzar "a kingdom, power, strength, and glory" even as Christ was given a kingdom "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12; 11:15). Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold (Dan. 2:38) even as Christ is head over his body, the church, and head over all mankind (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23). The sole, absolute monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar is therefore most like the absolute monarchy of the reigning Christ in terms of the glory and power attached to his government. However, as we descend through the image's body, the monarchical power grows more and more attenuated. The Mede-Persian monarchy was not absolute, but offset by its nobles, as seen in their designs against Daniel under Darius the Mede, and the resistance Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus experienced in allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple (Dan. 6; 11:1; Ezra 4:5).

The Greek's are known for their devotion to democratic government, which they identified with political liberty. However, history shows that democracy is the most unstable form of government of all, bounded only by the fickle will of the masses. The golden glory of Nebuchadnezzar's sole monarchy was further diminished by the division of the Greco-Macedonian Empire at Alexander's death between the four warring monarchies of Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt. Rome is represented by iron, the most *common* and *corruptible* metal. Rome was a republic, which differs in theory from a democracy in that it is governed by a written law (the "twelve tables") or constitution. The Roman people trace their descent from the Greeks and therefore abhorred monarchy, and viewed their political liberty as existing in direct administration of the government by the "senate and people." However, as with the Greeks, Roman history was marred by class antagonisms, parties, and continuous upheaval and civil war. Even during the period of the empire, Rome was still in form, if not in fact, a republic in which the emperor shared power with the senate. Our view is that the legs of iron point to the period of the republic, and that the feet of iron mingled with clay point to the period of the empire and Rome's direct administration of subject peoples through proconsuls of senatorial rank. The clay is the common mass of humanity and nations of the empire; the iron, Roman

rule. The iron and clay do not mix, signifying that the sovereign and subjects exist in mutual antagonism and do not adhere to one another.

The kingdoms of the image thus represent a scale ranging from absolute monarchy (Nebuchadnezzar), to mixed monarchy-aristocracy (Mede-Persian), the divided empire of Alexander (Greece) to democratic and republican governments (Greece and Rome). The glory of sole monarchy most approximates that of Christ, and is portrayed as the most resplendent by the head of gold, whereas republican government is represented by the common and corruptible metal of iron.

### **The Character and Quality of the Kingdoms**

As it happens, the form of government was also mirrored by the glory they returned to God. Nebuchadnezzar converted and became a worshipper of the Most High God (Dan. 4:37). Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes acknowledged God, released the captives and gave order to rebuild the temple, even financing its construction and sacrifices. However, the Greeks and Romans only bruised and crushed God's people and opposed his worship (not unlike the condition into which America is declining). Ptolemy Philopater entered the temple and attempted to compel the Jews in Alexandria to abandon the worship of God, and to annihilate the race from among his people. Antiochus Epiphanes carried the outrage still further, setting an idol in the Jerusalem temple and defiling the altar with swine's blood, and persecuting to death the people of God. And Nero carried the outrage to its very height and pitch as the great eschatological persecutor of the church and gospel, whose name was synonymous with the beast. Thus, if the metals reflect the glory associated with the kingdom's respective political constitutions, they seem also to bear some relation to the moral condition of their leaders as they embraced or resisted the religion of God.

This is not to say that republics and democracies are invariably bad or opposed to true religion, and that monarchies are invariably good and friends of the gospel. The Greek monarchies that grew up after the death of Alexander were great persecutors of God's people and cannot be characterized as republics or democracies. Even so, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that governments and cultures that pander to popular will and the universal suffrage of unenlightened masses tend to undo a nation's morals and institutions, resulting in lawlessness and rebellion to the government of heaven and the gospel of Christ;

and that monarchies, because they do not depend upon popular will to rule, can restrain the licentious will of the masses, assuming the rulers so minded. In ancient Israel, the hereditary priesthood of Aaron may have been intended to serve this purpose. However, this philosophical inquiry is beyond the pale of the present discussion and we must hasten ahead.

### **Nature and Timing of the Kingdom**

Many futurist paradigms assume that the kingdom and coming of Christ would be physical and political, ruling over earth's people's from Jerusalem. For this paradigm to be valid, the kingdom must be future, for thing anticipated or expected has yet to manifest. Against this view, however, is the immutability of God's prophetic word, which placed the coming of the kingdom in the days of the Roman Caesars. Jacob's prophecy to his sons placed the coming of "Shiloh" and the kingly sceptre in Messiah's hand in the "latter days" (Gen. 49:1,10). Balaam placed the coming of the "Star and Sceptre of Jacob" in the time when Chittim (the Romans) afflicted Eber (the Hebrews) (Num. 24:17, 24). Isaiah tied the coming of the kingdom to the birth of Christ, saying, "unto us a child is born...of the increase of his government there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:6, 7) At his conception, the angel told Mary that God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:32, 33). Jesus began his ministry with the announcement that the "time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). He told his disciples "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:26, 27). At the conclusion of his ministry before his ascension, Jesus said "all power in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He was given a kingdom, power, and glory (Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 5:12), and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven as co-regent in the government of the world, and now rules the nations with a rod of iron (Acts 2:33; Rev. 2:27). Unless all of this scripture, which cannot be broken, is to be ignored, then we must accept that the kingdom came in the days of the apostles and the rule of the Roman Caesars.

The timing of the kingdom is further corroborated by the ten toes of the feet for these clearly mark the time of the kingdom's coming. We believe the toes are best understood as the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus Caesar in 27 BC. These

provinces were in a settled condition, without legions to defend them. The provinces retained by Augustus were on the borders and required military force to govern. Dio Cassius explains: "His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers."<sup>4</sup> These ten provinces became a permanent, identifying feature of the empire, weak but distinct among the body's members:

*"In 27 B.C. the provinces had been divided into two classes, Imperial and Senatorial, 'provinciae Caesaris,' and 'provinciae Senatus' or 'populi.'" The latter were ten in number, Africa, Asia, Bithynia, Achaea, Illyricum, Macedonia, Crete and Cyrene, Sicily, Sardinia, and Hispania Baetica...The Imperial provinces in 27 B.C. were Gaul, Syria, Cyprus and Cilicia, and Hispania Citerior. The number was increased subsequently by the division of single provinces into two or more, and by the inclusion of all provinces constituted after 27 B.C., e.g. Moesia, Pannonia, and Dalmatia."*<sup>5</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, use of an image reminds us of an *idol*, which points, first, to the Gentiles and signifies the allotted time of their government and dominion over the world vis-à-vis the people of God; a dominion that would end with the kingdom and coming of Christ; second, use of an idol suggests a specific era in world history. Paul said God "winked at" Gentile worship of idols in other eras, but with the gospel call commands all men everywhere *to repent*, showing that the worship of idols was marked by Christ to be rooted out of the nations and all men called to worship of the true God

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<sup>4</sup> Dio Cassius, LIII, ii-xiii; Loeb ed.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Marris Taylor, *A Constitutional and Political History of Rome* (Methuen & Co., London, 1889), 464. "Africa, Numidia, Asia, Greece with Epirus, the Dalmatian and Macedonian districts, Crete and the Cyrenaic portion of Libya, Bithynia with Pontus which adjoined it, Sardinia and Baetica were held to belong to the people and the senate; while to Caesar belonged the remainder of Spain,— that is, the district of Tarraco and Lusitania,— and all the Gauls,— that is, Gallia Narbonensis, Gallia Lugdunensis, Aquitania, and Belgica, both the natives themselves and the aliens among them." Dio Cassius, LIII, xii; Loeb ed.

(Acts 17:22-31). Hence, as idolatry is now largely extinct in the civilized world and few men fall down before images or worship them as gods, the image is plainly seen *not* to reach unto the modern era. Since the kingdom would root these evils out, the kingdom is necessarily come.

The kingdom is the time when world dominion would become Christ's, as depicted by the Stone smiting the image and growing up into a mountain, filling all the earth. We believe that the Stone smote the image in the first century events marked by the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars. Bishop Lightfoot put it like this:

*"Whereas the Jews would not own Christ before for the Son of man, or for the Messias, then, by the vengeance that he should execute upon them, they and all the world should see an evident sign, that he was so. This, therefore, is called 'his coming,' and 'his coming in his kingdom,' because this did first declare his power, glory, and victory, on that nation that had despised him...not only in the horrid civil wars among the Jews, but also in the great concussions in the Roman empire, in the wars betwixt Otho and Vitellius, and betwixt Vitellius and Vespasian (of which the Roman historians, especially Tacitus, are very large); the like to which, there had not been before, even to the sacking of Rome itself, and the burning of the Capitol."*<sup>6</sup>

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars, the church went on to dominate the world. In the Byzantine empire of the east, Christianity became the very heart of its culture for over 1,000 years. In the west, and more especially England, Christianity was the dominate force in the development of civilization almost from the start.

## Conclusion

The dominion of Christ is firmly established over the earth and he rules the nations with a rod of iron.

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<sup>6</sup> John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the New Testament, The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 141, 142.

# Three Usages of the “Kingdom of Heaven” in Scripture

by

*Kurt M. Simmons*

The kingdom is a major theme of scripture. It occupies a large place among the Old Testament prophets, and the teaching of John the Baptist and Christ. Not surprisingly, significant confusion about the kingdom has always existed. Part of the reason for the confusion is that the phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used in several different ways. In this article, we want to identify the different usages in scripture and provide explanations and examples of each.

Scripture uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (or God) three different ways: 1) the place of God’s habitation and the saints’ eternal rest; 2) the church, or those who obtain citizenship and inheritance in heaven; and 3) the dominion over all people, nations, and tongues Christ received at his ascension and coronation.

Let’s take a look at these each in order.

## **The Kingdom as the Habitation of God and the Saints**

Apart from metaphoric use to describe governments and rulers, there are three usages of “heaven” in scripture; one refers to the kingdom of heaven. The three usages of heaven in scripture are: the firmament in which the birds fly; the firmament in which the stars are fixed; and the realm of the spirit, including Hades Paradise and Heaven, the dwelling place of God.

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.” Gen. 1:1-8*

The “heaven” of Gen. 1:1, seems to embrace the whole expanse over earth. The firmament that divides the waters above from those below refers to earth’s atmosphere, which divides water that is condensed into liquid and is heavy, from water that is vapor and is light. It is in this firmament that the birds of the air fly:

*“And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” Gen. 1:20*

The atmosphere in which the birds fly and the clouds are hung may be styled the “first heaven.” The firmament of heaven also describes the vast expanse of space, where the stars are set:

*“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for season, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.” Gen. 1:14, 15*

The outer space beyond earth’s atmosphere may be called the “second heaven.” The “third heaven” is the place of God’s habitation (Eccl. 5:2) and the place of his throne (Ps. 11:4; Isa. 66:1). It is also called the “highest heaven” (Deut. 10:14) and the “heaven of heavens” (II Chron. 6:18). Paul refers to the third heaven by name in II Cor. 12:1-4, where he makes it include Hades Paradise, the interim abode of the righteous dead, and where Jesus went when he died (Lk. 23:43; Jn. 20:17; Acts 2:27).

Of these three usages of “heaven,” two embrace the natural world, and one the supernatural. The firmament the birds and clouds fly in and that in which the stars are set are natural; they belong to the physical creation. The heaven which is the habitation of God is supermundane and spiritual, and, it alone among the heavens is called the “kingdom of God.” It is to this place that Jesus referred when he told Nicodemus *“Except a man*

be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Jesus referred to this place again when he said “*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 18:3). These passages both speak to the fact that the natural man is carnally minded and at enmity with God; he must undergo a fundamental change of heart and mind; he must turn away from sin and receive the gospel and things of the Spirit, before he can be saved and made an heir of eternal life. Another passage that refers to the kingdom of God as the place of the saint’s eternal inheritance is in Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians:

“*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.*” I Cor. 5:9-11

The washing and justification in the name of the Lord Jesus mentioned by Paul here doubtless is that first obtained by baptism in Jesus’ name (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16; 19:5; 22:16), and corresponds to the water of our rebirth Jesus mentioned to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:3-5). Certainly, that is the way the earliest Christian writers understood it. Tertullian wrote “We little fishes, after our Fish, are born in the water (of baptism).”<sup>7</sup> There is a play on words here. The word “fish” in Greek is ἰχθῦς, the first letters of which make up the phrase Ἰησοῦς Ἐριστὸς Θεοῦ Υἱὸς Σωτῆρ (“Jesus Christ of God [the] Son [and] Savior”). Finally, it is to heaven Paul refers when he writes:

“*Now this I say brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*” I Cor. 15:50

The lesson of this verse is that which is gross and palpable cannot inherit that which is ethereal, unless it first put off the physical and be made spiritual. Paul indicates that this occurs for each of us as we are called out of this world one by one at the last trumpet marking our physical death (I Cor. 15:51, 52; II Cor. 5:4-8).

The sum of these passages shows that the “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” sometimes refer to the habitation of God and the place of the saints’ eternal inheritance.

## The Kingdom as the Church – The Vision of Daniel Two

Jesus received dominion over earth as absolute monarch at his ascension, and now rules the nations with a rod of iron. He guides all things for the advancement of the gospel and the church. Christ’s dominion means that his church also has dominion and is a type of kingdom on earth. This is clear from the book of Daniel.

The book of Daniel was written and compiled while the Jewish nation was in captivity in Babylon for its sin and rebellion. God had delivered all nations of the civilized world into the power of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. God showed Nebuchadnezzar in a dream that his kingdom was to be the first of four successive world empires until the coming of Christ and his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar saw a dream in which these four empires were represented by an image of a man, divided into four parts, each part consisting of a different metal. The head of was of gold; the chest and arms of silver; the belly and thighs were bronze; the legs were of iron and the feet were partly of iron and partly clay. Nebuchadnezzar then saw a stone, cut out without human hand, strike the image upon its feet, reducing it to potsherds that were carried away by the wind; but the stone grew into a mountain and filled the whole earth.

The dream was interpreted for Nebuchadnezzar by the prophet Daniel, who indicated that each of the three successive kingdoms following Nebuchadnezzar’s would be inferior to those preceding it, as reflected by the declining value of the metals and their position in the body. This inferiority did not consist in the size or power of the empire, for the empires that followed Babylon were larger and more powerful. Rather, the inferiority consisted in the *diminishing glory of the kingdoms* as represented by the *increasing division of the sovereign power* and the *government’s policy and response to the people and worship of God*. The metals become *less precious* as the sovereign power was divided and shared. They also become increasingly *debased* as the governments they represent were inimical to God and persecuted his people.

Nebuchadnezzar was *absolute monarch* over earth and became a worshipper of the true and living God. He is therefore was portrayed as the image’s head of gold (Dan. 2:37, 38).<sup>8</sup> However, in the empires that

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<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 1

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<sup>8</sup> We believe Nebuchadnezzar was a type of Christ, similar to Solomon, in his rule over all earth as absolute monarch. Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom thus served as a foreshadow and adumbration of Christ’s kingdom.

followed, the glory of the sovereign power was increasingly divided, and their governments opposed to the people and worship of God. Cyrus the Great and several of his successors were friendly to the faith, even helping rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, and financing its construction and sacrifices. However, the sovereign power was shared with the country's nobles, many of whom resisted the worship of God, even causing rebuilding the temple to cease for a time (Ezra 4:5-24; Zech. 3:1, 2). The Medo-Persian Empire was therefore represented by the chest and arms of silver. The kingdom of the Greeks was the third world empire. It was divided into four parts at Alexander the Great's death, and its monarchs were generally hostile to God's people and worship. Ptolemy Philopater entered the Jerusalem temple and attempted to compel the Jews in Alexandria to abandon worship of God, and to annihilate the race from among his people.<sup>9</sup> Antiochus Epiphanes carried the outrage still further, erecting an idol in the Jerusalem temple, defiling the altar and temple with swine's blood, and putting to death Jews who refused to abandon the worship of God or circumcised their children.<sup>10</sup> The kingdom of the Greeks was therefore represented by the belly and thighs of bronze.

Rome was the fourth world empire. Dan. 7:7 says that Rome would be "diverse" from the preceding kingdoms. This almost certainly refers to Rome's *republican* form of government, where the sovereign power was shared by the emperor, people, and senate, compared to the other world empires, each of which were monarchies. Rome is represented by legs of iron and feet of iron mingled with clay; the iron represents Roman government, the clay the subject peoples. Iron is the strongest, but the most corruptible of the metals. The feet of iron mingled with clay accords with the weakness and corruptibility of popular governments, and seems to signify Rome's policy of *direct rule* of subject nations by presidents and procurators ("they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men," Dan. 2:40-43). That is, where the other empires imposed tribute and allowed subject peoples to govern themselves, the Romans mingled themselves among the subject peoples by direct rule through Roman governors. This had the effect of imparting some of the iron strength of Roman rule, but it also contributed weakness, for iron and clay do not adhere to one another, and the Roman governors were greatly resented by the subject peoples ("they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay" Dan. 2:43).

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<sup>9</sup> III Macc.1-7

<sup>10</sup> I & II Macc.

The ten toes are best understood to represent the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus in 27 B.C., which thereafter became a permanent feature and identifying mark of the empire. The Roman republic ended with the civil wars (49 B.C.) that brought Julius Caesar to power. With the death of Caesar (44 B.C.), the empire underwent a protracted period of war and unrest, as various factions all strove for the mastery. However, by 30 B.C., Augustus emerged as absolute ruler of the Roman world. In 27 B.C., Augustus set aside the provisional forms the government had operated under since the death of Caesar and settled the government upon a more permanent foundation. Under pretense of restoring the republic and surrendering the principate, Augustus returned the government of the empire to the senate. However, not all provinces were handed over. The senate was given charge of the provinces that were in a settled and peaceful condition, and required no legions, while Augustus retained the government of those upon the empire's borders. Augustus thus controlled the military power of the empire and preserved himself as absolute monarch, while the senate was given the outward show of sovereignty, but none of the substance. Dio Cassius explains: "His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers." The division of the empire into imperial and senatorial provinces became an identifying feature of imperial Rome from and after Augustus. Dio Cassius explains Augustus' motivation thus:

*"His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers."*<sup>11</sup>

The number of provinces ceded to the senate was ten:

*"In 27 B.C. the provinces had been divided into two classes, Imperial and Senatorial, 'provinciae Caesaris,' and 'provinciae Senatus' or 'populi.'" The latter were ten in number, Africa, Asia, Bithynia, Achaea, Illyricum, Macedonia, Crete and Cyrene, Sicily, Sardinia, and Hispania Baetica...The Imperial provinces in 27 B.C. were Gaul, Syria, Cyprus and Cilicia, and Hispania Citerior. The number was increased subsequently by the division of single provinces into two or more, and by the inclusion of all*

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<sup>11</sup> Dio Cassius, LIII, ii-xii; Loeb ed.

*provinces constituted after 27 B.C., e.g. Moesia, Pannonia, and Dalmatia.”<sup>12</sup>*

Thus, in Rome we find that the sovereign power was most divided (“the kingdom shall be divided” v. 41) and least glorious in terms of descent from monarchy to aristocracy to democracy, and Rome’s direct rule of subject peoples by presidents and procurators. In terms of resistance to God’s people and worship, Rome ranked first. Pilate was implicated in the murder of Christ and persecution over Stephen (John 19:19; Acts 8, 9; Rev. 12), and Nero was the world-wide, eschatological persecutor of God’s people whose name was synonymous with the “beast” (Rev. 13:18; 17:10). The stone that smote the image is Christ; that it struck the feet and toes signifies that the coming of Christ’s kingdom would occur in the period following 27 B.C. and the division of the empire into imperial and senatorial provinces. Jesus said his kingdom would come *in power* during the disciples’ lives (Mark 9:1; cf. Matt. 16:27, 28) and tied it to the world events that witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:31). In Daniel chapter seven, the kingdom follows Christ’s coming against the “little horn” out of the Roman Empire that persecuted the saints for three and a half years. This little horn was Nero, who persecuted the church for three and a half years from A.D. 64-68, but was destroyed by the “brightness of Christ’s coming” and the “spirit of his mouth” (II Thess. 2:8).<sup>13</sup> Thus, where Luke associates the kingdom’s coming with the fall of Jerusalem, Daniel ties it to the destruction of Nero. Both are correct; for this was Christ putting his enemies beneath his feet, establishing his dominion in the earth. With his enemies among the Jews and Romans subdued, Daniel says,

*“And the same horn made war with the saints and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of days came,*

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Marris Taylor, *A Constitutional and Political History of Rome* (Metheun & Co., London, 1889), 464.

<sup>13</sup> Among the events named by Daniel, in addition to his three and a half year persecution of the saints, that allow us to identify this as Nero is the three horns (provinces/client kingdoms) that were “plucked up” (rebelled or attempted to break from the empire) before the little horn (Dan. 7:8), but were subsequently subdued (Dan. 7:24). These three provinces or client kingdoms were *Britain, Armenia, and Syria*. Suetonius summarizes them, saying, Nero’s reign was marked by “*a disaster in Britain, where two important towns were sacked and great numbers of citizens and allies were butchered; a shameful defeat in the Orient, in consequence of which the legions in Armenia were sent under the yoke, and Syria was all but lost.*” (Suetonius, *Nero*, XXXIX; Loeb ed.)

*and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.” Dan. 7:21, 22*

Here we see that by virtue of Christ’s dominion in the earth, the church also obtained dominion; not by direct government of the nations through the papacy or any such thing, but indirectly through the providence of Christ, who guides history for the advancement and advantage of his people and gospel. That the stone became a great mountain that filled the earth, speaks to the spread of Christianity to every part of the globe, becoming a spiritual kingdom into which men of all nations flow:

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Isa. 2:2-4*

Paul says that the *church* is the house of God (I Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6). Hence, the nations ascending to the house of the God of Jacob refers to the church and gospel. The epistle to the Hebrews confirms this point, where the writer says that in coming to the church we come to Mount Zion:

*“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, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Heb. 12:22-24*

Thus, the kingdom of heaven sometimes refers to the church, the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

### **The Kingdom as Christ’s Dominion over Earth**

We have seen that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” sometimes has in view the habitation of God and the place of the saint’s eternal inheritance; we have also seen that the phrase is used to describe the spiritual kingdom of the church. It remains only to show that the kingdom of heaven also describes the kingdom of Christ and that this entails 1) Christ’s government over earth’s nations, including judgment of the living and the dead, 2) that this reign is from the right hand of God in heaven, and 3) Christ’s dominion began as a

*matter of law* at his ascension, but was not possessed as a *matter of fact* until Jesus put his enemies beneath his feet at his second coming in A.D. 66-70.

## 1. Christ's Government over Earth's Nations

It is sometimes supposed that language saying "all peoples, nations, and tongues" would serve Christ merely refers to the universal call of the gospel, and that men of all nations would convert to Christ. However, Christ's kingdom can in no way be limited to the church; all men are subject to his rule. That Christ is king and governor over earth's nations is attested by many passages of scripture.

*"Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."* Ps. 2:8, 9

Here we see that Christ rules the nations with a rod of iron, and dashes to pieces the kingdoms of those that refuse and rebel (*cf.* Rev. 2:27; 12:5). This language tracks closely that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the Stone smiting the image, breaking it to pieces, showing that more than the spiritual kingdom of the church is contemplated there. It was not the church that broke in pieces the Roman power; Christ accomplished this in the events of A.D. 66-70. It was Jesus putting his enemies (the Jews and Romans) beneath his feet that opened the way for the church to grow into "a great mountain filling the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35). Another passage showing Christ's government over the nations is Dan. 7:13, 14, where Christ received dominion over earth at his ascension:

*"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, and all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."* Dan. 7:13, 14

This is a coronation passage, parallel to Psalm two, above. In case there seems to be an ambiguity in the nature of the kingdom and dominion given to Christ, it is shown in the verses following, where Nero (the "little horn") is destroyed and world dominion becomes Christ's and the saints:

*"But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. 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."* Dan. 7:27

Here we see that the dominion possessed by Rome was taken from the "little horn" (emperor Nero) and given to Christ, and that by virtue of Christ possessing world dominion, the saints obtained dominion, too. A final passage describing Christ's rule over the world before moving on is Psalm 72:8-11:

*"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him."*

The dominion described here includes his enemies; hence, more is involved than the church. Christ's kingdom is over earth and its nations. When we consider passages like these from the perspective of Jews living under Roman rule, it is not difficult to see why they supposed that the Messiah would be a national liberator who would vanquish Rome, and lead Israel to world power like the glory days of Solomon. However, they greatly mistook the case. Although Christ would save his people from the political oppression of their enemies, sin and death were far greater enemies, and it was these Jesus was principally concerned to destroy. Moreover, the promised salvation of God's people did not belong to Israel alone, but was common to all men who come to Christ in faith. Since the gospel was universal in nature, the national institutions of the Old Testament would all be cast aside as obsolete, allowing Christianity to overtake the world. And since Christ was king over all men and nations under heaven, it was imperative that he reign from heaven. This brings us to the next section.

## 2. Christ Reigns from Heaven

Jewish belief that Messiah would be a national liberator was based in part upon the assumption that Christ would reign from earthly Jerusalem upon David's throne. This stems from a misreading of prophecies about Christ. For example, in a very famous passage, the prophet Isaiah mentions Christ seated upon David's throne:

*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be*

*no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of host will perform this.” Isa. 9:6, 7*

Another familiar passage, which we have looked at before, mentions Zion as the place of Christ’s throne:

*“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” Ps. 2:6*

It is not difficult to see how Jews living before the Christian era would have expected Christ to rule on David’s throne from earthly Jerusalem (Zion). However, this mistakes the case. David’s throne was, in reality, the *Lord’s throne in heaven*, which temporarily had been given to men to reign over national Israel upon earth. When the Israelites asked for a king to reign over them, God told Samuel that the sons of Israel had, in fact, rejected God as their king:

*“And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” I Sam. 8:8; cf. 12:12, 17*

Thus, both Saul and David, and all who followed them as kings in Israel sitting upon David’s throne, in reality, sat upon the throne of the Lord. Thus, when Solomon was anointed king, David rejoiced to see Solomon sit upon his throne (I Kings 1:27, 30, 35). Yet, scripture specifically states that Solomon in fact actually sat upon the *Lord’s throne*:

*“Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him.” I Chron. 29:23*

Removal of the throne of the Lord to earth was provisional until Christ came, when it would be returned to heaven. Thus, the place of Christ’s throne in “Zion” actually refers to God’s habitation in heaven. Psalm two says God set Christ upon his *holy hill of Zion*. Yet, Paul cites Psalm two in reference to Christ’s *resurrection* (Acts. 13:33). Thus, the holy hill of Zion in this prophecy refers to heaven, not earth at all. In Psalm three, David says God heard his prayer out of his *holy hill*:

*“I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.” Ps. 3:4*

Did God hear David from heaven, or from earthly Jerusalem? From heaven, of course! Zion and the temple were *patterns and copies* of God’s habitation in heaven, from which Moses was instructed to make the

tabernacle and temple on earth (Ex 25:40). Thus, Habakkuk sets God’s temple in heaven over against the inhabitants of earth: *“But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him”* (Hab. 2:20). But David places God’s temple in heaven: *“The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven”* (Ps. 11:4). Thus, God’s temple, throne, and holy hill all have heaven in view, and are specifically named as the place of Christ’s reign. If there were any doubt, Psalm one hundred-ten settles the issue:

*“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” Ps. 110:1*

Here scripture expressly states that Christ would rule from God’s right hand *in heaven*. Several New Testament passages describe this as being fulfilled in Christ’s ascension to heaven (Acts 2:33; Heb. 10:12, 13). When Jesus told his disciples shortly before his ascension “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18), he alluded to his receipt of the kingdom and dominion. Peter said Christ *“is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him”* (I Pet. 3:22). What this means for us is, that even though we do not see Christ seated upon David’s throne reigning from the heavenly Zion, we are told that it is an accomplished fact and may trust it implicitly.

### **3. The Kingdom came in Power at Christ’s return in A.D. 66-70**

We have seen that Christ’s reign over earth’s nations is from heaven. Jesus received this kingdom and dominion as a *matter of law* at his ascension and coronation. But it was not his as a *matter of fact* until he put his enemies beneath his feet in the events of A.D. 66-70. The case is analogous to Herod the Great, who sailed to Rome where he was made king by the Roman senate, but was three years defeating his enemies and bringing his kingdom into subjection. Herod received the kingdom as a *matter of law* from the Roman senate in the winter of 39 B.C., but it was not until the summer/fall of 36 B.C. that he subdued his enemies and made the kingdom his as a *matter of fact*. We believe scripture shows a similar pattern was true of Christ.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to “receive a kingdom and to return.” But his citizens sent a message after him, saying, “We will not have this man reign over us.” When the nobleman returned having received the kingdom, he had his enemies, who would not have him reign over them, slain before him (Lk. 19:11-27). This parable was told by Jesus at his triumphal entry

into Jerusalem, because the people and disciples supposed that the kingdom of God would immediately appear. The point of the parable was that the kingdom would come only *after* Christ's ascension to heaven and his return (second coming) to put his enemies (the Jews and Romans) beneath his feet. Thus, when instructing the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said

*"So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled."* Lk. 21:30, 31

Here the coming of the kingdom is expressly tied to the fall of Jerusalem, not Pentecost or any other event. In Dan. 7:24-27, the coming of the kingdom is tied to defeat of Nero. This is because the events of A.D. 66-70 were when Jesus put his enemies beneath his feet: Nero perished; the Roman empire was thrown into a series of civil wars known as the "year of four emperors," and Jerusalem was destroyed. Other passages showing that the kingdom came in these events include the epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews alludes to the nearness of Christ's coming when he stated that Jesus *very shortly* would come in wrath upon his enemies and to save his people from their persecutors:

*"For yet it is a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."* Heb. 10:37

And

*"'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.' And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."* Heb. 12:26-28

Here we see the coming of the kingdom is associated with the eschatological "shaking" of heaven and earth. "Shaking the heavens and earth" refers to the overthrow of nations and civil governments as Christ took

up his reign and put his enemies beneath his feet. This may be seen by consulting Haggai, who the writer of Hebrews quotes:

*"For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet, once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts...I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horse and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother."* Hagg. 2:6-7,21, 22

This eschatological shaking is referred to in the gospel of Mark as the kingdom coming *in power*:

*"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."*

It was then that Christ sat upon the throne of his glory and judgment of the living and dead began, and has continued ever since (Matt. 25:31-46, II Tim. 4:1; cf. Matt. 16:27, 28). Christ therefore is Lord of the living and dead, and rules the nations with a rod of iron. This does not mean the nations do not rebel; the very scriptures that predict Christ's rule state the nations will rebel. But Christ rules them with an iron rod and chastens those that resist by visiting them with wars, famines, and other calamities, always guiding history for the advancement of the church and gospel.

### **Conclusion**

The kingdom of heaven is used three different ways in scripture: 1) The habitation of God and the place of the saints eternal rest; 2) the spiritual kingdom of the church; and 3) the dominion Christ received over earth's nations and peoples at his ascension, but which he put beneath his feet at his second coming in A.D. 66-70.