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HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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THE KINGDOM: PRESENT AND FUTURE

In Daniel 2:44, 45 his interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was concerning four kingdoms before the kingdom of heaven would be set up (Dan 2:44). Three of these kingdoms are named as being: Babylon (2:38); Media/Persia (8:20) and Greece (8:21). The fourth kingdom is not mentioned by name, but we can conclude it was Rome (the kingdom following Alexander the Great's rule in Greece, and was the ruling power in the time of the New Testament). It was "in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up the kingdom which will never be destroyed, and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will endure forever" (Dan. 2:44) Of the fourth kingdom it is said that its "dominion will be taken away, annihilated destroyed forever" (Dan. 7:26).

The contrast in this passage is a contrast with earthly kingdoms, such as Babylon, Media/Persia, Greece and Rome (kingdoms that arise by human efforts) and the kingdom that comes into being by the divine intervention of God. This means the essential meaning of kingdom of God is *reign* rather than *realm*. Also, this reign cannot be a realm which arises by natural development or by human efforts, but one by which God breaks into the existence of the realm of earthly kingdoms. This is seen in the 45th verse of Daniel 2 where it is stated "In as much as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands crushed" the four human kingdoms. It was "in the days of these kings," consummating with the Roman Empire, that their time came to an end and the kingdom of God broke into history in the person of Jesus Christ, and God set up the kingdom prophesied by Daniel that would never be destroyed. Mark 1:14-15 states it this way: "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.'" The Apostle Paul states that "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law in order that He might redeem those who were under the law." (Gal.4:4). On these verses G. R. Beasley-Murray in his book *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* says: "The words 'time is fulfilled' means that the measure of time assigned by God for the fulfillment of the promise of the kingdom has been 'filled up,' and so come to its end. It has reached its limit, there is no further waiting." These verses also show that the "gospel of God" that Jesus proclaimed and later proclaimed by the apostles, was "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Matt. 4:23 9:35; Luke 4:43. 8:1, 9:11; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 20:24-27; 28: 23, 31). This "gospel of the kingdom" was the recurring theme of Christ's teaching throughout the gospels ending with these words: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come" (Matt. 24:14). In the beginning of his ministry he announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and quoted such prophecies as Isaiah 61:1-4 (Luke 4:17-20) and Isaiah 42:1-4 (Matt. 12:18-21); prophecies of the coming Messiah which he applied to himself. His teaching on the Kingdom of God implies that in his word and work there is the initiation of the sovereign reign of God that brings salvation and is to end in a transformed universe. This had been prophesied by Isaiah: "How lovely on the mountains

are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa. 52:7).

That the kingdom of God was inaugurated in the ministry of Christ is seen in his statement in Luke 4:43: "'I must preach *the kingdom of God* to other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.' And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea." In Nazareth he had preached from Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to *preach the gospel* to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recover of sight to the blind, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord...And he began say to them 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:18, 21). Further: "He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing" (Luke 9:11). When John the Baptist, who had proclaimed that the kingdom was at hand, sent his disciples and asked Jesus "Are you the coming One, or shall we look for someone?" Jesus' answer was: "Go and report to John the things you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raise up and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:1-5). The presence of kingdom of God was demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus. He told the unbelieving Pharisees that "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God *has come upon you*" (Matt. 12:28). This demonstrates the presence of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. When he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming his answer was: "The kingdom of God *is in your midst*" (Luke 17:21). Jesus doing his works "in their midst" meant the kingdom of God was there. When Jesus sent out the seventy he told them "Heal those who are sick, and say to them 'The *kingdom of God has come near to you*'" (Luke 10:9).

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul the ruler of demons his answer was: "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste...and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall his kingdom stand?...But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you*. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matt 12:24-29). The presence of the kingdom of God, illustrated in the works and ministry of Christ, had not only "*come upon*" the unbelieving Jews and was "*in their midst*" but was "*plundering*" the kingdom of Satan preparing for the deliverance of his people "from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved son" (Col. 1:13). All this shows that the kingdom of God is experienced in the present, even as it is to be inherited in the future. The power of the kingdom is demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus, and continued in the life of the church as believers are liberated from the kingdom of Satan (dominion of darkness) before the resurrection and the final destruction of Satan in the end of the age.

Several passages in the Scriptures speak of entering the kingdom as a present reality: Matt. 23:13: His woe against the Scribes and Pharisees: "You shut off the kingdom from men, for you do not

enter in yourselves nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” Matt. 21:31 “The tax-gathers and prostitutes are going into the kingdom before you.” Luke 16:16: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone is forcing his way into it.” Mark 10:25, 26: Entering the kingdom is equivalent to being saved; “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. And they were astonished and said to him ‘Then who can be saved?’” Concerning the present reality of the kingdom we quote George Eldon Ladd in his book *A Theology of the New Testament*: “People encountered the powers of the future kingdom of God in the person of the messianic King, Jesus. As they rendered a decision for the King, which meant a decision for the future kingdom, they experienced the forgiveness of their sins. As they repented and turned from their sins to submit themselves to the reign of God, they were able to realize in the present the blessings of the Kingdom in reality, though in part.”

This brings us to the kingdom in the future. The kingdom was inaugurated by Christ, was confirmed by his resurrection and ascension and will continue in the world until “he delivers up the kingdom to God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power, for he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:24, 25). Abolishing “all authority and power” is referring to the authorities and powers in the earth. This says there is a future reign of Christ upon the earth when he returns and “the kingdoms of this world (will become) the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). To the Ephesians Paul states it in these words: “He raised him from the dead, and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come” (Eph. 1:20, 21). The Jewish scriptures had prophesied that the Messiah (Christ) would be “installed upon Zion and given the nations as an inheritance” and he would “break them with a rod of iron, and shatter them like earthenware” (Psalm 2:6-9). He then warns the rulers of this world to respond: “Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the son, lest He becomes angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath may soon be kindled” (Psalm 2:10-11). Further: “He will shatter kings in the day of his wrath and judge among the nations, he will fill them with corpses and shatter the chief men over a broad country” (Psalm 110:5, 6). These scriptures indicate a warrior, a military commander endowed with both priestly and regal power, who will act for God in the restoration of divine government on the earth. This is what is referred to in the New Testament as “the restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21) and “the regeneration when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne” (Matt. 19:28). As noted above God said of Jesus “Ask of me and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession” (Psalm 2:8). A fundamental fact not grasped by the modern church is that “children of God are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8: 16, 17). This being true then Psalm 2:8 is applicable to the inheritance of the Christian. Jesus never spoke of the inheritance of the Christian as “going to Heaven.” He offered his followers the inheritance of the earth (Matt. 5:5). James stated that those who are rich in faith are “heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5). The Bible never speaks of “going to

heaven when we die,” or “do you want to go to heaven?” It does speak of treasure being prepared now with God in heaven (Matt. 6:20, 19:21), a reward “reserved in heaven” as a “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:5), at Christ’s second appearing on earth. At present this heavenly dimension is unseen but one day it will be revealed. This salvation is based upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (ver. 3). The Apostle Paul declared: “If Christ has not been raised then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 15:18). Notice that Paul in this passage and other passages, as in the gospels and the teaching of Jesus, refers to death as being “asleep.” If they who were “asleep” were already in heaven how could they perish if Christ were not raised? It is at the resurrection and not when we die that we receive an imperishable, immortal and spiritual body (I Cor. 15: 42-44, 54). It is at the appearing of Christ, not when we go to heaven, that we “shall see Jesus as he is” (I John 3:2). Nowhere are we told we face the judgment before the second appearing of Christ. Rather it is “in the last day” (Jn.12:48); the day “fixed” by God (Acts 17:31; “on the day when God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16); when “the Lord comes” (I Cor. 4:5) and at “the hour of His judgment” comes: (Rev. 14:7) that both the living and dead will be judged. It is in the context of the resurrection that Paul makes the following statement: “...He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). It is then that “the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matt. 25:34).

Inheriting the kingdom doesn’t mean we will be walking on “the streets of gold” or “living in a mansion that is silver lined.” It means “he who overcomes and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also received authority from my Father (Rev. 2:26, 27). This is a quotation from Psalm 2:8, 9, and is further stated in these words: “you did purchase for God with your blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5: 9, 10). This fulfills the prophecy of Daniel 7:18: “the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.” The Apostle Paul states: “If we endure we shall also reign with him” (II Tim. 2:12). Paul asked the Corinthians: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” and “Do you not know that we will judge angels?” The word “judge” when seen in the light of the book of Judges means “to rule.” That’s what the Judges of the Old Testament did. Not only did the Corinthians not know this, the church today does not know it.

To quote Robert Hach from his book *Possession And Persuasion*: “Heaven is not a *present place* to which the saved will go when they die; it is rather called “the age to come,” a time which will arrive at the coming of the kingdom of God, the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the nations of the earth. Heaven does, then, represent the everlasting home where God and His people will enjoy unending fellowship, but rather than an invisible home in the sky to which they *go* when they die, it is a visible home which will *come* out of the sky, that is out of the future at the second appearing of the Messiah, to renew the earth: it is the coming kingdom of God.”