

6. A Charter for Mankind

To make sense of the ministry of Jesus and His unchanging Message, we must enter the thought world of first-century Judaism and acquaint ourselves with Israel's Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures to which Jesus was devoted. In these precious documents are to be found the principal ideas which molded the young Jesus' thinking. Knowing Himself to be the heir to the throne of David, He would be drawn to that section of the Hebrew Bible which contained the core of Israel's national hope. It had been communicated to Israel's beloved king David by an extraordinary revelation given to him through Nathan the prophet (found in II Samuel 7, with its parallel in I Chronicles 17). These passages of Scripture record for posterity the divine arrangements made with the royal house of David. From the point of view of many historians and some theologians the Kingdom of Judah amounts to a minor Middle Eastern empire. In Scripture, however, its significance for world history and the destiny of the human race cannot be exaggerated.

One might expect that in the Christian West the terms of the covenant made with the house of David would be required reading of all students of history. The scriptural documents laying out God's intentions for the world through the royal line of David, representing the house of Judah, are vastly more significant than the Magna Carta or the Declaration of Independence. The contract established with David and his descendants is backed by no less a power than the Creator Himself. Underwritten by a divine promise, it guarantees the ultimate future of the human race under a beneficent government in the hands of the Greater Son of David, whom we believe to be Jesus of Nazareth. As the rightful heir to the throne of David, He is now temporarily removed from the earth. He will remain absent until a

dramatic turning point in world history is marked by His arrival to take up power over the nations in accordance with the Plan revealed to David through the prophet Nathan and later announced again by Jesus in the Christian Gospel.

The Davidic covenant is thoroughly political. It deals, we might say, in divine politics. It is expressive of the Creator's intention to restore harmony to a distracted earth, whose present political arrangements have in their various ways failed to realize the ideal for which man was created. God's purpose for man was that he should reflect divinity on earth. That is what it means to be a "son of God," to mirror the character of the Father. Adam was put in charge of the world and instructed to rule it. Sustained by a continuing fellowship with their creator, the first pair could have carried out their mandate "to subdue the earth." But this was not to be. A fatal disruption of God's intention occurred when Adam and Eve yielded to the blandishments of a rival power. They were overwhelmed by the lies of Satan. Falling for the counter-propaganda of the Devil, they abandoned the word of God which expressed His will for the conduct of affairs on earth.

To a large extent the pattern of disregard for the divine word, set by the original couple, has been characteristic of the whole course of human history. Israel herself, as custodians of the divine revelation which she preserved with meticulous care, failed to recognize her own Messiah, who was supremely the vehicle of the word and words of God. With notable exceptions — the family of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, as well as outstanding heroes of faith from every nation in every age — the course of history is marked by violence and disharmony at the level of the family and the nation. God's will has not been followed, nor His laws observed. The Apostle closest to Jesus defined the condition of the world as "lying in the hands of the evil one" (I John 5:19). Jesus believed that His Kingdom had an origin quite different from present societies and that Satan was now "prince of the world" (John 14:30). The Bible sees the earth as at present a rebel province which has rejected its Maker. One has only to turn on the nightly news, announcing yet another murder, to understand that the purpose of God for our race continues to be frustrated.

In the face of such obvious unhappiness and injustice, and what appears often to be purposeless suffering, many despair of finding any meaning for existence. The Bible responds to the tendency to abandon hope by assuring us that the world is in fact going somewhere. It is moving inexorably towards the goal for which it was created. But let no one think that human progress will lead us gently to a safe haven of peace and prosperity. It is the heart of the Bible's Message that only a dramatic reversal of present trends will produce the world which theoretically we say we desire.

The Bible's prognosis for mankind is grim. But there is light at the end of the tunnel. The prophets of Israel say two things. Firstly, things are bad and they are not going to improve — at least not to the point of achieving a genuine and lasting peace on earth. Secondly, when God takes a hand in human affairs and removes the wicked and replaces them with the righteous, things are going to be transformed. It is only by an exchange of political systems that lasting improvement is going to come. More specifically, it is only when God's chosen and trained agents take over the reins of government that order will be restored worldwide. This is the essence of "God's Gospel," the announcement of the Kingdom.

Unfortunately this kind of analysis of our problem is not popular, and many reject out of hand the biblical solution. The idea that we are not going to "make it" without a divine intervention deals a blow to our sense of independence. Many who claim to be Christians pick from the Bible what is comforting and reject the massive amount of biblical material dealing with future judgment, an event described in both Testaments as the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is simply the future moment in history when God decides to intervene to change the course of world affairs dramatically, cataclysmically and forever. The Day of the Lord of the Hebrew Bible is equated in the New Testament with the future arrival of Jesus to rule in His Kingdom. This proves once again that New Testament Christians have not discarded the Old Testament. They assume that their readers will know what the Old Testament is about. They do not feel the need to restate what had already been declared by the prophets. They expect us to understand that what the Old Testament reveals about God's Plan will make sense in the light of the continuing revelation in Jesus Christ.

It is most unfair to claim allegiance to Christ if one decides to water down or otherwise explain away unwanted teaching dealing with the coming Day of the Lord, which is also the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus was no benign Galilean peasant reassuring the world that everything is all right. He is first and foremost a prophet and spokesman for God, expressing both a tender compassion for human suffering and a fiery denunciation of the folly and wickedness of the world's ways. Above all Jesus is the bearer of Good News — of a bright future for the whole world when the Messiah comes to reign.

The mission of Jesus was driven by His overwhelming desire to carry out the will of His Father, the One God of Israel. Jesus summed up the reason for His ministry as “heralding the Kingdom of God.” That was “the reason for which [He] was appointed” (Luke 4:43). It must follow that a grasp of the Kingdom of God will provide us with the key to knowing the mind of Jesus.

Divine Arrangements with David

Little progress is possible in our quest for understanding Jesus' agenda until we subject to careful investigation the vastly important role of the Davidic covenant, which He treated as a blueprint for the unfolding Plan of God for the world. Jesus, as is well known, believed Himself to be the central figure in the world's drama, the appointed legal agent of the One God, heir to David's throne and ordained to take His place as sovereign in the Kingdom of God.

The terms of God's covenant with the celebrated monarch of Israel, King David, appear in II Samuel 7 and I Chronicles 17. From this central declaration of God's purpose Israel derived its inextinguishable hope for a brilliant future. The text from the Samuel version is as follows:

Once the king had settled into his palace and Yahweh had granted him rest from all the enemies surrounding him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, “Look, I am living in a cedar-wood palace, while the ark of God is under awnings.” Nathan said to the king, “Go and do whatever you have in mind, for Yahweh is with you.” But that very night, the word of Yahweh came to Nathan: “Go and tell My servant David, Yahweh says this: Are you to build Me a temple to live in? I have never lived in a house from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until today, but have kept traveling with a

tent for shelter. In all My travels with all the Israelites, did I say to any of the judges of Israel: 'Why do you not build me a cedar-wood temple?' This is what you must say to my servant David. 'Yahweh Sabaoth says this: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be leader of my people Israel; I have been with you wherever you went; I have got rid of all your enemies for you. I am going to make your fame as great as the fame of the greatest on earth. I am going to provide a place for My people Israel; I shall plant them there, and there they will live and never be disturbed again; nor will they be oppressed by the wicked any more, as they were in former times ever since I instituted judges to govern My people Israel; and I shall grant you rest from all your enemies. Yahweh furthermore tells you that He will make you a dynasty. And when your days are over and you fall asleep with your ancestors, I shall appoint your heir, your own son, to succeed you (and I shall make his sovereignty secure. He will build a temple for my name) and I shall make his royal throne secure forever. I shall be a father to him and he a son to Me; if he does wrong, I shall punish him with a rod such as men use, with blows such as mankind gives. But My faithful love will never be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your dynasty and your sovereignty will ever stand firm before you and your throne be forever secure.'" Nathan related all these words and this whole revelation to David (II Sam. 7:1-17).

The terms of God's Plan for David and Israel are clear. David will not be the one to build the temple. Instead, God will build a dynasty for David. There is a blessing for the nation also. A place of permanent security will be provided for Israel. Associated with that promise is the guarantee of a king who will rule as David's successor forever. The parallel account in I Chronicles 17 omits the reference to a chastisement appropriate for the immediate descendant of David, Solomon. The later version of the covenant thus places a greater emphasis on the ultimate object of the promise — the Messiah. Of Him it is said: "I shall set Him over *My temple and Kingdom* forever and His throne will be forever secure" (I Chron. 17:14). The New Testament, quoting a verse from II Samuel 7, recognizes both Jesus *and the Christians* as Messianic sons and daughters of God to whom the covenant promises apply: "Therefore come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be

sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:17, 18, citing II Sam. 7:14).¹

The covenant’s concluding guarantee — a throne forever — summarized the national hope of Israel and provided the basis of the Christian Gospel about the Kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus. Most appropriately the term “Messiah” or “Anointed King” became the title for the expected king of the line of David who would preside over the temple and the Kingdom of God. It is the essence of Christian belief that the historical Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is the person about whom the inspired documents had spoken.

It is important not to miss the Bible’s own definition of the Kingdom. It means the reign on a permanently secure throne of the ultimate ruler, representing God in the Davidic Kingdom as the sovereign of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Messiah or Son of God is to be ruler in “My,” i.e. God’s, Kingdom (I Chron. 17:14). We must emphasize that the divine Plan has to do with “a place for Israel” (II Sam. 7:10), a throne and a Kingdom. None of these terms must be allowed to slip away from our grasp. These are words with normal, natural meanings. They have to do with an empire on earth and a king ruling in Jerusalem. They are exactly the terms taken up by Gabriel in Luke 1:32, 33 which picks up the threads of the divine drama by pointing back to the Davidic covenant and forward to the arrival of the Davidic empire — a new world order which will supersede our present world system forever.

The birth of Jesus, as the key figure in the divine scheme, was indeed proof that God, His Father, was at work in the world according to the promises made with the chosen people. Gabriel speaks to Mary and to the world in words strongly reminiscent of II Samuel 7:

II Samuel 7:12-14

“I shall make your own [David’s] son succeed you...I shall make His royal throne secure forever. I shall be a father to Him and He a son to Me.”

Luke 1:32, 33

“[Jesus] will be great and He will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will rule over the

¹ Christians are said to be “anointed,” i.e., members of the Messianic community, in II Cor. 1:21. As saints, Christians are those appointed to rule (Dan. 7:27).

house of Jacob forever, and His
Kingdom will have no end."

The book of Chronicles recognizes the royal covenant as the substance of God's dealings with His people. A king of Judah appeals to the separated northern kingdom of Israel: "Do you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the rule over Israel to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?...So now you intend to resist the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David" (II Chron. 13:5, 8). It is important to be reminded that David's rule over Israel is called the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom, it should be noted, is not a kingdom in the hearts of David's sons. It is in their hands, under their control, as they govern as Yahweh's vice-regents. Looking back at the revelation he had received through Nathan, David reflected on the covenant with these words:

God has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord over Israel. And He said to me, "Your son Solomon is the one who shall build My house and My courts, for I have chosen him to be a son to Me and I will be a father to him" (I Chron. 28:5, 6).

The success of Solomon depended on his faithful obedience. As is well known, he failed the test as did many of his descendants of the royal line. The ultimate permanence of the throne, however, was assured by the divine oath sworn to David:

For the sake of David Your servant
Do not turn away the face of Your anointed.
The Lord has sworn to David
A truth from which He will not turn back;
Of the fruit of your body I will set [a descendant] on your throne.
If your sons will keep My covenant,
And My testimony which I will teach them,
Their sons will also sit upon your throne forever.
For the Lord has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.
This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;

I will satisfy her needy with bread.
Her priests also I will clothe with salvation;
and her saints will sing aloud for joy.
There [in Zion] I will cause the horn of David to spring forth;
I have prepared a lamp for My anointed [Messiah].
His enemies I will clothe with shame;
But upon Himself His crown will shine (Ps. 132:10-18).

So impressed was King David by God's provision for the future of His royal family and the hope this provided for the world that he dedicated his last words to a celebration of the Messiah and His worldwide rule. We cite the version of these inspired words suggested by Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on II Samuel 23:1-6:

The divine saying of David the son of Jesse, the divine saying of the man, the one highly exalted, of the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel. The Spirit of Yahweh speaks through me and His word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel says, the rock of Israel speaks to me, "There will arise a ruler over the human race, a just ruler, and He will exercise His dominion in the Spirit of the fear of God. In the time of this Messiah it will be like the light of the morning when the sun arises, as a morning without clouds. From the shining after rain comes fresh green out of the earth." Does not my house stand in such a relation to God that the righteous ruler will spring from it? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, established by every assurance. All God's good pleasure and all my salvation will spring forth from this covenant. But the worthless are as rejected thorns...²

On these themes Jesus built His conception of the Messianic Kingdom.

The ultimate triumph of the Davidic kingdom was foreseen also by the other prophets of Israel. Isaiah wrote in the eighth century of the "Prince of Peace" and of His "government of peace on the throne of David and over His Kingdom" (Isa. 9:6, 7). The promise of the covenant pointed to an ultimate fulfillment. Prophecy announced that the coming Messiah would "establish and uphold [the Kingdom] with justice and righteousness from then on [i.e., the Messianic future] and

² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Hendrickson, 1989, Vol. II, pp. 484-490.

forevermore” (Isa. 9:7). The entire project was bound to have a successful outcome. It was underwritten by the Lord God Himself whose zeal would accomplish it.

The Plan of God for Israel laid out in the covenant had dealt with “the distant future” (II Sam. 7:19). A complete fulfillment in the reign of Solomon is therefore impossible. A little-noticed phrase from David’s response to the information provided through Nathan deserves comment. From the words of an Australian theologian writing about the Davidic covenant we select this important excerpt:

The tenor of David’s prayer in II Samuel 7:18-29 indicates that David well understood the covenantal significance in the widest terms of the divine promises and their effect upon humanity as a whole...Puzzling in verse 19 is the Hebrew phrase *wezot torat ha’adam* (literally “and this is the law of man” — it needs to be understood that *torah* is a word with a wide meaning range, basically having a sense of “guidance,” “direction” rather than that it has full legal overtones like our word “law”)...W.C. Kaiser has shown clearly that verse 19b is to be taken as a statement, and that the Hebrew phrase concerned serves to introduce or to summarize (as here) a set of divine instructions. Under the “this,” the promises of the first half of the chapter are being referred to, while under the “law of man” their implications for the future, as far as David understood them, are contained. The curious Hebrew expression, “law of man,” has been shown to have parallels in the similar Akkadian phrase *terit nishē*, which carries a meaning of a “fateful oracle for man.” What is conveyed by the Akkadian term is the notion of an utterance by which the destiny of mankind is controlled or provided for. Such a concept fits the Samuel context admirably and with more than some probability Kaiser suggests that the sense to be given to II Samuel 7:19b is “this is the charter by which humanity will be directed.” That is to say, in the oracle delivered to him, David rightly sees the future and destiny of the human race is involved. The promises to David have built upon the broad history of covenant concepts as, from creation onwards, they have covered divine intent for human development, and David has seen the full covenantal connections which Nathan’s oracle has offered.³

³ W.J. Dumbrell, “The Davidic Covenant,” *The Reformed Theological Review* (39), May-Aug. 1980, p. 46.

The implications of this extraordinary divine communication granted to David are far-reaching. They provide a vista view of the outcome of human history. The future of humanity is bound up with the future of the royal house of David. From that family there will emerge a statesman-Messiah competent to solve the world's intractable problems. The covenant granted to David is nothing less than a divine charter authorizing the Messiah and His associates to rule the world. History is marching to that inevitable goal. Ignored by historians, philosophers and anthropologists and neglected by theologians, this precious information illuminates the later story of Jesus and the early Christians. It helps to account for the passionate zeal with which they spread the Good News. They saw themselves as participants in the greatest venture ever conceived by man — or rather conceived by God. Convinced of the claims of Jesus, Christians aligned themselves with the Messiah and His Message. Knowing that Jesus was divinely appointed to govern the world *and that He was inviting them to share that authority with Him*, they saw themselves as a kind of fifth column in a hostile world system. Their true status was unrecognized, as they worked in the service of an absent king, anticipating the overthrow of present governments at the reappearance of the Messiah.

A partial parallel is provided by behind-the-scenes conspiratorial movements in our day, which are reported to have involved plans for a world takeover. It is important to add at once that Jesus was not a clandestine campaigner with dark motives. His methods were entirely peaceful and His Message public. Above all He was the chosen channel of blessing for all who believed in Him. The majority of those who heard His agenda, however, did not accept His claims. It was inevitable, therefore, that Jesus gathered around Him a small number of intimate disciples who became increasingly conversant with the Messianic program for the world unfolding through God's elect servant. This cadre of believers formed an advance guard of the Kingdom of God which would one day be manifested in Jerusalem, according to the covenant-hope of the restoration of the Kingdom. Because so few accepted Jesus and His Messianic agenda ("narrow is the way leading to life [in the Kingdom] and few find it," Matt. 7:14), those who did are said in the New Testament to be in possession of a precious divine secret, an invaluable treasure, for which no sacrifice is

too great (Matt. 13:44-46). The secret was their understanding of God's Kingdom Plan, and their goal was to qualify for life in the coming age of the Kingdom and an appointment as co-regent with the Messiah. And even if the hostile world were to put them to death, they would reappear immortalized in the resurrection. The gates of Hades even would not prevail against them.

The Roman authorities viewed Jesus as a potential political threat. They were not unaware of the implications of Messianism. Their worst fears, however, were not justified. Jesus organized no revolution and made no political move. When His less well-instructed followers attempted to make Him king there and then, Jesus promptly removed Himself alone to a mountain (John 6:15). The time had not arrived for Him to accede to the throne. Nevertheless He was God's candidate for royal office. Jesus knew as well as His supporters that the role of the Messiah was to liberate Israel from foreign oppression (Luke 24:21).⁴ He also knew that the path to victory was via crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and a period of absence at the right hand of the Father. The time for an overt assumption of world power was not yet ripe.

The Non-Fulfillment of the Covenant

The failure of Jesus, as Messiah, to effect a world revolution or even a change of government in His own country has presented Bible readers with a problem. In what sense can Jesus be the Messiah if He never inherited the throne of David in Jerusalem? How can the Davidic covenant have been realized as long as the Messiah is not in possession of the throne of the royal house of Judah? A traditional solution espoused by churches is to say that Jesus has in fact been exalted to the status promised to Him, by being taken to the right hand of the Father. His position at present satisfies the conditions of the ancient promises. This theory is most problematic. Such an explanation entails giving the Messianic idea an entirely new meaning, divorced, as we think, from the ideas which clustered around the Messianic hope in its historical setting. These ideas the New Testament never abandoned. Jewish commentators faced with the same facts argue, on the other hand, that the failure of Jesus to

⁴ Josephus refers to the common belief of Jews of the first century that "a man from their country would become ruler of the world" (*Jewish War* 6. 312).

accomplish what the Messiah was destined to do — rule as King in Israel — merely goes to show that Jesus was not the Messiah. He obviously never became Messiah in the sense demanded by the prophets and the covenants.

The tension caused by this enigma is at the root of much of the division amongst those calling themselves Christians as well as between Christians and Jews. Our purpose in these chapters is an attempt to demonstrate that neither the Jew nor traditional Christian holds a position justified by divine revelation. We believe with the Jews that any claimant to Messiahship is a fraud if He never accedes to a restored throne of David. Without such promotion to royal office, inheritance of the land, accompanied by the liberation of His people and world rulership, He simply cannot be the biblical Messiah. The truth of the whole revelation given to Abraham and David is at stake on this point. We believe with the historic Church that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah and that He was brought back from death by resurrection, but we strongly object to the distorted notions which the Church has attached to Messiahship. The “received” opinion of many Bible readers that Jesus does not need to ascend the throne of David in Israel in order to justify His claim to be the Messiah seems to us to be clearly mistaken. It leaves the whole Messianic drama unresolved. It calls in question the divine covenants. The churches have spent much energy trying to explain away the obvious import of the role destined for the Messiah. They have had to do this because they want on the one hand to affirm that Jesus is the Messiah and, on the other, to deny that He is going to reappear again on earth in order to reestablish a Davidic empire with power to rule the world. The great difference between traditional Christianity and the faith of the New Testament believers has to do with *the future*. It appears to us that churches constantly attempt an exposition of the Christian documents without taking account of the great climax to which the Bible everywhere looks forward. They are trying to read the biblical story — which from start to finish is colored by its dynamic Messianic hope for the future — with the final chapter, to which the entire narrative looks forward, torn from the book. This anti-Messianic tendency afflicts Bible readers both in the professional “theological” camp as well as those seeking a more “devotional” relationship with God.

The debate is critical for the future of the Church. It is a debate about the meaning of the term Kingdom of God, which it was the concern of Jesus to preach and teach. We are dealing, therefore, with fundamental questions about the nature of the Christian faith and the Christian Gospel. The problem presents itself in this way: If we grant that the covenants made with Abraham and David express the divine intention for the world, we must either abandon our faith in Jesus as the object of the promises, because He has not fulfilled them, or maintain that much yet needs to happen for the Messianic story to reach its goal. It is the latter alternative which we adopt, believing that this is the view of the Apostles and of Jesus who taught them. The resolution of the difficulty presented by the non-fulfillment of the Plan (the world has obviously not returned to paradise under a restored Messianic Kingdom) is possible only when the future coming of Jesus to rule the world with His followers is restored to the prominence it everywhere enjoys both in the Hebrew prophets and in the New Testament.

The Davidic Covenant in Psalms Two and Seventy-Two

A considerable body of literature preserved in the Bible concentrates on the bright future to be expected when the Davidic covenant bears fruit with the appearance of God's world deliverer. A brand new administration is to arise when the Messiah takes up His office as sovereign of a new and peaceful order on earth.

"The sweet singer of Israel" (II Sam. 23:1) had other purposes in writing Psalms than merely the expression of daily thanksgiving and praise, important as these topics are. David and the other writers of Psalms were prophets, driven by the Holy Spirit to foresee and forecast the future. It is one of the amazing features of much contemporary biblical commentary that the predictive element in Scripture is so severely played down. The New Testament, however, treats Messianic passages in the Psalms and prophets as direct predictions of events. Some of these have already been realized in the sufferings of Jesus; others in His birth, resurrection and ascension. A vast amount of prophecy relates to the future establishment of the Messiah's reign on earth.

Psalm 2 stands at the head of the first of the five collections of Psalms in our Hebrew Bible (Psalm 1 is considered introductory). Its

topic is world government and the revolution which is going to bring this about. One would expect it to be the focus of much international discussion, since it deals with a major political event destined to affect the course of history and impacting the Middle East. Psalm 2 represents the purest Messianism, confirming the triumph of the rule of the Messiah in Jerusalem and the subjection of nation-states to His dominion. Conscious of the covenant which God made with his family, David tuned his harp to celebrate the coming victory of the Kingdom of God on earth. Those who later heard Jesus proclaim the impending arrival of the Kingdom would have brought to their understanding of Jesus' Message a knowledge of these verses which epitomized the hope of Israel, which is equally the Christian hope. In Paul's words:

I serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the prophets...And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God day and night. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews... (Acts 24:14; 26:6, 7).

The language of Psalm 2, which sustained the Jewish Messianic hope shared by Christians, is quite inappropriate as a description of any historical king or kingdom. It presents a picture of a single ruler, the Messiah of Jewish expectation, installed in Jerusalem as Yahweh's vice-regent for the control of the world. It speaks of a time when the Messiah will take possession of His inheritance as governor of all nations. The scope of the Kingdom is both national and international. Its center is definitely Jewish, but its power extends to "the uttermost parts of the earth" (Ps. 2:8). Psalm 2 speaks of a world rebellion in opposition to Messianic government. In the words of a modern paraphrase, a summit conference is convened to consider how the restraints of the new world power can be resisted. God is unimpressed by the show of human stupidity. Yahweh will have placed His royal representative in Zion in the person of the Messiah/Son of God (the equation of the two titles is critical for New Testament Christology), whom the nations are advised to accept as the legitimate channel of divine authority for the blessing of the whole world. Clearly the change from one world system to the new will not be a smooth transition. This is a measure of the extent of human

alienation from God at the time when He intervenes to replace current world leaders with the Messiah and the saints. The mood of the hostile world will express the sentiment of Jewish opposition to Jesus: “We will not have this man to rule over us” (Luke 19:14).

The comments of a leading authority on Hebrew Messianic expectations confirm our impression of the message of Psalm 2:

The King addressed in Psalm 2 is to exercise absolutely unlimited sway over the world...The simplest view will always continue to be that the poet [prophet!] is transported in spirit to the birthpangs of the Messianic era, and from this standpoint describes the course of things.⁵

Other vivid pictures of the new world order under the reign of the Christ appear in Psalm 72. This Psalm points to a time when initial resistance has been overcome and the benefits of divine rule are becoming apparent. A Jewish-Christian theocracy is hardly what the world expects or desires. Present world systems, as we have seen from Psalm 2, will not yield without a fight to the new regime. We should bear in mind that the Kingdom of God is to be administered not by Jews who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah but by men and women of all nations who by conversion have become engrafted into the true Israel of God headed by the Messiah. These members of the Messianic community, Jews and Gentiles in one body, are seen by Paul the Apostle as “the true circumcision” (Phil. 3:3), that is, those who by an infusion of the Spirit of Christ are the genuine heirs of the Messianic promises. The royal house of David, in the New Testament, is not restricted to the national Jews. It consists of all those, of whatever nation, who have absorbed the Spirit of Jesus and thus gained a right to be part of the theocracy of Messiah. This is the implication of Jesus’ promise that believers are constituted Messianic sons of God (John 1:12). Under their benign rule with Jesus the blessings outlined in Psalm 72 will spread across the earth.

The Psalm is probably the work of Solomon who had inherited the Messianic ideal from his father David. It opens with a prayer that God would administer peace on earth through His chosen king: “Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king’s son” (Ps. 72:1). The gift of divine judgment is to be conferred on the

⁵ *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Extra Vol., p. 727.

ruler of the Kingdom. Jesus sees Himself as the recipient of that office: “The Father gave [the Son of Man] authority to execute judgment” (John 5:27). Jewish tradition considered the ideal king to be the Messiah. So the Targum reads: “O God, give the knowledge of Your judgments to the King Messiah, and Your justice to the son of King David.” The *Midrash Tehillim* says of the sovereign addressed, “This is the King Messiah.” A portrait of the Messianic King, functioning as God’s instrument to restore peace to the earth, is provided by Isaiah 11:1-5:

A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse [David’s father]; a new shoot will grow from his roots. On Him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh: His inspiration will lie in fearing Yahweh, His judgment will not be given by appearances, His verdict not given on hearsay. He will judge the weak with integrity and give fair sentence for the humble in the land. He will strike the country with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips bring death to the wicked. Uprightness will be the belt around His waist and constancy the belt about His hips.

Christians, following the inspired leadership of Paul, recognize in this passage a portrait of the Messiah Jesus. Paul believed that the Messiah would establish His Kingdom by defeating “the evil one” foreseen by Isaiah. Quoting the ancient prophet, Paul predicted that “the Lord [Jesus] will destroy him [the Antichrist] with the breath of His mouth and will annihilate him with His glorious appearance at His coming” (II Thess. 2:8, citing Isa. 11:4).⁶ The Hebrew Bible provided a fund of essential information about events surrounding the future arrival of Jesus to fulfill His Messianic role of ridding the world of evil rulership. Following the violent overthrow of Satanic government represented by the final Antichrist a new and harmonious world would emerge.

⁶ Paul is interested in the Assyrian seen by Isaiah as a final instrument of divine punishment for Israel (cp. Ps. 83; Micah 5:5).

Psalm 89

The promise of future greatness for David's descendant, declared in the covenant, sustained the faithful during the nation's darkest hours. Psalm 89 celebrates an indomitable trust in God's purpose that the course of history is being guided by the lodestar of divine peace to come under Messiah's reign. Thus the Psalmist rehearses the Almighty's pledge:

I have made a covenant with My chosen One, sworn an oath to My servant David: I have made your dynasty firm forever, built your throne stable age after age...Once You spoke in a vision, to Your faithful You said, I have given strength to a warrior, I have raised up a man chosen from My people. I have found David My servant, and anointed him [made him a Messiah] with My holy oil. My hand will always be with him, My arm will make him strong. No enemy will be able to outwit him, no wicked man overcome him; I shall crush his enemies before him, strike his opponents dead. My constancy and faithful love will be with him, in My name his strength will be triumphant. I shall establish his power over the sea, his dominion over the rivers. He will cry to Me, "You are my father, my God, the rock of my salvation!" So I shall make him My firstborn, the highest of earthly kings. I shall maintain My faithful love for him always, My covenant with him will stay firm. I have established his dynasty forever, his throne to be as lasting as the heavens...I shall not violate My covenant, I shall not withdraw the word once spoken. I have sworn by My holiness, once and for all, never will I break faith with David. His dynasty shall endure forever, his throne like the sun before Me, as the moon is established forever, a faithful witness in the skies (Ps. 89:3-37).

Once again, we have the authority of the Apostle for applying these words to Jesus. In pursuit of the Messianic ideal God the Father has begun to rescue believers from the Devil's oppressive regime:

He has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that He loves...He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...He is the firstborn from the dead [by resurrection], so that He should be supreme in every way (Col. 1:13, 15, 18).

The sublime national hope of Israel, which Jesus, as a Jew, would have shared and which Paul as a model of apostolic Christianity specifically said he endorsed, looked forward to the appearance of the divinely authorized world statesman of this Psalm and the world peace described in outline by Psalm 72. The seventy-second Psalm is not quoted directly in the New Testament, but the function of the king described in the Psalm is exactly that claimed by Jesus. The idyllic portrait of a harmonious world goes far beyond anything ever realized under Solomon. The extent of the Kingdom is worldwide and its duration forever. It can apply only to a time beyond the turning point in history when, in the words of the New Testament Apocalypse, “the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our God and of His Messiah” (Rev. 11:15). The throne of the ideal ruler will be founded on spiritual principles of justice, the only sound basis of government, as many would concur. The seed of righteousness bears fruit when all oppression comes to an end and when refreshment comes to the earth under the influence of a new culture instituted by the Messiah. Eventually all nations will see the benefits of God’s rule through His Son.⁷

It was for this happy condition on earth that Jesus, whose heart was moved by the suffering He saw everywhere, urged us to pray “Thy Kingdom come...on earth” (Matt. 6:10). To take part in that Kingdom was to be the supreme desire of believers: “Seek first the Kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33). The so-called Messianic Psalms are some of the many cheering passages of Scripture assuring the world of a marvelous outcome beyond the day of judgment, when the Messiah will take the faithful to assist Him in the supervision of the new world. The element of judgment and tragedy must not be overlooked. Those who oppose the Christ will be refused entry into the Kingdom. A certain standard of conduct is required of those who hope to enter the Kingdom when it comes: “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not be able to enter the Kingdom” (Matt. 5:20). Disqualification because of certain unrepented, unethical practices threatened even members of the church community. Paul, like Jesus, insists on Christian standards for salvation:

⁷ See, for example, Isa. 19:16-25.

Do you not understand that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9, 10).

Psalm 110

Of all Old Testament passages this Psalm provides the favorite quotation for New Testament writers — not surprisingly since it encapsulates so beautifully the Messiah's progress towards world rule. Psalm 110:1 is cited or alluded to in the New Testament some twenty-five times. It is introduced as a divine oracle: "The utterance of Yahweh to my lord [*adoni*, the king]," and has close affinities with the Davidic covenant. Both the rabbis and Jesus saw in David's "lord" the promised Messiah-King (Mark 12:35-37). The Psalm contains all the elements of the New Testament revelation. Some have suggested that the New Testament is really a discussion and expansion of this Psalm. The book of Hebrews is virtually a commentary on its first verse.

The two principal players in the divine drama are Yahweh and His Messiah, who is the lord, and, paradoxically, also the son of David. Fulfillment of part of this Psalm came with the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father. Peter makes this the concluding point of his revolutionary sermon announcing to dismayed Jews that they have recently crucified their Messiah (Acts 2:34-36). To clarify a perplexing situation Peter brings in the evidence of the prophetic oracle of Psalm 110. According to the Plan, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead introduced the session of the Messiah at the place of honor at God's right hand. Jesus is installed as Lord and Christ, only, however, until God later "makes His enemies His footstool." Thereupon, according to the information supplied by the Psalm, Yahweh will "stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion," enabling the Messiah to "rule in the midst of [His] enemies" (Ps. 110:2). Evidently the figure described is a warrior, a military commander endowed with both priestly and regal office. Aided by the power of God (*adonai*), He is destined to "shatter kings in the day of [God's] wrath" (Ps. 110:5). Accompanying the conquering Messiah is a people in full support, dressed in shining garments and emerging at

the dawn of the New Day (Ps. 110:3). It is not hard to see here a poetic description of resurrected believers assisting the Messiah, at His coming, in the establishment (by force at this stage) of His Kingdom. The Psalm complements the description of the world takeover planned for the Davidic king seen in Psalm 2.

Even the most ingenious exegetical theories cannot get rid of this material as the basis for the Bible's explicit Messianism. There is not a shred of evidence that Jesus or New Testament Christians were embarrassed at the military role outlined for the Messiah. What Psalm 2 describes is not the activity of some Maccabean prince. The figure who acts for God in the restoration of divine government on earth is the Messiah Himself, not, however, the Messiah as much church piety has presented Him. This raises at once the question as to how far the Messiah Jesus of the Bible has been accurately portrayed to those who sit in pews. A theologian at Cambridge suggests that there is cause for concern when he endorses the observation of a colleague that

most preachers talk as if the Jesus they preach is identical with the Jesus of history. Theologians know that this is not so, but the theories devised in the attempt to connect the modern Christ with the original Jesus have become so far-fetched and obscure as to carry no conviction outside a very small circle.⁸

The professor notes "how very different Christianity has been at different periods."⁹ The burning question is whether the royal Christ of the Gospels is really the Jesus presented to potential converts in the 20th century. Professor Cupitt sounds the alarm when he observes that

developed Gentile Christianity of the sort which was beginning to take shape towards the end of the first century has very little to do with Jesus or the faith of the first generation. It is a new religion developed to *replace the original faith*.¹⁰

That early substitution of one faith for another would seem to require an urgent investigation, involving, as it must, a confusion about Jesus and His teaching of which most churchgoers are quite unaware. All too often the problem is silently ignored.

⁸ Don Cupitt, *The Debate About Christ*, p. 133.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The Jesus of history and faith may be expected to make a comeback when Bible readers begin to imbibe the Messianic atmosphere in which Jesus operated, an atmosphere bequeathed to Him by the Hebrew prophets believed to be the spokesmen of the Creator Himself. At stake in our discussion is the nature of the Kingdom which Jesus came to announce. Crucial to our investigation is a recognition of the supreme authority of the Davidic covenant as the “charter for mankind,” the “United Nations Charter,” in the truest sense.

When in the course of time the Messiah arrived on the scene, a watchword in which the genius of the divine Plan was concentrated was available to describe the essence of the Christian faith. It was a term with a familiar ring to Jewish ears. It evoked hopes of a future for Israel and the world, promising the triumph of God on the spiritual, material, social and political planes. It was also a thoroughly apocalyptic idea announcing a judgment to come upon all forms of godlessness and, by a spectacular intervention, the appointment of a new government over human affairs. Our New Testament is devoted to the preparation of those who seek to obtain a place in that New Age of the Kingdom of God on earth.