

1. The Hope of the Kingdom

The promise of the Kingdom

The hope of the disciple of Jesus Christ is based upon the return of Christ to the earth to establish the Kingdom of God. This has been the destiny of Jesus even from before his birth, as the angel Gabriel revealed to the virgin Mary: “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; *and of his kingdom there shall be no end*”¹. It is evident that these words of the angel have not yet been fulfilled, because when Jesus first walked the earth, he was rejected by his own fellow men, and put to death. Because of his sinlessness, God raised him from the dead², and after forty days he ascended into heaven³, where he remains to this day. It is therefore to the future that we must look for the fulfilment of Gabriel’s promise to Mary, and before Jesus can receive the throne of his father David *he must first return to the earth*, as the angels testified to the disciples when Jesus ascended into heaven: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come in like manner* as ye have seen him go into heaven”⁴.

There are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, and the future dominion of Christ. The prophet Daniel, for example, spoke of it to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, when he interpreted to him the dream of the image. Nebuchadnezzar’s intention was that

¹ Luke 1:31-33

² See Acts 2:24

³ See Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52

⁴ Acts 1:11

the kingdom of Babylon that he had built should last for ever, but this was not in keeping with the Divine will, as Daniel revealed to the king: “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever”⁵. On a later occasion, Daniel himself was privileged to receive a vision of the coming of the Kingdom, in which it was revealed to him that the faithful saints would also be involved in the rulership of the Kingdom, together with the Lord Jesus Christ: “And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that 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... But *the saints of the most High* shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever... 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”⁶. This is the true hope of the Gospel - to receive an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of God⁷.

The Kingdom of God will in every sense be a real political Kingdom on earth, and it will replace all the dominions of men. It will never be destroyed. When the Kingdom is established, the kingdoms of the world will “become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”⁸. It will bring to an end the period of man’s dominion, and usher in an epoch of everlasting righteousness and peace⁹. The prophet Isaiah described the Kingdom of God thus: “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. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into

⁵ Daniel 2:44

⁶ Daniel 7:14,18,27

⁷ See Psalm 37:29; Matthew 5:5; 19:28; Luke 12:32; Philipians 3:20,21; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26,27; 5:9,10; 20:4

⁸ Revelation 11:15

⁹ See Psalm 72:1-7

pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”¹⁰.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God

The Gospel that the apostles preached had the establishment of the Kingdom of God as its main focus. For example, when the apostle Paul preached to all who came in unto him when he abode in Rome for two years in his own hired house, he preached “*the kingdom of God, and... those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*”¹¹. Similarly, when Philip the evangelist “went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them”¹², the record specifies that he preached “the things concerning *the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ*”¹³. The Gospel is built upon these two great foundation stones of faith.

When Paul spoke to the Jews in Rome concerning his faith, he put it another way: “For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for *the hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain”¹⁴. The hope of the coming Kingdom of God is called by the apostle “the hope of Israel”. This is because the future destiny of Israel is intimately connected with the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth. The two are inseparably linked.

To understand how this is so, we must appreciate that *there has been a Kingdom of God on the earth in the past*. That Kingdom was the kingdom of Israel, which was ultimately overthrown because of Israel’s disobedience to God. The future Kingdom of God for which the believer in Christ looks, will be the kingdom of Israel *restored*. This is the simple testimony of scripture, as we shall see.

The Kingdom of God in the past

It may seem somewhat surprising to discover that the Kingdom of God has indeed already existed on the earth. Yet the scriptures leave us in no doubt that

¹⁰ Isaiah 2:2-4

¹¹ Acts 28:31

¹² Acts 8:5

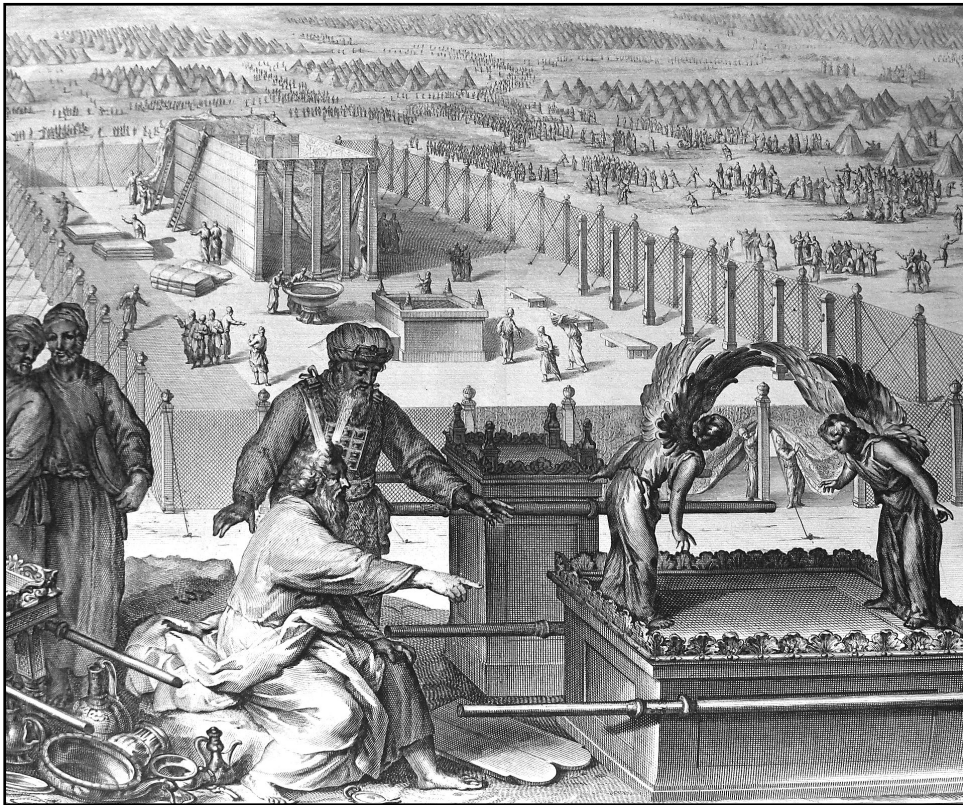
¹³ Acts 8:12

¹⁴ Acts 28:20

this is so. Israel of old, that we read about in the pages of the Old Testament, was the Kingdom of God on earth.

After God delivered the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, the people were led by Moses to mount Sinai, where God gave to them His Law. At this time they entered into special covenant relationship with the Almighty, and God said to them: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me *a kingdom of priests*, and an holy nation”¹⁵. Thus exalted above all people, they were constituted as the Kingdom of God, and God Himself was their King. But their continuance as such was dependent upon their obedience to the laws of God that they had been graciously given.

During their wilderness pilgrimage, they were instructed to build the tabernacle, so that God might dwell in their midst: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that



The erection of the tabernacle
The Philip Medhurst collection of Bible illustrations

¹⁵ Exodus 19:5,6

I may dwell among them”¹⁶. The tabernacle and its furniture had to be constructed according to the exact specification that had been given to Moses. There was to be no deviation from the Divine plan: “And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount”¹⁷. This was because the sanctuary was to serve as an elaborate visual aid, to teach the children of Israel the principles of holiness and separation. The tabernacle became the centre of worship for the kingdom of Israel, and the responsibility for conducting the daily ritual, and for teaching Israel the laws of God, was given to the priests, the sons of Aaron.

After the wilderness wanderings, the children of Israel eventually entered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, and then commenced the period of the Judges - a rather chequered phase of Israel’s history, characterized by the state of affairs where “in those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes”¹⁸. At the end of this unhappy period, the people came to Samuel the prophet, and asked for a human king like the surrounding nations. The request displeased Samuel, but God said to Samuel, “Hearken 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*”¹⁹. Clearly, if God was reigning over them, He was their King, and Israel was His kingdom.

In process of time, the people chose Saul the Benjamite to be their king, but this turned out to be an unwise choice, and he was rejected by God for his rebellion. Instead, God chose David, a man after His own heart, and under his leadership the kingdom flourished, and became great. The kingdom reached its zenith during the reign of Solomon, the son of David. Shortly before David died, he rejoiced that Solomon had been chosen by God to succeed him: “And of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon *the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel*”²⁰.

It was king David’s great desire to construct a permanent dwelling place for the ark of God: “And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God

¹⁶ Exodus 25:8

¹⁷ Exodus 25:40

¹⁸ Judges 17:6

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 8:7

²⁰ 1 Chronicles 28:5

dwelleth within curtains”²¹. But God declared to David that he would not build such an house, because he had shed much blood, and had made great wars²². Instead, the task would be entrusted to Solomon his son: “And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father”²³. Thus it was that “in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD... And in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it”²⁴.

The kingdom overturned

The right of the nation of Israel to be called the Kingdom of God depended upon their obedience to the Law covenant that God gave to them through Moses. It was made plain to the people of Israel that if they failed to obey God they would forfeit the privilege of being His Kingdom. Not only so, but the nation would be overturned, and the people scattered worldwide. The land too would be made desolate: “But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; and if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you... I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths”²⁵.

The history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament scriptures illustrates that sadly Israel chose to disobey God, and in consequence was punished exactly as predicted. During the reign of Rehoboam the son of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into the northern ten tribe kingdom of Israel, and the southern two tribe kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom was ruled by a succession of kings, and not one of them were faithful. The kingdom came to an end during the

²¹ 2 Samuel 7:1,2

²² 1 Chronicles 22:8

²³ 1 Chronicles 28:6

²⁴ 1 Kings 6:1,38

²⁵ Leviticus 26:14-16,33,34

reign of king Hoshea, when the Assyrians besieged Samaria for three years. The ten tribes were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in BC 720. The Divine record says that “they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal... For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day”²⁶.

In the southern kingdom, at least some of the kings were faithful, but the spiritual state of the kingdom was one of gradual decline. The southern kingdom continued for a further 140 years or so after the destruction of the northern kingdom, before it too was overturned because of disobedience. During the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of the southern kingdom, God sent the prophet Ezekiel to warn of their impending overthrow: “And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him”²⁷. The final overturning of the two tribes was brought about by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who destroyed the city of Jerusalem after a lengthy siege, in BC 586. The Jews were carried off into captivity, and the magnificent temple that Solomon had built was completely overthrown.

The exiles return

There was a restoration of sorts some seventy years later, in fulfilment of Jeremiah’s prophecy²⁸, led by Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel²⁹. Jews from all twelve tribes returned to the land following the decree of Cyrus³⁰, and Israel came into existence once again as a nation, *but not as a kingdom*. The temple was rebuilt following the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah the prophets³¹,

²⁶ 2 Kings 17:16,22,23

²⁷ Ezekiel 21:25-27

²⁸ Jeremiah 29:10

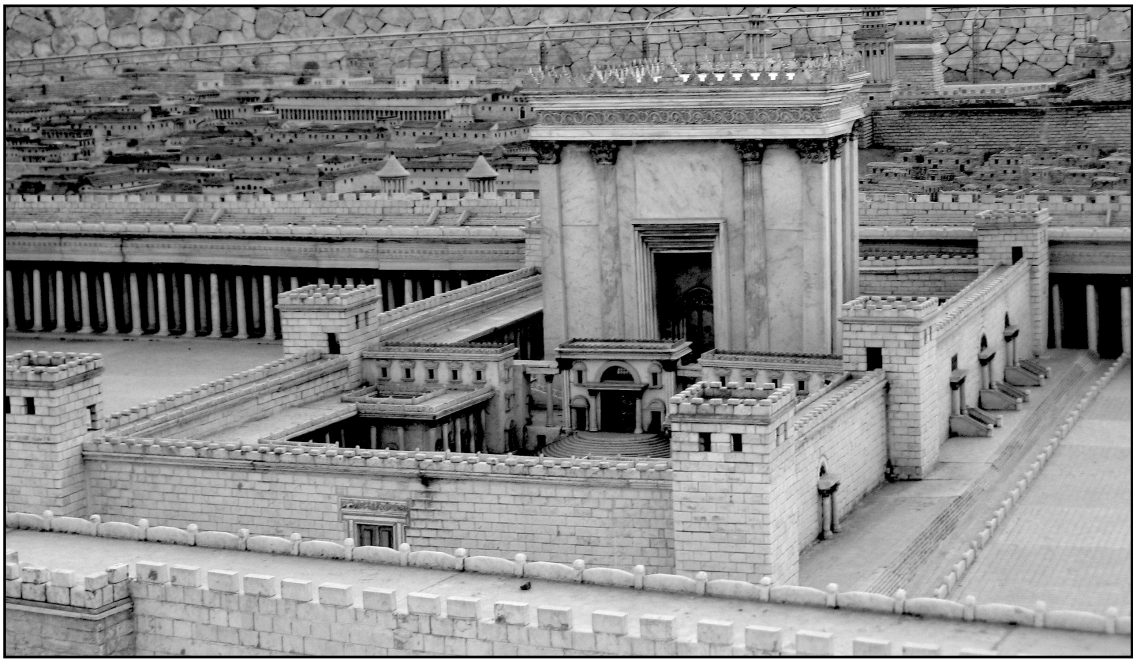
²⁹ See Ezra 2:1,2

³⁰ Ezra 1:1-4

³¹ Ezra 5:1

but it did not match the splendour of Solomon’s temple. Indeed, in the eyes of those who remembered the glories of the first temple, it was “in comparison of it as nothing”³².

It was to this restored nation that, some five hundred years later, the Lord Jesus Christ came, bringing with him the hope of salvation from sin and death. In his days the temple was rebuilt by Herod the Great. It took 46 years to build³³, and it was so magnificent that it was considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world.



A model of Herod’s temple

Judah’s commonwealth overthrown

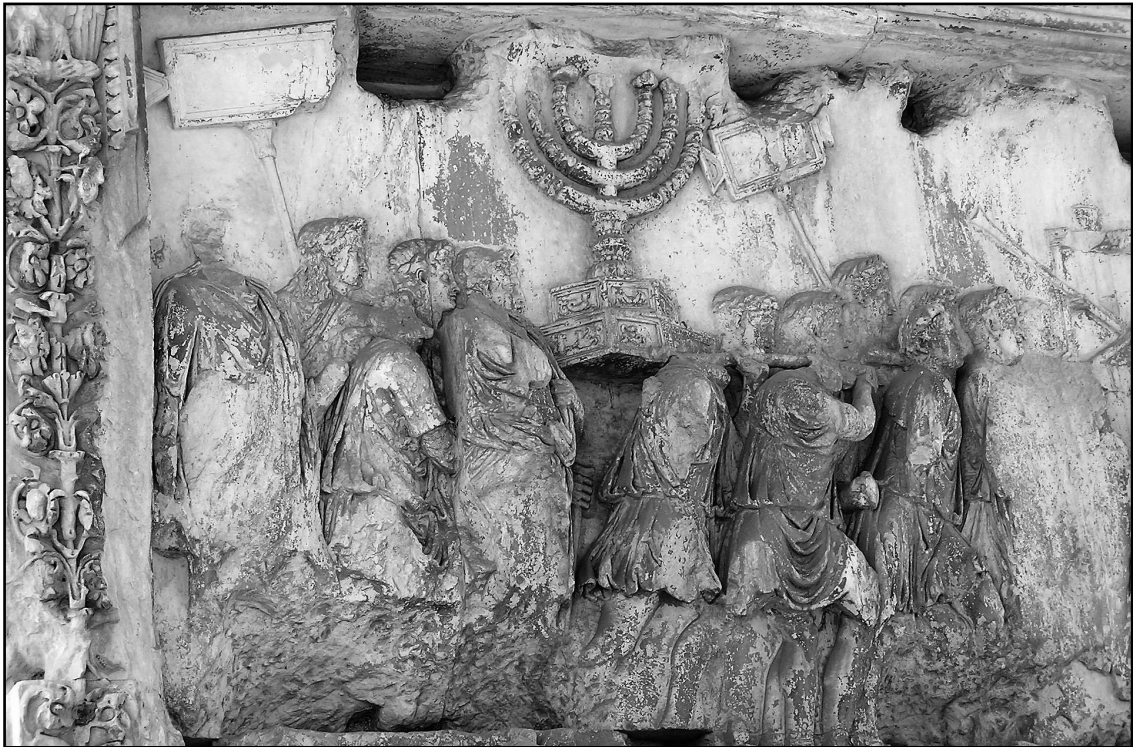
Instead of accepting Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour of men, the Jews rejected him, and had him put to death by the Roman authorities. By so doing, they sealed their own fate, and they became the recipients once again of the judgments of God - judgments which were ultimately poured out upon the

³² Haggai 2:3

³³ John 2:20

nation by the Roman armies. The nation of Israel was destroyed in AD 70, and many of the Jews perished. Those that survived were taken off into captivity.

All this was predicted by the Lord Jesus himself during his ministry: “For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation”³⁴. As for the magnificent buildings of Herod’s temple, they would be completely destroyed: “And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”³⁵.



Relief from the arch of Titus in Rome, showing the Roman soldiers carrying away the furniture of the temple

³⁴ Luke 19:43,44

³⁵ Luke 21:5,6

The kingdom to be restored

Thus it was that, in the terrible events of AD 70, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple - the very centre of Israel's religious worship - was overthrown³⁶. But the prophet Ezekiel indicated that the days would come when Israel's fortunes would change for the better, and there would be a *restoration* of the kingdom to Israel: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more *until he come whose right it is*; and I will give it him"³⁷. The Lord Jesus taught the same thing in his Mount Olivet prophecy - whilst he indicated that there were terrible times ahead for the city of Jerusalem, yet there would come a day when Jerusalem's downtreading at the hands of the Gentiles would cease: "And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled"³⁸. The Jewish people would be dispersed among the nations, yet they would be preserved in their dispersion, and one day their sufferings at the hands of the Gentiles would cease, and the kingdom of Israel would be restored. This is the consistent teaching of scripture, as the following testimonies indicate:

1) The Jewish people will be preserved as a distinct and separate people

- "For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, *yet will I not make a full end of thee*: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished"³⁹.

2) The Jews will be regathered as a nation into their own land

- "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even *gather you* from the people, and *assemble you* out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel"⁴⁰.
- "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will *gather them* on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one

³⁶ For an excellent summary of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, see *The Ways of Providence*, Chapters 24-26, R Roberts, CMPA

³⁷ Ezekiel 21:27

³⁸ Luke 21:24

³⁹ Jeremiah 30:11

⁴⁰ Ezekiel 11:17

nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all”⁴¹.

- “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel *will gather him*, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock”⁴².
- “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; *and I will bring them*, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness”⁴³.

3) **The regathered and restored nation of Israel will be established as the Kingdom of God on the earth**

- “And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; *the kingdom shall come* to the daughter of Jerusalem”⁴⁴.
- “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall *reign in mount Zion*, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously”⁴⁵.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he spent forty days with his disciples, during which time he taught them from the scriptures, and enlightened their understanding. Much of this time was spent “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”⁴⁶. It was this that prompted their question: “Lord, wilt thou at this time *restore again*⁴⁷ the kingdom to Israel?”⁴⁸ This was their hope - to see the kingdom of Israel restored as the Kingdom of God on earth. But the

⁴¹ Ezekiel 37:21,22

⁴² Jeremiah 31:10

⁴³ Zechariah 8:7,8

⁴⁴ Micah 4:7,8

⁴⁵ Isaiah 24:23

⁴⁶ Acts 1:3

⁴⁷ Gk. αποκαθιστημι - *apokathistemi*. To restore to its former state

⁴⁸ Acts 1:6

response of the Lord indicated that the kingdom would not immediately appear, and shortly afterwards the Lord ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high⁴⁹, where he remains to this day.

There can be no kingdom established in the absence of the king. Before the Kingdom of God is established, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ must return from heaven, and it is for this great event that all disciples of Jesus wait with eager anticipation: “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive *until the times of restitution*⁵⁰ *of all things*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began”⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 1:3

⁵⁰ Gk. *αποκαταστασις* - *apokatastasis*. Restoration. From *αποκαθιστημι* - *apokathistemi*. To restore to its former state. See Matthew 12:13; 17:11; Mark 3:5; 8:25; 9:12; Luke 6:10; Acts 1:6; Hebrews 13:19

⁵¹ Acts 3:20,21