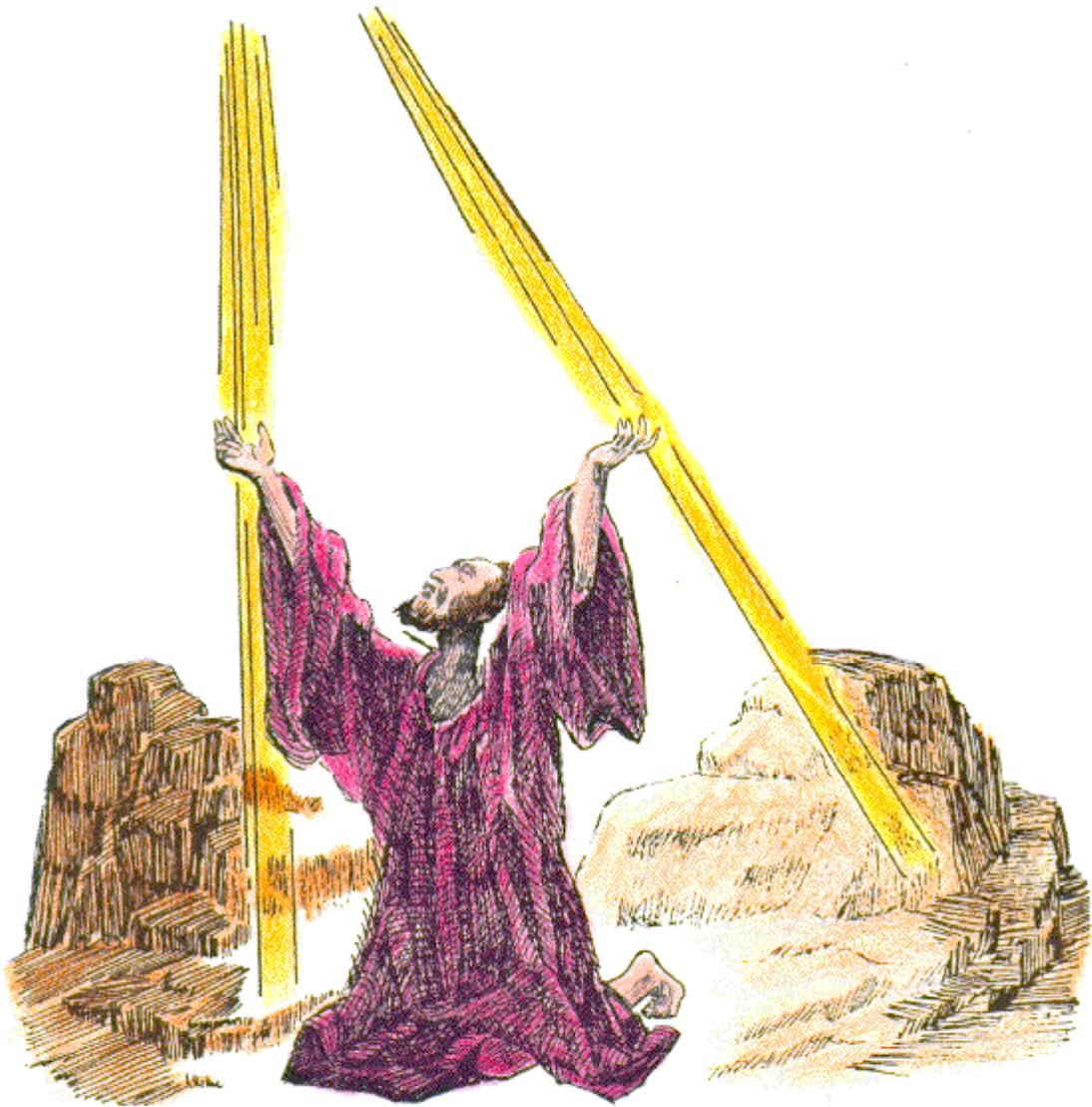


**THE
KINGDOM
OF
GOD**



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Chapter 1

THE MAN NAMED SAUL

You are about to read of a man whose religious devotion and zeal for godliness were extraordinary. He studied the religious law of his community with great fervor and was expertly trained in the traditions of the elders. He was God-fearing and pious. As a servant of the God of Abraham, he determined to protect his people from the influence of infidels and to preserve for his generation the sacred teachings of both the Written Law and the Oral Law. While still a young man, the sudden emergence of a strange religious sect stirred up the religious community of his day. He became actively involved in an effort to destroy the growing popularity of this disturbing movement. He resorted to ruthless tactics, using force and violence to instill fear in the hearts of the people. He felt justified in the use of brutal methods since it was his duty to defend the religion of God at all costs! However, during his campaign to eliminate the troublemakers and apostates, an astounding miracle took place that changed his life forever!

In the process of a life-changing experience, this man realized that his understanding of God, God's laws, and **God's kingdom** was incomplete. He needed more than just

the knowledge of religious law. He needed to increase his knowledge of God and the true nature of **God's kingdom**. He needed experiential knowledge that could release to him spiritual power to resist the forces of evil and the whispers of Satan. He became aware of the "greater jihad," the need to conquer his own soul instead of conquering others. He saw the ultimate futility of armed violence and realized the only power that could ever change the hearts of people was the power of God's mercy and compassion.

O God, as we read about this life-changing power, increases us in knowledge so that the beautiful attributes of your kingdom might rule in our hearts. O Lord, guide us along the straight path; protect us from the mischief of Satan; and lead us to eternal bliss. May your kingdom be revealed; and may your will be fulfilled in our lives as we determine to fully submit to you.

THE PHARISEE

Saul had become a Pharisee. The Pharisees represented a prominent sect of Judaism that advocated strict adherence to the religious Law. They were the religious fundamentalists of their day. The term "Pharisee" meant "separatist" and referred to the act of separating one's self from anything unclean or unholy. The Pharisee movement began about 800 years before Islam and steadily grew out of concern over the corrupting influence of Greek culture that had infiltrated various regions of the Middle East. Many Jews were disturbed by the concerted effort of the Greek Empire to disseminate its secular philosophy and pagan religion among the people of its

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newly conquered territories, including the Jewish people. To combat this invading influence, the Pharisees recruited new members, not only in Jerusalem, but also in other parts of the world wherever Jews and their traditions were being threatened by alien practices.

These members organized themselves into local brotherhoods and functioned through the administration of judicial experts, scribes, teachers, and priests. They viewed themselves as champions for the cause of God and determined to ensure the fulfillment of His command to remain separate and holy. The Pharisees were ardent students of the Holy Scriptures. They knew of the divine mandate that had been revealed centuries earlier to the Jewish people in the days of Moses. God had declared:

“ You are to be holy to Me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be My own.” (Leviticus 20:26)

The Pharisees revived the belief that God had chosen the Jewish people for a special purpose and reminded them that God's promise of preferred status was conditional:

“If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5,6)

This is the covenant spoken of in the Qur'an: **"Children of Israel! Call to mind the (special) favor, which I bestowed**

upon you, and fulfill your Covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you, and fear none but Me."
Surat-ul Baqara (2): 40

In view of this admonition, the Pharisees took it upon themselves to redefine the nature of the holy covenant between God and His chosen people. This was that portion of national identity that had been eroded by the passing of time and by heathen empires.

The Pharisees initiated a socio-religious revolution for the sake of returning to their religious roots. They insisted that the alarming trend of moral decline was the direct result of cultural compromise and religious apathy. The people had fallen prey to the enticement of modernization and secularism. They no longer were concerned about fulfilling the requirements of the religious Law. Consequently, the mission of the Pharisees was to compel every person in the community to not only study the sacred Law, but to apply it to daily life. This was just as much an individual duty as it was a national duty. It was the sacred Law, which was to define the identity of this surviving Jewish nation that was now scattered throughout the world. The observance of the Law would become the expression of Jewish devotion, and so it was imperative that everyone would participate. Group solidarity was deemed a necessity if the community hoped to survive.

THE SACRED LAW

The Pharisees believed that God issued laws for every detail of life. As servants of God, it was their duty to learn those laws and obey them wholeheartedly. They became devoted to the study, interpretation, and legislation of the sacred Law, and had become the religious experts of the community. The Pharisees regarded themselves vanguards of the Law and therefore claimed exclusive rights to its interpretation and implementation. Any interpretation or challenge from outside their ranks would not be tolerated.

Where were these sacred laws to be found? The Pharisees claimed two major sources, namely, the Written Law and the Oral Law.

The Written Law was those commandments and regulations that can still be found today in the Scriptures of the Torah. These laws were issued to the Israelites through Moses and were regarded by many Jews as binding for all time.

The Torah is referred to in the Qur'an as follows:

“It was we who revealed the Law; therein was guidance and light.” Surat-ul Maida (5): 44

“ We did reveal to Moses the book after we had destroyed the earlier generations, (to give) insight to men, and guidance and mercy, that they might receive admonition.” Surat-ul Qasas (28): 43

The Oral Law consisted of traditions and religious instructions that were supposedly transmitted orally from one generation to the next by the wise scholars beginning with Moses and the prophets. The traditions were not the inspired words of God but were considered personal commentaries and interpretations by the prophets and other holy men. These sayings were regarded just as sacred as the Written Law was. However, because of the changing times and incursion of foreign cultures, the traditions required new regulations that were inserted as amendments or supplements to the existing law. As a result, over the course of many centuries, the Oral Law, which became known as the "traditions of the elders," had grown into a huge collection of meticulous instructions. These regulations covered areas such as diet, food preparation, animal slaughter and sacrifice, tithing, commerce, body care, circumcision, holidays, dress codes, prayer, fasting, purification, and matters dealing with social behavior.

THE SACRED RITUALS

The most important daily routine for the Jewish community was the observance of prayer. The prayer ritual, which was mandatory for all males who had reached the age of thirteen, was conducted three times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening. It was meritorious to perform the prayer within the congregation of believers at some designated place of assembly, which eventually became known as the synagogue, a term derived from the Greek language. The best place for prayer was at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem where the worshipers could kiss the Temple

floor in profound adoration for the Divine. However, many of the Pharisees were unable to visit the Temple except for the annual pilgrimages to the Holy City.

Before the actual recitation of prayer, the devotee performed a ritual washing of hands and feet, and dressed in his prayer shawl and head covering. It was forbidden to utter the name of God with head uncovered. In addition, it was customary for the worshiper to attach to his forehead and left arm two little leather cases that contained inscriptions of verses from his Holy Book, the Torah for the Morning

Prayer. These two little cases were called tefillin or phylacteries (a term derived from the Greek language), and were held in place with leather straps. Before attaching them to his body, the worshiper would reverently kiss them and then fasten them according to the prescribed ritual. This procedure was performed with utmost precision, for these holy objects contained the words of Almighty God!

At the time of prayer, the worshiper stood, facing the Holy Temple at Jerusalem. Not only did he recite his prayers in the sacred Hebrew language, but also he adhered to a prescribed

routine of postures that included standing and lifting hands. No prayer was complete without the firm declaration of God's Oneness: "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

The rules for the priests of the Pharisees were especially stringent. They were admonished to live simply and to avoid any semblance of lavish food or lifestyle. They were to be healthy and free of any physical deformity. They could not marry a divorced woman or even go near one. They could not approach any appearance of death, be it a corpse or cemetery.

The priest had to be thoroughly trained in both the ritual of prayer and animal sacrifice.

The list of man-made rules and regulations for the religious community was long and complicated. However, the Pharisees regarded every activity of life ranging from eating and drinking to prayer and fasting, a religious act that required divinely prescribed guidelines. This endless list of religious instruction eventually became as sacred as the Divine Law, and as such, the Pharisees were willing to die for its preservation.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONVERSION EXPERIENCE

The news of Jesus' resurrection from the grave could not be contained. There were too many witnesses. As a result, thousands of Jews became followers of Jesus Christ and joined the band of His disciples, much to the alarm of the religious leaders. The Qur'an speaks of these new believers as follows: "Said the Disciples (of Jesus), 'We are God's helpers!' Then a portion of the Children of Israel believed, and a portion disbelieved. However, we gave power to those who believed against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed."
Surat-us Saff(61): 14

The Pharisees intensified their efforts to deal with this disturbing problem and enlisted the help of fervent supporters. One of them was a zealous student named Saul.

We have seen that Saul was a pious Jew extremely knowledgeable in the religious law. He gained popularity

among the religious hierarchy and became a ringleader among the fanatical elements of their support base. He joined the campaign to crush the influence of this new religious sect, for a devout Pharisee was not to tolerate the slightest contamination within the community. Saul had acquired a passionate hatred for the followers of Jesus; he viewed them as enemies of God Almighty. It was his religious duty to destroy them at all costs. Any means was justified, so long as it was for the cause of God. Such conviction added fuel to his fervor.

The followers of Jesus became known as the Nazarenes and followers of the Way. Saul hunted them down from house to house and dragged them to prison. Innocent victims were severely beaten, and some were put to death for the sin of apostasy.

As persecution spread, the followers of the Way fled Jerusalem and many escaped to Damascus. However, this could not hold back Saul's fury. He secured letters of endorsement from the priests at Jerusalem to present to the Jewish leaders at Damascus, authorizing him to round up the renegades and return them to Jerusalem for trial.

THE MIRACLE

It was during his journey to Damascus that Saul had an encounter that changed his life forever. The Injil relates the experience as follows, and describes what happened afterward:

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"Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's (Jesus') disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'

'Who are you, Lord ?' Saul asked.

'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' He replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. Therefore, they led him by the hand into Damascus.

For three days, he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord (Jesus) called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered.

The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' "(Acts 9:1-12)

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“ 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. In addition, he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'

However, the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go, this man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles

(Non-Jews) and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.'

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again." (Acts 9:13-18)

THE MISSION

What a shocking development!

Jesus himself had confronted Saul, the dreaded persecutor of the followers of Jesus! It was the same Jesus whom the Jews had supposedly eliminated permanently. It was He who spoke, and it was His heavenly glory that blinded the eyes of Saul.

It was true! Jesus had risen from the dead.

It was true! JESUS had ascended to GOD. What Saul believed to be a lie was all true!

How was it possible? He was so sure he was fulfilling the will of God. He had invested his whole life for destroying this following of Jesus. Now he had come to realize that he was wrong. Before this, no amount of reasoning or argument could have convinced him of his tragic error. However, a divine miracle of God did! It was a sign from God that none could deny, not even Saul. Saul was convinced; he was converted. The words Jesus spoke revolutionized his life. There was nothing that could change what God had ordained.

What did Jesus say that was so revolutionary?

According to Saul's own testimony, Jesus said to him:

"I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of Me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:16-18)

What else was Jesus to show Saul? In addition, what exactly did Jesus mean when He said, "those who are sanctified by faith in me?" Was it not the Law and strict

adherence to the Law that alone could sanctify a person and present him righteous before GOD?

There was so much for Saul to learn. He needed time to pray and meditate. He had no doubt about his miraculous experience, but he wanted to be sure that he was fulfilling the will of God. As a result, he immediately went to Arabia and then returned to Damascus. From there, he returned to his home city, Cilicia.

It took about ten years for Saul to prepare for the mission that Jesus had given him. Remember, Saul was to be a

witness of Jesus not only to the Jewish community, but to non-Jews as well.

Within his lifetime, Saul who became known by the Greek name Paul, made three major missionary journeys extending from Jerusalem and Antioch of Syria westward through Cyprus and Asia Minor, into parts of Europe, and finally to Rome where he was imprisoned and died. The theme of Saul's message was the same from beginning to end. Of his final days in Rome, the Scriptures declare:

"Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the **kingdom of God** and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 28:31)

Indeed Saul, later known as Paul the Apostle (The Sent One), had much to say about the **kingdom of God**, for it was a significant issue to the descendants of Bani-Israel. One of their own prophets said this of the future:

"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and end them, but it will itself endure forever." (Daniel 2:44)

In the beginning, Paul's traditional understanding of the **kingdom of God** was very different from the kingdom Jesus revealed to him. The concept of the **kingdom of God** that Jesus spoke of was so revolutionary. It was so unlike man's idea of a kingdom. After all, we are referring to the **kingdom of God**, and God's ways are far purer than ours are!

Chapter 3

The Preparation for the Kingdom

However, the whole universe is God's domain, **the kingdom of God** was a special designation for God's divine sovereignty that involved the human race. This kingdom was to be governed by the principles of God's Word, the only source of true light and guidance. Acting as God's representative, the human race was to receive that guidance and assume responsibility for earthly affairs.

Furthermore, humankind (the created) was to enjoy a special relationship of spiritual communion with the Creator. God had breathed into the human race His own Spirit thereby establishing a spiritual link and imparting spiritual life to the spirit of humanity.

In the beginning, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, enjoyed the beauty of Paradise and the purity of innocence. However, in time, Satan whispered cunning lies and

persuaded them to eat the forbidden fruit. Satan, who himself had rebelled against God, caused Adam and Eve to do the same, and the result was no different. Adam and Eve were removed from God's presence. The spiritual link between the Spirit of God and the human spirit was severed. Adam and Eve found themselves cast out of Paradise to live a life of hardship. Satan was there, waiting in the shadows with schemes to establish his own worldly kingdom here on earth. However, God did not forsake his prized creation, the human race.

He had planned a kingdom that involved the human race, and not even Satan could foil His plan. However, before this kingdom could be inaugurated, the human race first had to be delivered from the clutches of Satan. Evil had succeeded in contaminating the purity of heart. No matter how many laws and regulations there were, this impurity of heart would always surface. These impurities were the seeds of greed, jealousy, self-centeredness, pride, anger, and rebellion that produced immoral acts. Such evil could not be overcome by the knowledge of the law alone. As much as people attempted to live holy and peaceful lives, they were not successful.

Repeatedly, they became entangled in the web of Satan's craftiness and deception. How would God deliver the human race from such satanic oppression and restore blessing and spiritual vitality?

God planned to raise up a special community through whom the promise of blessing would be revealed for the whole world.

THE CHOSEN COMMUNITY

First, God chose a man from a pagan environment to begin a new community of believers who would submit to the one true God of the universe. That man was Abraham. God prepared a special lineage through the family line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Qur'an refers to this lineage as follows:

“Commemorate our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, possessors of power and vision. Verily we did choose them for a special (purpose)-proclaiming the message of the hereafter”. Surat Sad (38): 45,46

This lineage was to bear witness to the glory of God and in addition, prepare the way for God's intervention that would, in years to come, offer hope of the hereafter.

From this lineage arose the community of Jews with whom God established a special covenant of blessing.

From the community of Jews, God rose up the prophet Moses and revealed to him laws and regulations for community life.

These regulations formed the basis for both moral and civil laws. The moral law addressed the noble ethics of life that

were to distinguish Jews from neighboring nations based on "inner holiness" with regard to honor for both God and

fellow beings. The Code of moral law was to elevate the community of believers to a much higher standard of holiness and to serve as a model for all people for all time.

The civil law was different. It consisted of rules and instructions pertaining to daily living, and laws were formulated as needed to maintain a clear distinction between the practices and customs of the Jews and those of pagan communities. These laws dealt with issues of personal hygiene, diet, disease control, and religious rituals. The purpose of the civil law was primarily to set Jews apart from other nations based on "outer holiness."

Among the religious rituals, God instituted animal sacrifices. The offering of sacrifices was to be a central feature of worship for two main reasons:

First, it provided a means of atonement, or "kaffara," whereby the sins of the people could be temporarily covered by the mercy of God.

Second, and more important, the animal sacrifice was to be a symbolic reminder of the perfect sacrifice that God would

some day provide to accomplish the complete forgiveness and cleansing of sins.

Just as God provided the great sacrifice to redeem the child of Abraham, so God planned to provide a far greater sacrifice to redeem the children of Adam.

Unfortunately, like Adam and Eve, the community of Jews succumbed to the whispers of Satan, and they too ate of the forbidden tree. They lusted after other gods and rebelled against Him who alone is the one true God.

As a result, the Jewish people were swept into humiliating captivity by the Babylonian and Assyrian empires.

Hellenistic culture seeped into the Jewish community, especially in the remote areas outside Jerusalem. It was the encroachment of the ensuing Roman Empire, however, that especially revived the aspirations of the Jews for a coming Deliverer. While the Greek Empire was known for its culture and philosophy, the Roman Empire became known for its political might and spread of power. This show of force became a threatening reality

to the existence of the Jewish nation, especially when Roman soldiers marched into their pagan religion and political structure.

However, God did not forget His promise to bring blessing to the world through the lineage of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. This blessing was an important part of the kingdom of God, and surely, nothing could hinder God from establishing His kingdom. From time to time, through the voice of the prophets, God encouraged His people with the promise of a Mighty Deliverer who would rescue them from their enemies and rule over them as Eternal King!

THE CHOSEN NATION

Though Jews had been plundered and dispersed by invading empires, by the grace of God, a remnant of the seed of Abraham, Issac and Jacob managed to survive. They reinstated many of the religious laws and rebuilt the Holy City of Jerusalem. This remnant became known as the Jewish nation, and its people, the Jews.

The peaceful times of the Greek Empire had enabled the Jews to establish themselves in the Middle East. However, Greek influence invaded the Jewish consciousness with humanistic and secular ideologies.

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The time was ripe for God's plan to unfold as it did. During the rule of Caesar Augustus, a certain child was born, but this

was no ordinary child. The child was the Holy Son of the Virgin Mary to whom the angel spoke these words:

"Do not be afraid, Mary (Maryam), you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus." (Isa) "... The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David (Daud), and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:30-33)

To shepherds in a nearby field, an angel declared:

" 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be **for all the people**. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ (Al-Masih) the Lord.' " (Luke 2:10,11)

The Qur'an describes this one to be born as "a Sign unto men" and a mercy from Allah. Surat Maryam 19:21

THE SAVIOR

After centuries of prophecies and years of waiting, the promised Savior arrived. He descended from the lineage of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, and from the community of Bani-Israil whom God favored above all nations. Jesus Christ grew in divine wisdom and he knew about His prophetic role in the affairs of the human race. He knew about the spiritual battle being waged by Satan against the sovereignty of God, for Satan had even tried to seduce and deceive Him with cunning whispers: "The devil took him to a very high

mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. " 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' " (Matthew 4:8-10)

Jesus knew that a far greater struggle was taking place than the struggle between the Jews and the Romans. It was an invisible struggle in which the kingdom of Satan was attempting to overthrow the kingdom of God. But Satan would fail and Jesus would succeed in ruling as King.

It was for this special reason Jesus given the title Al- Masih. The term Al-Masih, which is rendered "the Messiah" from the Hebrew and "Christ" from the Greek, literally means "The Anointed One."

What is so significant about this title? Whenever a king was appointed to rule over Israelites, his head was anointed with oil as a sign of God's approval. In the same way, when the angel announced the birth of Jesus, the title Christ or Al-Masih (The Anointed One) was the sign of God's approval that Jesus had been chosen to rule as King.

Jesus Christ spoke about His role as Savior and King. However, the Jews failed to realize that His mission was two-fold. Before He could come as king to rule over God's people, it was first necessary for Him to come as Savior to rescue them from another kingdom. The Jews thought that kingdom was the Roman Empire. Instead, the kingdom of Satan had enslaved not only the Jews but also the whole world.

THE SACRIFICE

When Adam fell from the presence of God to the state of darkness, the seed of all humankind imbedded in Adam fell with him. Satan's kingdom has prevailed. The hearts of men and women have been stricken with the disease of sin and remain condemned for the judgment of God. Thus, Christ's first mission was to redeem humankind, not only from the terrible judgment of God's wrath, but also from the enduring oppression of evil in day-to-day existence. The Holy Scriptures declare that the reason Jesus appeared to humankind "was to destroy the devil's work." (1 John 3:8)

The devil's work, of course, is to prevent the members of the human race from ever returning to the Presence or Paradise of God. Satan does this by tempting the human soul to sin, when he knows that God cannot tolerate the slightest trace of sin in his presence. In addition, who among human beings can atone for his own sins, which in reality are acts of disobedience against God? There is no animal or human sacrifice worthy of paying the penalty for violating the holiness of God! However, God, who is merciful, intervened on behalf of helpless human beings and provided the pure "qurban" that alone is able to satisfy His requirement of justice. Just as He provided the sacrifice to free the son of Abraham, so also, God provided the sacrifice to free the human race and completely cleanse us. The Scriptures declare:

"The Christ (Al-Masih) will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be

preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Notice, it was Paul the Apostle, formerly Saul the Pharisee, who had this to say about forgiveness of sins:

"My brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus (Isa) the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the Law of Moses." (Act 13:38,39)

What was this unique sacrifice?

John the Baptist (Nabi Yahya) revealed the sacrifice when he pointed and declared:
"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Nabi Yahya was pointing not to a four-footed beast, but to Him of whom it was declared:

"You are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save his people from there sins."
(Matthew 1:21)

Jesus Himself at one time declared that He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28)

Jesus submitted his life completely to God and fulfilled His role as the redeeming sacrifice. He was executed in our place and shed His blood for the sins of the world. He was the ultimate fulfillment of the system of animal sacrifice that continually pointed to the mercy of God. However, even though we cannot fathom the mystery of this event, the Holy Scriptures teach that the sacrificial death of Jesus satisfied the requirement of divine justice, and that whoever pledges to follow and believe on Jesus Christ is forgiven.

Chapter 4

The Order of the Kingdom

The sacrificial death of Jesus was extremely significant. It opened the door to the

Kingdom of God for all people. It also opened the way for the coronation of its king.

According to the Bible, God rewarded Jesus Christ for His complete submission by

raising Him from the grave and lifting Him up to Himself. The Qur'an also speaks of

Jesus being raised: " Behold! God said: 'O Jesus, I will take thee and raise thee to Myself.'

" Surat Al-Imran (3): 55

Not only was Christ lifted, but also He was exalted. As God's "Anointed One," He was crowned King of the kingdom and Ruler over all. "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord...." (Philippians 2:8-11)

We now know who the King of the Kingdom is, but who will be the people of the Kingdom?

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The ones who have faithfully submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ and have been freed from the guilt of their sins.

"Grace and peace to you... from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom... to Him be the glory and power forever and ever." (Revelation 1:4-6)

In the last days, at the time of the Resurrection, Jesus will return to the world as the "Sign of the Hour." When He does, He will return in royal splendor to establish the kingdom of God in visible form here on earth. This is what the Holy Scriptures record: "They (all the nations of the world) will see the Son of Man (Jesus) coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30)

"When the Son of Man (Jesus) comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King (Jesus) will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.' " (Matthew 25:31-34)

THE VICTORY

The Kingdom of God and its King will not be fully revealed until the end time. However, the ministry, the sacrificial

death and resurrection of Jesus all helped to establish the reality of the kingdom and its ongoing influence and power. The healing miracles of Christ, especially over demonic afflictions, were a definite confirmation that the kingdom of God had come to confront the kingdom of Satan.

Notice, for example, the following account from the Bible: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ... But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.' Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself how then can his kingdom stand? In addition, if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. However, if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.' " (Matthew 12:22-28)

The miraculous resurrection of Jesus from the grave was a sure sign of Satan's inevitable defeat. By the sacrificial death of Jesus, the door of mercy leading into the kingdom of God had been opened for all people of all time... for all humankind in their inability to atone for their own sin of rebellion against a holy God.

If it had not been for Jesus Christ, the whole world would have remained in a state of condemnation and dread of the

impending judgment. However, the blood of the atoning sacrifice has released all true believers from such condemnation; it has removed the defilement of sin and opened the way for restored communion with God. In truth, Jesus Christ has instituted a new order of eternal significance!

THE OLD ORDER

Under the old order, particularly from the time of God's special covenant with His people (the Israelites), they had become a tightly knit community designed to be resistant to

pagan influences. This was according to **God's** instruction, for He knew their human weakness and vulnerability.

Remember that humanity's spiritual link with God had been broken by Adam's disobedience, and yet, had not been restored. Therefore, without the inner spiritual power to resist the evil one, precautionary measures had to be taken to protect the community from corruption.

It was important that the Israelites be seen as a holy nation since it was through this people that God had planned to raise up His "Anointed One," Jesus Christ. To preserve that distinction, God instituted a religious system to keep the hearts of His people focused and united. The most prominent features of this religious system were circumcision, animal sacrifice, worship ritual, and in time, the Temple of Jerusalem. Since the days of Abraham, Issac and Jacob, the

rite of circumcision had been performed on all males. This was to mark them as worshipers of the one and only true God of the entire universe.

The animal sacrifices were a means of atonement and temporary covering for sins. They also pointed to the future perfect sacrifice that God would provide to bring complete cleansing and restoration to the hearts of His people.

Rituals for worship included the burning of incense, ablutions and formal prayers. Later in time, the Temple of Jerusalem served as a symbolic dwelling place for God's presence and a visible reminder that God lives among His people. The Holy Scriptures refer to these important religious features in this way: "This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings-external regulations applying until the time of the new order." (Hebrews 9:9,10)

THE NEW ORDER

Under the new order, the external practices of the religious community took on new meaning. When Jesus was once asked if he were king of the Jews, he responded, "My kingdom is not of this world." The kingdom of God is not a physical place, but a spiritual reality. Thus, the principles of life that characterize the kingdom are spiritual in nature.

For example, referring back to the religious features of the Israelites, the circumcision of the flesh becomes a symbol of a

far deeper concept - the circumcision of the heart. The cutting away of all earthly desires marks the true believer in God and self-glory that would hinder the flow of true worship from his heart to God.

However, how can this sinful nature is cut away? Can we as humans reach into the heart to do the cutting? Do we as mere humans possess the power to remove the demonic influences of the devil? The history of human religion has proven man's inability to effectively cope with evil. However, remember that God sent the deliverer, Christ Jesus, with power and authority to free us from such bondage. The Holy Scriptures declare: "You have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In Him, you were also circumcised, in the putting off the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ..." (Colossians 2:10,11)

The animal sacrifices played a significant role in the religion of the Israelites, but they were of even deeper spiritual significance. The Scriptures explain it this way about the laws concerning animal sacrifices:

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ... For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. However, those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." (Hebrews 10:1-4)

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: '**Here I am** - It is written about me in the scroll-I have come to do your will, O God.' ... He sets aside the first to establish the second. In addition, by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:5-10)

Now that Christ Jesus had fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrificial system, there was no longer a need to sacrifice animals for atonement. However, that did not eliminate the principles of sacrifice. By his own example, Jesus left for his followers a far more noble understanding of the concept of sacrifice - not the sacrifice of animals, but the sacrifice of Himself and His own desires for the service of God. The Holy Scriptures speak of this kind of sacrifice as follows: "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:1-2)

Remember that Jesus declared the kingdom of God “is not of this world.” Thus, there is a need for a sincere change of perspective that will reflect a true transformation of the heart.

Chapter 5

The spiritual characteristics of the Kingdom

Rules and regulations for ritual worship for the community of the Israelites had become entangled in the long list of civil laws that accumulated over the years. Unfortunately, in time, the people lost sight of the purpose of the civil laws and their relation to the great moral laws. The religious leaders began to substitute practices such as ablution (the washing of hands and feet) for the “washing” of the heart. They gradually placed greater emphasis on those rituals that revealed only the external aspects of religion, ignoring the spiritual. These religious leaders, notably the Pharisees, began to exert influence upon the masses. Do you remember the Pharisees?

They were the separatists, the legalists, to whom Saul of Tarsus pledged his full support. The Pharisees added many more stringent rules of their own and claimed that they were the standard of holiness as opposed to the higher standard of holiness of the heart, which was much more difficult to attain.

The people lacked the inner desire and power to live holy lives. As a result, in general, the true religion of Abraham had degenerated into a religious system of rituals filled with arrogance and hypocrisy. Outwardly, the religious leaders could be seen washing their hands, performing their prayers and strutting in flowing garments. However, inwardly, their hearts were diseased, filled with greed, jealousy and pride.

They had abused the religious law to boast of their own version of holiness. They failed to recognize an important truth about the law. Yes, the law was to be a standard of holiness. However, its effect was to remind the people of their repeated inability to measure up to the standard.

Such failure should have humbled God's people and caused them to realize they were in desperate need of divine mercy. Instead, many of them viewed the law, not as a means toward humility and repentance, but as a means to display outward piety to receive the praises of men. For this reason, Christ Jesus issued significant guidelines and revealed the purer standards of the kingdom of God.

Some are listed as follows: "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."
(Matthew 5:20)

"Be careful not to do your act of righteousness before men, to be seen by them. In addition, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for

they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." (Matthew 6:1,5,16)

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' However, I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Matthew 5:21,22)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' However, I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27,28)

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' However, I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness,

causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31, 32)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5: 43,44)

THE TEMPLE

In the days of King Solomon, the community of the Israelites was extremely proud of its beautiful

Temple in Jerusalem. It symbolized for them the very presence of God. The Temple became their center of worship and prayer. Ever since the destruction of Solomon's Temple, the Jewish people have dreamed of its full restoration to revive its glory and splendor. However, Christ Jesus said the

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day would come when the center of worship for the people of God would no longer be a building on the mountain of Jerusalem or on any other mountain.

"...A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **God is spirit**, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:21,23,24)

In the new order, the important aspect of worship is not that people worship in a physical building, but that they worship in a spirit of sincerity. True worship was not to be tied to anything external, such as a mountain, a building or a ritual. It was to be an internal experience between God and the human spirit.

However, is there no temple in the new order? Is there no place for the presence of God to dwell?

Yes there is! God desires to dwell in the surrendered heart. If humankind is truly the best of creation, there is no other place that God would rather be than in the temple of a life that is fully submitted to Him.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body". (I Corinthians 6:19,20)

THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Before the advent of Christ Jesus, it was God's good plan that the Israelites should remain a separate community, a holy nation, undefiled by outside influence, and distinct in culture and religious practice. This was to safeguard the lineage of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. Remember, this was the family line from which the Virgin Mary was chosen among women to bring forth God's miracle of blessing for the human race, a holy Son to be named Jesus, meaning "God is salvation."

Now that Jesus Christ has appeared and has fulfilled the first phase of his mission, the wall of separation between the Jewish believers and all other believers should no longer remain.

God desires to dwell not only in an individual life, but also in the worldwide community of believers of all nations who have become members of the kingdom by pledging their allegiance to Christ Jesus as Savior and King.

"For He (Jesus) Himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jew and non-Jew) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. " (Ephesians 2:14-16)

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. " (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Since Jesus Christ came to redeem all humankind, it is apparent that the Kingdom of God will include people of all nations and tribes. The rules and regulations that were distinctly characteristic of the Israelites no longer apply. Though it was necessary for the Israelites to maintain a sense of external identity, keep in mind that the true kingdom of God is of a different nature-not of this world. It is a spiritual kingdom that will be known by its spiritual characteristics.

THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Remember that in the beginning of the human race, Satan deprived humankind of the gift of the Spirit, which God had breathed into human life. When Adam was cast out from the Holy Presence because of disobedience, the gift of the Spirit to humankind was forfeited so that there was no longer any spiritual communion with God. It was this special ability to commune with God that elevated humans above all other creatures. However, Christ Jesus has come, not only to restore the kingdom, but also to restore the gift.

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The Scriptures give clear instructions how to receive the gift of the Spirit of God: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. In addition, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38,39)

How does the Spirit of God manifest Himself in the life of a person, and what is the mark that reveals that he is a member of the kingdom of God? The Holy Scriptures indicate that the Spirit within produces fruit of noble character.

"However, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22,23)

It is apparent that there is no law that forbids these kinds of fruit, nor are they restricted by any cultural, geographical or environmental factors. In truth, these "fruit" are common aspirations of the human spirit, because like the human spirit, they originate from the same Divine Source. Among these fruit, the greatest is love.

Jesus Christ once declared that the entire Law of Moses could be summed up by two essential requirements: love for God and love for fellow beings. We are not surprised that the major influence that attracts people to the kingdom, and keeps them united, is the power of love. The Scriptures themselves declare, "God is love." (1 John 4:8). The love that should characterize the kingdom of God is described as follows:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is

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not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and

forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”(Colossians 3:12-14)

Remember that the kingdom of God does not reflect any earthly, national culture of East, West, North, or South. Neither does it impose any particular national culture nor identity on people of other backgrounds. Instead, the spiritual forces that are at work within the kingdom attempt only to transform culture so that each different culture might reflect the spiritual characteristics of the kingdom, which should be common to all of God’s servants. In addition, what greater characteristics can there be in the kingdom of God than the attributes of compassion and mercy!

It is no wonder that the followers of the King of the kingdom are described in the Qur’an in this way: “We sent after them (the prophets) Jesus, the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel, and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy." Surat-ul Hadid (57): 27

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Chapter 6

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The Conclusion

The kingdom of GOD presently exists in mystery form. It is spiritual in character

and remains hidden in the hearts of all those who profess Jesus to be the Anointed One,

the King of the kingdom, and who await His triumphant return to earth. At that time, the

kingdom of God will appear in visible form to establish true religion worldwide. Until

then, the indwelling power of the kingdom remains active and spreads into the lives of people all over the world.

This is neither a political nor a military kingdom. It does not expand by coercion; for is it not true that “there is no compulsion in religion?” Truly, God desires only the genuine worship of a willing and loving heart. He finds no delight in a forced confession of faith that is prompted by the threat of the sword! Its fundamental law, the law of love for

God and love for fellow human beings, propels the spread of the good news, the “gospel,” of the kingdom.

The power of love can accomplish far more than anything the power of the sword ever could! The human sword brings destruction and death. It creates fear and produces a backlash of anger and vengeance that results in years of hostility, suspicion and hatred. It slams the door shut to hope of forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. The sword is an effective means of afflicting the body, but ultimately hardens the heart. Love, on the other hand, melts the heart so that true humility can overcome human pride. In humility, forgiveness can lead the way to reconciliation and peace. However, this is possible only if the Spirit of God transforms the hearts of people - an experience which occurs when people become citizens of the kingdom of God.

It is true; the day will come when Jesus will return as King and Warrior to strike down the nations whose people have followed the whispers of Satan. At that time, there will be destruction and death, but it will be by the sword of God’s justice. Until that time, however, we as servants dare not sit in God’s place to carry out judgment. Vengeance belongs to God alone, and its cup will be filled during the dreadful Day of Judgment. Meanwhile, the task of God’s people is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom and to exemplify the attributes of the kingdom through deeds of mercy and power over evil. For this reason, Jesus Christ instructed all those who follow Him with these words:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” (Mark 16:15)

THE REMEDY

The love that is revealed in the kingdom of God is a stream of compassion and mercy that originates from Him. It flows into the hearts of God’s people, and spills over into the lives of those less fortunate. This kind of love is not self-seeking, nor self-centered, but is out-flowing. It penetrates the most difficult barriers and reaches to the lowest depths. It bears a genuine concern for the hopeless and destitute, the heart-broken and downtrodden. It calls for a life of self-denial, a period of “fasting”- not as an outward display of piety, but for sincere acts of charity that reflect the mercy of God. For God declares:

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.” (Isaiah 58:6-8)

During His earthly mission, Jesus Christ did not ignore the social ills of His day. He was deeply disturbed by the evil of greed and self-centeredness that led to poverty, religious hypocrisy, and public despair. He was filled with compassion for the helpless victims who were exploited by the political and religious hierarchy. Thus, Jesus clearly instructed His followers to show concern for the needy. He even told them that caring for the poor was the same as caring for Him. That shows how intimate He became with the needs of others.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited Me in. I needed clothes and you clothed Me. I was sick and you looked after Me. I was in prison and you came to visit Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger, invite you in or needing clothes, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me.' ” (Matthew 25:34-40)

Christ Jesus knew that social injustices could not be eliminated by violent protests and government overthrows. He recognized the source of these evils to be a spiritual problem, mainly the corruption of the heart. As long as Satan harasses the human race, this evil influence of corruption will continue to contaminate the life-stream of humanity. Only when Jesus returns to earth will Satan and his demonic

followers are destroyed. Until then, there is no human violence or sword powerful enough to rid the world community of evil.

Violent action may offer a temporary solution, but ultimately, violence leads to more violence, and once again, corruption resurfaces to inflict unbearable hardship on the innocent. This is why Christ Jesus never advocated the use of violence.

Instead, He encouraged acts of mercy, and He urged His followers to include the message of the kingdom of God, which offers the only hope for complete restoration of righteousness, peace and joy.

THE SECOND BIRTH

The internal attributes of righteousness, peace and joy are essentially spiritual attributes of the kingdom of God and can be experienced now, within the community, even before the kingdom descends in visible form. However, such attributes must first be established in the lives of individuals before they can become a reality in the life of a community. In addition, this can only happen when individuals become members of the kingdom of God, and begin to perceive with eyes of spiritual understanding. How does a person become a citizen of the kingdom? The Holy Scriptures respond as follows:

“No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Yet, to all who received Him (Jesus Christ), to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God, children that are not born of

natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”
(John 3:3,6; 1:12,13)

To enter the kingdom of God, you must be “born again!” You have already undergone a physical birth, but now you must undergo a spiritual birth. This is the “second birth.” However, how does this spiritual birth take place? It happens the moment you personally believe and accept the mission and lordship of Jesus Christ.

When you accept for your own life the atoning self-sacrifice of Jesus, your sins are forgiven and your heart is cleansed. The veil of sin is torn and no longer remains a barrier. Your human spirit is liberated to link with the Spirit of God; and in that experience of spiritual communion, you become a fellow member of the heavenly family whose supreme authority is God the “Father.”

THE TRUE RELIGION

My friend, no doubt, you also wish to see the kingdom of God established here on earth. As a true seeker of righteousness, you are terribly disturbed by the present trends in the world. You see the failure of socialist and capitalist systems in fulfilling basic human needs. You see corruption, hypocrisy and lack of religious devotion. You see unemployment and poverty giving rise to communal unrest and despair. You see the influences of western philosophy and technology turning your children away from traditional practices and religious beliefs. You see weak religious leaders compromising their stand in return for political favors.

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You see all this and you argue that the only solution is an armed struggle against the existing regime to achieve complete removal so that religious law and tradition can be fully implemented and firmly established. You may even approve of ruthless criminal acts, as long as they are committed for the cause of God. You claim that your ultimate goal is to restore true religion to the world. However, my friend is not true religion really the “religion of Abraham?” Does not the Qur’an speak of Abraham in this way?

“Follow the religion of Abraham, the sane in faith; he was not of the Pagans.”Surat-Ali-Imran (3): 95

“Behold, he approached his Lord with a sound heart.”Surat-us Saffat (37): 84

Is it not said that Abraham worshipped his Lord “with a sound heart?” Here it is again - the matter of the heart! What profit is violence if it can destroy an enemy but fail to change the nature of the heart?

If the heart is unchanged, there will always be fighting - if not with others from outside the ranks, then with one another from inside the ranks! Even if a common enemy is destroyed, you know that the evil eye of greed and the lust for power will eventually emerge from within to frustrate any intentions that were initially noble and sincere.

THE DIVINE ORDER

You claim they are human-centered and therefore doomed for certain failure since man is weak, forgetful and prone to sin. You assert that church and state must be one, and that a theocratic system is the only viable solution since it is God-centered and upholds the laws of God. You say the reinstatement and strict implementation of the " Shariah" is the only way to restore the divine order. However, in today's world of complex issues, can we really find a pure theocracy that contains specific and detailed rules and regulations to cover each situation? In light of the changing times, no one can deny the growing need for reinterpretation of religious laws and even the need for new laws based on previous legislation and consensus of the religious leaders.

But we know that such a religious clergy in today's world is not composed of sinless prophets, but of human beings subject to human weakness and human error. Only when Satan is fully defeated will humans be free from such weakness. Until then, we as humans cannot produce a divine order; nor can we fully implement one.

There is no organized religion in the entire world that can claim to be that divine order because humans are imperfect. No child of Adam in today's world possesses the moral perfection to interpret and legislate divine law with complete equity. For this reason, abuse of divine law will definitely surface when religion and state are one.

Do you really believe that the enforcement of stricter religious laws will cure the problems of the world? If you do, I invite you to consider the plight of Adam and Eve to whom was given only a single law. Tragically, they disobeyed their Lord and it is said they were cast out! It was based on just

one law that they were expelled from the wonderful Presence of Him.

Do you remember their crime? It was not idolatry or adultery or some other abominable act. It was not murder or blasphemy or theft. It was simply the act of eating the forbidden fruit; and for that misdeed, they suffered severe consequences. My friend, what will be the outcome of a community that is subjected to a whole volume of rules and regulations regarded as the " Shariah?" Will it be any better than the fate of Adam and Eve?!

No, there is no perfect system of government, and there never will be until Christ Jesus returns to establish the Divine Order worldwide. In the meantime, the best we can do is to persevere in the faith, promote the attributes of the kingdom and help alleviate human suffering with acts of charity. Furthermore, we can compel others to seek God with all their hearts, that in the name of Jesus Christ, they might receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

THE DECISION

You may object to any solution that is linked to Jesus Christ. You may view the followers of Jesus as a threat to your community. You may regard the religion that bears His name as a complete failure. However, remember, we are not focusing on any religion. We are discussing the kingdom of God and the King of the kingdom. We are dealing with spiritual precepts and spiritual destiny. We are talking about your soul and where it will spend eternity.

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Like Saul of Tarsus, it may be your goal to eliminate any religious movement that appears to threaten your own. You may be truly sincere and religiously zealous. You may be willing to give your life for the cause of God. Nevertheless, God revealed to Saul that though he was sincere, he was wrong. He was resisting the very power that alone was able to help achieve the noble goals of true religion.

My friend, could it be that you too have been pursuing the wrong path? Perhaps at this very moment, Jesus Christ is asking you, as He did Saul, "Why do you persecute Me?"

What is your answer? It took a miracle to change the life of Saul. It may also take a miracle to change yours. However, God is able and willing to do whatever is necessary to bring you to a full understanding of His kingdom and His Anointed One, Christ.

Perhaps the miracle has already begun and you have felt a stirring in your heart. Will you not allow God to complete His work in your life? It is better to respond to Christ Jesus now than to wait until the Day of Judgment. At that time, Jesus may again ask the question, "Why do you persecute Me?" However, it will be too late; there will be no clemency for those who rejected Him in this life. That Day will be a day of mourning in which God's wrath will be revealed. My friend, please heed the clear warning of Scripture:

"Whoever believes in the Son (Christ) has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

Saul of Tarsus did not regret the decision he made. Yes, he was a true zealot. However, after his miraculous experience,

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his zeal for God only intensified. He spent the rest of his days helping others to understand the true message of the Injil and to recognize Christ Jesus as Savior and King. His life was in constant danger since many Jews regarded him as an apostate from the

Jewish religion. However, his zeal and courage has continued to affect the lives of many other zealots who are profoundly concerned about piety and submission to God.

Like Saul of Tarsus, you too have now met up with Christ Jesus on the road of your spiritual pilgrimage.

In Christ, spiritual fulfillment is found. Saul of Tarsus knew it was time to change direction; God ordained it!

My friend, what about you?

As you step forward in faith, God will strengthen your heart with His Spirit, and that Spirit will guide you into all truth. Do not let your zeal for God be misdirected by human traditions and human tendencies. Instead, let the attributes of the kingdom of God - righteousness, peace and joy rule in your heart. Let your zeal be inspired by your love for God and love for others. Give honor to the King of the kingdom. In this way, in the full surrender of your heart, the Lord of your life will be praised forever and ever!
