

The Biblical View of the Kingdom of God

January 25, 2009

Michael Young

The Witness of the Old Covenant:

The Adamic Covenant:

It starts in the beginning; God did not waste much time before he first mentions the Kingdom of God and how it will look. We only need to go to Genesis 1:28:

Gen. 1:28

This passage is speaking to the establishment of the Adamic covenant. God is ordaining what the kingdom of God is going to look like and how it is going to function. He wants it to grow and fill the earth, He wants it to subdue and have dominion over the earth and all that it contains.

The Abrahamic Covenant:

Now let's take a look at Genesis 12:3, here in this first revelation of the Abrahamic covenant, God reveals his desire to bring blessing not only on Abraham and his family, but ultimately upon "all the families of the earth."

Gen. 12:3

The God of Abraham clearly intended to bring salvation not only to Israel, but through this people, to all the peoples of the earth. All further redemptive promises were in fact only expansions and closer definitions of that promise of salvation held out to the human race in that first declaration.

Also, important is God's confirmation of that promise to Lot and Abraham in Genesis 13:16. Here Lot and Abraham separate, following strife between their herdsmen and Abraham's gracious offer of the choice land to his nephew, and then God confirms his earlier promise.

Gen. 13:16

The term for "dust" here is quite common in the Old Testament, as in Genesis 2:7, "**then Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.**" Elsewhere it is also used figuratively to suggest a very great number, as in Numbers 23:10, where Balaam asks, "**Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel?**" It is clear that God is promising to Abraham an immense progeny, a line and number of descendants that far surpasses any natural human expectation.

In Genesis 22 God tests Abraham's faith by calling him to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son and heir of the promise. It seemed like God himself was telling Abraham to destroy that which the promise of many descendants would be fulfilled through. But, Abraham, unwaveringly obeyed God, considering that God was able to raise men even from the dead.

Heb. 11:19

Rom. 4:20-21

Abraham's obedience was rewarded with yet another confirmation of the covenant.

Gen. 22:17-18

The faith of Abraham is to be a means of bringing spiritual blessing to all the nations of the earth.

The statement that Abraham's descendants shall "possess the gate of their enemies" is the promise of spiritual and cultural dominance of the godly covenant people. John Calvin comments on this phrase, noting that the text means that "the offspring of Abraham shall be victorious over their enemies; for in the gates were their bulwarks, and in them they administered judgment." A bulwark is a strong solid wall-like structure raised for defense.

After the death of Abraham, the covenant is confirmed in Isaac, in similar language to the earlier promises:

Gen. 26:4-5

Similarly, God confirms his covenant with Jacob, demonstrating the continuation of the promise to Abraham:

Gen. 28:13-14

From the perspective of the New Testament revelation, it becomes clear that the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, God's Messiah and instrument of salvation to the world. In Gal. 3:14 it is clear that God designs this:

Gal 3:14

Those who have faith in Jesus Christ are indeed Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise:

Gal. 3:29

Acts 3:25-26

It is through the Christian church and the gospel of Jesus Christ that God will bring into the whole world a body of believers as countless as the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth.

It is God's design in the Great Commission not merely that not only do all nations receive a "witness" of the gospel, but that a countless multitude actually be brought to living faith in the one true God, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Matt. 28:19-20

The Messiah and His Kingdom:

Let's now move to the how the Messiah was instrumental in fulfilling God's redemptive purposes by looking at how they were foreshadowed in the messianic promises and prophesies of the Old Testament.

The Messianic Psalms with Peter & Paul's quotations:

In the Psalms we find clear pictures of a great king, God's Messiah, ruling over a vast kingdom that far transcends the boundaries of the nation of Israel.

Psalms 2:6-9

Verse 7, "**you are my son, today I have begotten you,**" is quoted by the apostle Paul in Acts 13:33: "**this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'**" According to Paul, Psalm 2:7 has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. By virtue of his death and resurrection, he has rightful authority over the nations, and has only to ask the Father that they be given to him as his heritage (v.8). The Father's offer to make the nations the Son's possession is realized through the Great Commission, as the church in obedience preaches the gospel and Christ sends forth the Spirit to empower that proclamation. Those nations that resist the authority of the resurrected and ascended Messiah are in danger of being broken in pieces with a rod of iron (v.9), as was rebellious Israel in the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).

Psalm 22:27-28

According to Matthew Henry, the text indicates that the ultimate outcome of the sufferings of Christ here depicted will be that "the church of Christ, and with it the Kingdom of God among men, should extend itself to all the corners of the earth." Such references to "all the families of the nations" need to be understood not only in reference to the Great Commission, but perhaps more importantly against the backdrop of the Adamic and Abrahamic covenants. God intends to bring not merely scattered individuals, but multitudes, even nations, to worship at the throne of Jesus Christ.

The universal reign of Christ is foretold in the 72nd Psalm, ascribed to Solomon:

Psalm 72:8-11

The Messiah's rule is clearly not restricted to Israel. God's Anointed One is to have universal dominion. That universal dominion is already realized in a spiritual sense with Christ now seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, with all things under his feet.

Eph. 1:20-22

Perhaps the most important of the messianic psalms for our purposes is Psalm 110, which speaks of the Messiah's enthronement.

Psalm 110:1

The apostle Peter declared on the day of Pentecost that Psalm 110:1 had been fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:30-35

Thus the risen Christ is now at God's right hand, and is now in the process of subduing his foes. "Sitting at the right hand of God" is a description taken from the judicial custom of the East and meant not only

the highest honor thinkable but also unlimited participation in the world dominion of God. Also, Christ being at the "right hand of God" should be understood in terms of his reign in heaven and not in terms of his physical reign here on earth. Notice the crucial word "until" used in the verse. Christ remains in heaven while his foes are being subdued and until the process is complete.

Psalm 110:2

While Christ is still in heaven at the Father's right hand, God sends forth from Zion, the church, his Son's mighty scepter, the gospel or Word of God, that he might rule in the midst of his foes. Christ's heavenly reign is exercised and enlarged as the church on earth, his kingdom, goes forth in the power of the Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission.

Daniel's Visions and Matthews parables:

The second and seventh chapters of Daniel contain visions which are directly relevant to our discussion on eschatology. In Daniel 2:31-35, Daniel relates the contents of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in which he saw a great image destroyed by a mysterious stone of supernatural origin:

Daniel 2:31-35

Daniel's interpretation of the dream is understood in terms of the succession of earthly kingdoms.

Gold = Babylon
Silver = Persia
Bronze = Greece
Iron = Rome

The mysterious stone which destroys them is identified with the kingdom of God. But what does this stone do? It utterly destroys the image, these other kingdoms. Then the stone becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. The kingdom of God starts as a stone, and then becomes a mountain, filling the earth. Later in Daniel 2:44 he talks about yet another kingdom:

Daniel 2:44

The kingdom of God will be indestructible, never-abandoned, triumphant, universal, and eternal. This picture of the victorious expansion of the kingdom of Christ is consistent with Christ's own parables of the growth of the kingdom. Small and unlikely beginnings eventually grow into the universal victory of the kingdom of God.

Matt. 13:31-32

The seed of one variety of the mustard plant is only one millimeter across. In Palestine the mustard plant can grow to a height of 8-12 feet. The principle here is that although the kingdom of God starts out exceedingly small, it will grow surprisingly large. This matches what Daniel says about the growth of the kingdom. From a small stone, to a mountain that fills the earth.

In the 7th chapter of Daniel, we see a vision of the four beasts: a lion, a bear, a leopard, and an unspecified beast.

Daniel 7:17-18

The beasts represent four kingdoms, the same four kingdoms which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream.

Lion = Gold = Babylon
Bear = Silver = Persia
Leopard = Bronze = Greece
Beast = Iron = Rome

Again the kingdom of God will be everlasting, universal and inseparable. When we look at Matt. 13:33:

Matt. 13:33

Here leaven is an illustration of the mighty, all-penetrating force of the kingdom of God. The parable of the leaven, like that of the mustard seed, teaches an optimistic and hopeful message that is an encouragement to our faith. It shows that the gospel cannot but succeed, and the work of the church is to preach, teach, and spread it in and throughout the world. The parable teaches faith, patience, hope and joy.

Additional New Testament considerations:

Jesus and John came with the same message:

Matt. 3:1-2

Mark 1:14-15

Both said that the kingdom of God was at hand. This meant the kingdom of God was near. It was close to being inaugurated.

The ultimate source of the church's growth and missionary expansion is the ascended Christ, who reigns over the church and the world from the Father's right hand, and is even now in the process of subduing his foes. This crucial witness to the present, active kingship of Christ is found in 1Cor. 15:22-26:

1 Cor. 15:22-26

Here in verse 25 Paul states that Christ must reign until all his enemies have been subdued, this is a clear allusion to Psalm 110:1. The reigning and subduing takes place while Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father, while he is in heaven. When Paul stated, "Then comes the end," he is talking about the second coming of Christ. The last enemy to be defeated is death.

Jesus gave a sterling promise regarding the kingdom of God.

Matt. 16:18

Jesus promises to build his church. Jesus calls Peter, "this rock." This is where he will build his church. Remember Daniel 2, the kingdom of God begins with a stone. Again, we encounter the indestructible nature of the kingdom of God. Not even the gates of Hell will stand against it. The kingdom of God will triumph over all of its enemies...