

# Heaven + Earth: The End Of The Story

Inarguably, it's the end of any story that's the most important part.

While the beginning of a tale gives context and setting, and the middle gives the story its shape and drama, it's the ending that provides meaning and gives resolution to the narrative. It's the ending that makes sense of everything, that allows all the intersecting threads of drama, intrigue, risk, loss, joy, and homecoming to find their place and purpose within the story and, particularly, in its overarching conclusion.

Humanity's story; an ongoing tale of love and war, victory and defeat, joy and tragedy, has not yet reached its conclusion, but, surprisingly, its ending *has already been written*.

While scientists and philosophers have had much to offer to the conversation about our origins and humanity's remarkable traverse through history, with all of our astonishing achievements, they have little to offer on the subject of where we might all be going or how our story finishes. When it comes to science, we are left largely in the dark about the questions that matter the most.

*What are we here for?*

*What is the purpose of life?*

*Where will we end up?*

## Life's Most Profound Questions

It's to the Bible alone that we can turn for answers to life's most profound questions. It has much to say about not just how

we supposedly got here and why, but also how humanity's story will reach its epic conclusion.

The Bible is the living, Spirit-breathed Word of God, the written revelation of what God has been doing in the past, what He is still doing right now, and what he has intended for the future of humanity.

The Word of God is like a vast tapestry, its main theme interwoven with many sub-plots and side stories that run like golden threads through an intricate design. Each of these threads complements the complete telling of God's story and confirm again and again to us the way in which God views the world, the people who inhabit it, and how important each one of us are to Him.

Far from being just black text on white pages; this book unveils the purpose, intentionality, and creative action of the Eternal One; breathed out, captured by way of quill and scroll by the faithful scribes who heard 'the voice of God', recording the Eternal's story for all to read.

What we also learn about God's story is that the master storyteller hasn't been absent or detached from His story, but fully present and, in fact, His full, enveloping presence, His close and intimate dwelling with humanity was actually the point of the story all along. What began in a garden, where God once [walked with us](#), will find its epic conclusion in a 'new creation', in a restored and regenerated earth where God at last dwells with His people.

The end of our story will actually be *our new beginning*. The conclusion of our story doesn't end with us going to be with God; but *with God coming to earth*, returning, at last, *to be with us*.

God's story has a conclusion, an ending, a moment when all the loose strings are neatly tied up and we'll sit back, with a sigh of satisfaction at a tale well told and an ending more

glorious than we could ever have imagined.

## The Purpose Of God

Much of scripture is given to expressing the heart of the Creator and what His hopes and dreams were for this place we call Earth, along with us, its inhabitants, as His intended image-bearers.

*“Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” | Genesis 1:26, CSB “Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD.” | Number 14:28, ESV “And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all humanity together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” | Isaiah 40:5, ESV “On that day the LORD will become King over all the earth – the LORD alone and His name alone.” | Zechariah 14:9, ESV “And blessed be His glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory; Amen, and Amen.” | Psalm 72:19, ESV*

It was always the purpose of the Eternal to fill this good earth with His glorious presence, as deep and as expansive ‘as the waters cover the sea’. Despite human failure and many, many detours in this story, God has declared that His purpose will not be thwarted. He will accomplish what He intended for His creation, even to [His own personal cost](#), as it turns out.

*“I declare the end from the beginning and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.’” | Isaiah 46:10, ESV*

## The Kingdom Of God

This glorious and absolute rule and reign of the wise and

faithful king is what the New Testament terms the 'kingdom of God'.

[The gospel](#) is the good news that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

What many people think of as 'the gospel' – being '[saved](#)' – is actually only just one aspect of a much larger story, *the full gospel* ('good news') story of God's will and purpose for the earth and how humanity is part of that.

*"To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to statistical analysis. The term basileia (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. "After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. It insists that we are saved for a purpose." – SBC Life*

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. 'The kingdom of God' is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with His glory, essentially, all of Himself, and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all of humanity. It also includes the promise of total reconciliation with humanity; only made possible in Jesus

(Ephesians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 1:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, Romans 11:36, Revelation 1:16).

## Heaven + Earth

God didn't just create humanity with purpose, He also created the earth with purpose. He cares deeply about what happens to this place we call home and all that He intended it to be.

A critical and essential reality of the kingdom of God includes its physicality. 'The kingdom' is not just an individual, spiritual, Christian *experience* but a literal reality that will be fully expressed and outworked *on the earth*.

Interestingly, intrinsic in the idea of 'kingdom' are the following five things: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land. You can read more about these different aspects in the articles. '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)' and '[The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet](#)'. However, the particular focus in this article is the reality of 'land' or physicality. This reality, when compared against many different passages in the Bible informs our understanding of what, or more specifically, where, this physical reality is intended to be.

Contrary to what many people may think, *going to heaven is not a Christian's final ending or God's promise*. Resurrection and *life* – heaven's own eternal life – on a regenerated and restored earth, is the hope for every [person of the kingdom](#).

*Earth* is the place where God's will is to be done (where His kingdom will be fully revealed) in the same way as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10), *earth* is the intended inheritance of those who have been faithful, (Psalm 37:11, Matthew 5:5), *earth* is the place where peace and safety will finally reign supreme (Isaiah 2:4, Ezekiel 34:25) and where righteousness will take up residence (2 Peter 3:13), and *earth* is where all creation will finally be set free from its bondage and brought

into the glorious freedom that God always intended for it (Romans 8:21).

*Earth* is the place where the curse of Eden will finally and completely be overthrown and God will return and take up residence amongst His people. Our long exile will be over.

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.” Revelation 21:3, BSB*

“As N.T Wright and other New Testament scholars have shown, it’s important to understand that kingdom terminology refers not to some faraway paradise filled with disembodied souls, but rather to the will and reign of God, unleashed into the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” (Rachel Held Evans). N T Wright puts it this way: *“Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord’s Prayer is about.”*

The life of heaven – the “life and light of mankind” came to earth in the person of Jesus, shining brightly and giving hope in a damaged and disordered world. In Jesus, we can see the intention of God all along for His creation. In Jesus, all the fullness of God’s glory was displayed in human form and we can see the kind of life God has intended for us.

What God began in the resurrection of Jesus is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glory.

The earth, renewed with heaven’s own life, is the epic conclusion to the story, and the final pages close with this promise: *“The angel showed me a river that was crystal clear, and its waters gave life. The river came from the throne where*

*God and the Lamb were seated. Then it flowed down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river are trees that grow a different kind of fruit each month of the year. The fruit gives life, and the leaves are used as medicine to heal the nations.*

***God's curse will no longer be on the people of that city. He and the Lamb will be seated there on their thrones, and its people will worship God and will see Him face to face. God's name will be written on the foreheads of the people. Never again will night appear, and no one who lives there will ever need a lamp or the sun. The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule forever.*** (Revelation 22:1-5, CEV)

*"One day the veil will be lifted; earth and heaven will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee will bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God's new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities." | N T Wright*

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**What happens after the end? Well, the short answer is *we don't know*. We're told so much in the Bible about God's purpose, His original intention for creation, and the lengths to which He has gone to get that story back on track. (Although, side-note, was it really ever truly off-track...?). We're also told how this particular story will conclude.**

**But what comes after? As it is written, "No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). The great Christian author, C S Lewis, puts it this way: "All their life in this world and all their adventures had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." (The Last Battle)**

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# The Kingdom | Now, But Not Yet

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

The sovereignty and rule of God has always existed and will always exist ([Psalm 47:7](#), [1 Chronicles 29:11](#), [Exodus 15:18](#), [Psalm 103:19](#)).

He is Almighty God, maker of the earth, sovereign over all, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He alone claims the title of the One and Only God and that there is none like Him in all the earth. The Psalmist declares the wonder and worthiness of this Eternal God, who is clothed in light, who stretches out the heavens like a tent, and who walks on the waves of the sea (Psalm 104:2, Job 9:8). All of creation bows in obeisance to His majesty, for all things owe their existence to Him (Psalm 104:30, Psalm 6:4, Psalm 96:11, Luke 19:40).

He is the God of promise, at whose Word the universe came into being and whose Word will never return to Him void, not accomplishing the purpose for which it was sent (Genesis 1:3, Isaiah 55:11). His loving devotion endures forever. He is faithful, true, just, and all glorious (Psalm 136:3, 1 Timothy 1:17).

His sovereignty is over and above all other kingdoms and His rule absolute (Isaiah 37:16, 1 Timothy 6:15). All the earth is His and everything that is therein (Psalm 24:1). This glorious

and absolute rule and reign of the only wise and faithful King is what the New Testament terms the *'kingdom of God'*.

## **In The Beginning**

This is the reality of the story in the beginning. Affirming God's sovereignty gives shape and purpose to the role for which humanity was created, that is, to rule wisely and well on behalf of earth's Sovereign.

*"Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth." | Genesis 1:26, CSB*

*"Yet as surely as I live and as surely as the whole earth is filled with the glory of the LORD." | Numbers 14:21, ESV*

Adam and Eve were given the authority and privilege of ruling over God's good creation, filling all the earth with His glory and accomplishing His purpose (Genesis 1:26). However, instead of partnering with God, they choose to undertake this rule on their own terms, enacting their own will instead of the will of the Eternal One.

As a result, they experienced disruption in their relationship with the King, and the consequence of their disobedience was catastrophic. The evil of sin entered God's good world, and would eventually spread like a dark, cancerous mass across the surface of the earth, setting in motion the destructive cycle the world has been subject to ever since.

Another kingdom was willed into existence, the kingdom of this world; earthly, transient, and dispensing death instead of life. It's ruled over by the spirit of corruption; where envy, murder, anger, and strife find footing and flourish. It's a dominion of darkness, from which there is no escape.

Every human is born into this kingdom, enslaved to the ruler of this world. We're born physically alive but spiritually dead. Without our spiritual connection to the King of all the earth, we're nothing more than 'dead men walking', living in darkness and far from the eternal life God intended for us.

## **Theocracy, Monarchy, Liberation + Redemption**

For centuries, God's story of liberation and redemption – part of His 'Kingdom Mission' – has been enacted in the history of the world. He wants to save and rescue His creation from this dominion of darkness, in which labour is futile and the only outcome is death.

God is for us; He loves us and wants to reconcile and transform us so that we can live the life of purpose for which He created us.

*“For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's children to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of him who subjected it – in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.” Romans 8:19-21, Christian Standard Bible*

This liberation and redemption was brought into sharp relief firstly by covenants made to [Abraham](#), through whom God promises to bless all the world ([Genesis 12:1-3](#), [Genesis 13:14-17](#), [Genesis 15:1-21](#), [Genesis 17:1-11](#)).

Abraham's twelve sons and their descendants, those who came to be known as the nation of Israel, were further witnesses to God's promises; the people through whom all the world would come to learn of the One and Only Sovereign over all. God ruled His people at this time through *theocracy*, a system of law and priesthood, and the intention was that the surrounding

nations would look upon His chosen people, blessed and ruled over by God, and turn to worship Him also (Isaiah 41:20, 43:10).

The nation of Israel struggled with their unique and privileged identity. They would worship and serve God for a season and then, when things were going well, they would become complacent and selfish, turning aside to worship gods made of wood and stone, like the nations around them. They abandoned their covenant with their King, over and over again, but He did not abandon them (Judges 17:6, Jeremiah 9:6).

Reestablishing His sovereignty over their lives, He reiterates His promises of liberation and freedom, through His just and righteous rulership, to the famous shepherd-boy-turned-king, [David of Bethlehem](#). He makes David king to rule over His people, and promises that, through him and his family, He intends for all nations to find blessing and peace. Ruling by way of *monarchy*, the nation of Israel was to be once again a blessing to all the world and witnesses of the Creator and King of all the earth (2 Samuel 7:8-12).

The tides of human history rose and fell. Israel's fortunes ebbed and flowed with these tides, experiencing periods of glorious peace and stability, as under King Solomon, David's son, but, also, periods of terrible wickedness and decline. In the final days of the monarchy, Israel demonstrated a complete deterioration in both faith and witness until, finally, they were enslaved and forcibly removed from their land under Babylonian conquest and occupation (Psalm 78:10-11, Jeremiah 32:30, 2 Kings 17:18-20).

The final book of the Old Testament, [Malachi](#), offers a glimpse into the hearts of those who had been specially chosen by God as His witnesses. Even with the perspective of their glorious history and events like the Great Exodus from Egypt, they had completely given in to apathy. They had neglected God's promises; and spiritual lethargy and a corrupt priesthood had

spread unfaithfulness, cancer-like, throughout the nation (Malachi 1-4, Ezekiel 21:27).

God reigned still but His people had long since rejected Him. The glory of His presence departed from them and would not return again for over 400 years (Ezekiel 10:15-19).

## **I Am**

It is into this vast length of silence that the King finally speaks, announcing His impending arrival into the story of not just Israel, but the entire world (John 1:19-23,28 cp Isaiah 40:3-10). His rule and sovereignty and indeed, His purpose – that all the earth be filled with His glory – was now to be fulfilled through *christocracy*; a system of rulership in the name of His Son, the Christ, the Messiah.

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone....for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” | [Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV](#)*

The message was clear. God was still King – He has always been King – and His reign, fractured early on in human history (Genesis 2), was going to be properly reinstated through His Son, Jesus. The Word of God had been sent out and it would not return to Him void. God’s kingdom, advancing for centuries, was now being planted right in the heart of hostile territory, ground that, in the past had not only been dangerous to the King’s messengers but, in many cases, fatal (Matthew 21:27).

[The Word became human, like us](#). Anyone who saw him saw all the radiance of God's glory; the exact representation of His being and the imprint of His nature ([Hebrews 1:3](#), [John 14:10-11](#)). The glory of the King had returned to take up residence amongst His people.

Jesus, who was in the very nature of God, emptied himself and took the form of a servant, made in the likeness of humans that sin ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)). He was God-With-Us. who became the representative of us all and in his human body, the war against the ruler of this world would be waged and won.

In Jesus Christ, it would become possible for all families of the earth, of any nationality, to find liberation, redemption and experience the righteous rulership of the King of Kings.

[The gospel](#) was the announcement of good news that Jesus, God's only Son, is both Lord and King of the kingdom and that, in him, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose. The work that God had been at for a long time now culminated in a tiny, obscure town in the middle of the demoralised and Roman-occupied nation of Israel.

*Earth in shadow, restlessly hold.  
Labour's waiting, in silent hope.  
For the promise, it longs to know, what heaven holds.  
Then the angels, in holy haste.  
Lift their anthem, your Saviour lays,  
in a manger, in humble form.  
Your King is born.*

***Prince of Heaven | Hillsong Worship***

## **Repent, For The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Hand**

When Jesus arrived on the scene, he went and resided in the land of Naphtali, the 'way beyond the sea', so that the words spoken so long ago by Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

*“the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned”* (Matthew 4:15-16, ESV). The implications are clearly profound, with deeply spiritual overtones. The light and life of humanity had finally arrived and the hope of liberation and redemption would be realised.

Then, he began preaching, saying *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent of your willfulness, your self-governing, your persistence in finding identity in false gods who cannot save and who do not, in reality, rule or even exist. Repent and turn to the One who rules heaven and earth, the maker and creator of all things, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”*

*“To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to statistical analysis. The term basileia (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven” occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God”* ([Acts 1:3](#)). | SBC Life

Jesus demonstrated the power and reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, through the miraculous – evidence that he was Lord of all; healing sickness, forgiving sins, multiplying bread and fishes, walking on water...raising the dead (Matthew 15:30, Matthew 14:13-33, Luke 8:49-56).

He qualified what the Kingdom of Heaven looked like; a kingdom defined by mercy and love, failure and forgiveness, exile and homecoming. The citizens of this kingdom, he said, were

otherworldly; children of light and salt, whose transformed lives of goodness and steadfast confidence would witness to the glory and power of this kingdom (Matthew 5:2-11, 13-14, Luke 15:11-32).

He stated plainly the way to this kingdom; by believing in him and being born again of water and of spirit, further expanded on throughout his ministry as referring to the representative death in baptism and [regeneration of new life by the Spirit](#) (John 3:5, 16, John 8:24).

He taught that the kingdom was not in some far-off place, out of sight, but here, right now, in their midst (Luke 17:21).

*“The kingdom, Jesus taught, is right here – present yet hidden, immanent yet transcendent. It is at hand – among us and beyond us, now but not yet. The kingdom of heaven, he said, belongs to the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful, and those who hunger and thirst for God. It advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility. In this kingdom, many who are last will be first and many who are first will be last. The rich don’t usually get it, Jesus said, but children always do. This is a kingdom whose savior arrives not on a warhorse, but a donkey, not through triumph and conquest, but through death and resurrection. This kingdom is the only kingdom that will last.” | Rachel Held Evans, 1981-2019*

Other places in scripture, particularly the writings of Paul the Apostle, affirm that the revelation of God’s original plan of creation, the redeeming, recreating, and re-ordering of all things, together with the reconciliation of creation to its Creator, all find their true and most meaningful significance in Jesus Christ [the King], the Word-Made-Flesh (Ephesians 1:3-10; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

The invisible God, the King of all the earth, was now

revealing Himself visibly through His Word-Made-Flesh, in whose hands the world and all that is therein, has been placed and who is Lord of all (John 3:35; Acts 2:36, Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20).

## The Church Of Christ Is Born

*“When Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, he was preaching much more than personal salvation for the individual. He was preaching “a new day in an old story” – the story of God the King – and God as king in King Jesus. The one gospel is about Jesus the Lord, the King, the Messiah and the saviour. This is the story that alone makes sense of Jesus’ choice of the word ‘kingdom’ to explain the mission of God to the world.” (Scot McKnight)*

When people give [allegiance to Jesus the King](#), they are transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of light, the Kingdom of God that has always existed and will always exist (Colossians 1:13). To be born again is to be [regenerated](#); the termination of people of the old creation, people enslaved to the ruler of this world, and the germination of them in the new creation with the divine life (Ephesians 4:17-24).

All of the darkness, the failure, the chaos, and ruin of our life is surrendered to the King, who erases it in the water of baptism (Matthew 3:15, Matthew 10:28, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Colossians 2:12, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:4-6). Light enters the darkness. New life is ignited in us and the new human is reborn.

*“The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. It insists that we are saved for a purpose.” – SBC Life*

These collective ‘citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven’ are the community of believers that the New Testament calls the church, whose guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ, the King. They are his witnesses, empowered and commissioned by him to represent him and the sovereign reign and rule of God to all the world (Acts 8:12-16,36-38, Luke 24:47).

*“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” | Acts 1:8. NIV*

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19, NIV*

## **‘Kingdom’: King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land**

1. A kingdom is a people governed by a **king**. In truth, there is only one kingdom that reigns over all, whose king is God. He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*, then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God has gone through many phases and a reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can read more about this in the article [‘Jesus, King Of The World’](#).
2. The king must **rule** over the kingdom. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly through wise governing. As Scot McKnight, historian of early Christianity, theologian, and author comments, *“kingdom redemption’ is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of “redemptive” activity that does not deal with sin, that*

*does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God's new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for the common good."*

3. There has to be **people** for there to be a kingdom. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/kingdom of Israel. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (Romans 11:1-28).
4. A kingdom must have a governing **law**. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus arrived, scripture takes care to tell us that he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely. By his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40).
5. A kingdom must have a **land**. In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, 'the land' is wherever the church (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this 'tree of the kingdom' will fill all the earth and God's rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4, Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32).

*"[This] good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's*

*relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine...It is the biggest story and the smallest story all at once – the great quest for the One Ring and the quiet friendship of Frodo and Sam.” | Rachel Held Evans*

## **What About God’s Promises To Israel?**

Jesus was [born King](#), destined to inherit the ancient throne of David, his royal ancestor through his human descent. He will rule wisely and well, not just over Israel but over the whole world. Not only was he the descendant of King David and therefore the legitimate heir to the throne of Israel, he was also the Son of God and therefore the promised saviour and King of the world. The confluence of these two aspects is no coincidence and we can only be astonished at how God chose to bring all these things together to achieve His purpose.

God has in no way forgotten His promises to individuals or to groups of people and implicit in that are literal promises to the people of Israel, elements of which still await fulfillment ([Isaiah 52:7-9](#), [Luke 2:25](#), [Acts 26:6](#)).

*“And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” [Isaiah 11:12, NASB](#)*

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – [Micah 5:2, NIV](#)*

Jesus left his [fledgling church](#), those first disciples who represented the expansive and diverse family that God would

build through him, with a promise: that He would one day return, to take them to himself, to restore and renew all the earth, to overthrow all the different manifestations of the kingdom of this world, and to fully establish the Kingdom of God, filling the earth with His glory. Those who confess him as Lord, Saviour and Christ [King] will be saved, including those from the nation of Israel (John 14:3, Acts 1:10-11, Romans 10:9, Titus 2:13, Revelation 1:7, Romans 11:14, Ephesians 1:10, Revelation 5:13).

When he returns, *to bring salvation* to those who eagerly wait for him (Hebrews 9:28), Israel, the people who had been God's witnesses, and indeed all the peoples of the earth, will hear the final entreaty of the King of Kings: *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

*"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the LORD alone are deliverance and strength.' "All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. But all the descendants of Israel will find deliverance in the LORD and will make their boast in Him." | Isaiah 45:22-25, NIV*

One day, all the earth will be filled with the glory and sovereignty of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords and God will once again dwell with His people. *"The kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

What God began in the [resurrection of Jesus](#) is what He intends to do for all of creation; to regenerate, to restore, and to fully dwell with His creation in all His glorious sovereignty.

*"One day the veil will be lifted; earth and heaven will be one; Jesus will be personally present, and every knee will*

*bow at his name; creation will be renewed; the dead will be raised; and God's new world will at last be in place, full of new prospects and possibilities." | N T Wright*

*"In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever." | Daniel 2:44, Christian Standard Bible*

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The kingdom is described in the Bible in several ways, such as 'the kingdom of heaven' (the gospel of Matthew), 'the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 1:11), 'the kingdom of Christ and God' (Ephesians 5:5) and 'the kingdom of God' (the gospels of Mark and Luke). You can read more about its people in the article '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)'. You may also enjoy [this podcast](#), produced by The Bible Project: Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

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## **In The Shadow Of The Empire**

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Christianity in the first century was a spiritual explosion, fueled by the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Jewish community, who lived and worshipped largely by themselves, Christians were active evangelists, eager to share the good news about Jesus

with all who would listen. They preached Jesus everywhere, not just as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, but as Lord, Saviour, and King; over and above Caesar.

Initially planted in the soil of Jerusalem, the gospel message soon spread rapidly beyond Israel; throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the Mediterranean world. In as little as just over 10 years after Jesus' resurrection, Christianity had already reached as far as Rome itself. As Jesus had promised, his disciples were to be his witnesses, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, Acts 2:41-47).

The area of [Asia Minor](#) was a huge melting pot of ethnicities and also one of the [first areas to flourish with converts to the new religion of Christianity](#). It was also part of the expansive [Roman Empire](#), at the height of its glory, and was therefore subject to Roman law and Roman customs.

Living in the shadow of the Empire would prove a difficult tension for Christians to navigate. No longer [giving allegiance to Caesar](#) as 'Lord of the earth' but instead confessing that this title belonged to Jesus Christ, how were they to behave as people *in the world but not of it*?

As *citizens of heaven*, did the laws of Rome no longer apply to them?

And, as *people of the kingdom*, how were they to live out the values of the kingdom in the society around them? Were they justified in using force to make *the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of the Lord and Christ*?

These are all important questions, not just for those in the first-century church but for every generation of Christians who have come after them.

How should Christians conduct themselves, living in the shadow of the Empire?

# A Letter From Peter, An Apostle Of Jesus Christ

The importance of the way a Christian behaves so as to be a credible witness for the gospel is a significant principle emphasised throughout the New Testament. It's a [theme picked up by Peter the Apostle](#) in his first letter to the early churches (1 Peter 1-5).

Discouraged by the persecution they were suffering because of their faith, Peter writes to the early churches throughout Asia Minor to encourage them and to provide wisdom and counsel in their response to the pressures around them and in their life of Christian witness.

## Keep Your Conduct Honourable

Firstly, Peter urges them, *keep your conduct honourable*. They are holy people, [called out of darkness](#) into God's marvellous light. Walking in the light means [walking humbly alongside God](#), doing justly and loving kindness. Deceit, malice, hypocrisy, slander, drunkenness, sensual living; these are all fruitless deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11) and Peter encourages the church to choose differently, to live exemplary lives in their neighborhoods so that their actions will refute pagan prejudices (1 Peter 2:11-12).

They had been [born again](#), by the living and imperishable Word of God, new creations guarded through faith for a salvation that would one day be revealed to all. Demonstrating lives that paralleled what they preached would witness to the truly supernatural power of the gospel and its ability to effect transformation.

## Respect And Submit To Authority

For the Lord's sake, Christians were to show respect to all people and, particularly, to those in authority. They were to be model citizens, subject to every human institution (1 Peter

2:13). As Jesus the master had made clear during his earthly ministry, *render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's*.

Their allegiance to Jesus wasn't an excuse to engage in illegal behaviours, disrespect of their masters, or dishonour of the Emperor or his delegates. *Pay your taxes, submit to the laws of the land, pray for those who have the rule over you*.

They were to treat their service to the Emperor, their master (if they were a slave), and indeed each other as service rendered to the King himself.

The Christian life wouldn't always bring blessing, and the persecution and suffering they were currently experiencing were proof of this reality. Yet Peter encourages them to look to the example of Jesus himself, who demonstrated that the kingdom of heaven advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility and, ultimately, through suffering.

The greatest suffering of all brought about the greatest victory for all (1 Peter 4:13-14).

## **Love Earnestly And Do Good**

They were to love each other earnestly. This was the defining mark of those who belonged to the King and it was how the world was to know they were his disciples.

Given to hospitality, they were to love with open hearts and generous lives. They were to live bright and unafraid: remembering that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. They were to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while continuing to doing good to all and especially to those of the household of faith (1 Peter 1:22, Galatians 6:10). *Love and do good to others just as Jesus has loved you. By this, all people will know you are his disciples*.

Early Christianity found particular expression through philanthropy; care for the poor, widows, and orphans, for those brethren who had been imprisoned or condemned, and particularly for brethren, who due to poverty, could not afford an honourable burial. The early church would often provide services for such persons, believing care in death as well as life was an active expression of love. The early Christian insistence on caring for those *made in the image of God* transformed the ancient world.

## **In The World But Not Of It**

*“The Christian ideal is not freedom from work, but strength to do it; not freedom from temptation, but power to overcome it; not freedom from suffering, but joy in an abiding sense of the Father’s love; not absence from the world, but grace to make the world better for our presence; not holy lives driven from the world, and living apart from it, but holy lives spent in the world and leavening it.” – Ellicott’s Commentary For English Readers.*

Like our early Christian brethren, we too continue to live in the shadow of the Empire. We too must wrestle with issues of allegiance, to show submission to those institutions and ordinances which have authority over us, yet not be conformed to this world in the process.

We may think this requires us to limit our interaction with the people around us or remove ourselves ‘from the world’, but this isn’t what scripture is concerned with. It’s the ruler of this world who is our enemy, not those who are enslaved to him; those who, like us, have also been made in the image of God. They, too, desperately need the presence of Jesus in their lives, whether they know it or not and our Christian witness in this current world is vitally important.

Jesus’ prayer for his disciples was not that God would take

them out of the world but that He would protect them from the evil one. We must not be conformed to the image of the ruler of this world, nor choose his way, a path that only leads back to darkness (John 12:31, 1 John 1:5-7). Jesus prayed for the protection of his followers, knowing we are left in this world for a specific purpose; to witness to the power of his saving name. *"You are the salt of the earth,"* he said, *"you are the light of the world"*.

Our commission is to live and work, to love and forgive, to mourn, trust, despair and hope [alongside and together with](#) our unbelieving neighbours and friends, all the while telling of the faithfulness of a good God and the hope found in the gospel message.

Our lives – our everyday, mundane, messy, uncomfortable, terrifying, joyful, and thoroughly human lives will be the greatest witness of all to the hope that lies within us.

How we conduct ourselves, as we live in the shadow of the Empire, is still just as relevant and important today as it was for our first-century brethren.

As Christians, we're now citizens of a spiritual city whose builder and maker is God, people of a heavenly kingdom, living out the values and ideals of [that kingdom](#) in this earthly life.

Yet we're also still literal citizens of the countries we live in. We still retain all the privileges that citizenship affords, together with the responsibilities it holds. *Because* we have given our primary allegiance to Jesus and, for the Lord's sake, we're to continue to submit to the laws and ordinances of the countries in which we live.

Christians have a greater not lesser responsibility to do good and model appropriate citizenship. We don't get a leave pass to flout the regulations and laws passed by those in authority, just because we're 'not of this world.' *"It is*

*God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules." (1 Peter 2:13-17)*

Yet, there must be a disclaimer at this point. We also have a responsibility – a greater responsibility, it can be argued – to model the values of the [kingdom of heaven](#). This responsibility often highlights issues of injustice, prejudice or inequality which may exist both within the church and without, issues to which God is adamantly opposed and therefore we also should be opposed.

The Atlantic slave trade, which operated between the 15th and 19th centuries, might never have been abolished, had it not been for the public agitation of those who spoke vocally against a legally sanctioned practice and campaigned tirelessly for its elimination.

Two distinct laws passed in Nazi Germany provided the legal framework for the systematic persecution and resulting genocide of millions of Jews, demonstrating that sometimes doing what is lawful isn't the same as doing what is right.

And in our own country of Australia between 1910 and 1970, at least 100,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed – stolen – from their parents and families as a result of various government policies, leaving a legacy of loss and trauma that persists today. The pain inflicted on an entire people through separation and forced assimilation was enabled by governmental law, regardless of the reality that it was morally repugnant to do so.

*As Christians, the law cannot be our ultimate moral guide. Slavery was lawful. The holocaust was legal. Segregation and apartheid were legally sanctioned. Many of today's laws are created to protect corporations rather than people. Simply put, the law does not dictate our ethics. God does. | Craig*

[God's values have the final word in our actions](#) and this may mean, at some point, our choices or actions put us in conflict with the culture around us or the laws of the country in which we live. *We submit, until, for conscience sake, we can no longer submit* (Acts 5:29, Exodus 1:7).

## **The Covid-19 Pandemic**

For Christians, times of trouble are opportunities to test and prove our own conviction; that there is One God who rules over all things and that we remain confident that He continues to do so, even through trouble and difficulty ([Psalm 103:19](#), [Daniel 2:21](#), [Ephesians 4:6](#)).

While the early Christians faced very different times of trouble than we do today, comparable only perhaps by how we choose to respond, our faithful response is no less necessary than theirs.

The ongoing crisis of Covid-19 is a troubling and anxious time. The most recent reports regarding the virus are particularly concerning, causing fear for many people, especially the elderly and vulnerable in our communities. Whilst we shouldn't be ambivalent about what's going on around the globe, we also need to be measured in our response and very careful not to be contributing to or escalating the level of panic that people may be experiencing.

It's extremely disturbing that Christians would contribute to misinformation regarding both the virus and associated treatment options, particularly in the social domain. Many, in reality, are unlikely to be qualified to actually comment from a medical perspective, yet this doesn't seem to prevent them from offering advice, suggestions, criticisms, or conjecture on the subject.

Verified medical information shared in responsible ways is helpful; unfactual, fear-inducing conspiracy theories are not. By all means, discuss the situation with those around you but choose to do so in responsible ways, with a view to banishing exaggerated fear.

Neither is it appropriate for Christians to participate in acts of disrespect or civil disobedience of those in authority, whilst current regulations don't directly contradict God's directives. We ought to instead continue to pray for wisdom and guidance in our own personal choices as well as for those in the difficult situation of accessing risks and making decisions on behalf of our nation.

Christians also have both a responsibility and a privilege to point the world's attention to the One who is still in control of all. We can choose to positively redirect the conversation, to comfort people's hearts and try to settle their fears, whilst still acknowledging the gravity of the current pandemic and assist in supporting practical measures to combat it.

There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Romans 13:1). We are to seek their welfare, to speak evil of no one, to respect the government and be law-abiding. If it is possible, as far as it depends on us, we're to live at peace with everyone. (Titus 3:1-2, Jeremiah 29:7, Romans 12:18).

We need to continue to pray, worship and connect in all the ways that are possible to us right now. Most of all, we need to continue to point the people of the world to Jesus, who told his much-loved followers: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Trust in God and trust in me also" ([John 14:1](#)).

## **Convictions + Conduct**

Our convictions and conduct go hand in hand. What we say and

what we do must show itself to be in agreement.

*“We don’t believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true.” | Dallas Willard*

If we believe that God is King of all the earth and remains sovereign still, then we must act in such a way that confirms this truth to the watching world.

We are to be thankful for those in authority and especially at a time like this, those in healthcare, who risk their own lives to treat and save others ([1 Timothy 2:2](#)). We need to remember to pray for them and assist where we can.

We ought to show responsibility in following the direction of the government and officials, acknowledging measured concern for the situation we all find ourselves in and abiding by recommendations for the good of everyone ([1 Peter 2:13](#)). Now, more than ever, is the time to show consideration and restraint and to lead the world by example. It is not the time (or ever!) for Christians to display greed or selfishness but to consider those who are our neighbour and to love them, as ourselves ([Romans 13:8-10](#)).

And, particularly, it is vitally important to consider those who are weak and vulnerable amongst our communities, who have always found a special place in God’s heart ([James 1:27](#); [Psalm 68:5](#)).

*We have opportunity right now, to remind the world of a good, good God, who is actively seeking to overthrow the effects of sin in the world and restore humanity to full relationship with Himself.*

Even here, in times that seem very dark, God is still busy making all things new.

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I first wrote about [the Christian response to the pandemic](#) over a year ago, when things had really started to impact our communities. We've seen a lot happen around the world in that time and, recently, it seemed as if Australia had finally gotten a handle on things and life might be returning to normal.

I confess, I've not personally felt any real sense of fear throughout this situation until very recently, when the various mutant strains became more contagious and seemingly more virulent. The recent restrictions in Sydney give cause for concern and Covid-19 now feels very much on our doorstep. I had to intentionally take time this week to remind myself of my faith, my conviction that God is sovereign still and that the wind and waves still know His name. Through it all, my eyes must remain on Him.

At the same time as this was occurring, three events impacted me personally and I felt compelled to again write about the situation.

One was several shares in one week on social media of what can only be described as 'doomsday' commentaries; fear-inducing and based in theory, not fact.

The second was the illegal, unmasked gathering/protest that occurred in Sydney, which was also shared on social media (whether to criticise or congratulate I couldn't say for sure, although it did appear to me to be in support of the protest).

The third was two different statements from Christian pastors within a denomination stating this: that if you chose to vaccinate, you weren't faithful, and, that if you didn't choose to vaccinate, you weren't faithful. In my opinion, this kind of religious pressure, criticism or coercion about a very personal choice is completely irresponsible and amounts to spiritual abuse, especially from those in a pastoral position.

I was reminded again of the relevance and importance of the Christian faith in our world, to provide hope, comfort, and assistance to those who are struggling, fearful, or angry. And I was reminded of the example left for us in God's Word, which seems to have an answer for every situation, of those in the early church who lived in the shadow of the Empire and navigated the same tensions with faithfulness and steadfast hope. We can learn a lot from them.

**Pictured: Sculpture of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Emperor of Rome 24 January AD41 – 13 October AD54**