

The Royal Timeframe

A Consideration of the Timing and Nature of the Kingdom of God

By [Michael R. Burgos](#)

Few motifs show up as consistently in the New Testament more than the kingdom of God. This is especially true in the gospels where the loose ends of the Davidic dynasty are picked up and bound in the person and work of Christ (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12-15). In Acts, the apostles display the indelible marks of having been with the King of kings, carrying out the expansion of the kingdom under his royal banner. Few, however, understand the timing of the kingdom and envision something that is strictly to be revealed in the future at Christ's return. This study explores the timing of the inauguration of the kingdom and its official commencement in the work of Christ.

When John the Baptist began preaching, he urged his hearers, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Matthew recorded the very first words Jesus ever preached, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).¹ The soon-coming kingdom of heaven was the central feature of Jesus' preaching ministry as he mentioned it over fifty times in the gospel of Matthew alone. Jesus preached about the soon-coming kingdom of God, taught about it (e.g., Matt. 22:2), and he instructed his disciples to pray for its arrival (Matt. 6:10). Most of Jesus' parables were about the kingdom of God. Indeed, Jesus said that he was sent for the very purpose of preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43), and when he sent out his disciples to preach he told them, "Proclaim...the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 10:7).

The baptism at the Jordan formally begins Jesus' public ministry and bears a variety of coronation signals. Jesus is baptized by a prophet and anointed by the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; cf. 1 Sam. 16:13). The hovering Spirit alluded to the inauguration of the new creation in Christ (Gen. 1:2) and the Father's announcement is reminiscent of the coronation hymn of Psalm 2:7: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."

Jesus' ministry bears all of the marks of a reversal of the curses identified in Genesis 3 and thus the inauguration of the kingdom of God. It begins with his recapitulation of the fall and Israelite wilderness wanderings in both his forty-day

¹ All biblical citations from the *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

fast and temptation. It is followed by an array of healings and exorcisms that typologically portray the abolition of sin and death (even literally; cf. Mark 5:41-42). Jesus' healing of the leper in Mark 1:40-45 is particularly noteworthy since leprosy results in ceremonial uncleanness and utter isolation both from worship and God's covenant people (Lev. 13:45-46). Leprosy then is a visceral representation of the curse and its effects. Remarkably, Jesus touched the leper and healed him, making himself ceremonially unclean in the process.²

In Matthew 12:22-25, the Pharisees criticize Jesus' exorcisms by suggesting that he is in league with Beelzebub (i.e., a circumlocution for Satan). In v. 28 Jesus said, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (cf. Luke 10:9). The miraculous works of Christ were the foretaste of the eternal kingdom wherein death and demons no longer hold sway over the elect. Moreover, Jesus told the disciples, "proclaim as you go saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:7-8). Hence, miraculous reversals of the effects of sin are the hallmarks of the inaugurated kingdom.

Jesus described the kingdom not merely as an ethereal concept, but in terms of redeemed people. The kingdom of God is like something small that turns into something great, like a mustard seed or a small amount of yeast (Matt. 13:31-33). Indeed, the kingdom is the church—redeemed souls who numbered a few hundred in the upper room and now comprise multiplied millions.

In Luke 21:29-33, Jesus provided an explicit time frame for the kingdom of God to arrive. Jesus told his disciples that when the trees began to sprout leaves, it would be then that the kingdom of God would come. Subsequently, the kingdom of God would have to arrive that Spring. Predictably, when spring arrived, Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29; cf. Mark 9:1). The underlying Greek of the phrase "fruit of the vine" is ambiguous, generally to any beverage that was derived from the fruit of the grapevine (e.g., wine, grape juice, or vinegar). The natural reading of these passages require that the next time Jesus partook of wine or juice the kingdom of God would arrive.

After Jesus was arrested, beaten, tried, and scourged, he was made to carry his patibulum (John 19:17). When he was unable to carry it, likely due to the loss of blood brought about by the scourging, one of the Romans offered Jesus what is described as "wine mixed with gall" (Matt. 27:34). The term translated "gall" is a rare term in the New Testament, used only twice (cf. Acts 8:23). It refers to some

² The laws pertaining to the cleansing of lepers are nearly incomprehensible apart from their fulfillment in Christ. The leper presents himself before the priest (Lev. 14:2) and an elaborate ritually involving two birds, a scarlet yarn, water, and hyssop ensues. One bird is killed and one blood-washed bird being set free (vv. 3-7). On the eighth day (i.e., the Lord's Day), sacrifices are presented and the former-leper is pronounced clean.

kind of bitter herb,³ likely designed to hasten Jesus' death. This cocktail was perhaps a token act of mercy sent by Pilate, given his wife's dream and his former hesitancy to murder Jesus (Matt. 27:15-23). Some translations suggest Jesus tasted this cocktail, then refusing it after he tasted it, as does the *English Standard Version*: "But when he tasted it, he would not drink it" (v. 34). While the verb *geuomai* (trans. "taste") could mean that Jesus took a sip, the context and syntax of the verse imply only that Jesus got close enough to the cocktail to sense what was in it and only to reject it (cf. Matt. 16:28; Acts 10:10). Likely, the cup was put up to Jesus' face such that he could breathe in the bitter aroma and "perceive the flavor."⁴

After having hung for three grueling hours on the cross, someone placed "sour wine" (Grk. *oxos*, i.e., an admixture of vinegar and water that was popular among Imperial troops) on a sponge and lifted it to Jesus (John 19:29-30). It was then, while paying the penalty for the sins of his elect, that he drank the fruit of the vine. It was then that the kingdom of God came to earth. Fascinatingly, John notes that the sponge was placed on a hyssop branch and given to the Lord. This is a remarkable detail since his crucifixion occurred on the Day of Preparation when Jews would customarily slaughter the lamb for the Passover. It was with hyssop that the Jews applied the blood of the lamb to their doorpost and lintel, protecting their firstborn from the destroyer (Exod. 12:22). Subsequently, the kingdom of God was formally inaugurated on earth at the cross.

There is a strong coronation theme that occurs throughout the passion narratives from the crown of thorns, the purple robe and scepter (i.e., reed), the mocking of the governor's soldiers, Pilate's proclamation "Behold your King!," and the multilingual sign placed above the crowned head of Christ (Matt. 27:27-37; John 19:2-3; 19:14, v. 18). The most humiliating and terrible event of the life of Christ was at the same time his coronation and restoration of divine glory (John 17:5)—for the cross is the very event for which a people more numerous than the stars in the sky will look upon saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever" (Rev. 11:15. Cf. Psa. 2:2; v. 7 LXX). D. A. Carson well observed: "The very event by which the Son was being 'lifted up' in horrible ignominy and shame was that for which he would be praised around the world by men and women whose sins he had born... The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification."⁵ Indeed, the last days kingdom of God was inducted in a crucified and risen Savior.

³ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1085.

⁴ Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 114. Cf. BDAG, 195.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 554

The second or last Adam motif featured mainly in the Pauline corpus (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45; Phil. 2:6-7) but also in the gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:1-11; 27:54; Luke 3:38; John 19:5)⁶ adds an important dimension to the inaugurated kingdom in Christ. Whereas Adam was given the dominion mandate (Gen. 1:28), he failed in that his rulership and progeny had been driven east of Eden—estranged from God due to his sin. The dominion of man over the earth no longer reflects the dominion of God since sin has touched the entire human constitution. Jesus, the second Adam, has not only recapitulated the fall but has reversed it by the cross and in the vacant tomb. He then sought to fulfill the dominion mandate upon the basis of his comprehensive Lordship (Matt. 28:18-19). Hence, the inaugurated kingdom—a kingdom of disciples who bear the likeness of God’s unique Son, will expand until “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD” (Ps. 22:27) and every nation is discipled.

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⁶ See Peter J. Link, Jr., Matthew Y. Emerson. 2017. “Searching for the Second Adam: Typological Connections between Adam, Joseph, Mordecai, and Daniel,” *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Journal*, 21.1, 123-44.