THE *KINGDOM* in 1st Century Christianity

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the *King James Version*.
Other Scripture versions are notated as follows:

BBE Basic Bible in English
CEV Contemporary English Version
DRA Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition
ESV English Standard Version
GNB Good News Bible
GW God's Word
ISV International Standard Version
KJV King James Version
MKJV Modern King James Version
MSG Message Bible
NIV New International Version
TLB The Living Bible
VOICE The Voice
YLT Young's Literal Translation

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For seekers
who will not stop
until they discover
the height
the depth
and breadth
of what Jesus
said to find:
the Kingdom

Matthew 6:33
Seek first the Kingdom of God
and be in good standing with its laws.

JESUS IS KING

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INTRODUCTION

Why were the early Christians fed to the lions? No other religious groups were fed to the lions. Jewish people were not fed to the lions. Neither were the folks who followed the ten major religions of Rome and the dozen minor religions. None of the visitors from far-away lands with strange religions were so persecuted. What was it about the Christians that turned them into enemies of the empire?

The answer lies in the vast difference between first-century Christianity and the religion that we have today. What you are about to discover will challenge your perspective as you discover original Christianity was a government and not a religion, a nation, not a church. It is no less than life-changing. It will alter the way that you live your Christian life and bring a clarity to the scriptures that, for many of us, has been lost for centuries.

In this book, we will dig deeply into the concept of kingdoms, the very foundation of the first-century believers' faith. Our current culture of anti-king and republic form of government erased long ago our

knowledge of kingdoms and how they functioned. We have been bombarded by the frailties and faults of the worst of the monarchs. We have lost sight of five thousand years of historical kings and kingdoms, the majority of which flourished and were successful. We have also lost our way in scriptural inquiry into God's plans for kingdoms and why He Himself instituted the kingdom as His form of government. It is so important to Him that He calls Himself "the King of Kings."

My journey to the Kingdom, where I am now a law-abiding citizen, took a major leap forward around the turn of the century, when I made an incredible spiritual voyage toward a forgiving lifestyle. As a result of that trek, I wrote a book so others could follow, titled *Forgive Instantly & Live Free*. The first half of the book lays out the two parts of forgiving that it takes to free both parties: the offender and the offended. The second half gives the secret to instant forgiveness, which is the ownership of God. He owns all things, including me. Discovering the depth of God's power in His ownership is what transformed my future.

That question of ownership led me to write another book, *Being God: Stealing God's Power, Glory, and Kingdom*. The task of writing that treatise took me into the depths of a fundamental truth that we in America, and now around the world, are averse to. The book is a full expansion of the New Testament principle "you

have been bought with a price," as put forth in 1 Corinthians 6:20.

We like to own things, including our own lives. I once had the opportunity to present the Gospel to a vice admiral (three stars) of the US Navy. As I laid out the price that Jesus had paid for us, he immediately responded: "I don't want to be owned by God." Never before in my life of witnessing had a party so adequately understood the door of salvation and known clearly the reason why he rejected it. He expressed the motive of many in the human race who don't know how to put their refusal into words. We have songs like "My Life" by Billy Joel and "My Way" by Frank Sinatra. "Mine" is one of the first words that we learn on our own as children; no one teaches it to us.

That book landed me in the domain of the Kingdom. I did not know about the Kingdom at that time, but I was basking in the newfound freedom of letting God own and take over every aspect of my life. Suddenly, living had become easy. I knew I was in the promised land, "the rest" as put forth in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 4:9 (KJV)
There remaineth therefore
a rest to the people of God.

I discovered "the Kingdom" after a decade of pursuing Jesus and intensely studying the Gospels and the book

of Acts, which is where you find Him. I was committed to following Jesus as He had requested of me. "Follow me" were His exact words. That meant going to where He was portrayed and quoted. I wanted to know Him and step in His footprints. In my first reading of the scriptures as a new believer, it had intrigued me that the early believers were willing to give all that they had to the newly formed flock. Mistakenly, I had associated the events around the gift of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5 with the statement in Acts 4 that they had all things in common, leading me to conclude they had given away everything they had to the common group. One particular gift, however, does not imply everything that they owned. It was a large gift, but not necessarily their entire net worth.

I went back to Acts 4:32 to explore what they meant by common ownership. It did not mean that they gave things away, but rather that they shared all that they had as though all in the group were owners of the assets. I checked the translation options to discover the word "commonwealth." I had heard that term associated with four of our states: Kentucky, Massachusetts, Virgina, and Pennsylvania. Since those states are commonwealths in name only and not in practice, little can be learned from them concerning the day-to-day functioning of a commonwealth. I checked the dictionary to dive more deeply into that translation. To my surprise, there was the word "kingdom."

It was enlightening to discover that kingdoms are commonwealths. In a kingdom, the king owns everything, but he shares ownership with his subjects willingly.

Bingo! Hold your cards. Can there be a mistake? The light just came on. Right there it was; they were functioning as a real, vital, living kingdom. They were not a religious group, but a new nation of subjects of the newfound king, Jesus. They considered their possessions to be the property of the kingdom and, therefore, the wealth was held in common for all to use and share. Everything in scripture came together in that truth. I had found the hidden kingdom. With a fresh new anointing of that revelation, I began the most exciting study of my Christian life diving into the reality of the Kingdom. I already had been resting in the King's domain, and now I had sight of the King. The word "kingdom" is a contraction of two words: king and domain. I had made the discovery that all of humanity is searching for, one of God's greatest gifts to us—the Kingdom of God.

Luke 12:32
Fear not, little flock; for it is your
Father's good pleasure to give you the
kingdom.

You are about to journey into the most exciting adventure of your Christian life. In the following

pages, I will lay out the Kingdom so simply that you can comprehend what the world cannot find. They are unable to grasp that Jesus is no longer in a manger, or on a cross, or seated teaching children dressed in ancient tunics. Rather, He is seated on His throne in Heaven as the King of Kings. They cannot see that the kingdom is here now, a borderless Kingdom in the hearts of true followers. They are missing the Kingdom that Jesus delivered at His first coming and are totally unaware of their deficiency.

Not only do we want to look afresh and anew at kingdoms, but we want to understand God's mind in His creation of them. We will look at the success of benevolent kings in scripture and in real-life examples today. You will see the Bible in a fresh, new perspective that will make you say, "How did I miss that?"

I learned that I was not the only one who found the Kingdom. Throughout history are Kingdom believers who knew and lived the Kingdom life. We will learn the Kingdom life is the Christian life that Jesus intended for us. The proof comes from His own lips. Get ready for the greatest journey of your life, following Jesus in His exact footsteps.

The Challenge: Read It for Yourself

The Roman Amalgamated Religion and its offspring have diminished the use of the Bible. They depend on

liturgy and doctrine written by men rather than the words of Jesus. Even the Reformation emphasized Paul's writings over Jesus's words. They teach the books of the Gospel to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament and therefore less relevant than Paul's writings. The Kingdom has been intentionally hidden by those who would rather be king than serve the real King. Ever since the Garden of Eden, man has sought to elevate himself above the King of Kings. Ego keeps us from the Kingdom and hides it through the exaltation of man in religion. The serpent in the Garden of Eden tempted Adam and Eve by enticing them with the concept of being God or equal with God. Who was God? He was and is the King of Kings. We tend to follow their pattern. We still find it difficult to give God His rightful place at the top of the chain of command.

It must be stressed that Jesus is the source of our faith. Paul and all others are commentators, not the source. No statement by any human, even one under inspiration, can ever nullify or change what Jesus proclaimed. Theologians and denominations twist the words of Paul to meet their own requirements in support of doctrinal positions unique to each. Jesus's words will never pass away. In spite of men denying, minimizing, and marginalizing them, His words are still our source.

Matthew 24:35
Heaven and earth shall pass away,
but my words shall not pass away.

Before you toss this book aside, let us take a fresh look at what Jesus actually said and taught in the Gospels. Let's see again, with clear eyes, not shaded by past theological arguments, how the book of Acts actually portrays the new believers. We will look at what we may have missed. Most denominations have been so obsessed with particular themes that they have missed Jesus as King. In so doing, they are blind to His real purpose in reestablishing the Kingdom of God on earth as a vital, living nation.

I am not asking you to take my word for what Jesus or the scriptures say. We don't need another human opinion on Bible interpretation. We just need to see the scriptures through a clear lens not tainted by those who have already muddied our thinking. We will not challenge doctrines, but we will ignore them so that Jesus can tell the story instead of theology books written by men.

Let's see what we missed. Let's pull the scales from our eyes and see what is in plain sight. How many times have we read it and failed to perceive what was clearly written? May the Lord open our eyes. Understanding the Kingdom is easy, if only we can see past the prejudices that blind leaders who never found the Kingdom have taught us. Kingdom living is the life that God intended for Adam and Eve. He intends this life for us today as well.

Matthew 7:14
Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,
which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

CHAPTER 1

Shadow Government

A Shadow Nation,
not Visible on a Map
A Kingdom, not a Theology
A Government, not a Religion
Citizens, not Members
Followers, not Lawyers
Servants, not Theologians

Acts 17:6–7 (VOICE)
These people—they're political agitators turning the world upside down! They've come here to our fine city, and this man, Jason, has given them sanctuary and made his house a base for their operations.
We want to expose their real intent:
they are trying to overturn Caesar's sensible decrees.
They're saying that Jesus is king, not Caesar!

Early believers functioned as a kingdom, a separate nation. While living physically in the Roman Empire, they had their allegiance to another government, that of the Kingdom of God. Their group was not a religion but a country, a separate nation, with a king as its government. It had its own laws and citizens. It was borderless in that it existed in the hearts of men wherever they were. The size of the nation was the largest of all kingdoms, because it extended to the corners of the world, wherever believers went.

Even though we speak in the past tense as we describe what the first three centuries of followers of Christ were like in their beliefs and practices, we must call attention to the fact that the living vibrant Kingdom exists today. Since Jesus reestablished the Kingdom of God, it has never ceased. It has been overshadowed by a replacement organization that was more a religion than a nation. There still exist quiet underground groups and individuals of Kingdom Christians. They are still marginalized and persecuted by the accepted orthodox culture of the day.

The Kingdom of God is the most radical idea that God ever brought to earth. It is a government ruled by God Himself as its king, the King of Kings. His throne is established in the heavens, where He rules earth as a colony. He established its laws with His spoken word. He chooses its citizens to populate it. He staffs the

colony with under-kings and royal citizens, who are considered His children. They are also priests because of their direct access to God. Just as King George III ruled the American colonies from abroad in England, so God rules the earth from heaven afar.

When we say God is King, we are referring to the visible image of God, which is Jesus. We must understand the view that the early Christians had of the Trinity. It is much different than our present-day view, which is influenced by the imitation organization that draws on ten other religions to amalgamate an all-encompassing view that enmeshes them all. Most Christians currently define the Trinity as three distinct persons. That is because of the centuries of teaching influenced by the Roman trinity: Zeus, Aphrodite, and their son, Apollo. These Roman gods were distinct persons. Our God is not.

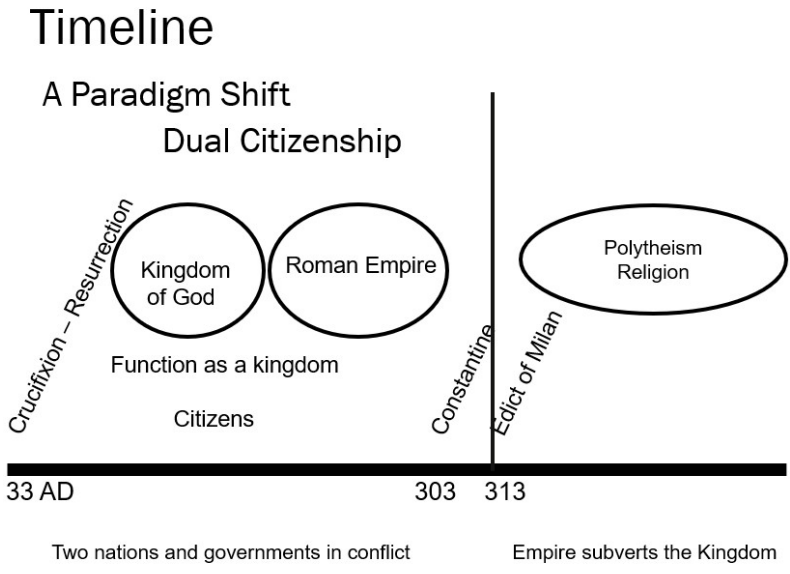
The early Christians' analogy of the Trinity was to view God as the sun and Jesus as the beams of light that come from the sun. That makes them inseparable. Jesus is just the visible part of God that we can see. To early Christians, Jesus and God were the same, one the visible part of the other. The Holy Spirit was the heat waves from the sun, while Jesus was the light waves. All three are the same manifestations of the sun. That is why, when John saw his vision of heaven, he saw only Jesus on the throne. Jesus is the visible manifestation of God. Because they are inseparable, not three distinct persons,

but all of God is on the throne at the same time. We only see God on the throne as Jesus because He is the only visible image that our eyes can capture.

Colossians 1:15
(Jesus) Who is the image of the invisible God.

John 10:30
I and my Father are one.

Early Christians did *not* have an underground religion. They had a shadow government, and they did not hide it. They openly declared their allegiance to King Jesus. They were described, in Acts 17:7, as declaring Jesus to be their king rather than Ceasar. They were citizens of an unseen Kingdom that exists in the hearts of men, a Kingdom without borders.



Emperor Constantine was faced with a dilemma. The Kingdom of God was out pacing the Roman Empire. To save the Empire, he, along with some provincial leaders, devised a plan to transform the structure of Christianity into something they could control.

Men have invented many religions. All of them place obligations on people and make them feel good for doing something to please God. Humans get satisfaction from religion. An individual makes a decision, prays a prayer, worships, gives, and participates in a host of activities that earn them credit as they perceive them to be valuable. Conversely, the Kingdom has but two things to do: get in the Kingdom, and stay in the Kingdom by being law-abiding. Then, as a law-abiding Kingdom citizen, one has all the rights and privileges that come with citizenship.

Acts 17:6 (ISV)
These fellows who have turned the
world upside down have come here, too.

It was the statement of an outsider, a nonbeliever, who declared the followers of Jesus were the people "who turned the world upside down." What was it that made them so different than what we see in the current version of Christianity? What did they have or know that we have somehow lost? Was it a higher level of dedication? What made them willing to share all their possessions for the good of the community? What

drew them so tightly together that they had unity? What motivated them so much that they were willing to suffer death over disavowing their founder? How did they manage to do these things for nearly three hundred years?

Finding the answers to those questions becomes more difficult as we move further along in the human timeline. Isaiah 53:6 tells us, "We have turned everyone to their own way." If that is true, then we continue to drift farther from God and not closer. We like to have our own way. And the farther we drift, the harder it is to know the mind of God. We have killed and exiled the kings of this earth so that we can have it our way. Democracy is not the effort to find the will of God, but the demand of men to have their own way. It is the will of man perfected. We shall not have a king rule over us. Yet we continue to seek a leader who can solve all the problems and dilemmas. Religious folks believe Jesus will someday return, set up His Kingdom, and rule on earth for a thousand years. The truth is simpler. He already is King and has a Kingdom that extends to the earth colony. But someday, He will move his throne here and be present in the colony. Then every knee shall bow. Right now, only his citizens willingly bow.

Isaiah 45:23
I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out
of my mouth in righteousness *(justice)*, and

shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*[allegiance]*.

Romans 14:11
For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

Philippians 2:10
That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.

How Could We Have Missed It?

The Kingdom of God is a monumental directional change in our way of living. We have elevated ourselves and our form of Christianity and feel we are right in our practices. We fight with each other over doctrine and are positive that we have the correct interpretation of God's word. We are so confident in our Christian structures that we exclude others who deviate even a little from what we hold to be Christianity.

One can easily see how other groups would be surprised to learn that they have been wrong and trekked off in the wrong direction for decades, if not centuries. But the shock comes when we too must admit we also have missed the message Jesus delivered and the goal that He wanted us to achieve.

Getting to the true core of Christianity implies understanding the very foundation of who Jesus is and what He came to do. He was born a king, with full bloodlines traced though His father and mother back to King David *(see appendix A)*. But more importantly, they can be traced to Adam, the only other person who could claim to be a direct son of God. We claim to be sons of God through a spiritual rebirth, but only Adam and Jesus could claim to be sons of God in their physical formation.

Luke 4:43
He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: *for therefore am I sent*.

Jesus did not come to start a religion. Jesus came to restart the kingdom that Adam had lost. Adam did not lose a religion; he lost a kingdom. The chain of command from the King of Kings down to Adam was surrendered, as Adam obeyed the evil one rather than God. The cross was only a step in the path that would lead to the restoration of the Kingdom. The good news of the salvation message is only part of Jesus's good news. He had a fantastic nation He invited you to join. We fall short when we fail to offer the Kingdom to new converts. The Kingdom was Jesus's goal, and the cross was the means to get there. The larger goal is to enter the Kingdom. Kingdoms have kings. Losing sight of Jesus as King leaves one without a kingdom.

Isaiah 9:6
For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the *government* shall be upon his shoulder:

Isaiah declared the government would rest solely upon Him. He did not say that the Messiah would have the church or a religion on his shoulders. We have allowed Christianity to become a religion when God's original purpose was to have a nation. Nearly all denominations recognize that Jesus will return to set up a kingdom. Kingdoms are nations with a form of government, not a form of religion.

Religion and government are two different animals. They don't mix. We even have some denominations who pride themselves on separation of church and state, more proof that government is in a different category. Let us dive into the Kingdom and leave behind the arguments of religion.

CHAPTER 2

Kingdoms Are Commonwealths

Acts 4:32
And the multitude of them that
believed were of one heart and of one soul:
neither said any of them of the things which
he possessed was his own; but they had *all*
things common.

The early followers of Jesus called themselves "the Way." Their critics and detractors called them Christians as a derogatory term, but believers followed Jesus's words as He called Himself, "the Way," the truth and life (John 14:6). "Way" fit the movement well because it was "a way of life" and not a religion. It was a movement centered on how to live the Christian way of life. It was a functioning kingdom, not a religious system of ceremonies. It was a nation in the hearts of

men, with a king, a type of government just as it had been delivered to Adam. It was totally different than what we practice today in many circles of Christianity.

The early followers of the Way had found the great treasure, the pearl of great price. They had found the Kingdom and were willing to trade their lives and their possessions to have it. Jesus had accomplished what He had come to do, to restore what Adam had lost. God did not give a religion to Adam, He gave a dominion. The treasure, the valuable pearl of great price referenced in scripture, is the Kingdom once delivered to Adam and now restored through Jesus. Jesus brought the Kingdom with Him when He came here. He taught it and offered it to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles.

Acts refers to the early converts as having all things in common. Strong's concordance lists "common" as the translation of the Greek *koy-nos'*, which means shared by all or several. That term, today, is condensed into just one word: commonwealth. A commonwealth is a political community founded for the common good. The noun "commonwealth," meaning "public welfare, general good or advantage," dates from the fifteenth century. The term literally means "common well-being."

E. Stanley Jones discovered the Kingdom while visiting Russia. Jones was a missionary to India in the

early twentieth century. Russia had lost their king to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. While visiting the country, he met many Russians who lamented the loss of their commonwealth kingdom and gave him insights to the successes of that form of government. He connected the dots to what he saw in the book of Acts and became a lifelong advocate of the Kingdom of God. Just before he died in 1972, he published his most famous work, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*.

In contrast to the magnificent concept of living under God's direct rule, mankind invents religious systems that he can lead without God. The Pharisees were one of those systems Jesus had to defeat. He called the Pharisees lawyers. Lawyers is a government word, not a religious term. Everything to Jesus was in government terms. They were the religious legal know-it-alls of their day. Our present world has its share of the same, but few of them have a clue as to what the real live Kingdom is about. They know doctrine and can quote verses, but the true Kingdom is not within their grasp. Just like the Pharisees, they have taken away the knowledge of the Kingdom and prevented their followers from finding it.

Matthew 23:13
But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven

against men: for ye neither go in yourselves,
neither suffer them that are entering to go in.

There is a time when it is necessary and appropriate to reach out and give a hand up to those who desire to find the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the treasure that you are willing to sell everything so that you have enough to buy the field where the treasure lies buried. Jesus gave the illustration of the pearl of great price as a metaphor of the Kingdom. His mission was to restore the Kingdom back into our hands here on earth. The Kingdom is that pearl of great price, the treasure worth more than all the wealth of the world.

Some believe Jesus is the pearl of great price. Jesus is very important to the Kingdom message because He is the door to the Kingdom. When I buy a house, the door is very important. A house without a door is not usable, but I want more than just the door. I want the house behind the door also. I want the whole package. I not only want Jesus; I want the Kingdom. He opens the access to it. Jesus described Himself as the door but went on to encourage finding the good green pasture that lies beyond the entrance.

John 10:9
I am the door: by me if any man enter in,
he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and
find pasture.

Many have been given a mental roadblock. We have been told the church is the Kingdom. But what if that is not true? What if the church is not the Kingdom? The church has no king, nor does it have a domain. It certainly has no dominion over you, even though it tries to gain that control.

Others believe and teach the Kingdom is far off in time waiting for Jesus to come and set up His realm. But what if that is not true? Who said He has to come to set up His Kingdom? Can He not set up His Kingdom from afar and oversee its functions from His present vantage point in heaven? Isn't He God? "Is anything too hard for the Lord," Genesis 18:14 proclaims. Besides, He already came to earth two thousand years ago and accomplished that task. Could it be that He set up His Kingdom then, and we have missed it because an evil force has hidden it? Has it been hidden because someone or something doesn't want us to find it? Could it be the devil, or is it men who want to rule in place of the real king? Either would be a likely answer. The most sobering thought is that we have hidden it from ourselves because of our innate, inborn desire to rule our own lives.

Most seminaries and Bible colleges do not teach anything about a present, real, functioning kingdom. Neither do you hear many correct messages on the Kingdom from the pulpits. We hear the Kingdom is not

here yet, but will be someday. We hear the church is the Kingdom. Only a few current-day songs reference Jesus as King. Jesus is portrayed from the pulpits as a baby in a manger, a savior on the cross, in the tomb, risen, and ascended, but not as a king. Yet, the Gospels mention "king" and "kingdom" two hundred seventy-five times. Jesus declares His Gospel, His Good News, to be the Kingdom, not the cross. The cross was an agony to Him, while the message of His kingship was His thrust and joy. The message of the current-day Christian world is personal salvation by way of the cross, while the message of the early believers was a new citizenship in a fantastic kingdom by way of Jesus as your savior king. The Way had a much broader message. It presented Jesus as the door, but went on to give the proper way to live the Christian life as a citizen and servant to the King. To serve the king means to obey the king. There, again, is the law-abiding citizen concept.

In my quest for information about the Kingdom, I found pastors and churches who are on the right track. They preach and pursue the Kingdom. Churches can be kingdom-minded and help their members achieve Kingdom knowledge and citizenship. I found them to be few in number, but profound in their efforts. There is no reason a church cannot go on to explore and expound the living vibrant Kingdom that flourishes in the shadows of our current times.

Through these pages, I intend to help you dig up the pearl of great price. Some years ago, I found the pearl that Jesus indicated few would find. The devil does not want us to find the Kingdom. Many religious institutions do not want us to find something that would pull our attention and affection away from themselves. Far too often, a denomination and its growth have become more important than the King. But most of all, the Kingdom is hidden by our own ego that places ourselves high in our worldview. We are locked in our own self-exaltation and desire to be in control. We would have fought for the rights to own property privately and to vote if we had lived back in colonial revolutionary times. We like to own things, including ourselves. Giving up control to the King is not easy once we have tasted "our own way."

Isaiah 53:6
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have *turned everyone to his own way*;
and the *Lord* hath laid on him the iniquity of
us all.