

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES
TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,
IN JESUS....

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#14

Pioneers of the Kingdom

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This article first appeared in 2008 and has not been posted for some time. Given the day in which we live with so many uncertainties and structures crumbling all around, it seems needful to reissue this revised edition. Let us not shrink back in fear; instead, let us press on as conquerors through these uncertain times, forging our way through the things that can be shaken (and are being shaken) as pioneers of the unshakable kingdom of God with King Jesus as the lead Pioneer.

Among those who are rightly more than conquering through Him who loves us, there are some who we could call *pioneers*. Pioneers are most definitely conquerors (or: overcomers). For example, we could say that John the baptist was not only a forerunner but also a pioneer. *Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand. Make ready the way of the Lord!* In fact, we could say that many of the saints of the ancient days—Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Caleb—and some of those more contemporary to us—Peter, James, John, and Paul—were all pioneers.

What is a pioneer? A pioneer is one who opens the way or prepares the way for others to follow. A pioneer could be called a *trailblazer* or one who cuts a way through the bush so that others may follow—one who goes forth into territory not trodden by others, into uncharted territory. The pioneer leaves the comfort and security of home and willingly pays the cost to go in and occupy new territory; he puts down his feet and declares that this is a new possession. There is great cost, peril, danger, and even perplexity for pioneers. But they are obsessed to make it through to the new land so that others may follow. They are not concerned that those who follow will not have to pay the same price. They are more concerned that others may enter into what they have occupied. Pioneers have vision, courage, faith, and a sense of destiny. Their very life is a testimony. They go out, not knowing where they are going because few, if any, have gone their way before, and many won't because the cost is too high for them.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. (Hebrews 11:8 NASB)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13 NASB)

Reading Hebrews 11, we discover that God has had pioneers down through the many centuries. They were spiritual pioneers who were pioneering a way into *the kingdom of the heavens*—*pioneers of the kingdom of God*. They were so captivated by *the heavenly vision* that they confessed they were strangers to the kingdoms of this world. They were no longer an earthly people but a *heavenly* or *celestial* (both terms interchangeable) people of whom the world was not worthy (see Hebrews 11:32-40). They were wanderers on earth, always seeking for and

reaching toward the goal and the promises of God. They were looking for God's city, for His country, for His purpose, for His end to come to earth and manifest His glory to all the world.

Before proceeding, a brief explanation is needed of some phrases that I use from scripture.

First, the kingdom of the heavens and the reign of the heavens are one and the same in meaning, which refers to *the kingdom of God* coming to this earth to rule over the nations in righteousness, justice, mercy, and peace. The kingdom of God is the will of God manifested in His entire creation. *The heavens do rule and the reign of the heavens* mean that heaven truly reigns or rules over all the affairs of the nations on earth. This reign will openly manifest in the coming age when King Jesus, the Son of God, reveals to all that He holds (and has held for over 2,000 years) the scepter of the kingdom as the great voices in heaven have previously confirmed: **The kingdoms of the world did become those of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign to the ages of the ages!** (Revelation 11:15 YLT). King Jesus' mission is to sum up all things in heaven and on earth, driving towards the day (ages of ages) when He will hand over the kingdom to His Father.

To be clear, the Lord's people are in the kingdom of God in some measure today, but the reign of the heavens going beyond this, referring to when the kingdom openly manifests itself on earth in a way that it is clear that God rules through His Son in the affairs of man or, more specifically, the nations. This is when the prayer ***Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*** becomes a reality for all to know. This occurs when the kingdom of Christ is established on earth among the nations and the glory of God openly manifests as it fills the whole earth with ***the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*** (Habakkuk 2:14).

Second, the heavenly vision (as described by Paul) is very similar in that it refers to Christ who is seated at the right hand of God today (by the way; ruling and reigning), waiting to visibly return to this earth to openly reign as the King of kings, the ruler of the kings of the earth. Paul saw Christ in a blinding vision as he traveled the road to Damascus. He was blinded by the glory of the risen Christ whom he had been persecuting by persecuting those who were of the *Way*. Paul did not use the term *heavenly vision* to indicate that we die and go to heaven, as so many proclaim in our day. He was given a vision of the heavenly Christ, the Celestial One, who is seated at the right hand of glory, far above every name and every rule and authority, even ruling in the midst of His enemies. Simply stated, Paul's heavenly vision was of King Jesus and His kingdom. At the end of Acts, it is recorded that Paul was ***preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ***. Another way of looking at this is: the celestial kingdom indicates the character or nature of the kingdom (i.e., life, light, love) as well as the origin of it. The celestials refer to another realm, the spirit realm or God's realm (or: dimension), and this realm will come to bear in the rule of the nations, and all who are counted worthy to enter into the celestial realm (along with the physical or earthly realm) manifesting fully as new creations (full stature; complete in Christ) in the age to come, will be the complement of Christ in summing up all things in the heavens and on the earth.

Of course, much more could be written on these matters. The point that I want to stress is that these terms are not about going to heaven but about heaven coming to earth. ***Heavenly vision is not a vision of going to heaven, but a vision that comes from heaven, just as the heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1) is not about a call to go up to heaven but about the call that comes from***

heaven, meaning it comes from God. And, this vision and calling are centered and founded in God's Son, our Lord Jesus. Those who conquer in this age will be counted worthy to enter the next age with immortal bodies in the image of Christ. They will be constituted to dwell not only on earth but also among the celestials (God's realm), and they will work with King Jesus as He heads up all things in the heavens and on the earth and rules the nations in righteousness until the consummation of the ages when He hands over the kingdom to His Father so that God may be all in all.

Now, returning to the subject at hand; upon recounting the faith of those who have gone before us, the writer of the Hebrews epistle began to make a personal appeal to believers: **Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us** (Hebrews 12:1). Many people seem to take this verse to mean that all who have gone before are in heaven looking down at us and urging us on in the race of *the* faith, as if they are monitoring all our activities. However, this cannot be the meaning, for these beloved ones who preceded us are not in heaven with redeemed bodies (Romans 8:23); rather, they are *in* death, asleep, waiting for the *better resurrection* (Hebrews 11:35), which they cannot attain apart from us (Hebrews 11:40). (Whether the dead in Christ are in some conscience spiritual state, I leave for the theories of the theologians and preachers.) For example, as he spoke to the men of Israel following the ascension of the Lord, Peter said: **Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day** (Acts 2:29). Peter contrasted David's death with the Lord's death. Unlike David, the Lord was not left in the tomb, nor was His body allowed to undergo decay (Acts 2:27). Consequently, the Lord has ascended but the saints of old have not. Thus, they are not in heaven looking down upon us as if we are in some big stadium, and they are cheering us on.

Another way of stating this verse is: ***So therefore also, having lying around us a crowd of witnesses that are giving testimony to us.*** We are given the sense that they are not above looking down, but they are lying around us. In a sense, they are lying around us, for they are in the grave waiting for the resurrection. However, it is not them per se but their testimony that is lying around us. It is their testimony that urges us to run the race. How do they give us their testimony? They do it by the history of their lives as recorded in scripture. Their lives stand as a testimony to us; and as we consider their walk of faith, along with their failures, we too run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1). They were not super-humans. They were men and women like us who had many weaknesses and made many mistakes along the way, sometimes big mistakes; but what counted the most—a good testimony through faith—is recorded, for they believed God at the crucial moment in their lives. **Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him** (Hebrews 11:6). They pleased God, and that is what counts the most.

Today, the testimony of this great throng of pioneers urges and exhorts us to press on as they did. The world system of our day is not our home; it is crumbling before our very eyes, even at this moment. Our destiny is to be a heavenly people and our vocation is to bring *the reign of the heavens* to this earth, leading the nations to Christ and teaching them righteousness through living examples of the Christ-life of love—a life of self-giving love. We are called to be strangers to the *kosmos* (world system; *in it but not of it*) of our day; being ones who are continually pressing on toward the goal, looking for the glorious day of our King Jesus, setting our sights on

His coming kingdom and our glorification. (Of course, we have already entered into His kingdom, spiritually speaking, and in some measure; however, we await our Savior to come from heaven (God's dimension) to bring us in fully and change us into His likeness.) This is our calling and expectation.

Pioneers are the ones who *wholly follow the Lord, who are filled with the spirit, and who hold to the heavenly vision* (the kingdom of God and King Jesus).

Wholly follow the Lord.

"Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, FOR THEY HAVE WHOLLY FOLLOWED THE LORD." (Numbers 32:11-12 NKJ)

The testimony of Caleb and Joshua, who took Israel into a foreign and, at times, hostile land, is that they followed the Lord wholly or fully. This is the testimony of a pioneer. True pioneers are ones who wholly follow the Lord, yielding themselves fully to the Lord. There is nothing partial about pioneers; they are all for the Lord. They have no other ambition but to follow Him, to go wherever He leads, even if it is straight through the shakable kingdoms of the world system.

While the whole first generation that came out of Egypt wanted to go back to Egypt (the world), Caleb and Joshua wanted to press on toward the goal for the prize. They believed God! After the Lord had led them out and within two years had brought them to Kadesh-Barnea, they were told to go in and spy out the land promised to them. Of the twelve men who went in to check out the land, only Caleb and Joshua saw that it was good land. All the others feared the people of the land, although the Lord had promised that they would possess it. In the end, the first generation of the sons of Israel that came out of Egypt fell in the desert under the judgment of God. We could say they are the ones who rejected the better resurrection. Only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to lead the second generation into the land of promise. God takes away the first (order) to establish the second (order). For the thirty-eight years that followed, Caleb and Joshua fully followed the Lord while the first generation of the sons of Israel wandered around the wilderness in the stubbornness of their heart.

The entire nation suffered for the actions of the many that refused to take the land promised by the Lord. Even Caleb and Joshua suffered those long years; they never gave up but instead pressed on toward the goal. They had vision and they kept the goal in sight. It is like the word given through Habakkuk.

"For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay." (Habakkuk 2:3 NASB)

The heart of a pioneer declares that it will certainly come, for God has promised. In our day, we are to hold to the fact that King Jesus is coming soon, even as other brethren push back on such a glorious truth. As more structures crumble, they will see and follow the true pioneers into the kingdom of the Son of God's love where immortality awaits.

Praise God; He always has His pioneers who are fully committed to His ways and who wholly follow Him through the trials and tribulations. The Lord never leaves nor forsakes His people, and a pioneer holds to this fact, trusting the Lord fully. Caleb and Joshua followed the Lord in all things. They carried their cross and followed the Lord (Luke 14:27). They are part of the great throng of witnesses who have shown us the way, and the way is to follow the Lord fully, not partially. When we do, we can say that we too are going the way of the pioneers. (I see following the Lord as being led by Him. When we follow another person, we generally see their back side, but this is not so with Jesus, for He is in us by His spirit. He walks with us hand-in-hand, yoked.)

A different spirit.

"But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it." (Numbers 14:24 NASB)

So, the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him." (Numbers 27:18 NASB)

There was something different about Caleb and Joshua, and it dealt with the spirit. They were of a different spirit from the rest of their brethren of their generation. Simply, they were led not by the spirit of the world (*kosmos*) but by the spirit of God.

Pioneers have a different spirit. They are fully possessed by the holy spirit. Why? Because pioneering is a spiritual matter, and it can only be done by spiritual people! It is not for the natural man or for the carnal person. It is not done by Christians who have their minds set on the things of this earth, being loyal to these things, but by those whose minds are set above where Christ is seated (Colossians 3:1-2), being loyal to Him alone. We are to be spiritually-minded. Only through the spirit of God can we see Christ and lay hold of Him and all that God has for us *in* Him. God's spirit gives us vision.

Paul told the Corinthians: **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world [*kosmos*], but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God** (1 Corinthians 2:12). Oh, who can know all that God has prepared for those who love Him? But God reveals to us through His spirit what eye has not seen and ear has not heard (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). We can only enter into this great calling as spirit-filled and spirit-led people. Of course, being filled with the spirit demands that we be filled with the God-breathed word (compare Ephesians 5:18-19 to Colossians 3:16). The two are inseparable. This goes to the very heart of the anointing that John, the apostle of love, told his children was dwelling within them—that is, this anointing would teach them of all things, for this is the spirit of truth.

Vision of the heavenly land.

And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land." (Numbers 14:6-7 NASB)

Because they were of a different spirit, Joshua and Caleb saw things on earth from a different perspective than the rest of their brethren. When ten men saw the dangers in the land, these two men saw the good in the land. They simply saw beyond the natural and saw the spiritual reality. God had promised them the land, and it was good.

A pioneer who is full of the spirit is one who sees things differently from the world's view and from the view of other believers in Christendom that have substituted the kingdom of God and King Jesus for many other things. They are the conquerors, the first fruits of the new creation. Remember, the rest of Israel that fell in the desert belonged to the Lord, for, while in the wilderness, they had followed the rock, which was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4), but they lacked the vision that comes from a spirit-led life, a life that lives fully before the Lord, a life of faith, love, and truth. The giants of the land did not overcome Joshua and Caleb. They saw that the land was God's provision, and it was His call to enter into it—to possess the land that was promised. By faith, they believed God and saw through the obstacles, which could be shaken. They saw it as an exceedingly good land. They fixed their eyes on the Lord and stormed the land to possess it.

Now this matter of possessing the land is a type of what is in God's heart for the ecclesia. We are to possess the land; however, the origin of our land is not earthly but heavenly in nature. Our land is a new, glorified body in the image and likeness of our Lord Jesus, the Celestial One (1 Corinthians 15:48-49 CLV) that will be given to all who conquer through the life of Christ while they occupy bodies of death. As Paul said, it is reserved in heaven for us, waiting to come to us. Glory will come to the conquerors through resurrection and transfiguration, which will, most likely, occur in fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles. They are the ones considered worthy to attain to the coming eon (interchangeable with *age*) and the resurrection from the dead, being sons of the resurrection (see Luke 20:34-38).

However, in another sense, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Celestial One, is our celestial land, our land of milk and honey. He is the fulfillment of every spiritual blessing among the celestials. Every blessing is *in* Christ, and these blessings are set before us among the celestials (Ephesians 1:3), especially in the age to come. Of course, this is ours today *in* spirit, but it is in the day of Christ that it will be fully manifested. Our vision must be set on what lies ahead.

Who are the true pioneers today? They are the ones who *wholly follow the Lord, who are filled with the spirit, and who hold to the heavenly vision*. This is the testimony of pioneers of the kingdom of Christ, and we see this same testimony in Paul, the beloved apostle.

The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly [celestial] kingdom; to Him {be} the glory forever and ever. (2 Timothy 4:18 NASB [CLV])

This dear brother in Christ has left us his testimony to urge us on. Paul wholly followed the Lord and held to *the heavenly vision* (Acts 26:19). He never took his eyes off the one who had blazed the trail, who had gone before and had conquered the world (John 16:33), the flesh (Hebrews 4:15), and the devil (John 14:30; 1 John 3:8). Although Paul's path was a lonely one at times as others deserted him, he knew the Lord stood with him and strengthened him (2 Timothy 4:16-17). This was Paul's testimony and his assurance that the Lord *did* deliver him from every evil

deed and *will* bring him safely to His heavenly kingdom in *the day*. As shown later, Christ is the Pioneer of suffering, and Paul entered into the sufferings of Christ as a pioneer for the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10).

Praise God for the testimony of the saints who have gone before. However, **the key is not to fix our eyes on the people but on their testimony, their example**. When we do, we see one thing. **We see Jesus!** We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, *the Man* who conquered, *the Man* who cut the way through the bush, *the Man* who is the true Trailblazer; the one true Pioneer who says, "Come, follow Me. I have made the way. *I am the Way!*" Who was in the land with Joshua, Caleb, and the second generation? The Lord was with them! Who was with Paul as he strove to be counted worthy of the celestial kingdom? The Lord was with him! Who will be waiting in the air (atmosphere of earth) for all His people as He comes to openly manifest *the reign of the heavens*? The Lord will be there! He is the Pioneer who forged the way for others to follow. He is the one who paid the full price for all to follow Him. He waits with anticipation for that glorious day when He will receive His people. What a glorious day that will be! When we see Him, we will be like Him!

The one, true Pioneer.

Can anyone doubt that our Lord *as man* is the Pioneer? Is He not the one who has gone before to prepare the way for the rest to follow? Is He not the one who entered uncharted territory into which no man had ever gone? No one had ever followed His path before. He is uniquely the Pioneer, the Forerunner, the Trailblazer. Just consider these facts—

He took on the form of man. God had never entered into His creation in this way. This was uncharted territory for even God; to be humbled by a human body, so frail, weak, and limited. He shared flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14). He was even made a little lower than His created messengers (Hebrews 2:9).

He is the first man to obey God in all things (John 5:19; 8:28). No man has ever done this (Romans 3:10, 23).

He is the first man to be tempted in all things and yet be without sin (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). All born of Adam's race have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

He is the only man to reconcile mankind to God, having made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). His blood is the only blood that effectively cleanses an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:19-22).

He is the only man to descend to the lower parts of the earth and ascend on high, far above all the heavens (Ephesians 4:8-10), even far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age (man's day), but also in the age(s) to come (Ephesians 1:21).

He is the first man to render powerless the one who had the power of death, the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

He is the first man to conquer the grave and the world (Acts 2:32; John 16:33).

He is the first man to enter within the veil and appear before God for all of humanity (Hebrews 9:24).

He is the first man to be crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9).

He is the first man to be exalted and seated at the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 2:33; 7:56; Hebrews 10:12).

He is the only man to hold the keys of death and hades, which will not prevail against His ecclesia (church) (Revelation 1:18; Matthew 16:18); that is, death shall not prevail because, in due time, He will raise His people from among the dead. Why? Because He is the firstborn from among the dead. The earth is like a great coffin that has held man in the grave since Adam. Praise God; this man broke through this mighty coffin and ascended to the throne of God. At the resurrection of the dead, it will be shown that the gates of hades (the unseen) could not prevail against His people, for His blood-bought saints will rise from among the dead; mortality will put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-57). With the consummation of the ages, death itself and hades will be thrown into the spirit-fire of God (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14). Death will be swallowed up in victory! Ultimately, all of the human race will be set free from death.

He is the first man to truly rule over all creation and to sit upon His own throne to rule in righteousness (Revelation 3:21; 11:15). He is the King!

He is the only man who will sum up all things in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1:10) so that God the Father may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28). Today, *the* Man sits in glory as all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 1:13); but the day is coming when He will leave the throne of His Father and appear to this earth (likened to pulling back a curtain that hides heaven from the physical, earthly realm), raise the scepter of the kingdom over this earth and reign until He puts all things in subjection under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:27). His reign will sum up the entire 7,000-year history of the heavens and the earth, which will ultimately lead to the grand Jubilee of creation sometime in the ages to follow.

This only touches upon the fringes of all that the last Adam, the Second Man (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47) has accomplished and will accomplish. Do you see the vastness, the greatness of this Pioneer? There is none like Him in heaven or on earth.

Now, the word *pioneer* is not used in most Bible translations; however, two translations do use it in four verses. Going forward, I will quote mostly from the *James Moffatt Translation*. In scripture, there is one Greek word that is used exclusively for our Lord Jesus, and it is found in Acts 3:15, 5:31, and Hebrews 2:10, 12:2. It is the word *archegos*, which has been translated in the many versions as "chief leader, author, captain, prince, *pioneer*, originator, or source." Its meaning implies that Christ began something. He is the source of it. It all originates with Him. He blazes a trail to it. He goes before all the rest as a forerunner. But it also means that He finished the course. He arrived at the conclusion. He completed what He set out to do. Also, He has called

His people into all that He has possessed. These four verses point to the coming king and His kingdom.

Pioneer of life raised from among the dead.

"Pilate had decided to release him, but you repudiated the Holy and Just One; the boon you asked was a murderer, and you killed the pioneer of Life. (Acts 3:14 JMT)

The Son of God is the very source of life. In Revelation 3:14, we read that He is *the originating source of the creation, the chief of creation, or the origin and beginning of creation*. In Colossians 1:16-17, we discover that He created all things and He holds all things together. He is life itself. Without Him, there would be no life in the universe because by His very life the whole of creation is held together. Destroy the Son and all of creation is destroyed. But thank God; nothing, not even death, could destroy Him. He broke the stranglehold of death and defeated it, rendering death powerless forever. The world tried to destroy its very lifeblood, but God raised Him from the dead. Hallelujah!

What is the significance of being a pioneer? Simply put, man was dead in his transgressions. We all were destined for a permanent grave, with no hope of any release; but the Pioneer entered into death and conquered it for man. This was a tremendous accomplishment. No one had ever done this. It was truly uncharted territory. But thank God; it is no longer uncharted. He entered it and defeated it. It is finished!

Now, as the Pioneer of Life, He leads us into His life, which is the overcoming, conquering life—the life that has conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil—***the Christ-abiding life of self-giving love***. The Pioneer calls us to follow Him into the depths of His life. He has opened the grave and cleared a path to His celestial kingdom (heavenly in character) that we might be with Him in His day (future day). Oh, what a tremendous trail He has blazed for us!

But there is more to this verse. He is the Pioneer of Life, whom God raised from the dead—a *fact*. It is not some myth that the Pioneer was raised from the dead; it is a fact that was witnessed by at least 584 people (1 Corinthians 15:5-8) after His resurrection from among the dead.

Consider this: The thought of being resurrected from the dead was not new to the Jews. They believed that all the dead (righteous and wicked) would be resurrected at the same time and judged. What was new was the concept of being resurrected ***from among*** the dead. We see this very clearly in Martha's response to Jesus when, in reference to raising her dead brother, Jesus stated, ***Your brother shall rise again***. Martha responded: ***I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day*** (John 11:23-24). We see the same understanding with the three disciples who witnessed the Lord's transfiguration.

And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead. And they seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead might mean. (Mark 9:9-10 NASB)

Thus, resurrection of all the dead at the same time was the common understanding of the Jews, but rising from *the* dead, that is, from *among* the dead in the middle of history (not an endpoint of it) was something entirely new to them.

Christ has set the course for those who are led by His spirit. He is the first fruit (singular in the Greek) of those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). As the first fruit, the first man to come out of the grave, He will lead many out from *among* the dead at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23). He will not lead all the dead at His coming, only those who have believed on Him and conquered through His victorious life [one new man *in* Christ (Ephesians 2:15)] while they lived. They are a kind of first fruit of the new creation from among the human race.

It is significant that the words of the verses in Acts 3 were addressed to the nation of Israel that was offered the kingdom of the heavens, but many from the ancient nation lost the right to this glorious privilege. The Pioneer declared: ***Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it*** (Matthew 21:43).

One day, as I was pondering this verse, the Lord spoke to my heart that **His conquerors are the fruit of His kingdom—meaning God's fruit is not so much about what people do for Him (bearing fruit as in good works) as it is what they have become to Him (being fruit as in having character that is worthy of the God who invites them into His own kingdom and glory)**. Mind you; good works are part of God's plan (e.g., Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13), but these works are to come from good fruit (Matthew 7:17-18). The ancient nation of Israel failed to produce a people (i.e., fruit for God) worthy of the kingdom. Simply, they were disqualified, for they were not tasty fruit to God, bringing no satisfaction to His heart. Another metaphor used in scripture is that they were rotten fruit.

Pioneer and Savior to grant repentance.

"God lifted him up to his right hand as pioneer and saviour, in order to grant repentance and remission of sins to Israel." (Acts 5:31 JMT)

This verse refers to Christ as the Pioneer in reference to granting repentance to Israel. In one sense, this has been fulfilled. Repentance was offered to Israel and a remnant believed on the Lord in that day, thus continuing the line of spiritual Israel of which we who believe in this day have been made to be partakers—having been grafted into the rich root of the olive tree as the true Israel of God.

The fact that the Pioneer and Savior has been exalted to the right hand of God is significant, and we see this in the account of Stephen's martyrdom. Stephen was a man full of grace and power, being full of the holy spirit (Acts 6:8, 10; 7:55).

Some men rose up to dispute Stephen, but they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. So, they schemed to accuse him of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God. This stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Jewish council. They

put forward false witnesses who made accusations against him, saying: **"This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."** All who fixed their gaze on Stephen saw his face like the face of an angel (see Acts 6:10-15).

Stephen, speaking to the council, began to give a summary of the history of Israel and concluded it with the most severe of rebukes.

"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and {yet} did not keep it." (Acts 7:51-53 NASB)

When the men of the Jewish council heard this, they gnashed their teeth at him, but this did not matter to Stephen. He was full of the spirit, which led him to look up and gaze into heaven. At that very moment, heaven opened to Stephen, like a curtain pulled back. He saw the throne of God and the glory of God. What a vision! Stephen declared: ***Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God*** (Acts 7:56). With this statement, the Jews stormed Stephen, drove him out of the city (outside the camp), stoned him to death (Acts 7:57-60), and sealed their fate for the age(s) in which Christ reigns over this earth. Essentially, they gave up any right to the better resurrection as the many that had preceded them had valiantly pursued and will enter into in the day of Christ.

Praise God; the one who is at the right hand of God, one day very soon, will stand again and descend to this earth. The man in glory is coming! When He comes, heaven (God's realm) will be opened for all to see the King of kings appearing in the magnificent splendor of His glory.

Pioneer of their salvation through suffering.

Now, we come to Hebrews where we discover another aspect of pioneering that deals with suffering.

In bringing many sons to glory, it was befitting that He for whom and by whom the universe exists, should perfect the Pioneer of their salvation by suffering. (Hebrews 2:10 JMT)

The Father perfected *the Pioneer (author) of our salvation (our rescue from self) and this perfection came through His sufferings*. Some translations have suffering in the plural and others in the singular. Without any doubt, Jesus' death on the cross was a great, even horrendous suffering, but His sufferings go much deeper than merely a physical suffering. In fact, He experienced a great suffering in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the place in which He would pour out His soul in prayer to His Father. As He did this, He became grieved (sorrowful) and distressed (heavy). **Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me"** (Matthew 26:38). Three times, Jesus went a little beyond the three disciples and fell on His face and prayed, **"My**

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

What was the suffering of Christ in this dark hour? It was the suffering of His soul. His soul was going to the place of death. When the soul comes to this place, there is only one cry to the Father, and that is, "Your will be done!" We could say that in that hour, His soul was lost (fell into the ground to die) so that it would be gained. He was living the very charge that He has given to all who desire to be His disciple.

"For whoever wishes to save his life [soul] shall lose it; but whoever loses his life [soul] for My sake shall find it." (Matthew 16:25 NASB)

The Lord experienced everything that we are called to experience in our being led by Him, which leads to the salvation of the soul. Through these sufferings, He was perfected or made complete as man. He suffered in His soul to the point of death, which is the ultimate point in losing the soul. In referencing Christ as our Great High Priest, the Hebrews epistle states that He was tempted (yet without sin) and He suffered in these times for our benefit.

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18 NASB)

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as {we are, yet} without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 NASB)

At Gethsemane, Jesus set the example of a soul going into death and being gained in resurrection. Disciples of Christ must follow this same path in order to gain the salvation of their soul. Our Lord Jesus is truly *the Pioneer of the salvation of our soul through sufferings*. He was perfected through His sufferings and so are we so that, one day, we might be complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28). He has pioneered the way to the salvation of our soul, and we are called to follow in His steps (Matthew 16:24).

Our spirit is saved when we first believe; our body is redeemed at the resurrection (and transfiguration) when Christ comes; but our soul must be saved while we live in the body, which simply means that one lives by the rule: **Not my will, but Your will be done**. Our soul life is saved by losing it to the will of God. The Hebrews epistle deals with the matter of the soul. **But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:39).**

One aspect of the salvation of our soul and coming into glory [a reference to the kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12)] is the connection between suffering and coming into glory. Paul clearly explained this to the believers in Rome.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} in order that we may also be glorified with {Him.} For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are

not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:16-19 NASB)

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23 NASB)

The operative words are *if* indeed we suffer with Him. In other words, adoption as sons and becoming fellow heirs with Christ in glory come through suffering. *If* is a conditional statement. *If* we do not suffer (in the right manner, see 1 Peter 2:18-25; 3:13-4:19), then we will not be joint heirs with Christ in His kingdom and be glorified with Him. The right kind of suffering, that is, suffering that comes from following the Lord, taking up our cross, and being led by the spirit of God, even to the point of walking through God's spirit-fire, leads to the salvation of our soul.

The good news is that all who are called to be sons as first fruits of the human race can and will go through suffering because they have the Pioneer residing within who knows how to lead them through the fire, to the glory of God.

Pioneer of the faith for the joy.

To run our appointed course with steadiness, our eyes fixed upon Jesus as the pioneer and the perfection of faith.... (Hebrews 12:2 JMT)

...The pioneer and perfecter of [the] faith.... (Hebrews 12:2 MON)

Again, Hebrews encourages us with another facet of Christ as the Pioneer. In this verse, He is the Pioneer of *the* faith. Some translations state *our* faith and others state *faith* alone instead of *the* faith. *The* faith is a specific aspect of faith that refers to *the reign of the heavens*—the kingdom of glory—that is explained through *the word of the kingdom*. In a sense, all of these expressions have instructive value in light of the entire verse; therefore, it is beneficial to look at each one.

The faith.

Pioneering is a kingdom matter, for it is about reigning with Christ. Our Lord endured the cross, despising its shame, for one reason—the joy that was set before Him. What was this joy? It was vision (spiritual sight) of seeing many sons literally coming unto His glory. We also need to be reminded that there was much more to this vision, for it includes all of the human race that will be saved one day as well. His passion in the darkest hours of His life on earth was seeing a people, the one new man in Christ (essentially *the* Christ), set free from the bondage of death and corruption and brought into the glory of His kingdom (1 Thessalonians 2:12). In His day, the day of Christ (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16), His loved ones will come into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

Glory has a purpose, and that purpose is for a people to reign with Christ. We are not saved "to go to heaven." We are saved to reign with Christ wherever He is. This is the heart of our beloved Lord Jesus—a people to sit down with Him on His throne as He has sat down on His Father's

throne (Revelation 3:21). This is why the writer of Hebrews reminds us that He has sat down. When He brings the many sons unto glory they too will sit down, meaning they will reign with Him. In a sense, the bringing in of many sons has been an on-going process for the last 2,000 years as the Lord Jesus has given His faith to many.

Reigning with Christ in the age(s) to come means to be seated on His throne as a conqueror when He comes in all His glory, to openly establish (no longer hidden to natural sight) His rights (currently established and seen in spirit) over all the nations as King of the nations. There is only one King over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9). He will be King of all! The King is the Pioneer of *the* faith!

Our faith.

In the other sense, coming into *the reign of the heavens* requires an active, living, experiential faith. We must be led by our beloved Lord, but how do we do this? It is by faith. But whose faith is it? It is the faith of the Son of God! As some versions translate it, He is the author or originator of faith. It is His faith, but His faith is to be our faith. He is the one who walked this earth, always entrusting Himself to His Father. We are called to walk in His way. How do we do it? By fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the Pioneer of faith! There is no other way. We must be like Peter who stepped out on the water and walked toward the Lord. He stayed above the water as long as he fixed his eyes on his master. But when he looked down and saw the danger of the water, he began to sink. *Oh, ye of little faith* (Matthew 14:22-33).

Pioneering is like walking on water. What does water represent? In this case, it is uncharted territory, an unknown, often filled with danger; and we must be willing, by faith, to step out and onto it. The toils, trials, and dangers of this world will come when we step out. The bush (another metaphor) stands in front of us as an obstacle saying: "You cannot come this way. Go back to the comfort of the world. Go back to the city. The world has an easier life. The city is better. You will never make it going this way. Even better, go back to religion; it is safer, more comfortable." Oh, what a lie! We are called to walk on this water every day, not looking down but fixing our eyes upon the one who has gone before. If we do, then we will not sink but will conquer as He conquered this world. We will cut a path through the bush. We will show others the way to the living God; to the Pioneer of Life, Salvation, and Faith, even *the* faith. We will cut a path for others to see the glory of the Lord, and by the power of the holy spirit to enter into His glory in that day.

His kingdom shall have no frontier.

Dear brethren; our Pioneer has opened a whole new territory for those who are running the race of *the* faith to receive the victor's crown. As mortals, we are limited to frail, dying bodies that are set within the limits of this earth. Our territory is limited while we are in these bodies of flesh and blood. Praise God; a day is coming in which we will be set free from these bodies of death (Romans 7:24) to take on glorified bodies conformed to the glorified body of our Lord (Philippians 3:20; 1 John 3:2).

We are limited in this day, but we are being called into something that has no bounds. The Pioneer's work is so complete that there is no territory untouched by Him. He went forth and conquered all that there was to be conquered for God and for the human race.

The old Moravian version of the Bible says in Luke 1:33: **And his kingdom shall have no frontier.** Isaiah declared: **There will be no end to the increase of {His} government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this** (Isaiah 9:7). Isaiah could be reworded as *the greatness of His empire shall have no border.*

Do you see the significance of these verses? Christ has conquered all; there are no limits to His kingdom. Having no frontiers doesn't mean there are no frontiers to conquer. It means His kingdom has no boundaries and no limits. Nothing can or ever will interfere with the expansion of His kingdom. The frontiers that will be opened to His people, the sons and daughters of God, will extend without end. Hallelujah! When He lifts His scepter over the kingdom of this world, He will bring *the reign of the heavens* to this earth, His government shall have no limits as it increases until the consummation of the ages when there will be a grand jubilee for all humanity (all debts forgiven) and all creation (fully set free) and God is **all in all in all** (1 Corinthians 15:28). Forever it will be *the throne of God and of the Lambkin* (Revelation 22:1, 3).

It is time to press on as a pioneer, fixing our eyes on *the* Pioneer! He is calling *us* into His boundless, unchangeable and unshakable kingdom embodied in His very life.