

The Fulfillment of God's Plan?

From the beginning of God's dealing with Abraham, he wanted a nation to be his representatives on Earth. He declared he would give Abraham's promised descendants land from Egypt to the Euphrates. They would be as numerous as the sands by the sea. There would be peace and abundance. The nations would stream to Israel to learn about God. This promise was fulfilled during the reign of King Solomon, when we see what God's reign on earth might look like.

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl.

For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates.

And he had peace on all sides around him.

And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

In the Ancient Near East world, this was heaven on earth; and frankly it sounds pretty good these days as well. It's difficult for most modern people to conceive of living in an era when foreign armies may come and torture and slaughter the men and

haul off the women and children into sexual slavery at any time. But that was the reality then. So in Solomon's time, the promise of God was being met. But it gets better. Read just how good it was during Solomon's time, and try to take yourself 3000 years ago into another era of human existence.

Solomon also had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen. And those officers supplied provisions for King Solomon, and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month. They let nothing be lacking. Barley also and straw for the horses and swift steeds they brought to the place where it was required, each according to his duty.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.

Clearly, these other men were celebrities everyone was aware of. They were the Platos and Aristotles of their day, and Solomon's wisdom surpassed it. Plus, he was a best selling songwriter and poet!

He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

And a scientist, with scientific breakthroughs in botany and biology!

He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish.

*And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.*¹

Truly, this was an awesome time to be a Hebrew. From their point of view, it looked like God's intentions had succeeded, and everything was working according to plan.

Alas.

Within a few decades, civil war would tear the nation apart into Israel and Judah, and within few centuries, the Hebrews had so fallen into paganism and idolatry that God divorces them. They were, from the beginning, unequally yoked, and Israel was never able to become equally yoked with God through performance and trying to measure up by fulfilling the requirements of the Covenant of the Law.

In fact, God's plan was being worked out accordingly. Just not like the Hebrews expected.

As the nations of Judah and Israel continually ceased obeying God's statutes and worshipped other gods, he sent prophets to warn that judgment was coming, in accordance with the terms of the Covenant. But they ignored the prophets, and eventually God sent the hated Babylonian Empire to obliterate the nations of Israel and Judah and destroy the Temple of God, a house that God had long stopped living in, actually.

¹ Taken from 1 Kings 4.

The Promised New Covenant

Even as Babylon was preparing to attack, one of these prophets, Jeremiah, announced something new was coming. He declared God recognized the Covenant of the Law was flawed and that he planned replacing it with a new one.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”²

The Old Covenant has 613 points to it. The New Covenant would have four points to it.

1. *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” Instead of having the Law written on stone tablets to be memorized by the minds of men, God’s law would be written on their hearts.*

² Jeremiah 31:31

2. *“And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Nothing would separate God from his people; no religious rites, no priesthood, no enemy power.*

3. *“And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.” They would not need a priesthood or certain pedigree or access to a certain level of education to know God. He would not relate to people based on their nationality, but to individuals.*

4. *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Their sins would be forgiven and forgotten.*

Wow! Does this sound like Good News?

One of Jeremiah’s contemporary prophets lived abroad, added a few more points to the New Covenant. Ezekiel had already been exiled, and laid out the case for God bringing judgment. He prophesied that the Jews would be scattered, and then brought back. When they are brought back, he wrote this, from God:

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Here, God promises to replace their hearts of stone with a heart of flesh and he declares he would put the Holy Spirit inside of them, which would cause them to walk in his laws. This is living from the heart, not from the mind. He forecast that the temple indeed would be in human flesh, not in a stone building. Wow!

In that passage, do you see how God desires not to live in a house of stone, but in a house of flesh?

This was truly astounding and seems impossible. How could God live inside humans? This seems blasphemous because everyone knew that humans were broken under the power of Sin. The corrupting influence of Sin had messed people and the world up. The Law of Moses established many purification rules just to make it safe to enter God's Presence in the Temple. How could God's Presence enter sinful humans without killing them? Ridiculous.

When Ezekiel wrote this, the nation of Judah was safe and secure. The Temple had not been destroyed and it seemed impossible such a thing could happen. The nation of Judah had people from all 12 tribes living in it, and collectively, they were known as Jews. The notion of God bringing judgment and scattering the Jews was ludicrous.

Until it actually happened. Babylon sacked the nation, destroyed the temple, and scattered the people. This is called the Babylonian Exile. The Jews had their identity as God's Chosen People shattered. They experienced a crisis of faith.

During this period, the texts that make up the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) were compiled, edited, and distributed, firmly establishing their identity as God's Chosen People. And they waited for the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah to be

fulfilled. This happened seventy years later, when God returned the scattered Jews back to their homeland, and the reconstruction of the Temple began and was completed. This seemed all according to the prophecies that were widely distributed, and which we find in the Old Testament. The expectation was, now that the nation of the Jews had been restored and the Temple completed, and with the Jews living by the Law completely for the first time in centuries, now, for certain, God would come and set up his earthly kingdom and destroy all of Israel's enemies. God would bring the Kingdom of God to earth: Heaven would invade Earth and be established forever. Finally, the state of Eden would arrive. Heaven on earth with God as King.

But God didn't come. He didn't even fill the Temple as he had done in the past. Remember, he wanted to live in a temple of flesh, after all, but the Jews didn't understand that. To them, God was silent. There were no more visions, no more prophecies. And Israel continually struggled with foreign oppressors. It seems that the Domain of Darkness would be dominant over Israel, and this was contrary to their expectation of the prophecies regarding the promised Kingdom of God.

The Promised Kingdom of God

From the beginning, Israel believed God was not just King of Israel, but the King of the Earth.

Yahweh will reign as king forever and ever.³

I am Yahweh, your holy one,

the creator of Israel, your king.⁴

³ Exodus 15:18

When Hezekiah prayed before the face of Yahweh and said, “O Yahweh, God of Israel who lives *above* the cherubim. You *are* God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the world; you have made the heavens and the earth.”⁵

*For Yahweh Most High is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.*⁶

There are actually dozens of verses where Yahweh is named King of both Israel and over all the other nations. Recall that God has delegated authority of those other nations to divine beings, the sons of God. Over the millennia, these entities have pledged their loyalty to the evil one, Satan, who therefore gained authority over them. And yet, Satan’s rules as an usurper, in violation of God’s will. Satan has established his Domain of Darkness in defiance and to war against God’s purposes for humanity to image God and to be like God on the earth.

The Hebrew notion of “kingdom” differs from our modern conception. Today, we think of a kingdom as a territory with borders. Biblically speaking, it means the “reign, dominion, or rule” of a sovereign.⁷ It means the active, dynamic rule and reign of a King, rather than a territory. While the Kings of Israel and later Judah were thought to be the representatives of God, Israel and Judah were not considered the Kingdom of God because God’s rule and reign were never perfectly executed there as it is in heaven. God’s will is done in heaven, perfectly. God rules and reigns in heaven all the time. The Kingdom of God is heaven and sometimes is called the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁴ Isaiah 43:15

⁵ II Kings 19:15

⁶ Psalm 47:2

⁷ Presence of the Future, p46

We see this definition in action when Solomon’s “kingdom was firmly established.”⁸ This means “his authority to reign was settled.”

*And these are the numbers of the chiefs of those prepared for the army who came to David at Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him according to the word of Yahweh.*⁹

The kingdom of Saul was turned over to David, which simply means the authority that had been given to Saul was given to David. Notice the Word is in action.

A persistent hope and promise in the Old Testament was that God himself would come to earth and establish the Kingdom of God in person, ruling the planet with perfect justice and peace, and destroying all the enemies of Israel. Generally, this event is called the Day of the Lord and is usually described prophetically with symbolic language of destruction, followed by a time of perfect peace. Thus, God will come to save his people from all enemies, spiritual and physical. This is the Jewish view of salvation as described in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

The hope of the Kingdom of God was an earthly one, not a spiritual one. The goal of the Hebrews was not to die and have a spiritual existence, but for God to physically come and renew the planet. Redemption included the earth. “The prophets do not think of the earth as merely the indifferent theater on which man carries out his normal task but as the expression of the divine glory.”¹⁰ Remember that God created humans to fill the earth with his likeness, with his image. God loves the earth and he

⁸ 1 Kings 2:12

⁹ 1 Chronicles 12:23

¹⁰ Ladd, 59

wants to use it to demonstrate his glory. God’s personal visitation will then restore the earth to its intended purpose.

*“For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth,
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,
and her people to be a gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;*

*they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,
and their descendants with them.
Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust shall be the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.¹¹*

Juxtapose this description with the mission statement of the Domain of Darkness, and you can see it is the polar opposite. The Kingdom of God is really good. There is depression, no sickness, no weeping, no distress, no infant death, no injustice, peace between predator and prey; there will be abundance, peace, and individual relationship with God. That's pretty good. And the prophets declare that God will bring the Kingdom. People cannot force it and cannot make it happen.

¹¹ Isaiah 65:17-25

Before this peace can be established, though, the Day of the Lord will be full of judgment for both Israel and the other nations. The Day of the Lord has happened in the past, as when God brought judgment to Israel by Babylon.

The sound of a tumult is on the mountains

as of a great multitude!

The sound of an uproar of kingdoms,

of nations gathering together!

The LORD of hosts is mustering

a host for battle.

They come from a distant land,

from the end of the heavens,

the LORD and the weapons of his indignation,

to destroy the whole land.

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;

as destruction from the Almighty it will come!¹²

Therefore I will make the heavens tremble,

and the earth will be shaken out of its place,

at the wrath of the LORD of hosts

in the day of his fierce anger.¹³

Notice the prophetic language. When Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, there wasn't literal earth shaking and the whole land wasn't destroyed. This is prophetic language,

¹² Isaiah 13:4-6

¹³ Isaiah 13:13

speaking about things in the spirit realm and through poetic imagery. If you were one of the Hebrews slaughtered by the Babylonians, it would have felt like the earth was shaking. If you were one of the Hebrews hauled off to slavery, it would have felt like the whole land was destroyed.

It's a fearful thing to enter into a covenant of Law with God, and then not uphold your end of the bargain. Remember when I said the day Israel rejected the covenant of grace for a covenant of law was a bad day? This prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled when Babylon destroyed Israel. The prophecy goes on to predict the fall of Babylon as well, at the hands of the Medes and the Persians, which happened a few decades later.¹⁴

Lots of Old Testament prophecies predicted God's wrath coming through the vehicle of the hated Babylonians, and then the ensuing fall of Babylon. Daniel saw three successive human empires subsequent to Babylon: the Medes-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and the Roman Empire, in the form of a human statue. Then he saw something new, speaking to King Nebuchadnezzar regarding the King's dream:

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found.

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth....

¹⁴ Verse 17.

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...”¹⁵

This and other prophecies saw the Kingdom of God descending from heaven as a stone to overthrow the human kingdoms. A stone. Or a rock. The same rock on which you should build your faith.

Many of the prophets predicted the transition between God setting up his kingdom as a time of fierce wrath, judgment, and destruction, followed by peace. The wrath and judgment was poured out on Israel through Babylon, but peace did not follow. After seventy years of exile, God gathered the Jews back into Palestine and a new kingdom was established. The Jews rebuilt the Temple, started the sacrificial system again, and waited, expecting God to show up at any moment.

But he didn't. And no prophetic voice arose to explain why. The Jews fervently followed the Law, even adding to it, making it stricter and more severe. Jews suffered terrible persecution for not violating the parts of Law, such as suffering torture rather than consuming pork. The Jews became something of a joke during this period in the Ancient World. While no new prophetic voice arose, the Jews engaged in much analysis of the Prophets, to see where their misunderstanding occurred, and to try and make sense of their world.

They began thinking of time dualistically: This Age (or This Present Age), and The Age to Come. It was also called the Age of Darkness and the Age of Light. In This Age,

¹⁵ Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45

the forces of darkness would rule the planet wickedly under the domain of darkness. Then God would come in, destroy his enemies and evil in an apocalyptic event and usher in the Age to Come, when the Kingdom of God, the peaceful rule and reign of God, would be established across the world. The Jews expected to be the people who would not suffer when God blasted into the earth to set up his Kingdom, with its headquarters in Jerusalem. Some Jewish writers in the centuries before Christ saw this earthly kingdom ruled by a human messiah. Others saw it as ruled by God himself.¹⁶

The blessings of the Kingdom of God would not

“be experienced in the present, for this age is abandoned to evil and suffering.

Such theology was forced upon devout Jews as the only possible explanation for the evil plight. Israel was obedient to the law and yet did not find deliverance. The solution to the problem of evil was thrown altogether into the future. The present is irredeemably evil, and the righteous can only submit patiently to suffering, sustained by the assurance that deliverance will surely come when the evil age is over and the new age of the Kingdom arrives...”¹⁷

The Domain of Darkness had conquered the world and “God’s people found themselves at the mercy of faithless angels. No deliverance could be expected before the messianic era.”¹⁸

This constituted the thinking of Jews regarding the Kingdom of God when Jesus was born. The Present Evil Age would last until God brought his Kingdom with fury and

¹⁶ Ladd, 91.

¹⁷ Ladd 95-96

¹⁸ Ladd, 97

wrath. This sets the stage for John the Baptist declaring, “The Kingdom of God is near!” and the ensuing apocalyptic fury over Jesus’s bold statements: *the Kingdom of God is here*.

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

After four centuries of no prophetic voice and the Jews wondering when the Kingdom of God would end This Age and establish the Age to Come, John the Baptist burst on the scene with the announcement they longed to hear

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”¹⁹

It sent shock waves through Israel.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”²⁰

John’s declaration of the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire followed with an interpretation using prophetic symbolism declaring the separation of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked. At last, the Jews thought. *This present age was about to end!*

John’s preaching was firmly rooted in the Old Covenant: it was based on works. To be saved, you had to confess your sins and do the work of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The act of baptism declared this to the world. His audience waited breathlessly for the time of the Present Age to be fulfilled and the judgment of God to fall and usher in the Age to Come.

¹⁹ Matthew 3:2.

²⁰ Matthew 3:11-12

It actually made sense. The current global empire based in Rome was predicted in Daniel to be the empire that the Kingdom of God would descend on and destroy.

And then Jesus arrived to one of John’s baptismal services. He gets baptized and an inter-dimensional portal opened between heaven and earth, and the Holy Spirit descended on him, followed by a voice.

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”²¹

The atmosphere must have been electric. Jesus departed for a time of testing in the wilderness (which we covered in the Identity chapter), and when he returned, he declared the time was fulfilled. The Kingdom of God was here.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”²²

Gospel means good news. It’s an odd message to declare the terrible time of destruction, wrath, and judgment is good news, but the Jews were looking forward to seeing their oppressors destroyed by God.

Except that wasn’t what Jesus meant. His message to “Repent” didn’t add, “for the repentance of sins.” It was a call for the Jews to change their mind about the nature of the Kingdom of God and God’s heart. God really did not want to come and obliterate the Romans. He wanted to save them.

²¹ Matthew 3:16-17

²² Mark 1:15

Jesus announced the Kingdom of God had come, and then immediately he began casting out demons and healing the sick.

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.”

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.²³

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.²⁴

²³ Mark 1:21-28

²⁴ Mark 1:21-39

Healing the sick and driving out demons from the oppressed wasn't just an add-on to the Gospel of the Kingdom. It *is* the Gospel of the Kingdom: it demonstrated the active rule and reign of God! It declared the truth of Jesus' declaration, that the Kingdom of God was present and overthrowing the works of the enemy. Jesus did this everywhere he went.

Under the Old Covenant, the impure would infect the pure, the unclean soil the clean, the sinners would dirty the righteous. This is why so many laws about separating Jews from the non-Jew and cleansing rituals were given for when someone touched something unclean. A leper touches you and you were unclean.

Not so with the coming of the Kingdom of God:

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."

And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

In the Kingdom, the clean touch the unclean, and the unclean is purified.

The Kingdom is active. It's dynamic. It has power. The salt hits the meat, and the salt changes the meat. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness flees. In addition, this passage reveals the heart of God towards the sick: he wants to heal to sick and oppressed. He wants to fix what is broken. The rule and reign of God manifested in Jesus, and everywhere he went, he could not help but to overturn the rule and reign of the enemy.

Jesus' Mission Statement

Jesus saw This Present Age as the other Jews saw it: completely dominated by the Domain of Darkness, the spiritual powers and forces of darkness. But the earth wasn't irredeemable. The human race was worth saving.

At the start of his ministry, Jesus announced his mission. He entered a synagogue (a place where the Jews went to hear scripture read and taught about). He took a scroll from Isaiah, and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The audience was aghast and shocked!

Let's look at the six points of Jesus' mission statement:

1. Involves the Holy Spirit
2. Good News to the poor
3. Liberty to the captives

4. Rescuing the oppressed
5. Healing of the sick
6. Proclaim year of the Lord’s favor (Year of Jubilee: inheritance is redeemed, debts cancelled, and slaves freed).²⁵

Do you see how this is exactly the opposite the mission of the Domain of Darkness as illustrated in Psalm 82? God’s heart for the earth is exactly the opposite of how the earth is being influenced by spiritual forces of wickedness.

1. Involves wicked spirits
2. They rule unjustly
3. They give favor to the wicked
4. Refuse justice to the weak and fatherless
5. Refuse rights of the sick and poor
6. Don’t rescue the weak and needy

Jesus came to overturn the works of the domain of darkness, the enemy forces under sway of Satan by introducing the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Many Christians will say the “gospel” is that Jesus died for our sins. Yes, that’s a tiny portion of it, but really, that’s not new good news. The Old Covenant made provision for your sins through animal sacrifice. If all Jesus did was to die for your sins, then he didn’t die to save you, he died to save a bunch of animals from being sacrificed. In fact, the gospel of Jesus Christ is much more and much better than “Jesus died for

²⁵ Leviticus 25:10-40

your sins.” In fact, Jesus came pronouncing the Gospel years before he was crucified. Let’s look at what he was talking about.

Everywhere Jesus went, he preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and then immediately he overthrew some of the works of the enemy by casting out demons and healing the sick. Jesus declared the God’s Kingdom had come and his miracles and works were intended to *prove* it. Jesus’ teachings were to instruct on how to enter the Kingdom. His parables illustrated to His disciples the truth about the Kingdom of God. And when he taught His followers to pray, at the heart of their petition were the words, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

All of this flew exactly counter to the Jewish expectation that the coming of the Kingdom of God would see the immediate overthrow of the spiritual forces of evil and the immediate establishment of God’s home, rule, and reign on earth. But Jesus announced that the Kingdom was here.

The Kingdom is Here

Jesus announced that the Kingdom was at hand, that it was in the very midst of His followers and that this was very Good News. He declared that He was where Heaven intersected on Earth, that He embodied Eden, the Temple and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus declared the Kingdom was a present spiritual reality that manifest in his supernatural ministry, and that it was a reality you could enter right now, and that it was a gift.

“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”²⁶

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”²⁷

“The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.”²⁸

This last statement indicated that the Kingdom is a dynamic force, something new, and was replacing the Old Covenant. The Law and Prophets were the scriptures that surrounded and verified the Covenant of the Law. But now something new had come: the Kingdom of God. Jesus' followers were waiting breathlessly for the fulfillment of the Prophetic hope in their scriptures.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”²⁹

The Kingdom of God was in the midst of them because it was manifesting in Jesus, and Jesus was in the midst of them. He's not saying the Kingdom of God is in the midst of the Pharisees or in humans apart from faith in Jesus. The rule and reign of God was certainly not manifesting in their lives.

²⁶ Matthew 12:28

²⁷ Luke 12:32

²⁸ Luke 16:16

²⁹ Luke 17:20-21

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”³⁰

The Pharisees were a sect of Jews who studied and practiced a severe form of the Law, adding copious rules to try and force adherence and obedience. Jesus is telling them to change their minds about the Kingdom of God. It’s not taking the form or the shape that they expected. The Kingdom is coming in a way they didn’t anticipate, and they needed to think like a child, not like an educated Pharisees.

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”³¹

This statement, made to a Pharisee, makes no sense to his present frame of reference. Jesus is trying to remake his view of the Kingdom and of reality.

The New Testament writer Paul agrees with Jesus on the nature of the Kingdom being a present spiritual reality.

“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”³²

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”³³

“I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”³⁴

³⁰ Mark 10:15

³¹ John 3:3

³² Romans 14:17

³³ Colossians 1:13

Some parables indicate that the Kingdom was already at work in the world in Jesus' time.

He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened."³⁵

This last parable is brilliant because it's specifically targeting the existing mindset of the Jews, trying to help them think differently about the Kingdom of God. In the Law of Moses, leaven (yeast) is equated to sin. But here, Jesus is equating it to the Kingdom of God. It was jarring for his Jewish audience to think about. The Kingdom of God invaded the earth, starting small, and will expand and grow, so that eventually the whole earth is filled with the rule and reign of God. This is not how the Jews expected the Kingdom to come.

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."³⁶

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:50.

³⁵ Luke 13:18-21

³⁶ Mark 4:30-32

Here again, Jesus is giving an example of how the Kingdom starts small and will grow with time and by its very nature. Just like the stone in Daniel that struck the image and grew to a great mountain that filled the earth.³⁷

The Kingdom is Not Yet

When Jews of Jesus day heard the phrase “Kingdom of God,” they assumed Jesus meant that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was going to come and overthrow the Romans and establish *Heaven on Earth*, with Jesus as King over Israel and ushering in the Age to Come, a new age of peace, thus ending “This Age.” Jesus, however, announced the Kingdom had come. But he also said the Kingdom was coming in the future, or better yet, *from the future*.

*As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.*³⁸

Consider these passages which contrast “The Age to Come”, when God’s rule and reign would manifest heaven on earth, and “This Age”, under the oppressive spiritual forces of the Domain of Darkness.

*“And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in This Age or in The Age to Come.”*³⁹

³⁷ Daniel 2:25

³⁸ Luke 19:11

³⁹ Emphasis added. Matthew 12:32

Jesus said, “Truly, I say unto you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and lands with persecutions and in The Age to Come eternal life.”⁴⁰

[Upon being asked about marriage after the resurrection of the dead at the end of This Age, Jesus said], *“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age [to come] and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given marriage, for they cannot die anymore because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the Resurrection.”⁴¹*

Paul agrees that the domain of darkness is constituted by the spiritual rulers of this age, and ultimately they (not Rome or the Jews) were responsible for crucifying Jesus.

None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.⁴²

In each of these passages, we see that *The Age to Come* is associated with receiving eternal life, salvation, the resurrection into immortal beings, and when Jesus

⁴⁰ Mark 10:30, and parallel passage in Luke 18:30

⁴¹ (Emphasis added. Luke 20-34-36)

⁴² 1 Corinthians 2:8

returns to fully usher in the Kingdom of God at some future point. There are many other passages that explain this view. Here are a few:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’⁴³

“I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven...”⁴⁴

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”⁴⁵

Peter agrees:

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

The Apostle Paul agrees:

The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.⁴⁷

⁴³ Matthew 25:31-34

⁴⁴ Matthew 8:11

⁴⁵ John 18:36

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 1:11

⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 4:8

And the Revelation of Jesus Christ, written by John, also agrees:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”⁴⁸

The Kingdom brings Repentance

Under the Law of Moses, repentance was a thing you had to do. This is what John the Baptist preached. But with the Kingdom, “repentance” becomes a noun: it’s a thing you receive.

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”⁴⁹

And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”⁵⁰

God grants repentance.

The Kingdom of God brings Power

When the Kingdom comes, the power of God to change things comes. The rule and reign of God is demonstrated by dynamic works and might.

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Revelations 11:15

⁴⁹ Acts 5: 29-31

⁵⁰ Acts 11:18b

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 4:20

And they were all amazed and said to one another, What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!⁵²

And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.⁵³

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.⁵⁴

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.⁵⁵

To whom I am sending you, to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.⁵⁶

The Now and the Not Yet

The Jews' ideas about the Kingdom of God coming with fire and judgment to overthrow the current age were mistaken. Many of them could not shake the view that the rule and rein of God would come like lightning, with clouds of terror. In their hearts, they wanted the wicked to suffer and die, not to be saved and changed. They did not

⁵² Luke 4:36

⁵³ Luke 6:19

⁵⁴ Luke 24:49

⁵⁵ Acts 1:8

⁵⁶ Acts 26:17b-18

understand the nature of the Kingdom was based in love and grace, and could be entered in by faith.

Jesus came declaring the Kingdom of God was present and in the future. In a sense, the Kingdom of God is in the future, where the rule and reign of God is perfectly executed across the earth, and all the prophetic hope in the Old Testament about peace on earth and everlasting life would manifest. But the Kingdom of God is also in the present, breaking in from the future. Jesus proved it by casting out demons, healing the sick, forgiving sins, and pursuing justice. He overturned the works of the enemy wherever he went. He did so in Israel and outside of Israel, to demonstrate he had authority and power over the other nations as well. And then Jesus commissioned his followers to do the same: preach the good news of the Kingdom, which includes demonstrating the good news of the Kingdom by overturning the works of the enemy. That the Kingdom is not fully here yet is obvious.

*We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*⁵⁷

John declared this is in spite of the Kingdom having broken through and spreading across the Roman Empire. This remains the case today. On the Cross, Jesus put everything in subjection to him, but not everything is in subjection to him yet. The kingdom is Now and Not Yet.

⁵⁷ 1 John 5:19

*Now in putting everything in subjection to him [Jesus], he [God] left nothing outside his [Jesus] control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.*⁵⁸

When Jesus returns again, the Kingdom of Darkness will be ended permanently. Today, we live in the tension of the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of God (Light) battling. The Kingdom of God is growing, expanding slowly. It's like a grain of mustard seed growing into a big plant. It's like a speck of yeast leavening the whole lump of dough. It's like a rock, growing into a mountain to fill the earth.

This is the underlying nature of the cosmic battle around us. When our prayers for healing get answered, the Kingdom has broken through. When they aren't, the Domain of Darkness temporarily thwarted it.

Our mission as Christ followers is to seek the Kingdom of God- the rule and reign of God-, because "The Kingdom of God is near" is really Good News. No longer do we have to just take the assaults from the enemy. We have real power to overturn the enemy's works and to spread the Kingdom

⁵⁸ Hebrews 2:8