

THE END-TIME KINGDOM OF GOD:
A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO EVANGELISM

by

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A THESIS
Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
Religion
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina
June 2015

Accepted:

Dr. Benjamin Gladd

Second Reader

ABSTRACT
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The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the kingdom of God, and the end-time events that accompany it, occupied a central place in the gospel ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. Therefore, the modern church must rightly proclaim the gospel within a biblical-theological understanding of the kingdom of God. Much of today's evangelism is void of any reference to biblical theology, eschatology, or the kingdom of God. However, these three subjects held a central place in the gospel ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. They were continually using the Old Testament in order to bring their listeners to an understanding of the end-time kingdom of God. We first come to understand God as king in his creating the earth and everything in it. He then delegates his kingship authority to man to rule over the earth. A rival kingdom emerges in the serpent and the fall of man and a promise of restoration is made by God. The promise implies that the kingdom of God will again have dominion over the entire earth. The Old Testament speaks of this in its many references to the end-time kingdom of God. This kingdom will also be preceded by a time of tribulation for God's people. In the New Testament we read of the long awaited king who was promised to come and restore the kingdom of God on earth. This long awaited king, Jesus Christ, inaugurates the kingdom of God on earth, but not all of the promises of the end-time kingdom are realized. However, while the end-time kingdom of God has been inaugurated so has the expected end-time tribulation. The time of tribulation and the kingdom of God on earth are not sharply divided. Rather, they are simultaneously present on the earth. Therefore, the gospel that Jesus and the Apostles proclaim is one that is framed with the end-time kingdom of God which is understood

through the Old Testament expectation that had been proclaimed by the prophets. This must not be lost in today's evangelism.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Missy.
She is the love of my life,
my best friend,
and a gift from God.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will focus on the prominence of the end-time kingdom of God in the gospel proclamation of Jesus and the Apostles. The reason that the end-time kingdom focus is so central to Jesus and the Apostles is because it is a central issue of the Bible. In an article entitled, “The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid,” Graeme Goldsworthy makes two main points. “The first is that Jesus is the kingdom of God that has already come in a representative though potent way... The second main point is that the Bible speaks of the reality of the kingdom as its central issue.”¹ Assuming that Goldsworthy is correct in saying that Jesus is the kingdom of God and that the kingdom is a central issue of the Bible, and noting that Jesus proclaimed “the gospel of the kingdom” should we not then also understand the kingdom of God as a grid for proclaiming the gospel? The kingdom of God was both explicit and implicit in the gospel proclamation of Jesus and the Apostles. Therefore, in order to rightly understand the gospel as proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles one must possess a biblical-theological understanding of the kingdom of God. This would require not only an understanding of the kingdom’s past and present, but also its future. The end-time kingdom of God was central to the gospel proclamation of Jesus and the Apostles and there will be significant consequences for the church today if the kingdom is disconnected from our gospel proclamation. Therefore, since the kingdom of God, and the end-time events that accompany it, occupied a central place in the gospel ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, the modern church must rightly proclaim the gospel within a biblical-theological understanding of the kingdom of God.

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, “The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 12, NO. 1 (2008), 14.

The Kingdom of God

It is not my intention to promote the kingdom of God as *the* central theme of the Bible. Rather I intend to promote it as a prominent theme from which the whole Bible can be understood. In light of this, the kingdom of God is a suitable vessel from which God's revealed word to man can be carried. Jesus and the Apostles often spoke of the gospel in terms of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God provides a grid from which we can understand both the New and Old Testaments and therefore, the gospel.

In the gospel according to Matthew he records that from the beginning Jesus preached that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.² Later in chapter nine we read that Jesus went throughout the cities and villages proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God. This proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom was not only a message for Jesus and his Apostles, but a message that is to endure to the end. Jesus said, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). In Mark's gospel we read the same kind of the gospel proclamation. "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel'" (Mark 1:15). In the gospel of Luke Jesus describes his purpose as one of preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, saying "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43). Finally, John gives his purpose statement in writing his gospel in chapter 20, "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you

² Thomas Schreiner explains that the terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are synonymous. They reference the same reality of the kingdom as the the kingdom of heaven emphasizes that the kingdom is from above. Thomas Schreiner, *The King In His Beauty*, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013) 442.

may have life in his name.” Jesus is identified throughout John as the Christ, the Messiah. Thomas Schreiner writes:

Identifying Jesus as ‘king’ is another way of designating him as the Messiah. When Nathaniel declares that Jesus is the ‘Son of God’ and ‘the King of Israel’ (John 1:49), he is confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. Nathaniel’s confession functions as a framing device (John 20:30-31), showing that Jesus’ royal status functions as a major theme in the book.³

The theme in John of showing Jesus’ royal status is similar to the theme of the Bible. Michael Bird comments:

“The whole sweep of redemptive history is driven by the conception of God as both king and yet becoming king. God shows his kingly power by redeeming his creation from the evil that has infected it, and he redeems it specifically through the work of King Jesus. As such, the biblical story is told in such a way that we are constantly confronted, from Genesis to Revelation, with the theme of God’s reign over God’s people in God’s place.”⁴

Therefore, the kingdom of God must not only be considered in its historical context or present reality, but an eschatological understanding of the kingdom is essential. An eschatological emphasis was not absent in the gospel proclamation of Jesus and the Apostles and it must not be absent in modern evangelism.

Biblical Theology

In order to understand the Bible one must understand how the Bible relates to itself. Graeme Goldsworthy writes that:

³ *ibid.*, 509

⁴ Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 2013), 235.

Biblical theology is the study of how every text in the Bible relates to every other text in the Bible. It is the study of the matrix of divine revelation. At the heart of the gospel is the person of Jesus Christ; he is the word of God come in the flesh. The nature of the gospel is such that it demands that it be at the center of the biblical message. Biblical theology is, then, the study of how every text in the Bible relates to Jesus and his gospel. Thus we start with Christ so that we may end with Christ. Biblical theology is Christological, for its subject matter is the Scriptures as God's testimony to Christ. It is therefore, from start to finish, a study of Christ.⁵

Jesus demonstrated Biblical theology with the two men on the road to Emmaus following his resurrection. The two travelers are discouraged at the death of Christ and bewildered by his missing body. Jesus rebukes them saying, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:27). He is telling these men that they have not done biblical-theology, that they are missing what the prophets have spoken about the Christ. Jesus explains to them that what was written in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms was about the Messiah.

The apostles were consistently looking back to the Old Testament and the story of Israel in their gospel proclamations. In Peter's sermon on Pentecost he leads with a reference to the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16). In his second sermon he proclaims that "what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18). When questioned by the rulers, elders, and scribes Peter appealed to Psalm 118:22, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Peter describes Jesus to Cornelius as the one to whom all the prophets bear witness that in him is forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). The Apostle Paul shares the gospel in Antioch by giving a history of Israel (Acts 13:16-23). The gospel of first importance which Paul

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, "Lecture 1: The Necessity and Viability of Biblical Theology," Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, *Journal of Theology*, 12/1 (Spring 2008), 7.

delivered to the Corinthians was according to the Scriptures, or, to put it another way, according to the Old Testament. The gospel of the Apostles was not void of the Old Testament and the history of Israel. It was a constant component of the gospel proclamation that was usually explicit and other times implicit, but almost always it is there. It is clear that the gospel according to Jesus and the Apostles was not void of the Old Testament or disconnected from the history of Israel. All of the Old Testament was pointing to Christ and the events around his coming, death, burial, and resurrection.

Modern Evangelism

The kingdom of God and biblical theology played a prominent role in the gospel proclamation of Jesus and the Apostles. It is clear that they understood the Old Testament Scriptures as a reference to Christ and that it was to be understood in light of the person of Jesus. The kingdom of God was either explicit or implicit with Jesus and the apostles, but it was consistent in their gospel proclamation. This is not a method or an approach that is to be left behind along with the first century. It is unfortunate that the emphasis of the kingdom of God and biblical theology has largely been lost in modern evangelism.

Bill Hybels' well-known book "Becoming a Contagious Christian" is one of the most popular books on evangelism in the last twenty-five years having sold hundreds of thousands of copies. In a chapter titled "Making the Message Clear" Hybels gives several examples of how to communicate the gospel to others. His concern is for Christians to be "not only shining examples for Christ, but also lucidly expressing His message so others can see the truth of the gospel."⁶ The core of his gospel message includes that God is holy and that man has become evil and deserving

⁶ Bill Hybels and Mark Mittleberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994) 150.

of death and hell, but “Jesus Christ paid the price of salvation for the whole world” and “only those who say yes to Him will actually receive forgiveness.”⁷ He then goes on to give popular illustrations which communicate these points.

One simple illustration to communicate these truths is what he calls “Do vs Done.”⁸ In this approach there is a comparison and contrast between the work of man and the work of God in salvation. Man cannot achieve salvation by what he does rather he must trust in the work that Christ has already done.

Another approach that is highlighted is the popular Bridge Illustration. In this diagram there is a chasm that separates man from God. This chasm is bridged by Christ sometimes with a reference to 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”

The Romans Road⁹ has been a popular approach used by many to communicate the gospel using verses out of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. The first verse that is used is Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This verse is used to describe the condition that man is in. To explain the consequences of our fallen condition we turn to Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Now, in order to know how to respond to Jesus Romans 10:13 is given, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Hybels summarizes by writing, “Do you see how simple it is to receive God’s gift? All we have to do is recognize the fact that we’ve sinned and deserve death, and then call out to God humbly for his forgiveness and the new life He’s offering us.”¹⁰

⁷ *ibid.*, 154.

⁸ *ibid.*, 155.

⁹ *ibid.*, 160.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 160.

There is also an illustration that communicates that it is not enough to merely believe the right things about God or attend church. This is called the Airplane Illustration¹¹. The idea is that it is not enough to know about the science of aviation, the physics of flight, spending time at the airport, or being at the right gate. One must actually board the airplane trusting that it will take you where you want to go. He draws a parallel here with Christianity saying that “you finally have to take a step of faith and ‘get on board’ by receiving the forgiveness He purchased on the cross and entrusting your life and future to Him. That’s what it means to become a Christian.”¹²

I do not doubt that the Lord has used these approaches to bring many into his kingdom. However, these popular presentations are void of any mention, explicit or implicit, of the kingdom of God and do not have any traces of biblical theology as did Jesus and the Apostles. To be fair, Hybels is making a point of how to share the gospel message when time is short and one must be quick and clear, but at the same time these quick methods are the only methods shown in the chapter entitled “Making the Message Clear.” If the focus is going to be on making the message clear should not attention be given to the methods of Christ and his Apostles? It is not as if there is only one way to share the gospel message or that Jesus and the Apostles only did it one way. But there are some themes to their methods of proclaiming the gospel, namely the kingdom of God and biblical theology, that need to be included in our evangelistic efforts today. Constantly Jesus and the Apostles were referencing the message of salvation to the bigger story of the Bible and the kingdom of God. But does it really matter? As I said earlier, many have been brought into a saving relationship with Christ thanks to these evangelistic methods. I would argue that it does matter. A gospel without a kingdom and a gospel with no story behind it, with no history, is one that is foreign to Jesus and the Apostles and not without consequences for the church today.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 161.

¹² *ibid.*, 162.

Darius Salter addressed several different methodologies in his book “American Evangelism.” While he is addressing the medium of the message more than the message, the medium is not neutral. The medium of the message carries meaning and significance. For example, small group evangelism seeks to create a comfortable environment for non-Christians to enter into. “Before the average person comes into a vital Christian experience, he usually needs a period of exposure to the experience of others.”¹³ However, sometimes creating a welcoming environment can subtly become the goal of the group. “Sometimes the transition from the *koinonia* of coffee and doughnuts to the self-denial of the bread and wine is never made. Bible study does not guarantee that the feeling orientation of the evangelistic group will become something more than the current enthrallment with self-improvement in American culture.”¹⁴ The kingdom of God is not less than a caring community but so much more.

Another popular approach is one-on-one evangelism. Dawson Trotman, of The Navigators, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, and James Kennedy who created the “Evangelism Explosion” model all used the one-on-one approach and emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. These men have been effective leaders training thousands in evangelism. However, as Salter writes:

Evangelicals may be far too eager to erase the unruly elements of the conversion process, while packaging the gospel for easy, rapid, and strain free consumption. Such cognitive reductionism means that the “spiritual” aspects of evangelical life are increasingly approached by means of and interpreted in terms of principles, rules, steps, laws, codes, guidelines, and so forth.¹⁵

¹³ Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 199.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 201.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 209.

The beauty of the story of the Bible and the glory of the kingdom of God is lost when it is broken down into steps an individual must take to find peace with God.

The day Peter preached at Pentecost over 3,000 souls were added to their number. History has shown that there have been days and seasons of revival. However, revivals can become exalted above the slow and steady teaching of the Scriptures. Dallas Willard comments on this by writing: The approach to wholeness is for human kind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our own powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience. But we don't like to hear this. We are somewhat misled by the reports of experiences by many great spiritual leaders and we assign their greatness to these great moments they were given, neglecting the years of slow progress they endured before them.¹⁶

Praise the Lord for the great revivals that have taken place, but as Jesus said, “‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.” (John 4:37-38). While there may be many effective revivals they are often due to the work of another preceding the revival.

The Consequences of a Gospel without a Kingdom

In the well-known passage in John 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again. He does not tell him that he must be born again to be saved, he tells him that unless he is born again he *cannot see the kingdom*. Many will associate being born again with being saved, but Jesus associated being born again with seeing the kingdom. My point is not to make a sharp distinction between seeing the kingdom and being saved, but language does matter. Jesus chose to associate being born again with seeing the kingdom of God. If we choose to neglect the kingdom in our

¹⁶ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, Ny: Harper Collins, 1988), 70.

evangelism there will be consequences. When Jesus said “The kingdom of God has drawn near” certain word associations probably came into the minds of his hearers. Scot McKnight would suggest that the words that Jesus’ audience would have associated with kingdom are “‘David’ (and by implication, ‘king’) or ‘Israel’ (and by implication, ‘land’ and ‘law).”¹⁷ They would have thought of a King and his kingdom, “‘a people governed by a king’ – this is how the Old Testament uses the term ‘kingdom.’”¹⁸ If the gospel proclamation is reduced to only the plan of salvation then the demands of the gospel lose their voice. “God’s kingdom authority is the reiteration of his commandments. When the kingdom appears in power, it is time for people to repent. They must obey the gospel. The gospel itself requires a certain kind of conduct.”¹⁹ The gospel that is void of the kingdom and only about one’s personal salvation can create a culture of “easy believism.” But it is imperative that the gospel of the kingdom not be divorced from the work of Christ and what he accomplished in his death and resurrection. John Frame explains:

All that the canonical Gospels say must be read in the light of the plotline of these books: they move inevitably toward Jesus’ cross and resurrection, which provides forgiveness and the remission of sins. That is why it is so hermeneutically backward to try to understand the teaching of Jesus in a manner cut off from what he accomplished; it is hermeneutically backward to divorce the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels from the plotline of the gospels.²⁰

However, the problem with evangelism that is only focused on the plan of salvation is that it reduces the gospel to a decision to believe. Many times this will come in the form of an

¹⁷ Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group), 65.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 185.

²⁰ D.A. Carson, “What is the Gospel?—Revisited,” Sam Storms & Justin Taylor, *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 160.

evangelist's desire to preserve the purity of sola fide ("faith alone"). But, according to John MacArthur:

[W]hat it actually has done is emasculate the message of salvation. It has also populated the church with "converts" whose faith is counterfeit and whose hope hangs on a bogus promise. Numbly saying they "accept Christ as Savior," they brazenly reject His rightful claim as Lord. Paying glib lip service, they utterly scorn Him with their hearts (Mark 7:6). Casually affirming Him with their mouths, they deliberately deny Him with their deeds (Titus 1:16). Addressing Him superficially as "Lord, Lord," they stubbornly decline to do His bidding (Luke 6:46). Such people fit the tragic description of the "many" in Matthew 7 who will one day be stunned to hear Him say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."²¹

When you remove the lordship of Jesus as King from the gospel message it will have bitter consequences of a people who will accept Jesus as a Savior but not as a King, which leads one to believe that they might actually be outside of the Kingdom.

The Consequences of a Gospel without a Biblical Theology

As we saw earlier, modern evangelism seems to be more concerned with presenting a personal Savior rather than the God of Israel, the God of my salvation rather than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The problem is not that Jesus is someone's personal savior, the problem is that cannot be all that he is. There is a wider cosmic scope of the gospel that leads from creation to new creation. Biblical-theology is necessary in order to expand the simplistic view of

²¹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 173.

the gospel that Jesus died for sins, as important as that is, to a more robust understanding of all that the gospel entails.²²

For the most part modern evangelism is more concerned about breaking the gospel down to the most simple and irreducible level. It seems that the discussion on how to do evangelism is framed in a similar way as how to make a quick sale. Why must the gospel message be reduced to its most basic and unsophisticated form? Certainly, a moment may present itself when you only have a few minutes or even only seconds to say something of the gospel message. Then perhaps the “Do vs Done” illustration could be helpful as a small taste of what the gospel is. But these small tastes of the gospel must not become the normative standards of our evangelism. As Gordon Clark said:

It is impossible to teach the system of doctrine in five minutes, or to reduce it to five spiritual laws, recently discovered by psychology. The Christian message is the whole Bible; it is the whole counsel of God. All of it must be taught, not just a small part, for it is all profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. It is by taking heed thereto that a young man may cleanse his way.²³

God has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures and preserved them for us. To neglect the bigger story and the bigger benefits and consequences of the gospel will build a culture of evangelism with a God who is small and a gospel that is only personal rather than global.

A gospel that is void of biblical theology will also lead to poor hermeneutics. Graeme Goldsworthy wrote, “I have found that many Christians have as their first or main question to put to any passage of the Bible, ‘What does it tell us about ourselves?’ They might sometimes start

²² Graeme Goldsworthy, “Lecture 1: The Necessity and Viability of Biblical Theology,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 12, no. 1 (2008), 11.

²³ Gordon Haddon Clark, *Today’s Evangelism: Counterfeit or Genuine* (Trinity Foundation, 1990) 122.

with, 'What does it tell us about God?' But that soon takes second place to the more self-indulgent questions."²⁴ The way in which one receives the gospel will often be the way in which one views the Christian life and interprets the Scriptures. If the gospel is primarily about me, then the Bible is primarily about me. This line of thinking will lead to a self-centered culture in the church where every member is seeking what they can get from the church. The fruit of an individualistic gospel proclamation will be an individualistic church and burnt out leadership that is attempting to keep the flock happy more than holy.

²⁴ Goldsworthy, "Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics" Southern Baptist Seminary, *Journal of Theology* 12/1 (Spring 2008), 4.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

In order to gain a biblical-theological understanding of the kingdom of God, it is clear that we must begin with the Old Testament. The Old Testament is future oriented in that it was written in a time of expectation while the New Testament is more oriented towards fulfillment. The reason that the New Testament is a time of fulfillment is because the long-awaited Messiah has come. “In the Old Testament, the ultimate purpose of the future coming of the Lord and the Day of the Lord is the establishment of the kingdom of God.”²⁵ During this time of expectation the people of God were awaiting a king and a kingdom. A word study of the phrase “kingdom of God” would be an insufficient method in discovering how the kingdom of God was understood in the Old Testament. “Though the term ‘kingdom of God’ is not found in the Old Testament, the thought that God is king is found, particularly in the Psalms and in the prophets. God is frequently spoken of as King, both of Israel and of the whole earth.”²⁶ It is the sovereign rule of God that permeates the pages of the Old Testament. “It was Yahweh’s sovereign action on which the attention of Old Testament writers focused, and it was the manifestations of his sovereign power that called forth their worship. Even when later writers did come to speak of the kingdom of God or of heaven, they did so chiefly in order to describe the rule of God.”²⁷

In this chapter attention will be given to how the kingdom of God is portrayed in the Old Testament. It is important to understand the kingdom of God in terms of creation and especially in

²⁵ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and The Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1986) 17.

²⁶ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1979) 7.

²⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 17

God's assignment to man. After the fall of man God said that he "will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). From this promise there is an end-time expectation of what God will do through the offspring of the woman. The prophets addressed this end-time expectation in regards to the kingdom of God. They spoke in parables and in symbolic ways that addressed their own nation, Israel, as well as the Gentiles. In this chapter I will focus on the method in which the prophets spoke of the end-time kingdom of God. Attention will also be given to how Israel would have understood the arrival of the kingdom. The Old Testament expectation was a time of tribulation that preceded the coming of the kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God in Genesis 1-3

"By causing the creation to come into existence by his word of power, God establishes it as his own vast kingdom. He thus establishes himself as the great King over all creation, without limits of any kind, and worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power in the worship of what he has created."²⁸ He is the rightful ruler over all of the created universe because he created it. As Gerhard von Rad says, "If the world was called into being by the free will of God, then it is his very own possession, and he is its Lord."²⁹ Therefore, in understanding the kingdom of God properly it is important to see that he is the rightful king over all creation.

On the sixth day he created man in his own image. When God created Adam he did not create him out of nothing as he had done before, but he made him out of the dust of the ground. God makes man in the image of divinity and of the substance of the earth. Not only were they

²⁸ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Academic, 2004) 34

²⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Israel's Historical Traditions*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001)143

made of the substance of the earth, they were to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-27). God commands Adam and Eve to not only have dominion over the earth but to fill it as well. Therefore, one concludes that God created man out of the earth, for the earth, to fill the earth and to have dominion over the earth.³⁰ The significance of this is that God as king has delegated his kingly rule to man. In Genesis 1 we see that God takes on the naming function of his work. “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Gen 1:5). However, the task of naming is delegated to Adam in chapter 2. “Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.” (Gen 2:19). God created the earth and ruled the earth, but delegated his kingship to Adam.

Adam was immediately tested in his allegiance to the most high king and in his own faithfulness of his delegated kingship. The serpent comes to undermine God’s work. The serpent approaches Eve, Adam’s helper, and begins to question her about what God had said. He twists God’s word to them in order to create doubt and suspicion. The serpent asked, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” (Gen. 3:1). That *actually* is not what God said. God said that they may not eat of the tree in the midst of the garden. Eve tells the serpent that if they eat of the tree in the midst of the garden that they will die. He responds by assuring her that they will not die, but their eyes would be open and they would become like God. The serpent brought confusion in regards to God’s word, doubt in regards to God’s character, and the offer of a better life outside the rule of God. At this point in time a rival kingdom emerges that challenges and questions God’s authority. The kingdom of darkness sets itself in direct opposition to the kingdom of God with each one bidding for the allegiance of God’s people.³¹ Adam and Eve were

³⁰ R. Alan Street, *Heaven on Earth*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2013) 27

³¹ *ibid.*, 28

deceived into rejecting the kingship of their creator in favor of their own independent kingship. In accepting the forbidden fruit they were rejecting their sovereign ruler. It is not that God was no longer king of the earth, but it was that man had rebelled against God as king.

As a result of this rebellion, and God's faithfulness to his word, man along with creation is cursed. "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.'" (Gen. 3:16) The woman's role in filling the earth will be an excruciating experience. Then to Adam, God said: Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I have commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, til you return to the ground, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:17-19).

God created man to have dominion over the earth, but due to the curse his dominion will be one of pain and frustration. Not only is man cursed, but the ground is cursed as well. However, there is a promise of hope amidst the curse that God sets on the earth and man. God tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Though the fall of man estranged him from God, disrupted the marriage relationship, cursed the earth, and made man's original task of subduing and filling the earth difficult, there was the hope of the offspring of the woman who would defeat Satan.

These first three chapters of Genesis are essential to understanding the nature of the kingdom of God. God created the world and is therefore the King of the earth. God delegated his kingship to his image-bearers and tasked them with filling the earth and having dominion over it.

However, man's kingly rule of the earth was greatly disrupted by Satan's deception. This caused man to rebel against God as king in an attempt to "be like God" and rule independently. The condition that the earth and man were made in was marred, but they are not without hope. God made a promise that the offspring of the woman would defeat the offspring of the serpent. In other words, the kingdom would be restored.

The End-Time Kingdom of God as Proclaimed by the Prophets

The end-time kingdom of God was a leading subject among the Old Testament prophets. As the Old Testament was written in a time of expectation so the prophets were awaiting the coming of the kingdom of God in the latter days. Isaiah and Micah spoke of a time in the latter days when, "the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and all the nations shall flow to it." (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1). Hosea wrote of a time when the children of Israel would seek the Lord their God and also David their king (Hosea 3:5). Jeremiah went beyond Israel and prophesied about the restoration of the Gentiles, "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days." (Jer. 48:47). Ezekiel refers to Gog, an enemy that the Lord brings against Israel to oppress them in the end-time tribulation. In Daniel's prophecy, there is the statue that represents many worldly kingdoms, including the end-time kingdom of God that destroys them all.

In Isaiah 2:2-3, the prophet is looking to both the past and the future. He is looking to the past in that he is developing what Moses wrote in Genesis 49:10. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." The nations will seek to obey the ruler from the tribe of Judah. In Isaiah 2:2-3, we see the future fulfillment of this prophecy as all the nations flow to the house of the Lord saying, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” In this end-time kingdom prophecy, Isaiah looks to the past in order to see the future.

Micah 4:1-3 is a twin to Isaiah 2:2-3, but Micah adds a new creation element. Micah adds in v.4, “but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.” Micah has pictured a latter-day temple-mountain (v.2) and then moves towards imagery of paradisiacal garden. This connects well with Ezekiel’s description of Eden as a garden on a mountain (Ezekiel 28:13-14). Thus, we see that the beginning of creation is repeated in the new creation.³² The end-time kingdom of God is not something wholly other than the kingdom of God at creation. There are sharp distinctions to be sure, however, the traces of the kingdom of God in creation are within the imagery we have of the end-time kingdom of God in the new creation.

The prophet Hosea wrote that the Lord told him to “love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress” (Hosea 3:1). He does this to show that the Lord loves Israel even though they seek after other gods. Hosea buys the woman and tells her not to play the whore or belong to another man. In a similar way the people of Israel will be restrained. They will have no king or prince who will lead Israel into apostasy and fail to keep them faithful. They will be without sacrifice, no longer having the benefits of their temple. The Lord will purge his people in order to restore them by not even giving them the opportunity to defile him.³³ However, Israel is destined to return and seek the Lord. “An eschatological time will come when God will restore Israel from captivity and reinstall Davidic kingship, and the nation will trust in God.”³⁴ The Lord chose to communicate this reality through Hosea taking an adulteress for a wife.

³² G.K. Beale, *A new Testament Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011) 105

³³ *ibid.*, 103

³⁴ *ibid.*, 103

Jeremiah went beyond Israel to even prophesy of the restoration of Gentile nations in the end-time. To Moab, Jeremiah prophesies, “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, declares the Lord.” (Jer. 48:47). He offers the same hope to Elam. “But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, declares the Lord.” (Jer. 49:39). “Like Israel, these nations will suffer punishment under God’s judicial hand and even go into exile, but ‘in the latter days’ God ‘will restore the captivity’ of these people. The restoration of the faithful among these nations appears to coincide with the restoration of the remnant of Israel.”³⁵

There is a reference to Israel’s end-time tribulation in Ezekiel’s prophecy of Gog (Ezekiel 38-39), an enemy that is to appear in the latter days. Following the oppression by Gog, God will pour out his spirit on Israel.

They shall know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God.” (Ezekiel 39:28-29).

This is a possible development of Deuteronomy 4:30 which reads, “When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.”

Lastly, Daniel prophesies through the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a statue. G.K. Beale writes, “The vision was of a huge statue composed of four sections, each of which represented a world empire. The climax of the vision portrays a stone coming from nowhere that smashes the statue and grows and fills the entire world.”³⁶ This stone that is cut from a mountain by no human hand that destroys the final kingdom is strikingly similar to the image of

³⁵ *ibid.*, 107

³⁶ *ibid.*, 108

the mountain that we read about in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4. Both Isaiah and Micah prophesy, “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it.” (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1). Again, Beale explains, “Micah even equates ‘the mountain of the house of the Lord,’ (Micah 4:1), with God’s eternal kingdom, the latter an explicit element of the mountain in Dan. 2: ‘The Lord will reign over them in mount Zion ... forever.’ (Micah 4:7). Additionally, it is clear that the eschatological temple was to be situated on a mountain (Ezekiel 40:2; Rev. 21:10).” Daniel’s interpretive prophecy of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is explicitly describing the end-time kingdom of God as coming in power and reigning forever.

The End-Time Kingdom of God and Tribulation

The expectation given in the Old Testament is that before the restoration of the kingdom there would be a time of tribulation. Ezekiel prophesies of a time of tribulation that will come on the people of Israel after they have returned from exile.

“Thus says the Lord God: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.” (Ezekiel 38:14-16).

In a similar way, Daniel 7-12 tells of a latter-day tribulation for the people of Israel after they are restored to the land, but before the consummation of other prophecies that were associated with Israel’s return from exile. Commentators are placing the time of tribulation at the time of the last

world kingdom.³⁷ In this section, consideration will be given to the end-time tribulation that is revealed in Daniel 7.

Daniel chapter 7 is divided in two categories, the vision and the interpretation of that vision. Therefore, we must look to v.15-28 in order to understand v.1-14. First, we will consider the identity of the son of man. In v.13 we read,

I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

If one only read the vision and not the interpretation one would conclude that the son of man is the Messiah. But, the interpretation does not seem to make this connection explicitly. The interpretation in v.15-28 connects the son of man to the saints of the Most High. In v.14 we understand that the son of man will receive a “dominion a glory and a kingdom,” but verses 18, 22, and 27 speak of the saints of the Most High receiving the kingdom. “But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.” (Dan. 7:18). The saints are receiving what the son of man received in the vision. “The Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.” (Dan 7:22). Again we see that it is the saints that are receiving the kingdom. Finally in v.27 we read that, “The kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.”

³⁷ *ibid.*, 189

The son of man that is given the kingdom in v.13 is identified as the saints of the Most High in verses 18 and 27.

Some OT theologians have referred to this kind of relationship as “the one and the many” or “corporate representation,” whereby a king, priest, or father represents respectively a kingdom, a nation, a family. Even though the king, priest, or father is, of course, technically distinct from what he represents, each one is corporately identified and represents the kingdom, nation, or family. Such representation means that what is true of the representative is true of the represented.³⁸

As it is clear that the saints of the Most High are to receive a kingdom, it is equally clear that a time of tribulation will precede their taking possession of the kingdom. Consider v.21, which is just prior to the verse explaining that the sons of the Most High will receive a kingdom. “As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them.” Then again the preceding verses to v.22 which also describe the saints of the Most High being given a kingdom. “He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court shall sit in judgement, and his dominion shall be taken away to be consumed and destroyed to the end.” (Dan. 7:25-26). There will be a time of tribulation prior to the saints of the Most High receiving the kingdom.

The End-Time Kingdom of God and Restoration

The expectation of the Old Testament is that the end-time kingdom of God would include the resurrection of the body. Therefore, when Ezekiel prophesied to the valley of dry bones and

³⁸ *ibid.*, 192-193

they came to life it added to the expectation of Israel of the resurrection. “Upon the opening of the graves and the coming alive of the dead, a return to the land shall be effected in its fullest sense.”³⁹ In Daniel 12 we read about “a time of trouble” that precedes the resurrection of the dead. But following that time of trouble they will be delivered and “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2). Therefore, the resurrection of the dead is not only a New Testament doctrine but also a doctrine of the Old Testament.

In Isaiah 65 we read about the joy that would come in the restoration of all things, the new heaven and earth. The overwhelming theme is joy. “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.” (Isaiah 65:18-19). During other times in Israel’s history there was concern of building houses and planting vineyards because they might not be able to enjoy it because of their disobedience and oppression by others. But this end-time kingdom of God will not be one of fear. “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 one shall long enjoy the work of their hands.” (Isaiah 65:21-22).

The coming Day of the Lord is foretold in Zechariah 14. Along with other prophecies, the trend of a time of tribulation precedes the peace of the kingdom of God. “Behold a day is coming for the Lord, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses plundered and the

³⁹ *ibid.*, 304

women raped.” (Zech. 14:1-3). But following that time of tribulation the Lord will come and fight for Israel. “Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.” (Zech. 14:3). Following this battle the time of restoration will come. “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.” (Zech. 14:8-9). It is clear that the Old Testament expectation was set directly on the coming of the kingdom of God and the restoration of all things.

Conclusion

The kingdom of God is a central theme throughout the Old Testament. In the beginning we come to terms with God as king of creation as the one who spoke it all into existence. By his word all things obeyed him and came to be. Therefore, as the creator of all things he is the king over all things. In creating man in his image, he created man in the image of a ruler. He expressly gave man dominion over the earth. Adam and Eve were to rule the earth and to fill it with more image-bearers, that the glory of God might be known all over the earth through the dominion that God had given man. However, a deceiver approached man in an attempt to bring suspicion on the king of the earth and the kingdom of darkness was inaugurated on earth. While God, being faithful to his word, punished Adam and Eve, still promised to defeat the work of Satan. The kingdom of God would prevail on the earth.

God consistently spoke to his people, Israel, of the kingdom of God. He reminded his people through the prophets Isaiah and Micah that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the highest of mountains and the nations would flock to it. He called his prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. He did this in order to symbolize what Israel was like in their unfaithfulness to him. The promise of restoration was not exclusive to Israel. We see in Jeremiah

that the same hope for restoration belonged to Moab and Elam. Then through Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream we understand that the kingdom of God will come to destroy all other kingdoms and reign forever.

However, the people of God understood that this time of restoration would not come before a time of tribulation. It was consistently clear through the prophets, especially Daniel, that a time of trouble awaited the people of God, but the restoration would come. Ultimately, God as king would fight for his people and bring about the restoration that was promised in Genesis 3. Israel longed and waited for this restoration. This is why Jesus came proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. This is why the apostles, following the resurrection, asked Jesus, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The kingdom of God was at the forefront of the minds of the people of Israel. They longed for their king to come and restore all things. They were a people of expectation, looking forward to the fulfillment of all the promises concerning the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Introduction

In the previous chapter I noted that God is the rightful ruler over the earth because he is the creator of the earth. God's kingship is rooted in the world being his own creation. On the sixth day of creation he made man in his own image and delegated to him the authority to rule over the earth, subdue it, and exercise dominion. This delegated dominion was disrupted by the deception of the serpent who tempted man away from keeping God's commandments. However, God promised that he would defeat the work of the serpent by the offspring of the woman. This includes the restoration of the kingdom of God. The Old Testament expectation and hope was in the restored kingdom of God on earth. But this restoration would not come before an intense trial, as told in Daniel 7. The prophecy in Daniel 7 makes clear that there will be a time of great tribulation for the "saints of the Most High," but they will also eventually be given the kingdom. The hope of Israel was the worldwide dominion of the kingdom of God on earth.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ represented the coming of the restoration of the kingdom of God on earth. He was the long-awaited king who would restore the kingdom to Israel. But while the kingdom restoration came with Christ, it has not fully come as it will one day. Therefore, when he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom to the people of Israel, it included an "already" and "not yet" dimension. He proclaimed a kingdom that had come and was ready to be found. He also proclaimed a kingdom that would execute a great and final judgment that would happen at a later time. As I have already written, the scope of the kingdom of God in one sense includes all of creation by merit of his being the Creator, but in another sense it is limited to those who recognize Christ as their king. Geerhardus Vos has described the kingdom in this way, "To him [Jesus] the

kingdom exists there, where not merely God is supreme, for that is true at all times and under all circumstances, but where God supernaturally carries through his supremacy against all opposing powers and brings men to the willing recognition of the same.”⁴⁰ The kingdom of God includes God’s sovereign rule over his people. G.E. Ladd even summarizes the kingdom as simply the rule of God.⁴¹ But we must go further than just God’s general rule over people. Graeme Goldsworthy is helpful in his summary of the essential nature of the kingdom of God in saying that “the essence of the kingdom is God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.”⁴² In light of this there are two helpful grids in which we should think about the kingdom. The first is the “already” and “not yet” aspect of the kingdom. The kingdom of God has come, but has not yet been fully realized. The second is considering the kingdom of God as, “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.” In Matthew 13, Jesus gives his famous parables on the kingdom of God. These parables deal with the kingdom of God as God’s people in God’s place and under his rule, but they also include the framework of the “already” and “not yet.” This chapter will focus on the “already” and “not yet” dimension of the teaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God.

Parables of the “Already” and “Not Yet”

In Matthew 13, Jesus teaches in parables about the kingdom of God that help to explain the kingdom in terms of the “already” and “not yet.”⁴³ The parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value describe an “already” aspect of the kingdom. These two parables are about a kingdom that is ready to be found. The parable of the weeds and the net address the “not yet”

⁴⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 50.

⁴¹ G.E. Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 11.

⁴² Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 87.

⁴³ Knox Chamblin, *Matthew: A Mentor Commentary*, (Great Britian: Christian Focus Publications, 2010) 707.

aspect of the kingdom in regards to the final judgment. The remaining two parables of the mustard seed and leaven address the growing of the kingdom from small and insignificant to vast and overarching as redemptive history moves from the “already” to the “not yet.” I should add that the parable of the weeds also addresses the aspect of the mingling of this age and the age to come as the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one “grow together.” In these parables Jesus helps his listeners to understand the “what” and the “when” of the kingdom. It is important to understand the “what” and the “when” of the kingdom in order to understand where the church is currently situated in redemptive history and how to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. The church is currently located in the time of the “latter days.” However, not all of the blessings and promises have come in their fullness. Therefore the church is an inaugurated eschatological community awaiting the fulfillment of all that has been promised but is also presently experiencing the blessing of what already has taken place. In this chapter, attention will be given to understanding what Jesus was teaching the people about the kingdom of God through these parables.

Old and New Treasure

It should be noted that Jesus addressed the need to understand the connection between what had already been written in the Old Testament with what was being accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. When Jesus finished teaching the parables of the kingdom he asks if his listeners understood him. They reply in the affirmative. He then goes on to say, “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (Matt. 13:52). Jesus is saying that the teachers of the kingdom “must manage God’s household with the resources of Jesus’s new definitive teachings about the

eschatological inauguration of God's reign, which fulfills the old Scriptures of Israel."⁴⁴ This means that in order to understand the kingdom one must bring out the treasure of the old as well as the new, the Old Testament (or old covenant) as well as the New Testament (or new covenant). "The Old Testament promises of Messiah and kingdom, as well as Old Testament law and piety, have found their fulfillment in Jesus's person."⁴⁵ In order to understand and teach rightly about the kingdom of God a biblical-theological understanding of the Scriptures is required. This means that a right understanding of how Jesus is the fulfillment of all that had already been written in the Old Testament was necessary for the people of God to understand themselves as well as to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God. Therefore, the evangelist of the gospel of the kingdom of God must possess a biblical-theology of the Scriptures.

Why Parables?

Jesus' disciples asked him why he spoke to them in parables. His response was that it was in fulfillment to what the prophet Isaiah said, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them" (Isaiah 6:9-10). R.T. France explains:

It is a "secret" in the sense that it is accessible only to the insiders. That does not mean that it is to be jealously guarded from others; indeed, Mark adds in this context the saying "Nothing is hidden except in order to be revealed, or concealed except to become visible" (Mark 4:22). It means rather that until those people become insiders they will not be able

⁴⁴ David L. Turner, *Matthew BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 355.

⁴⁵ D.A. Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 333.

to grasp it. Only as disciples share “the message of the kingdom” (v.19) and it is fruitfully received will the secret be communicated.⁴⁶

As Jesus explains in the parable of the sower, the seed, which is the word of God (Luke 8:11), is not always sown on good soil. For some, the word of God will be snatched away by the evil one as a bird might devour a seed left on a path (Matt. 13:19). Some will receive the word of God with joy, but due to shallowness will not remain amidst trial and persecution (Matt. 13:20-21). Others will fall away due to the cares of this world (Matt. 13:22). However, there will be those who hear the word of God, understand, and bear exponential fruit (Matt 13:23). The word of God and the kingdom of God will be made known to whom God chooses to make them known. As Jesus prayed, “I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (John 11:25-27). Therefore, Jesus taught in parables that these things might be hidden from the “wise” and revealed to “little children.”

Parables of the “Already”

Two parables that represent the “already” aspect of the kingdom are the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl of great value (Matt. 13:44-46). In the parable of the hidden treasure a man stumbles upon a treasure hidden in a field and with great joy sells all that he has to buy the field. The second is like it in that a merchant finds a pearl of great value and sells all that he had to buy it. They both address the “already” of the kingdom in that the kingdom is already present

⁴⁶ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company 2007) 511.

to be found. They are also similar in how they make the point that the kingdom is to be valued above all else.

A difference between these two parables is that one is looking for something while the other is not. The man who finds the hidden treasure stumbled upon it while the other is a merchant in search of a pearl of great value. This could be compared to those who are looking for the kingdom and those who are not. Joseph of Arimathea was described as a man looking for the kingdom. “Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43). Jesus describes those who had not been searching for the kingdom as having found it. Speaking to the chief priests and elders he says, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matthew 21:31). The kingdom of God is discovered by those who are searching as well as by those who are not. Ultimately, the discovery of the kingdom depends on the will of the Father (John 6:44). Jesus described this phenomenon as one that is unpredictable. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). A person cannot so much search for wind as much as have the wind come upon him. In a similar way, the kingdom comes upon a person whether they are searching or not.

Joy in discovering the kingdom is expressly stated in the parable of the hidden treasure and implied in the parable of the pearl of great value. Joy is a characteristic of the age to come. Isaiah wrote of the new heavens and earth:

“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 and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (Isaiah 65:18-20).

Joy is also a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), who is himself a deposit of the age to come (Eph. 1:13-14). The joy that belongs in the coming of the kingdom of God is presently available because the kingdom of God has come to earth; the joy of the age to come has broken into this age.

The supremacy of the kingdom above all things is the central message in these two parables. It is worth more than all they own and they are both willing, and even joyful, to sell all they have in order to obtain it. The kingdom demands our absolute allegiance above all other things. Therefore his disciples must count the cost. As Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross cannot be my disciple. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-27, 33). This could seem contrary to being saved by grace and not by works, but it is not. Salvation is a free gift of God, but it still costs everything.⁴⁷ However, while the kingdom of God might cost everything, like the hidden treasure and pearl of great value, Jesus teaches that it is worth more than whatever you might lose. As Jesus said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (Luke 9:24-25). The apostle Paul counted all things as loss for the sake of knowing Christ (Phil 3:8).

An alternate view of this parable will attempt to give an explanation for how we understand Israel and the church. In summarizing these two parables, Hoyt writes, “A precious remnant of Israel will remain in the field for redemption, and a pearl of great price - the church - also in the

⁴⁷ This is similar to how John MacArthur describes salvation. “Salvation is absolutely free. So is joining the army. You don’t have to buy your way in. Everything you will need is provided. But there is a sense in which following Christ - like joining the army - will cost you dearly. It can cost freedom, family, friends, autonomy, and possibly even your life.” John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, Tn, 1993) 183.

field will be redeemed.”⁴⁸ This is to be rejected on two grounds. First, the parable is teaching what the kingdom is like and it is not teaching about how we are to understand the relationship between Israel and the church. Second, as mentioned earlier, we should not attempt to bring such sharp divisions between the church, Israel, and the kingdom of God.

Parables of the “Not Yet”

When we read of Luke’s account of Jesus in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, we read that the scroll from the prophet Isaiah was given to him. In his reading he ends with the “year of the Lord’s favor” and does not finish the sentence which includes “the day of vengeance of our God.” John Frame explains, “The Lord’s favor is ‘already,’ his vengeance is ‘not yet.’”⁴⁹ In other words Jesus is reading in the synagogue about the day of the Lord’s favor and does not read about the day of vengeance. The reading of Jesus that day of the prophet Isaiah communicated an “already” and “not yet” element to the kingdom of God. Two parables that focus on the “not yet” are the parables of the weeds and the net. The parable of the weeds includes an “already” and “not yet” aspect in that Jesus speaks of an enemy sowing weeds among the wheat. The “sons of the kingdom” are growing together with the “sons of the evil one.” I will address this aspect later. However, this parable is moving towards and emphasizing the final judgment which is “not yet.” Likewise, the parable of the net is focused on the judgment at the close of age.

The parable of the weeds compares the kingdom of God to a man who sowed good seed in his field and then while he slept an enemy came and sowed weeds in his field. Eventually the plants grew and the wheat bore grain and the weeds appeared. The master then tells his servants to let the

⁴⁸ Herman Hoyt, “Dispensational Premillennialism,” Robert G. Clouse, editor, George Eldon Ladd, Herman A. Hoyt, Loraine Boettner, Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977) 86.

⁴⁹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013) 95.

weeds grow together with the wheat and that they can be sorted out at harvest. Jesus interpreted this parable himself saying that the one who sowed the good seed was the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom, and the weeds are the sons of the evil one. Jesus explained that the harvest represented the close of the age and the reapers represented the angels.

The parable of the net is similar to the one of the weeds. They both are ultimately giving an illustration of the final judgment. The only difference is that the wheat and weeds grew together over time before they were separated while the fish are immediately sorted out, keeping the good and throwing away the bad. Jesus compares this sorting out to the final judgement saying:

So it will be at the close of age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt.13:49).

In the final judgment God will judge the entire earth, sorting out the good from the bad. This judgment is foreseen throughout the scriptures.⁵⁰ The kingdom of God cannot be separated from the judgment to come. In order to understand what the kingdom is like and what the kingdom will be, we must understand it in light of the final judgment.

Parables of the Overlapping of the “Already and Not Yet”

The parable of the mustard seed that grows into a tree that hosts nesting birds and the parable of the leaven both focus on the growth of the kingdom of God from something seemingly small and insignificant to its larger and more dominant end. These two parables are about the

⁵⁰ God is judge over all the earth (Psalm 82:8; Isaiah 24:1). God pronounced judgment on Adam and Eve (Gen 3:16-19). He judged the people of Noah’s day (Gen 6-9). He judged Israel by sending the Levites to execute his judgment (Exodus 32:26-25). Nadab and Abihu were judged for offering unauthorized fire to the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-3). Nebuchadnezzar was judged following his boasting of his great power (Daniel 4:31-32).

kingdom of God growing from this age to the age to come. The parable of the leaven describes unnoticeable leaven that is hidden in flour until it was all leavened. “It is the kingdom of God as an eschatological sphere of salvation, which breaks in, makes a small unpretentious beginning, miraculously swells, and increases, as a divine ‘field of energy’ it extends and expands ever farther.”⁵¹ The kingdom will grow from a small seed of little significance to a large tree where all nations will flow. Most scholars have connected the parable of the mustard seed with the writings of Ezekiel.⁵² In Ezekiel 17 we read about the parable of the two eagles and the vine. The first eagle transplants a twig from a cedar and then plants a seed which becomes a flourishing vine. Then another eagle came and the vine bent its roots and branches towards this second eagle. Ezekiel goes on to explain that the first eagle is the king of Babylon who took the “twig,” Judah’s king Jehoiachin, to Babylon. The seed, or the royal offspring, is Jehoiachin’s uncle, Zedekiah. He is the one who despised the covenant, broke away from Nebuchadnezzar, and turned to Egypt. The King of Egypt was Hophra, who is the second eagle. This turning to Egypt would prove to be disastrous for Zedekiah. Following this parable Ezekiel quotes the Lord saying:

I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. (Ezekiel 17:22-24)

⁵¹ Rudolph Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man: A Study in the History of Religion*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: James Clark Company, 2010) pp. 123-124.

⁵²G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company 1986) 123.

This parable is clearly connected with the parable Jesus gave of the mustard seed. It tells of a humble seed or kingdom that grows into a tree where the birds come to nest.⁵³ This is similar to the kingdom of God that reigns over all the earth. The kingdom of God had come in the person of Jesus Christ. His kingdom is growing and will continue to grow until the day it is the kingdom that reigns over all the earth. The kingdom of God has already come in the person of Christ, but it is not yet what it will be.

The prophet Daniel also used this imagery of a great tree that was visible to the whole earth to represent a mighty kingdom (Daniel 4:10-12). His prophecy was in regards to the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar and his eventual humbling that would remain until he realized “that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Daniel 4:25). Therefore, this image of a great tree representing a kingdom would have been familiar to Jews in the first century who were looking for the kingdom.

The parable of the weeds also gives us a picture of the “already” and “not yet” of the kingdom of God as the “sons of the kingdom” and the “sons of the evil one” are mingled together. According to the prophecy in Daniel 7 there would be a time of tribulation that would be followed by the giving of the kingdom of God to the saints of the Most High. The fourth beast, or fourth kingdom, will “devour the whole earth,” “speak words against the Most High,” and “wear out the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:23-25). But his power will be taken away and destroyed, then “the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:26-27). Therefore, those who were looking for the kingdom of God were expecting it to come after a time of tribulation as depicted in Daniel’s prophecy. But this is not what we see in the parable of the wheat and weeds. We see

⁵³ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 253.

the “sons of the kingdom” mingled together with the “sons of the evil one.” The kingdom has come, but has not yet thrown out of the kingdom “all causes of sin and all lawbreakers” (Matt 13:41). By this we understand that the time of tribulation and the time of the kingdom have been mingled together in this age. But not all agree that the parable of the weeds is evidence for the presence of the kingdom of God being already present on earth.⁵⁴ However, this disagreement comes by means of a theological presupposition that does not allow for the time of the kingdom of God and the time of tribulation to overlap.

The “Already” of the Tribulation

Not only is the kingdom of God “already” present on earth but the end-time tribulation also has an “already” and “not yet” element that must be considered.⁵⁵ As Daniel 7:23-27 seems to make clear, the time of tribulation will precede the coming of the kingdom. In one sense this is correct, but it does not divide quite that neatly. The time of tribulation and the time of the kingdom overlap. In Daniel 7:13, we understand the Son of Man to be Jesus,⁵⁶ but later in the same chapter

⁵⁴ Robert Saucy writes that this teaching does not give evidence in favor of the presence of the kingdom. This comes from the literalist hermeneutic that would not allow the time of tribulation to overlap with the time of the kingdom because it does not overlap in Daniel 7. While it is clear that the giving of the kingdom to the saints of the Most High follows a time of tribulation, it is also clear in the teaching of Jesus that the kingdom of God has already come in his presence. Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan 2010), 95.

Another opponent to the kingdom of God being already present on earth is Alfred Plummer. He wrote, “the Son of Man brings the kingdom with Him, and at that consummation ‘the sons of the evil one’ may be said for the moment to be in the Kingdom; but they are immediately expelled, as having no right to be in it.” This line of interpretation is not in harmony with the traditional literalist approach. The “sons of the kingdom” and the “sons of the evil one” are growing together. The kingdom is already present with the “sons of the evil one.” Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmanns 1956), 196.

⁵⁵ The beginning of the reign of Jesus is marked by his resurrection and his being given “all authority on heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18) and was confirmed at the time of Pentecost by the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. The Old Testament readers did not generally foresee that the kingdom of God and time of tribulation would be overlapped, but rather that the latter would precede the former. However, the Apostle John wrote in Revelation that the time of the kingdom and tribulation are in fact intertwined. “I, John, your brother in the tribulation and the kingdom” (Revelation 1:9).

⁵⁶ Jesus understood himself as the fulfillment of this vision as he stood before the high priest who asked if he was indeed the Christ. Jesus responded, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man

the interpretation explains that the Son of Man is the saints of the Most High. In this we see Jesus as a representative of the people of God. We see this aspect of Jesus identifying himself with the people of God when he asks Saul why he is persecuting him. Saul was persecuting the church, but Jesus identified the persecution of the church to his own person being persecuted. In this we see that Jesus, as a representative of the people of God, experienced tribulation in his ministry on earth, and experienced great tribulation in his death. In his ministry Jesus said, “The foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). He was also persecuted and slandered by others who said, “Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Matt 11:19). Later Jesus would experience his great tribulation in his death. As Jesus foretold, “the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Jesus would undergo hardships in his ministry and ultimately endure a great tribulation.

In a similar way, God’s people, the saints of the Most High, will follow this pattern set forth by their representative, the Christ. The experience of the church will be one of tribulation that will ultimately lead to the great tribulation at the end of age. Paul wrote to Timothy to beware that they were in the last days and of the time of trouble that is to be expected. He wrote Timothy:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than

seated at the right and of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” This quote by Jesus is a reference to Daniel 7:13.

lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

As Peter had already preached at Pentecost, they were already living in the last days. Therefore they should also expect “times of difficulty,” the time of tribulation has already begun. John wrote confirming the end-time tribulation as well writing, “Children, it is the last hour, and you have heard that the antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). The presence of “many antichrists” was evidence that they are indeed in the “last hour.” But there is also an expectation that the antichrist is coming. This is how we understand the “already” and “not yet” of the end-time tribulation. The antichrist has not yet come, but there are already many antichrists.

Conclusion

The emphasis of the kingdom of God runs through both the Old and New Testaments. It was prominent in Jesus’ ministry, especially as portrayed by Matthew. Jesus spoke of the kingdom that was “already” in the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl of great value. In this he offered a kingdom that was to be found, to be rejoiced over, and to lose all in order to gain.⁵⁷ An integral component to consider in the kingdom of God being present on earth in the coming of Christ is his

⁵⁷ In regards to the time of the kingdom of God there is not a consensus among evangelicals. Dispensationalist would argue that the kingdom is a matter of the future and not the present. Herman Hoyt writes, “the mediatorial kingdom will be ushered in by Christ at that point in time when he returns to earth.” Herman Hoyt, “Premillennial Dispensationalism,” Robert G. Clouse, George Eldon Ladd, Herman Hoyt, Loraine Boettner, Anthony Hoekema, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 91.

The Scriptures do teach that the kingdom of God has a future phase that has yet to be realized. The commitment of dispensationalists to a literal thousand year reign is a hindrance to their embracing the reality of the kingdom of God that is present today. The literal thousand year reign of Christ is a controlling element in the dispensational view of the kingdom. As Charles Ryrie noted, “The doctrine of the millennial kingdom is for the dispensationalist an integral part of his entire scheme and interpretation of many Biblical passages.” Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press 1965), 160.

statement to the pharisees in regards to his healing ministry. He told them, “if it is by the Spirit of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). Anthony Hoekema compared this “already” and “not yet” phenomenon to D-Day and V-Day in World War II.⁵⁸ D-Day was the day the allied troops invaded Normandy in what eventually led to an Allied victory. But even though the troops were successful that day it was not the day of final victory. V-Day was the day that victory was declared in Europe to mark the end of World War II. Hoekema compares the first coming of Christ to D-Day, the event that assures victory, and the second coming with V-Day, the day that marks the end of this age and the final victory over Satan and all lawlessness. God’s final victory has yet to take place. We live in an age where the curse and sin continue on the earth.⁵⁹ Jesus spoke of the final judgment that was expected in the coming of God’s kingdom. He did this through his parables of the weeds and the net. God will judge the earth. The expectation of the Jewish people of the coming kingdom would have been largely influenced by Daniel 7. In Daniel 7 we see the kingdom of God coming and immediately judging and reigning over the whole earth (Daniel 7:26-27). Jesus was introducing a different way to think about the kingdom. Jesus also taught of the kingdom as having already come and appearing as small and insignificant, hardly a kingdom whose dominion covered the whole earth. He taught this idea in the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven. This included the overlapping of this age and the age to come, the “sons of the kingdom” are with the “sons of the evil one.” The time of the kingdom is mingled with the time of tribulation. Jesus was reshaping his listeners understanding of the end-time kingdom of God by teaching them in parables through the grid of the “already” and the “not yet.”

⁵⁸ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1979), 21.

⁵⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing: 2008) 276.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ACTS

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is that in order to rightly understand and proclaim the gospel in the way of Christ and the Apostles one must possess a biblical-theological understanding of the end-time kingdom of God. In Acts we read of the apostles Peter and Paul proclaiming the gospel. Both of their gospel proclamations included a biblical-theological understanding of the end-time kingdom of God. In this chapter consideration will be given to the gospel ministry of Peter and Paul. Both employed a biblical-theological approach in their understanding and proclaiming the presence of the end-time kingdom of God.

The Kingdom Restored

Following his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days with his disciples “speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). So naturally, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The Old Testament expectation of a coming kingdom as well as the emphasis that Jesus placed on the kingdom makes this question natural. They were right to be thinking in terms of the kingdom of God on earth, yet they were not fully understanding the end-time kingdom of God. Jesus explained to them that it was not for them “to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7). The problem with their question had to do with timing, not with the content.⁶⁰ Luke even sets this expectation in recording what the angel Gabriel said to Mary about her son: “And the Lord God will give to him the throne

⁶⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 683.

of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). The disciples understanding of the kingdom being fully restored according to the expectations set forth in the Old Testament, especially in Daniel 7, would have had the disciples thinking in terms of a kingdom of worldwide dominion. However, what they did not expect or understand was that the kingdom of God on earth had been inaugurated but not consummated.

In Acts, Luke emphasizes a realized eschatology through pneumatology.⁶¹ After Jesus tells his disciples that it is not for them to know the timing of the restoration he tells them that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Acts 1:8). Later, Peter would base his sermon at Pentecost on explaining why these men were speaking in tongues. He explained that Joel’s prophecy about the Spirit being poured out in the latter days was being fulfilled (Acts 2:14-17). This tells us that the disciples understood that the “later days” had come, even if not yet fully.

Peter’s Sermon at Pentecost

In Acts 2 we read that on the day of Pentecost all of the disciples were together when something like a mighty rushing wind came from heaven and filled the house. Tongues of fire then rested on each one of them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. At that time in Jerusalem there were devout Jews from many different nations. This was significant because they heard the disciples speaking in their own native languages. At this sight, some were amazed while others mocked. Some of the mockers claimed that the disciples must have been drunk and speaking out of their minds. At this point Peter stood up and gave his famous sermon at Pentecost. He appealed to Joel 2, making the claim that the last days were now upon them (Acts

⁶¹ *ibid.*, 684.

2:17). He also referenced Psalm 16 in making a defense for the resurrection of the Christ (Acts 2:25-28). Finally, Peter made the case that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was in fact both Lord and Christ, citing Psalm 110 (Acts 2:34-35). In response to Peter's preaching that day, about three thousand souls were added to their number (Acts 2:41). In this section we will consider the connections between the end-time kingdom of God and what Peter taught from Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110.

The day of Pentecost was an important day in redemptive history as it marked the coming of the Spirit of God and gave evidence that the latter days had begun. The arrival of the Spirit is made evident in three ways.⁶² First, there is the "sound like a mighty rushing wind" that filled the house that they were in. The Greek and Hebrew words for wind can refer to either the physical wind or the Spirit of God.⁶³ This ambiguity in translation is perhaps more helpful than problematic. Adam became a living being when God breathed life into him. In Ezekiel we read about the valley of dry bones that came to life after the wind breathed life into them (Ezekiel 37:9-10). So now the coming of the Holy Spirit is marked by a mighty wind that breathes new life into the disciples (Acts 2:2-4). Second, we read that tongues of fire rested upon each of them (Acts 2:4). God's presence was often marked by fire. "Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire" (Exodus 19:18). The tabernacle where God made his presence known was marked by fire. "For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys" (Exodus 40:38). God made his presence known through fire. John the Baptist described Jesus as the one who would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16). The fire and rushing wind point us to

⁶² Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997) 57.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 57.

the Spirit and presence of God. Third, there is the speaking of tongues (Acts 2:4). In Acts 2 we have an explicit understanding of what this phenomenon of speaking in tongues is. At that time in Jerusalem there were devout Jews “from every nation under heaven.” In other words, there were Jews present who spoke in many different languages. The crowd became amazed as they heard the disciples speaking in their own native languages about “the mighty works of God.” Immediately following this Peter, began his famous sermon at Pentecost where he explains what has taken place.

While some were amazed at what was happening others mocked saying that the men were drunk. Peter then addressed the crowd explaining that the men were not drunk but that what they were witnessing was in fact the fulfillment of what the prophet Joel had prophesied. “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28). In citing Joel, he declares that the last days have come upon them and what they are hearing is prophecy that has been induced by the pouring out of the Spirit. It must be noted that Peter used the phrase “latter days” (*en tais eschatais hemerai*s) instead of the wording used in Joel, “after these things” (*meta tauta*). This substitution comes from the only other place in the LXX in which it is used, Isaiah 2:2-3.⁶⁴ On this G.K Beale writes,

Thus, Peter appears to interpret the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost upon the Christian community in fulfillment of Joel also to be the beginning fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the end-time temple, under the influence of which the nations would come. Part of the reason for linking these texts is that the following context of Joel is concerned with the establishment of the end-time temple (Joel 3:18).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011) 136.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 136.

In Numbers 11, we read about two men who are prophesying in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses about what was happening and Moses responded positively to the idea of others prophesying. Moses told him, “would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Numbers 11:29). “What Moses foresaw and longed for, and what Joel predicted, Peter now declares to have arrived. The Lord’s people have received the Spirit, and to signify this event, they all prophesy, declaring God’s great deeds in the dialects of the nations, as the Spirit gives them utterance.”⁶⁶ Peter is explaining to them that these men are not blabbering drunks, but rather are speaking in the tongues of the various nations gathered in that place. This is a result of the Spirit being poured out on them, which is a result of them being in the last days, which is all according to the prophecy of Joel.

Peter then goes on to explain that Jesus, having performed many wonders and signs, was delivered up, according to God’s plan, crucified, and later raised from the dead. He said this in order to explain that the pangs of death had been loosened and that Jesus would not be held by death. Making this point Peter cites Psalm 16:

I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence (Acts 2:25-28).

This Jesus whom they proclaimed is no longer held by death, but has risen from the grave and is Lord of all. This is the teaching of Psalm 16. The Holy One is described as being at the right hand of God and not being abandoned to Hades or his body seeing corruption. The fact that Jesus has

⁶⁶ Dennis Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997) 62.

risen from the dead and has been given authority to sit at the right hand of the Father shows us that Psalm 16 was speaking about him. The end-time kingdom of God has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ and his sitting at the right hand of God. The end-time kingdom is one where God's people are resurrected and sit under the kingship of Christ. While this has not yet been completely fulfilled, it has been fulfilled in part. Jesus is enthroned and he is the first fruit of the new creation.

“In Acts 2:29-31, Peter shows that David, being dead and buried, could not fulfill the promise of resurrection or incorruption he finds in Ps. 16; after attesting Jesus's exaltation in Acts 2:32-33 he produces another key text that David, not having ascended, could not fulfill (2:34-35).”⁶⁷ Peter continues to emphasize Jesus as Lord by quoting and associating Psalm 110 with Jesus (Acts 2:34-35). The Psalmist writes of the Lord as sitting at the right hand of the Lord until his enemies are made his footstool. “Jesus is reported in all three synoptic Gospels as having interpreted Psalm 110:1 as a messianic passage and as applying it to himself.”⁶⁸ Peter continues by affirming that God has indeed made Jesus both Lord and Christ, and that it is this Jesus whom they have crucified. At this point those in the crowd realize that the end-time kingdom has come upon them in the person of Jesus Christ, their king and they are “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). They ask Peter what they should do and he responds by telling them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).

Peter's Sermon to the Gentiles

In Acts 10 we read Luke's account of Peter being sent to Cornelius to preach the gospel. Cornelius, a centurion, has a vision about a man named Peter who he is to send for. The following day Peter falls into a trance and has a vision of a great sheet being let down with all kinds of

⁶⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic) 959.

⁶⁸ Frank E. Gaebeliein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan) 280.

unclean animals on it. He was then told to kill and eat the unclean animals. To this request Peter protested saying, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). Then Peter hears a voice from heaven telling him, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:15). While Peter was considering this vision, men sent by Cornelius arrive where Peter is staying. These men ask Peter to join them in their return to Cornelius. Peter goes with them and meets Cornelius and proclaims the gospel to him and his household. Cornelius and the Gentiles with him believe the gospel, receive the Holy Spirit, and begin speaking in tongues to the amazement of the Jews with Peter. The gospel that Peter shared with the Gentiles included the reality of the end-time kingdom of God. This was declared by his proclaiming Jesus to be “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36), his describing the healing ministry of Jesus (Acts 10:38), the judgment to come (Acts 10:42), and the work of the Holy Spirit in the new believers (Acts 10:44-47).

It is significant that Peter preached peace and announced that Jesus is “Lord of all” to a Roman centurion. Cornelius would have been familiar with the peace of Rome, known as the “*Pax Romana*,” under the rule of Caesar. For Peter to announce peace under the rule and Lordship of Christ was a direct challenge to Caesar.

[J]ust as Caesar established the Roman “peace” forcibly, so also God would ultimately subject all his enemies in the present, meanwhile, God offered terms of peace to those willing to accept it. Whatever “preaching peace” might signify in other texts, it is highly significant when Peter addresses it to a military officer belonging to the occupying power.⁶⁹

Richard Longenecker summarized Peter’s sermon as a message of peace, which not only belongs to the Jews but also the Gentiles under the rubric of Christ being Lord of all.⁷⁰ This is how Peter

⁶⁹ Craig S. Keener, Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic) 1799-1800

⁷⁰ Frank E. Gaebelin, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John & Acts, Volume 9, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981) 393.

began his sermon, with a message of peace from the Lord of all, to a centurion under Caesar living during the “Pax Romana.” Jesus was the king whose rule ultimately brought peace, not Caesar.

Peter continues by describing the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. He explains that Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power and went about doing good and healing. The healing ministry of Jesus is a sign that the age to come has come upon them. It is not merely a good work being done by Jesus in healing those oppressed by the devil. But, it is also a sign of his messiahship. Jesus had already identified himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2, “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” (Luke 4:18-19). Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Lord’s anointed who was setting at liberty those who were oppressed. The title of the “Lord’s anointed” was one reserved for the kings of Israel. David often referred to Saul’s position as king as the “Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:10, 11, 16, 23). Jesus identified himself in the reading of Isaiah 61 as the Lord’s anointed, and Peter preached Jesus as the Christ, the Lord’s anointed. This anointing is demonstrated through his great power, which is revealed in his healing ministry. Peter goes on to explain that this Jesus, the Lord’s anointed, was put to death and after three days rose from the dead. Upon his resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to preach that he is the one appointed by God to judge all the living and the dead. Peter is proclaiming Christ not only as Lord of all, but also as the judge of all.

Peter was preaching the end-time kingdom of God as having come in the person of Christ. Peace was offered through Jesus and not through Caesar. Jesus was Lord of all, not Caesar. The judge of all was Jesus and everyone who believed in him would receive forgiveness of sins through his name. This was the good news of peace in the work of Christ the King.

Upon hearing this message from Peter, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles and they began speaking in tongues. The same thing that happened to the Jews at Pentecost was happening now to the Gentiles. This was a kind of Gentile Pentecost.⁷¹ The fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel that Peter had earlier explained to his Jewish audience was now being fulfilled even among the Gentiles. Perhaps this is why the circumcised believers were so amazed. They had thought that the promise was only for Israel.⁷²

Paul and the Kingdom of God

There has been some debate over whether or not Jesus and Paul preached the same gospel. The gospel that we see Jesus preached emphasizes the kingdom while the gospel that Paul preaches seems to emphasize justification by faith and soteriology. There is even disagreement on how to study the difference between the two. Should we try to make Paul's gospel of justification fit into Jesus' gospel of the kingdom? Or should we try to make Jesus' gospel fit into Paul's?⁷³ Paul's epistles do include language that deals more with soteriology than with the kingdom, however Luke recorded Paul's ministry as one of proclaiming the kingdom. In this section we will explore Paul's kingdom emphasis as recorded in Acts.

Paul and his companions came to Antioch and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Acts 13:14-48). After a reading from the Scriptures, they were invited to share a word of exhortation and Paul accepted. He gave a brief overview of the history of Israel telling them that the good news that was promised to the fathers has been fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus. In

⁷¹ Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts: The History of Redemption*, 134.

⁷² G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 691.

⁷³ Scot McKnight, "Jesus vs Paul", *Christianity Today*, December 2010, 27.

his sermon he includes references to Isaiah 11, Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, Psalm 16, Habakkuk 1, and Isaiah 49, all of which allude to the end-time kingdom of God.

By referring to Jesus as David's son, Paul is giving the context in order that Jesus can be understood by the Jews as the promised king of Israel (Acts 13:22-23).

Paul's Christian proclamation begins by announcing that God has brought forth the messianic Deliverer from David's line in the person of Jesus. The promise Paul alludes to is in Isaiah 11:1-16, a messianic passage of special import for Judaism because it speaks of the Messiah's descent from David, of his righteous rule, of his victories, and of the establishment of his kingdom.⁷⁴

There is an emphasis on David because there is an emphasis on the kingdom and the promises associated with it. The history of Israel is the history of a kingdom. At this point in time Israel is awaiting the anointed one, their king, to come and be the fulfillment of all that God had promised through the prophets.

Paul then goes on to quote Psalm 2:7 saying in reference to Jesus, "Today you are my Son, today I have begotten you." Richard Longenecker suggests that Paul is binding together in his sermon the Jewish confession along with the Christian confession. The Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2 tell of God speaking of his "son."⁷⁵ It was common in Judaism to link passages together based on similar verbal analogies.⁷⁶ Psalm 2 is written to give us an understanding of the end-time Davidic king. Brevard Childs argues that Psalm 2, "was placed in such a prominent place... to emphasize the kingship of God as a major theme of the whole Psalter."⁷⁷ In this we see Paul preaching the kingdom of God by means of his preaching of its king.

⁷⁴ Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, John & Acts, Volume 9*, 425.

⁷⁵ Richard Longnecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Regent College Publishing 1994), 120.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 426.

⁷⁷ Brevard Childs, *The Old Testament as Scripture*, (Fortress Press, 1979) 516.

Paul continues by quoting Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16 in tandem connecting the “holy and sure blessing of David” with God’s promise to not allow his Holy one to see corruption. In light of this Craig S. Keener writes, “The connection between Isa. 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 is natural midrashically.”⁷⁸ Keener is stating that the promise of the blessing of David and the promise of the Holy One not seeing corruption is fulfilled in the person of Christ. While it is not explicitly stated in Isaiah 55 or Psalm 16, Paul does explicit state that these two scriptures find their fulfillment in the person of Christ. Paul was preaching the kingdom of God as he announced Jesus as the one who received the “holy and sure blessing of David” and the one who did not see corruption. As Paul goes on to explain, “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption” (Acts 13:36-37).

Paul then gives a warning to the people by referencing Habakkuk 1:5, “Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.”⁷⁹ Following this warning the people begged Paul to continue teaching these things the next Sabbath. The following Sabbath, the Jews’ jealousy was kindled because of the crowds and they began to contradict what he was saying. At this, Paul cites Isaiah 49:6, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” “As Paul and Barnabas saw it, the Jews of Pisidian Antioch in their exclusiveness had rejected the very thing they were looking for: “The Life of the Age to Come.””⁸⁰

In Paul’s sermon to the Jews in Antioch, we see that he was clearly preaching the kingdom of God. He taught about the Messiah in Psalm 2. This was a Psalm that would have been

⁷⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*; Volume 2, 2072.

⁷⁹ “The context of Hab. 1:5 is Babylonian judgement on wicked Judah, judgment so terrible that God’s doomed people would not believe it.” *ibid.*, 2090.

⁸⁰ Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, John & Acts, Volume 9*, 430

understood by the Jews to be speaking of the Messiah, the end-time king and kingdom. In preaching of the resurrection, Paul was preaching that Jesus was the Holy One of Israel. This was clearly not a reference to David as he went on to explain, but a reference to Jesus. Therefore we see clearly in Paul's sermon to the Jews in Antioch that he preached to them the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Later on in Acts we see Paul addressing not Jews in a synagogue, but rather pagans gathered together at the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-34). While in Antioch, Paul was asked if he had a word of exhortation, but at the Areopagus there was an open forum where "all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). Paul found an altar with the inscription, "To the unknown god" and let that be his starting point. The substance of his address was made up of his describing the nature of God and man's proper response to him.⁸¹ He concluded his address by telling the people to repent because God "has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Here, Paul is again implying the kingdom of God as he describes a judge over all mankind and that the people must turn towards him lest they face his judgment. Paul's message to the Athenians was to repent before the judge of the earth. This message is not unlike what Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). The message that the judge of all the earth demands repentance is not a message that is void of the kingdom. Psalm 2, a psalm about the coming of the king, reads, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:12). The message of the kingdom is a message of judgment. Paul was preaching the

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 476

kingdom of God when he told those at the Areopagus that they must repent because there is a fixed day of judgment.

The kingdom of God was a controlling theme of Paul's preaching and teaching. Paul characterized his own ministry among the Ephesians as one of proclaiming the kingdom. "And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again" (Acts 20:25). Paul then goes on to refer to his teaching ministry as one in which he did not withhold from them the "whole purpose of God." "Exactly what his summary of that purpose was is not clear, but he does call his summary 'profitable' (Acts 20:20), 'the gospel of the grace of God' (Acts 20:24), and 'the kingdom' (Acts 20:25)."⁸² The kingdom of God is a legitimate controlling theme and perhaps the theme that Paul employed in order to give to the Ephesians the "whole purpose of God." How does one go about teaching the whole purpose of God? G.K. Beale writes that "seeking a center to Scripture is an attempt to find heuristic lenses for God's people that guide them to understand better the various details of Scripture. Acts 20:26-27 is a biblical rationale for searching the content of such a center."⁸³ In the closing verses of the book of Acts we read Luke summarize Paul's ministry in Rome: "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31). Clearly Paul preached the kingdom of God. Therefore a debate is not needed on whether or not Paul and Jesus preached the same gospel or if Paul preached the kingdom. Not only did Luke characterize Paul's teaching as proclaiming the kingdom (Acts 28:30-31), but Paul himself did as well (Acts 20:25). It is not in question whether or not Paul emphasized different aspects of soteriology that the gospels do not record Jesus as having emphasized. However, there should not be a sharp division between

⁸² G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 164

⁸³ *ibid.*, 164

the proclaiming of the kingdom of God and the doctrine of justification by faith alone that was so emphasized in his letter to the Galatians. For Paul to write a much needed letter on justification to the Galatians is not in any way evidence of him not proclaiming the kingdom of God. Again, the kingdom of God is a suitable vessel to declare the “whole purpose of God” which would certainly include Paul’s soteriology.

Kingdom & Tribulation

Throughout Paul’s ministry he faces intense persecution. In his letter to the Corinthian church he writes of his suffering that included imprisonments, beatings with lashes and rods, being shipwrecked, “in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardships, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Paul understood this suffering as connected to entering into the kingdom. Paul sought to strengthen the disciples in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch by “encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). In the same way that Jesus’ life included tribulation, so would Paul’s (Acts 9:16) and so will the church suffer tribulation (1 Timothy 3:12). As Dennis Johnson has written it is “necessary for Jesus’ disciples to enter the kingdom’s fullness through suffering. In God’s plan, suffering is the path to glory not only for Jesus, but also for those who follow him.”⁸⁴ As noted in previous chapters, the connection between Jesus and his people is tightly connected. While Daniel 7 interprets the Son of Man as the saints of the Most High, Jesus interpreted the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13 as referring to himself. Jesus asked Paul, “why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul was

⁸⁴ Dennis Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, 216

persecuting the church, but Jesus personalized the church to an extent in which the persecution of the church was not only to the church but also to himself. Paul considered his own sufferings as completing what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 1:24). The life of the church is intertwined with the life of Christ. The restoration of the kingdom of God will include tribulation. In the same way that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer (Luke 24:26) it is necessary that the church will enter the kingdom of God through tribulations. Paul understood that the end-time tribulations were already a present reality. Though there is a great tribulation in the end (Daniel 7:23-25; Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14), it has already begun, first in the life of Christ, and now in his church. In the same way that the kingdom of God is “already” and “not yet,” so the time of tribulation is “already” and “not yet.”

Conclusion

The end-time kingdom of God was a prominent theme in the Apostles’ gospel ministry. Following the resurrection of Christ, the disciples thought that perhaps the time had come that the kingdom would finally be restored to Israel, that the end-time kingdom of God had arrived. Jesus did not rebuke them but rather told them it is not for them to know the times or seasons that the Father has set. Jesus is validating their expectation of the end-time kingdom, but correcting their understanding as to what is revealed and what is hidden, with the full restoration of the end-time kingdom being hidden. As the disciples spoke in tongues at Pentecost, Peter boldly declared that the latter days had come upon them by citing Joel 2. This phenomenon of speaking in tongues was an expectation that had been built up through the history of Israel of what would occur in the latter days with the arrival of the end-time kingdom of God. We also see the Gentiles brought into the people of God with Peter’s preaching to Cornelius and his household. Again the Spirit of God is at work as they experience a kind of Gentile Pentecost as the Gentiles begin speaking in tongues,

demonstrating the power of the Spirit that was promised to come in the latter days. Finally, we see in Acts that Paul's ministry may be characterized as one of proclaiming the kingdom just as clearly as Jesus's ministry was characterized as proclaiming the kingdom. Luke's recording of the Acts of the Apostles gives clear evidence that the end-time kingdom of God was a prominent theme of the Apostles's gospel ministry that was made possible through a clear understanding of biblical theology. In other words, the end-time kingdom of God is to be understood through an understanding of the progressive development of its revelation in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Biblical Theology in Evangelism

“The Bible isn’t just a potpourri of pithy sayings from which we can pick up a nugget here and a nugget there. No, it’s a grand, sweeping, world-encompassing story that traces the history of God’s dealings with mankind from the very beginning to very end.”⁸⁵ However, the grand storyline of the Bible has been largely lost among evangelicals today, especially in regards to evangelism. This is due to an absence of biblical-theological training in the church and with her leaders. Graeme Goldsworthy suggests a reason for the absence is that there is a preoccupation with sound doctrine.⁸⁶ This can be described as “missing the forest for the trees.” The preoccupation with details, not taking anything away from the importance of these details, can distract from the larger story of the Bible. In fairness it should also be noted that it is just as likely for the important details, sound doctrine, to be at risk with a preoccupation with the larger story, biblical theology. The trees can be missed for the forest. But even a good thing like the pursuit of sound doctrine can take away from the church’s interest in biblical theology. However, in order to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and the Apostles it is critical to have an understanding of the grand narrative of the Bible. The story of the Bible is the context for the gospel. If the context of the gospel is not rightly understood then the gospel will not be rightly understood, or at best understood in a minimalistic and individualistic way. The gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles as part of a story, a story about a kingdom and its king. If the gospel is reduced to a set of propositions, as true and beautiful

⁸⁵ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011) 67.

⁸⁶Goldsworthy, “Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics” Southern Baptist Seminary, *Journal of Theology* 12/1 (Spring 2008), 6-7.

as they might be, the story of the gospel will be lost. The story of the Bible is that God is separated from man, initiates with man, and eventually returns. According to Christopher Vogler, “all stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and movies. They are known collectively as The Hero’s Journey.”⁸⁷ Stories help us make sense of the world. Stories are used to promote worldviews and political agendas. Brian Godawa writes that, “we are creatures of story, created by a story telling God, who created the very fabric of our reality in terms of his story.”⁸⁸ The storyline of the Bible must become common knowledge within the church because it is the storyline of our world in which we inhabit. If the storyline of the Bible is unknown, if biblical theology is nonexistent in the church, then the hero of the story will be reduced to something less than the hero of the grand narrative. As Graeme Goldsworthy has written, “Show me a church without a good appreciation of the Old Testament and biblical theology and I’ll show you a church with a weak understanding of the gospel.”⁸⁹

Jesus demonstrated biblical theology following his resurrection as he accompanied two travelers on the road to Emmaus recorded in Luke 24. The two travelers were discussing the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus when Jesus himself enters the conversation. He rebukes them for being slow to believe all that was written about him in Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Thus, he establishes himself as the reference point for understanding the Old Testament. If the Old Testament and biblical theology is neglected in our evangelism then even the message of the New Testament will be compromised. Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism, or as Edith Schaeffer’s book title claims, “Christianity is Jewish.”⁹⁰ Peter made sense of Pentecost

⁸⁷ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, (Michael Wise Productions, 2007) 3.

⁸⁸ Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2002) 71.

⁸⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) 52.

⁹⁰ Edith Schaeffer, *Christianity is Jewish*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 1977).

through explaining the prophet Joel's message (Acts 2:17). Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Jews in Antioch by reciting the history of Israel (Acts 13:16-23). While the New Testament is not to be minimized in any way whatsoever, we must remember that it is built on Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms – all of which find their fulfillment in Christ. The Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. Therefore the gospel we proclaim must be built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (Eph. 2:20). Jesus must be understood in our gospel proclamation as the hero of the grand story. To lessen the gospel by minimizing the Old Testament or by avoiding biblical theology will lead to a weakened gospel, and a weakened gospel will lead to a weakened church.

The Kingdom of God in Evangelism

The Kingdom of God is a viable controlling theme of the entire Bible. Thomas Schreiner writes,

The drama of God as King and human beings as his subjects is worked out in history and in a certain place. The story of Scripture is not only the relationship between God and human beings; it also relates to the universe. What is the destiny of the world that God has made? The Scriptures promise that there will be a new heaven and a new earth - a new creation where the glory of God will illumine the cosmos. So the kingdom of God has a threefold dimension, focusing on God as King, on human beings as the subjects of the King, and the universe as the place where his kingship is worked out.⁹¹

This drama of the kingdom unfolds over the history of the world and throughout the Scriptures. God is the creator of the earth and therefore its king. He delegates his kingship to Adam who he

⁹¹ Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013) Prologue XV.

created in his image, therefore Adam is in the image of a ruler and creator. He authorizes Adam to rule, subdue, and have dominion over the earth. The serpent deceives man and sin and rebellion enter the story. The rest of the Bible is devoted to God's plan to restore man and creation, the kingdom of God on earth. Moving towards this end, God chooses a people for his own possession, Israel, that will be to him a kingdom. As N.T. Wright says, "In Israel's scriptures, the reason Israel's story matters is that the creator of the world has chosen and called Israel to be the people through whom he will redeem the world."⁹² Israel is a central piece to the story of God's redemption of the world. That is why it is crucial to understand the history of Israel, because it is the history of the kingdom of God on earth, and the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom. "What God does for Israel is what God is doing in relation to the whole world. That is what it meant to be Israel, to be the people who, for better and worse, carried the destiny of the world on their shoulders."⁹³ Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's story, he is their long awaited king. The anticipation of the people of Israel was for their God to restore all things and bring about worldwide dominion (Daniel 7:23-27). If one does not understand the good news of Daniel 7, then they cannot fully understand the gospel of the kingdom.

The missing aspect of the kingdom of God can also lead to nominalism. The proclamation of a kingdom demands one of two responses, allegiance or rejection, even if that rejection is indifference. A gospel that is void of a kingdom will tend towards offering propositions that are to be believed or disbelieved, but lack in a calling to repentance. This is not how the Scriptures portray the Lord's anointed and his kingdom. As Psalm 2 describes the Lord's anointed, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." This is not an appeal to agree or disagree with a set of principles, but a

⁹² N.T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*, (Harper One, 2012) 73.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 74.

call for allegiance to the king. When Jesus announced that the kingdom was at hand, he simultaneously called for repentance (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). This can be lost in an effort to remain faithful to the truth that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). Zane Hodges argues against the requirement of repentance by stating that the issue of repentance is totally absent in John's gospel. In this he claims that repentance is therefore not a condition for salvation.⁹⁴ However, the argument that repentance is absent in one gospel does not negate the kingdom's call to repentance. H. A. Ironside rejects this line of reasoning by explaining that John wrote years after the authors of the Synoptics and that while the Synoptics focused on repentance, John focused on belief, choosing not to repeat what has already been made clear.⁹⁵ Ironside is saying that the absence of repentance in one gospel does not negate its presence in the other three gospels. The gospels are all in harmony, with some authors having specific emphases as did the synoptics and John. John MacArthur comments on Hodges assertion about the absence of the word "repentance" in John's gospel by also showing that the word "grace" is also missing from John's gospel.⁹⁶ Certainly this absence does not take away from the graciousness of the gospel. Neither does the lack of the word "repentance" in John's gospel take away from the gospel's call to repent. The call of the kingdom is a call to become the subject of a King. The preaching of the gospel must include a call to repentance, as Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The announcement that kingdom of heaven is at hand is good news and therefore repentance is good news. Isaiah describes the good news as God's reign. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'" (Isaiah 52:7).

⁹⁴ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, (Grace Evangelical Society, 2013)146-148.

⁹⁵ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Nashville, Tn: Thomas Nelson, 2005) 62.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 62.

The kingdom of God should not be absent in our evangelism today. It calls for repentance, it calls for allegiance and obedience to a king who is not indifferent towards how we live our lives. “In the Great Commission, Jesus sends his disciples through the world to make disciples, not only teaching them about the cross and resurrection, important as those are, but also ‘teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you’ (Matt. 28:20).”⁹⁷ The call to conform to God’s law is good news, because God’s ways are good. The kingdom of God is most accurately represented when his subjects are keeping his laws and representing the kingdom of God on earth. This is why Jesus taught us to pray for God’s will to be done and his kingdom to come. His kingdom is represented in the obedience of his people.

The absence of the kingdom of God in evangelism today is a travesty. How can what was so prominent with Christ and the Apostles be so neglected today? What has taken its place? The plan of salvation, as crucial as it is, has supplanted the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom has been reduced to only personal salvation. It is not that the gospel of the kingdom is something other than personal salvation, the problem is that the plan of salvation has become all that the gospel is. It has been reduced to a “get out of jail free card” as the monopoly game would put it. As Dallas Willard says, the “‘Gospels of Sin Management’ presume a Christ with no serious work other than redeeming humankind... [and] they foster ‘vampire christians,’ who only want a little blood for their sins but nothing more to do with Jesus until heaven.”⁹⁸ The kingdom of God must be accurately presented with a call for repentance and allegiance to the King. This does not compromise the doctrine of “faith alone.” We are permitted entrance into the kingdom by grace

⁹⁷ John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing) 2013, 96.

⁹⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1998) 403.

alone, through faith alone, by the work of Christ. None of that excludes the call for repentance. To come into a kingdom is to come under the rule of a king.

The Kingdom of God and the Gospel

At this point it is important that I be clear in my definition of the gospel. There tend to be two sides in the argument of defining the gospel. One side is often accused of their gospel being too small, while the other, in an effort to show forth the grand sweeping implications of the gospel, is often accused of minimizing the cross in an effort to proclaim a big gospel. Those accused of having the gospel too small insist that they are being true to the gospel as proclaimed by Paul who decided to know nothing among the Corinthians other than “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Those who argue for a “bigger” gospel are jealous to proclaim the renewal and remaking of the entire cosmos. These two sides tend to talk past each other. The more narrow view is focused on the cross work of Christ while the larger view is more focused on the implications of the work of Christ and the eschatological hope of the gospel. As D.A. Carson noted, “The narrower focus draws you to Jesus – his incarnation, his death and resurrection, his session and reign” while the “broader focus sketches in the mighty dimensions of what Christ has secured.”⁹⁹ So how are we to understand the gospel? Is it the work of Christ or the implications of what Christ has done? Again, D. A. Carson is helpful writing:

The heart of the gospel is what God has done in Jesus, supremely in his death and resurrection. Period. It is not personal testimony about our repentance; it is not a few words about our faith response; it is not obedience; it is not the cultural mandate or any other mandate... The gospel is the good news about what God has done. Because of what God

⁹⁹ Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, eds, *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, D.A. Carson, What is the Gospel? - Revisited, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010) 162.

has done in Christ Jesus, the gospel necessarily includes the good that has been secured by Christ and his cross work. Thus it has a present and an eschatological dimension. We announce the gospel.¹⁰⁰

The gospel is not the kingdom of God, it is the gospel of the kingdom of God. The implications of the gospel or the context of the gospel is not the gospel. Therefore, while the kingdom of God is preeminent in the gospel ministry of Jesus and the Apostles it must be understood that the kingdom of God in itself is not the good news, it is not the gospel. Neither are the implications of the kingdom of God the gospel. Certainly the implications of what God has done in Jesus are glorious, but they are not the good news. The gospel is the announcement of what God has done in Christ, especially through his death and resurrection. The gospel is not a changed life, a changed neighborhood, or peace among different races. Those things could and should happen as a result of the transforming message of the gospel, but they are not the gospel.

Eschatology in Evangelism

Eschatology is often thought of in terms of the events that take place at the end of history. However, eschatology should not be reserved for the events at the end of the age, but rather something that is a present reality. Certainly eschatology is concerned with what is yet to be, but we also must understand it as a current reality, a fulfillment that has come to be realized in our age.¹⁰¹ The eschaton has already been inaugurated, therefore eschatology is a doctrine that is helpful to the church in understanding the present reality and not just the future. We must have an eschatological view of the kingdom of God. As Jürgen Moltmann said, “From first to last, and not

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 162.

¹⁰¹ Anthony Hoekema argued, “we must insist that the message of biblical eschatology will be seriously impoverished if we do not include in it the present state of the believer and the eschatology must include both what we might call ‘inaugurated’ and ‘future’ eschatology.” Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 1.

merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present” and therefore “the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, and of every Christian existence and of the whole Church.”¹⁰² We must understand eschatology as a doctrine that runs through all of our theology. It is not something that is far removed where Christians can debate things that have yet to come. Instead it is something that should affect our day to day lives. Karl Barth noted that “eschatology, rightly understood, is the most practical thing that can be thought.”¹⁰³ The reality that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated changes the way that we see the world, indeed we even enter a new world. Herman Ridderbos has said that understanding the kingdom of God has already come and is not yet fully come is “one of the fundamental presuppositions for understanding the gospel.”¹⁰⁴ To understand the gospel rightly we must understand eschatology. As Peter Jensen wrote, “the form of the gospel is eschatological. In accordance with the teaching of the New Testament we recognize that the gospel announces that the eschaton has arrived, although it awaits its consummation in a further decisive universal revelation of Christ.”¹⁰⁵ A proper eschatology is essential for us to understand the gospel of the kingdom.

While the benefits of the inaugurated kingdom of God on earth belong to the church we must remember that the kingdom of God is not yet what it will be. We also live in an age of tribulation. Daniel 7 teaches about the tribulation that precedes the kingdom of God. However the kingdom of God has entered into history before the time of its final dominion over all the earth and, therefore, the kingdom of God is present during times of tribulation and will be present even

¹⁰² Jorgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, (Fortress, Press, 1993) 16.

¹⁰³ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (trans. G.T. Thompson; London: SCM 1949) 154.

¹⁰⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (trans. H. de Jongste; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), 104.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 51.

in the great tribulation. In the same way that the kingdom of God includes an “already” and “not yet” dimension, so the tribulation carries the same aspect of “already” and “not yet.” The Old Testament expectation was for the time of tribulation to precede the coming of the kingdom of God. That is why the disciples were so confused by the suffering and death of Jesus, the Messiah. How could the coming king that would restore the kingdom of God to Israel die? As noted earlier, the church will follow in the same way as its representative, Jesus. A time of tribulation will precede the time of glory. Jesus came as the king of the expected end-time kingdom of God on earth. However, he also endured great suffering in his ministry and especially in his death. In the life of Jesus there were tribulations and a great tribulation. In the same way the church will face tribulations and ultimately the great tribulation.

Paul was clear on the reality of tribulation for Christians. Luke recorded in Acts that Paul went back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “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” (Acts 14:22). In order to “strengthen” and “encourage” the disciples in these towns he thought it necessary to warn them that they will face many tribulations. The church must be encouraged by understanding that there will be tribulation and suffering. Again, Paul encouraged his readers in his epistle to the Romans: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:17). Suffering is just as much a part of the Christian experience as is our future glorification. For the church, tribulation is inescapable. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). James spoke of encountering trials with joy (James 1:2). Peter

encouraged the church to not be surprised at trials as if they were something strange, but that they should expect them and even rejoice in sharing with the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:12-13)

The end-time tribulation, which is a present reality for Christians, should not be divorced from our evangelism. Jesus taught his followers to count the cost. This is recorded in Luke's gospel as Jesus tells his listeners, "whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Jesus continued this teaching using analogies of a builder counting the cost, whether or not he will be able to complete it. He also gives an analogy of a king going out to war; first he must consider whether he is able to win, if not he should ask for peace. The point that Jesus is making is that it is a momentous decision to follow him. It is an invitation to tribulation and suffering. It is not that the benefits of the gospel should be minimized, but that the cost of following Jesus should not be cast aside. Jesus and the Apostles were very clear of the tribulations and suffering that will accompany life in the kingdom of God in this age.

Therefore, in our evangelism we should be clear, not only of the benefits that the gospel afford us, but also the tribulations that are promised. In Jesus' parable of the sower, he shares about the seed that is sown on rocky ground. He describes this as the person who receives the word immediately and with joy only to fall away when persecution and tribulation arrive on account of the Word. The persecution and tribulation of the church is not something that is to be discovered when it comes upon a believer, rather it should be something that is taught and expected. If anyone will follow Jesus they must be taught to anticipate persecution and tribulation. This should take place even in our evangelism. Obviously the tribulation is not the gospel, but in order for one to understand rightly what the gospel means and its implications we must warn of the persecutions and tribulations to come. This should not only be seen as a warning, but also an encouragement for the strengthening of souls as Paul did in Acts 14. The church must be given courage to face the

tribulation in order to have strength to endure. This does not need to be taught only after trials arrive, but before.

Conclusion

The gospel communicated by Jesus and the Apostles and throughout the Scriptures was through the grid of the kingdom of God, biblical theology, and eschatology. The ministry of Jesus is recorded as one of proclaiming the kingdom of God. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). To understand this statement about the kingdom of God one must possess an understanding of biblical theology as well as eschatology. Biblical Theology is necessary in order to understand what the kingdom of God is. The writers of the Gospels never record Jesus giving any clear and concise definition of what the kingdom of God was and it is likely that neither did Jesus in his unrecorded ministry. In a similar way, if one reads a biography of one of the Presidents of the United States one should not expect to find a definition of what exactly the United States of America is. It is something that is understood. The United States of America is something that we not only learn about in school, but something we experience as citizens. In light of that, we must understand the kingdom of God as it is progressively revealed in the Scriptures. A biblical theology is not only a study of what the kingdom of God was and is, but it is also a study of what will be. The kingdom of God that is to come has already come in this age. The age to come has entered into this age. In other words, what the Old Testament Jews looked to as the future kingdom of God, is the church’s present reality. Therefore some of the categories of the future kingdom apply to our current context. This means that the modern church must proclaim the gospel with a right understanding of the kingdom of God through a biblical theology that rightly communicates eschatology. If any of these three aspects are lacking, the gospel will not be understood in its fullest and richest sense. If the kingdom aspect is left out of the gospel, then the church will reduce the

gospel to the plan of salvation. If biblical theology is absent in our gospel, then the kingdom of God will be reduced to a list of propositions. Lastly, if the gospel we proclaim has no eschatology, then what hope are we setting out before our hearers? The kingdom of God, and the end-time events that accompany it, occupied a central place in the gospel ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, therefore, the modern church must rightly proclaim the gospel within a biblical-theological understanding of the kingdom of God.

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