

The Presence of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the New Testament portrays the kingdom of God as a present reality that is inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus and continues to advance in and through the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

The kingdom of God can be defined as the 'reign of God.' This reign of God is the promise of the Old Testament where God draws his rulership close and manifests it in the Son of David. This reign is promised to triumph over the whole world, defeat evil and be an immanent administration of eternal sovereign rule that God has always had. In this respect the 'kingdom of God' is an eschatological event--a climax of the end time promises of God where God draws near. The Old Testament anticipates an "age to come" that resolves the problems of sin, evil and rebellion within creation--it is this 'age to come' which dawns and is inaugurated in the concept of the kingdom of God.

Our purpose is to show the presence of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God comes in Jesus' ministry in the Gospels. After the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom does not retreat or disappear but advances (1) as Christ ascends to a reign over all creation in fulfillment of promise made to David and (2) as the gospel is preached to the nations.

1. The Kingdom of God in the Gospels.

a. The Presence of the Kingdom.

i. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

It is no secret to those who have studied the gospels that the message of Jesus' ministry begins with a bold call to repentance and the startling, if not somewhat archaic to Western ears, pronouncement that "the kingdom of God is at hand."¹

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach [κηρύσσειν], saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Mark 1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming [κηρύσσω] the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

First, we note the importance of the Greek "ἤγγικεν." It denotes arrival and approaching. For example, it is used when Jesus approaches a city (Mk. 11:1; Lk. 7:12) or when people approach Jesus (Matt. 26: 46; Lk. 15:1). As such, there is nothing unique or special about the word itself except that it is used to describe the approach or coming of "ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ."

¹ We will not explore the difference between Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" and Mark and Luke's "kingdom of God." It will suffice for our purposes to say they denote the same reality, without exploring the reason for the differentiation.

Second, we note the contexts of both passages. In both contexts we are to understand that there is a dawning of eschatological activity as a culmination and fulfillment of the plan of God.

In Matthew, verse 17 is set up by the quotation of Isaiah 9:1-2 as a fulfillment of Scripture. Isaiah 9 entails the promise of the Messiah and the establishment of his messianic reign and government. It encompasses a spiritual light dawning in the land, the release of burdens and oppressions, the coming Son who is 'Mighty God,' and the establishment of the throne of David, the dawning of justice and righteousness. Matthew's use of Isaiah establishes the content of the "kingdom of God/heaven". The presence, then, of Jesus in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali is the fulfillment of prophecy as the kingdom of God approaches near to Israel's people in the presence of their Messiah. As it were, the King/Messiah embodies the approaching of the kingdom.

In Mark, there is a connection between the "τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ," fulfillment and the kingdom of God. In Mark, we have the preparation of John the Baptist for "the way of the Lord." As in Matthew, John the Baptist is "the voice of the one crying in the wilderness." The quotation of Isaiah 40:3 connects John's ministry to the preparation of the dawning of the Lord. The background of this text indicates a fulfillment of the dawning of the reign of God as YHWH returns to his people.

What we might notice in the opening of the gospels is the coalescence of several Isaianic themes coming to fulfillment in the work of Jesus: (a) the dawning of the glory of the Lord (Isa. 40:5); (b) the 'return from exile' as eschatological event; (c) the dawning of the "euangellion" and the "reign of God" (Isa. 40:9,10; 52:7; 61:1). The kingdom of God is the dawn of God's reign into history in the person of the Messiah. It is fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy but also the inbreaking of eschatology. Thus, while in continuity with the plan and purpose of God in redemption, it signifies the irruption of God's power and activity. God takes action to establish His sovereignty and reign. In this respect it might rightly be denoted as "apocalyptic." This pattern of God's inbreaking activity is central to OT redemptive history but in Jesus has now come with an intensity previously unwitnessed as it is a "fulfillment"--or as Paul puts it "in the fullness of time" (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, Gal. 4:4).

ii. The presence of the Spirit and the Kingdom of God.

For reasons we cannot explore in entirety here, the notion of redemptive history and inbreaking eschatology is foreign to most Western ears. In the church, eschatology is typically relegated to future events, yet for the first Christians it was in Jesus that they found, to borrow George Ladd's phraseology, "*The Presence of the Future.*" This presence of the future is

noticeable when we consider the great lengths the Pharisees went to to deny the implications of the power which they witnessed in Jesus' miracles.

In Matthew 12:22-32, the Pharisees respond to the amazement of people who had been questioning if Jesus was actually the Messiah, e.g. 'the Son of David.' This would of course have implications for the plan of God and its fulfillment. What is not debated is the presence of miracles and supernatural activity. While a modern rationalization would entail denial of activity, the Pharisees are forced to acknowledge the presence of such activity and thus find it necessary to explain away the miraculous as demonic activity.

Matthew 12:28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Jesus outrightly rejects that his power could come from the Devil because the Devil's power could not operate against itself. It would be a kingdom that would collapse in on itself. However, the implication is clear: if it is the Spirit of God, then God's kingdom has dawned. While this is grammatically a conditional statement, we are meant to understand from the way Jesus condemns the Pharisees for blaspheming the Holy Spirit, it is indeed by the Spirit of God which Jesus conducts his miracles.

The statements is thus clear: we are to understand from Scripture that the kingdom of God "has come" (ἐφθασεν). The 'kingdom of God' is not merely a future reality but rather something that has dawned or 'come' already in the activity of Jesus. The kingdom is no longer a distant reality or an expectation but something that has arrived on the scene in the activity and ministry of Jesus.

This connection between the Kingdom and the miracles of Jesus becomes clear when we consider Jesus' somewhat enigmatic response to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:2-6.

Matthew 11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

(1) Since John began his ministry announcing the dawning of the kingdom of God that is near and anticipated the coming of the Lord, his question is simply: 'are you the fulfillment?'

(2) Jesus is response is not merely a "yes" but to point John to the eschatological activities that were happening through his work. The

response of Jesus is a clear yes for one seeped in an Old Testament worldview. Jesus alludes to passages such as Isaiah 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:7, 18 and 61:1. Thus, what we have is Jesus showing John the Baptist *via* his own miracles that the promised eschatology of the Old Testament has come and that he is indeed the expected one. As D.A. Carson writes, "Thus Jesus was allusively responding to the Baptist's question: the blessings promised for the end time have broken out and prove it is here."²

Thus, what we see in the activity of Jesus is that the presence of the kingdom is here. It has arrived within human history.

b. The Parables of the Kingdom.

In Matthew 13, there are four parables of the kingdom that indicate that Jesus believes that the kingdom has begun but it will spread and expand slowly in the midst of the present evil age until it's final consummation at the end of the age.

First, we have the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:24-30 and its explanation in 13:36-43. Jesus sees himself (the Son of Man) as one who is sowing the message of the kingdom. However, at the same time, the devil is sowing weeds. The harvest will come at the end of the age. The distinction here between Jesus' message and the typical Jewish expectation of the kingdom is that the kingdom begins but rather than immediately bringing the end of the age, it expands--the devil is able to sow his seeds and then the end of the age will come.

This emphasis is clear when the sower of the good seed says:

"27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

The kingdom is allowed to advance in the midst of the present evil age until the time of the harvest. The emphasis of the parable of the weeds is that the kingdom of God has come but not in the expected manner. Those in the kingdom of God represent the good seed, i.e. the sons of the kingdom (v.38). They have been sown by the Son of Man, i.e. Christ (v. 37). But contrary to the popular kingdom expectations at the time evil has not been eradicated from the world to which the kingdom has come. In fact the good seed and the bad seed are presently living in the world together. The emphasis is the kingdom is presently working and active in the world but it awaits a future

² D.A. Carson *Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), 262.

fulfillment where those who belong in the kingdom will be separated from those who do not belong in the kingdom because they belong to the devil.

The nature of the advancing kingdom becomes clear with the two parables told between the parable of the tares and its interpretation. In Matthew 13:31-32 Jesus compares the kingdom of a mustard seed.

Matthew 13:31 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

Here again the kingdom is starting out slowly and spreading until it reaches full size of being larger than all other plants/kingdoms. The implication is clearly rather than coming all at once the kingdom begins in a manner that is small and relatively unnoticeable until it expands to its full scope.

This expanse of the kingdom is immediately explained when Jesus compares the kingdom to leaven in the way that it works:

Matthew 13:33 He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

Finally, the kingdom of God is illustrated as a dragnet:

Matthew 13:47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. 48 When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. 49 So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Rather than the kingdom being enacted at the final judgment--the kingdom is a net going through the sea in advance of the sorting which is the final judgment. It is clear that the judgment is a culmination of the work of the kingdom but it is equally clear that kingdom activity begins in advance of the final judgement.

In these parables we see the presence of the kingdom in the midst of evil and the culmination of the kingdom in the eradication of evil at the judgment.

c. The Future of the Kingdom.

To balance out our examination of the portrait of the Kingdom in the Gospels, Jesus portrays the kingdom as something that is still future. Although Jesus' ministry brings the kingdom, the presence of the kingdom is not fully realized. In other words, while 'the age to come' begins in the ministry of Jesus, 'this present evil age' does not find its conclusion until sometime in the future.

While we cannot examine the breadth and scope of the passages that represent the future aspect of the kingdom, Jesus can and does still speak of the future reality of the kingdom.

Jesus envisions the full reception of the kingdom at the judgment:

Matthew 25:34 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.

In Matthew 8:11-12, the kingdom is compared to a feast table. At the same time the Gentiles are enjoying the feast of the kingdom, Israelites are cast out into 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

d. The Inauguration of the Kingdom.

Our overview of the kingdom leads us to agree with the conclusion of George Ladd:

God's Kingdom, his reign, will come at the end of the age in a mighty irruption into history inaugurating the perfect order to come of the age to come. But God's Kingdom, his reign, has already come into history in the person and mission of Jesus. The presence of God's Kingdom means the dynamic presence of his reign. It means that God is no longer waiting for men to submit to his reign but has taken the initiative and has invaded history in a new and unexpected way. . . God's reign which will come at the end of the age to accomplish God's redemptive purpose in the world has come into the midst of human history in the person and mission of Jesus.³

While our survey of the kingdom in the Gospels has been cursory and introductory, it fits perfectly into the structure that has been described as "already" and "not yet."

First, Jesus clearly believes that His kingdom has come. Second, Jesus clearly believes that the kingdom will advance slowly rather than being immediately consummated or postponed until a future date. Third, Jesus clearly believes that the future will bring the consummation of the kingdom. Such scheme is not a "realized eschatology" or a "postponed eschatology" but an "inaugurated eschatology."

The question naturally arises: what happens to the kingdom after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus? There are essentially three options: (1) it has arrived in its entirety; (2) it is postponed; or (3) it is inaugurated and continues to advance until it is consummated. We will suggest that the evidence of the New

³ George E. Ladd *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974) 144.

Testament, particularly Acts and Hebrews, forces us to arrive at option 3 as the only viable interpretation.

2. The Kingdom of God in Acts.

a. Acts & The Kingdom

With the opening of Acts 1 and 2, the issue of the kingdom again arises to the attention of the disciples:

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

To this Jesus responds:

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 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."

In this passage, Jesus rejects that they can know the date and time of the coming of the kingdom. However, using the contrastive "ἀλλὰ" he indicates that they can recognize the presence of the kingdom by the reception of the Holy Spirit. They ask for the time but Jesus gives them the sign. The sign is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The importance of this response is further highlighted by the context because Jesus had been teaching on the kingdom, it was their expectation that perhaps it would come upon their re-gathering with him. Jesus has been expounding the kingdom and has already told them they would receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

That this reception of the Holy Spirit is itself an eschatological event is indicated (1) by the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy; (2) the connection to the ascension of Christ which is Jesus' messianic enthronement; and (3) the promise of gospel proclamation to the ends of the earth. The kingdom is not delayed but inaugurated by Christ's installment on the throne of God at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

(1) It is well recognized that the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost is explained by Peter quoting Joel 2. Peter's explanation is 'what you see in this [speaking in tongues with the Holy Spirit] is that [Joel 2]. It is only a preconceived hermeneutical grid causes a reader to deny that Peter's use of Joel is correct.

The hope of the Old Testament is being realized. It is now 'the last days.' The descent of the Spirit imparted upon God's people, (a New Covenant promise) indicates that the promise of 'the last days' have begun. The New Testament sees presence of the Spirit on God's people as an event of eschatological significance. While the Holy Spirit is active in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets, the Spirit is uniquely promised in the equipping of the Messiah and the people of God in their eschatological restoration.⁴

- (2) In Acts 2, Peter speech focusses on the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. He testifies that Christ did not remain dead but was raised up by God. Our focus is on the exaltation of Christ into heaven itself:

Acts 2:33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, " 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.' 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

For Peter, Jesus is appointed Lord and Christ as he is exalted into heaven. The gift of the Spirit is a declaration that Christ has been exalted. It comes as fulfillment to Psalm 110. It is Messianic prophecy fulfilled: David now has a 'son' who is declared Lord over all things. This is the fulfillment of what God has 'sworn to him[David],' namely one of 'his [David's] descendants on his throne' (2:30).

Jesus reigns at God's right hand on the throne promised to David's descendants. The throne of David was not merely ruling in Israel but it was ruling in the throne of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 28:5 And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.

1 Chronicles 29:23 Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him.

What we might say, is that what is typified in the Old Testament shadow when a Davidic Son is on the throne in Jerusalem is fulfilled in the final reality when the Son of David reigns in the heavenly Jerusalem in the throne of the Lord at the Father's right hand. Indeed, in the Psalms, the throne of David is not just over Israel but over all creation and nations (Ps. 2, 72:8-11; 89:27; 110).

Craig Blaising puts it this way: "Even the fact that Christ's present seating *in heaven* is at the right hand of God is in accord with the Davidic pattern of

⁴ For further explication and defense see especially Geerhardus Vos, "Paul's Eschatological Concept of the Spirit" *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 91-125.

kingship. Throughout the Psalms, David is spoken of as the one who is God's right hand [Ps. 16:11; 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 63:8; 80:15, 17; 108:6; 110:1; 138:7, 139:10]... Reception into heaven at the right hand of God is a *Davidic* blessing. And this is what the New Testament declares to have been granted to Jesus, Son of David."⁵ The throne Jesus receives at exaltation is the throne of the kingdom of God in fulfillment to the Davidic promises of the Old Testament. It is an inauguration of the kingdom.

- (3) Finally, Joel promises that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' This includes both Jew and Gentile. Part of the promise of eschatology is that the disciples will be witness to the ends of the earth. The Isaianic background includes Isa 42:6; 43:10,12; 44:8; 49:6; 45:22; 52:10; 60:3. Missions so that everyone who believes will be saved, including Gentiles, comes from the authoritative commissioning of the triumphant Lord. Missions to the ends of the earth is part and parcel of the rich fabric of the Old Testament eschatological expectation. Missions is the kingdom like a mustard seed expanding.

b. Proclamation & Gentile Inclusion in the Kingdom

While this theme could be explored in depth, we note that proclamation of the kingdom turns to the Gentiles not in a failure of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel but because the nature of the realized kingdom is rejected by Israel. It is not that Israel rejects thereby the kingdom is not restored but rather the kingdom's restoration is inaugurated *and that conception of fulfillment* is rejected as they deny that God has acted in Jesus and fail to repent unto salvation.

- (1) The disciples preach the kingdom as an act of present proclamation. Philip preaches 'the gospel about the kingdom':

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God [εὐαγγελιζομένω περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ] and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Philip is literally 'evangelizing' about the kingdom of God. He proclaims it as good news to be received and believed. Paul, likewise, attempts to persuade the Jews to believe it and accept the Way. When the kingdom is given as testimony and Jews reject, Paul turns to the Gentiles.

Acts 28:23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God [διαμαρτυρόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ] and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

⁵ Craig Blasing and Darrell Bock *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Bridgepoint Books, 1993) 184, emphasis original.

Acts 28:28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” 30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God [κηρύσσω τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ] and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Witnessing and proclaiming salvation is ‘preaching the kingdom of God.’ While it is clear that this salvation/kingdom is rejected by Jews, the nature of the message does not change but the object of the proclamation shifts exclusively to Gentiles. Paul has been testifying concerning the kingdom and shifts to pronounce or proclaim it to the Gentile along with further teaching about Jesus.

The proclamation and ‘evangelizing’ of the kingdom that began with John the Baptist continues through the disciples and the early church. Rather than merely teaching about the kingdom they testify to it, evangelize it, and herald it. It is difficult to see such present and powerful ‘heralding’ of a kingdom that has retreated for another day.

- (2) The disciples see David’s throne restored. When the disciples wrestle in Acts 15 with the position of the Gentiles in the church, they support the full inclusion of the Gentiles by appealing to Amos 9:11,12.

Acts 15:15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 16“ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.’

The argument is simple: the Old Testament promises the tent of David will be rebuilt. Upon that rebuilding the result will be that Gentiles will call upon the Lord. James argues from the reality of the restoration of the ‘tent of David’ to find sufficient explanation for what they are witnessing, the conversion of Gentiles.

The reign of Christ is not postponed but he picks up the Davidic promises and in ascending into heaven fulfills promises made to David. The spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and specifically to the Gentiles, is proof that the kingdom is inaugurated and continues to advance through Acts.

c. A future restoration in Acts

Although the reception of the Holy Spirit is an eschatological event signaling further the advance of the kingdom, it is clear that the disciples recognize that the full realization of the kingdom will still entail a destiny for Israel.

Acts 3:19 Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for

restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

So Christ has been appointed over his people and for his people--but he will remain in heaven until he comes from the presence of the Lord for 'the times of refreshing' and the 'restoring of all things.' The kingdom as a future hope is confirmed as the disciples exhort Christians that the path into the kingdom is one that comes through faith and tribulation.

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

3. The Kingdom of God in Hebrews.

It is impossible to understand the book of Hebrews without an understanding of the nature of New Testament eschatology. New Testament eschatology is a larger set of which the nature of the 'kingdom of God' is just a subset. For Hebrews 1:1, the 'last days' of the Old Testament have begun and have found their fulfillment in Christ. It is, again, an inaugurated eschatology whereby the Old Testament promises find their fulfillment and realization in Christ while full consummation awaits.

a. The presence of the kingdom in the ascension.

Hebrews 2:5-9 explain the inauguration of the reign of Christ while the full consummation awaits.

Hebrews 2:5 Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? 7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

The '*world to come*'⁶ is not subjected to angels. This brings into purview the eschatological orientation prominent in Hebrews. The historical progress of time is divided into 'this age/world' and the 'age/world to come'. God and the Son have created these ages (Hebrews 1:2- *αἰῶνας*). This also brings into view what

⁶It is noteworthy world is *oikoumenē* not *kosmos*. EDNT (*Evangelical Dictionary of the New Testament*) notes that this common in LXX Psalms "In all instances it refers to the earth as a whole, its inhabitants and its "kingdoms" which God has created, leads, punishes and will ultimately judge..." EDNT 2.503. It is quite probably that Hebrews is reading Pss. 93:1 [LXX 92] and 95:10 [LXX 96] eschatologically due to their close association of 'reigning' and '*oikoumenē*' (cf. Lane, *Hebrews* [Waco, Tx: Word, 1991] i.45-6). If we asked him to interpret these passages He might say—"it is not the present world that cannot be shaken because we know in Christ that this world is passing away and will give rise to the eschatological new creation. We know that it is this what Christ will reign over." The present reign of Christ is the dawn of the *oikoumenēn tēn mellousan* in and over the present evil age. [This is why we do not see all things under Christ's feet because *the oikoumenēn tēn mellousan* has not been consummately realized.]

our author has said about the 'last days'. This is the eschatological climax of the end. It is this future inheritance of new creation that has not been given to angels. But like the creation under the first age—it is put into subjection of man/adam. This time it is under the authority of the eschatos Adam. Thus, the final order of new creation is not ruled by angelic figures (e.g. *contra* Qumran).

Psalm 8 is used because describes the position of man/adam over creation. "What is adam that remember him/the son of adam that you are mindful of him." It is thus a reflection upon Genesis 1:26-28 for the purpose of doxology (cf. Ps. 8:1,9 "Oh LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth")

To give humanity dominion over all things is to put the 'all things' in subjection under the authority of humanity. Thus, mankind is made a little lower than *elohim*. Mankind is given glory and honor—a position of "exaltation" to rule over creation. Man's glory and honor is to rule over creation under YHWH as anointed vice-regent. Adam is Son/King.

It also describes the placement of Israel's king over creation and the restored manhood, i.e. Second Adam.⁷ It is to the King of Israel that rulership and 'Sonship' is given as this king is placed on the throne. Interestingly, is Psalm 8:2 —"*From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength Because of Your adversaries, To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.*" If Psalm 8 is *only* about the original Adam/man then the reference to God establishing strength to cause enemies to cease makes little contextual sense. But if it is about the king of Israel—the King's very role (as established by YHWH in strength) is to bring the rebelling creation/nations into line. The King of Israel was YHWH's representative to subdue YHWH's enemies. Thus, Israel's king was to have all things placed under his feet. For example—2 Samuel 7:11 (& context); 2 Samuel 22

2 Samuel 7:11 even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. 9 The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you.

2 Samuel 22:48 The God who executes vengeance for me, And brings down peoples under me [The KING], 49 Who also brings me out from my enemies; You even lift me above those who rise up against me; You rescue me from the violent man.

Psalm 8 is thus to be read as kingly particularly in conjunction with Psalm 2 and 110. It is the triumph of the Davidic king in the manner in which was always promised that the Davidic king would triumph over his enemies. Noteworthy is the fact that Hebrews quotes Pss 2, 8 and 110 in its first two chapters.

b. The Use of Psalm 2, 8 and 110.

⁷ See Doug Green's "Psalm 8: What is Israel's King that You Remember Him" www.wts.edu. See also F.F. Bruce's *Hebrews*, p.72 n.24.

Psalm 2, 8 and 110 are foundational for the theology of Hebrews.

In their use and application in Hebrews, what we have is not a postponement of the kingdom but an inauguration. Jesus is the Son of David who is installed in Mt. Zion in fulfillment of Psalm 2. He is the true king/human in fulfillment of Psalm 8. He has all things under his feet although his enemies seem to need subjugation yet. He sits at the right hand of the Father in fulfillment of Psalm 110. In short, a bifurcation that distinguishes an enthronement of Jesus the Messiah to God's right hand as distinct and separate from an earthly enthronement as the *only* fulfillment of 'Davidic kingship/Messiahship' is nothing but the product of obscurant 20th-century eschatological speculation not Biblical exegesis.⁸ It is to our detriment that we so divide Biblical kingdom theology reading such ahistorical categories back into the first-century context.

The kingdom is carried forward as the Jesus is crowned with glory and honor (cf. also Acts 2 for the use of the Psalm 2 and 110). In this crowing all things are under his feet (universal sovereignty) although we do not yet see such sovereignty.

This universal sovereignty is precisely the type of rule promised to David's descendant (Psalm 72 and 89). Christ's exercise of this reign is not a retreat of the kingdom or a postponement of the kingdom of God rather his ascension into heaven is an advancement of the promised kingdom of God. In the ascension the Son of David is raised up and crowned with universal sovereignty over all creation. Indeed, Psalm 110:2 promises that the king will rule from Zion in the midst of the enemies--this is analogous to the manner in which we see the kingdom spreading in Matthew 13.

It has always been the intention of the Lord that the Son of David would reign not merely from the earthly Jerusalem/Zion, but from the heavenly Zion. The earthly, for Hebrews, is paradigmatic of the ultimate heavenly reality. Thus, Christ's present reign from heaven should be understood as the inauguration of the reign of God in the last days, which in the New Testament is nothing other than the kingdom of God.

c. The presence of the kingdom in the assembly of the saints.

As the Davidic kingship of Christ is established, Hebrews sees the believer here on earth as one who by faith approaches the heavenly Jerusalem and Zion while they are inheriting the kingdom.

⁸ One of the ways this bifurcation is justified and propounded is by introducing the distinction between spiritual and physical kingdoms. One is often told the 'physical' is what was promised in the OT and in the kingdom offer of the Gospels. But what is accomplished in the interim is the 'spiritual.' This distinction is largely imposed upon the text and fails to recognize (a) the continuity between the Old Testament, the Gospels and 'the Church age' and (b) the typology between Old Testament 'shadows' and the realization of these 'realities' in the New Covenant.

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

'Firstborn' is a title here of rulership and inheritance. It is a Messianic title promised to the Davidic kingship, Psalm 89:27 "And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." To ascribe this title to Christ indicates his current Davidic/Messianic rule. The assembly of the king, currently dwells in heaven, but by faith the present believer approaches 'Mount Zion' and 'The heavenly Jerusalem.'

Heaven is the place from where Jesus reigns and from here he is ministering and giving his kingdom. Thus, the saint is grateful for 'receiving a kingdom.' A William Lane writes, "The present tense of the participle emphasizes that Christians are now only in the process of receiving this gift and that process will continue into the future."⁹ Hebrews' unshakable kingdom is the eschatological and everlasting kingdom in Daniel 7:26-27. It is the kingdom of the 'Son of Man'--the Messiah. It is a kingdom that will survive the shaking of the heavens and the earth--but it seems that this kingdom is a present possession of the believer.

The context of the quote from Haggai 2:6, 21 entails the triumph of God's kingdom over the kingdoms of the earth. The subject is similar here in Hebrews to the consummation of the reign in Psalm 8 and 110 when all the enemies come under the feet of the Messiah.

Some commentators have suggested that the writer of Hebrews with his reference to kingdom and its unshakability may be further alluding to the LXX of Psalm 95:10 [Eng. 96:10] and 92:1 [Eng. 93:1], where the Lord's reign established an unshakable 'world [οἰκουμένην].' For Hebrews, his reign is inaugurated and will be completed in a world [e.g. τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν, cf. Heb. 2:5] that cannot be shaken.¹⁰

Ps. 95:10 εἶπατε ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν Ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν, καὶ γὰρ κατώρθωσεν τὴν οἰκουμένην, ἥτις οὐ σαλευθήσεται, κρινεῖ λαοὺς ἐν εὐθύτητι.

Ps. 92:1 Ὁ κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν, εὐπρέπειαν ἐνεδύσατο, ἐνεδύσατο κύριος δύναμιν καὶ περιεζώσατο, καὶ γὰρ ἐστερέωσεν τὴν οἰκουμένην, ἥτις οὐ σαλευθήσεται.

⁹ William Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Waco, Tx.: Word, 1991) 484.

¹⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 485-86. Notice further that Psalm 95 is further to be a proclamation of the reign of God to the nations. See note 6 above.

These added allusions to the Psalms, while only a probability at best, fit well within the theology of Hebrews where the reign of the Lord is inaugurated by the Son to be carried through an eschatological 'shaking' upon which the kingdom/world to come [τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν]¹¹ will pass through having triumphed over rivals. It is this world to come which is subject to Christ [τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν -Heb.2:5].

As a whole, with respect to the Kingdom of God, Hebrews portrays what the rest of the New Testament confirms: a kingdom whose inbreaking is in the ministry and work of Christ--and kingdom that spreads in the midst of evil only to triumph over all rival kingdoms in the eschatological end. While the reign of God the eschatological kingship drawn near has begun, it has yet to triumph when the saints enjoy the fullness of this kingdom.

4. Conclusion:

a. The Role of Inaugurated Eschatology.

The purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament.

It has been our intent to show that Jesus begins the kingdom as it comes in His earthly activity.

We have further shown that Jesus proclaims that the kingdom will continue to advance in a manner that is progressive and surprisingly in the presence of evil.

The kingdom program of Jesus does not cease with his death and resurrection but continues in his ascension into heaven, as we see in both Acts and Hebrews.

The basic conception in the New Testament is that the kingdom of God is the reign of God that has dawned in this present evil age. This kingdom is inaugurated and continues to advance even now as Christ rules over all things in fulfillment of the promises made to David. It is clear that the New Testament awaits a consummation of this kingdom, although we have not explored the nature of the this consummation.

b. Significance for the Bible Fellowship Church

The goal of the Bible Fellowship Church has always been to derive our doctrine from Scripture and submit to Scripture in every formation and articulation of that doctrine. It is important that we pay careful attention to the nature of the kingdom of God and its implications for eschatology.

¹¹ The coming of the kingdom of God is synonymous in Biblical language and Second Temple Judaism to the inbreaking of the age to come. Further validation of connecting the kingdom and 'the world to come' may be in the connection to the use of firstborn in Hebrews 1:6 'τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην' and 'firstborn' and kingdom in Hebrews 12. The firstborn is sent into the world to bring about 'the coming world.' He comes into the present evil age to bring the age to come.

We currently believe that the Bible describes a future where a millennial reign of Jesus is established on this earth.¹² While some formulations of the millennium deny present aspects of a Messianic reign, this denial is not the logical corollary from or a necessary implication of a firm belief in a future millennium. For example see the work of George Eldon Ladd, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock for the synthesizing of pre-millennialism with present aspects of the kingdom.

Within our current understanding of the millennium, it is important that we infuse our understanding of eschatology and the kingdom with a *strong* present aspect of the kingdom as we find in the scheme today known as "inaugurated eschatology." Against alternatives, this present aspect is in greater faithfulness to the text of Scripture specifically the eschatological conception of the whole New Testament.

Inaugurated eschatology has several strengths that are relevant for the BFC:

- (1) It makes sense of the preponderance of New Testament data which everywhere proclaims and displays the concept of an inbreaking of 'the age to come'/'kingdom of God'. This structure, of course, brings the New Testament into greater continuity with the Old Testament. It shows the Scripture to contain one plan and purpose of redemption that is worked out in a consistent 'redemptive history.' In its kingdom program, the New Testament is the realization and fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- (2) It keeps the church from dehistoricizing the Bible and our conception of salvation. We are protected from becoming functional Marcionites or using the Bible ahistorically *only* as something to be mined for timeless principles that are abstracted from the history of God's redemption.
- (3) Missions, of which the BFC is passionate, is a function of eschatology. Inaugurated eschatology unifies the New Testament so that the salvation preached by Paul and the Apostle is none other than that which Jesus offers in the kingdom of God. This allows us to recognize the obvious Biblical portrait that the spread of the gospel to the nations is not 'plan B' as it were, but the plan and purpose of the fulfillment that God envisioned for his kingdom.
- (4) It helps us better understand God's present activity and power in this world so that as believers we may better serve our Lord in every sphere of life.
- (5) It brings greater faith and confidence in God when we recognize the manner in which Jesus exercises his authority. All is in subjection to him, but we do not yet see all in subjection to him. Thus, we walk by faith not sight.

¹² I believe this can be validated through a careful and contextual exegesis of Revelation 20.