

## *The Work of Incarnation – Manifesting the Kingdom*

### **I. Introduction**

1. All four gospel writers recorded Jesus' baptism as publicly attesting His solidarity with Israel, but as Israel's *messiah* – Yahweh's anointed well-pleasing Son.
2. From that point, the gospel writers constructed their individual accounts of Jesus undertaking His messianic vocation as the servant-son through whom Israel was to be liberated and restored and God's kingdom established as pledged by His prophets.
  - a. The three synoptic writers pointed to Jesus' wilderness testing as initiating His work. It was through that ordeal that Jesus' messianic status was proven out in His own experience and He emerged from it prepared to execute His mission.
  - b. For his part, John bypassed the wilderness episode altogether (although his account seems to allude to it – cf. John 8:42-46, 14:28-31, etc.), moving from Jesus' baptism to His work in forming His inner circle of disciples (ref. John 1:35-51).

### **II. Manifesting the Kingdom**

Jesus' wilderness ordeal was ordained by His Father to prove out His sonship, but it also initiated what was to be a perpetual conflict between rival kingdoms: the kingdom He had come to inaugurate and the kingdom of the world ordered and administered under the Satan's lordship. These two kingdoms were set in absolute antithesis, with neither allowing for the other.

- The kingdom Jesus was born into was the satanic anti-creation, anti-man world kingdom arranged against the Creator and His designs for His creation. This was the kingdom that ruled over the children of Israel in their alienation, even as it did the Gentile nations.
- In contrast, the kingdom Jesus had come to inaugurate was the "*kingdom of God*" – the kingdom Yahweh had promised to establish when He returned to Zion, liberated and regathered Israel, set His Davidic king on the throne and again took His place in His sanctuary in the midst of His people. This kingdom, promised to Israel, would fulfill the Creator's design for His own loving, life-giving rule over His creation in and through man.

Jesus departed the Jordan river into the wilderness fully aware of His messianic mission, what it would demand of Him, and what was at stake. He realized that He was undertaking a conflict of cosmic proportion; a conflict that would divide the world in two. This is what He meant when He told His followers that He hadn't come to bring peace but a sword – a sword, not for killing, but for cleaving (Mat. 10:34-36). So Simeon prophesied to Mary: "*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed...*" (Luke 2:34).

Thus Jesus emerged from the wilderness having withstood the satanic world ruler, and immediately began His messianic work of proclaiming and manifesting the kingdom He would soon inaugurate as Yahweh's anointed King, once He had fully defeated the opposing powers. Until that day, His mission involved announcing the in-breaking kingdom, demonstrating the kingdom's nature, power, and goal, confronting Israel's notions and expectations of the kingdom, and challenging them to return to Yahweh and enter it as true sons.

## A. Announcement and Confrontation

1. The three synoptic writers transitioned from the wilderness episode differently, though they all show Jesus commencing His public proclamation of the “gospel of the kingdom” accompanied by His call to the sons of Israel to repent (i.e., rethink their notions of the kingdom and its King), lest they miss its coming. In this sense, Jesus picked up where John the Baptist left off. \* Note Mat. 4:12-17 and Mark 1:14-15
2. All three recorded that Jesus was going throughout Galilee proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, which eventually led Him to Nazareth. Their accounts indicate that Jesus was in Nazareth shortly after His wilderness ordeal, and then again later in His ministry (cf. Mat. 4:12-13 with Luke 4:13-30 and Mat. 13:54-58 with Mark 6:1-6). All three synoptic writers mention Jesus’ rejection by the people of His hometown, but Luke provided the most detail.
3. Luke transitioned very quickly from Jesus’ wilderness testing to His appearance in the Nazareth synagogue, emphasizing that the Spirit who had anointed Him as Messiah and led Him through His wilderness ordeal now brought Him to Galilee and His hometown. By the time He arrived in Nazareth, Jesus had been preaching in the villages and teaching in synagogues throughout Galilee, so that the Nazarenes were well aware of His activities when He entered their synagogue that Sabbath day (4:14-15). And though Luke didn’t mention that Jesus had been working miraculous signs as part of His early witness to the kingdom, his account of the Lord’s comments in the synagogue indicate this (4:23).
4. No doubt every eye was on Jesus when He walked into the synagogue and sat down. He’d grown up in that town (Mat. 2:19-23), and so most of the men present would have known His family and Him from the time He was a small child. They knew Him as *Yeshua* (Joshua), the son of Joseph (v. 22), and had watched Him grow up and work alongside His father. But in recent days they’d been hearing astonishing reports about things He was saying and doing, and this certainly would have caught their attention and sparked their interest.
  - a. Men would stand and read from certain scrolls when the synagogue was convened, with the occasion determining the readings. That day, one of the readings was to come from the prophet Isaiah, and eager to hear from Jesus, the attendant was instructed to hand the scroll to Him to read. The passage Jesus read may have been assigned to Him, but Luke’s account suggests that He selected it (4:17-19). Either way, He read the opening verses of Isaiah 61, which identify a servant-messenger anointed with Yahweh’s Spirit in order to bring to Israel good news of her liberation and restoration in His favor. \* ref. 61:1-11
  - b. After He finished, Jesus handed the scroll back to the attendant and sat down. And with every eye locked on Him – and likely after an awkward silence, Jesus announced that the prophet’s words were being fulfilled in their very presence. *He* was the one Isaiah’s text was referring to, and this explained His words and works of power and healing: Through Jesus, and in the power of His Spirit, Yahweh was at last fulfilling His pledge to return to Zion, liberate His captive people, renew His covenant with them, and establish them in glory. *Put simply, Jesus’ presence meant that Yahweh’s kingdom was at hand.* \* 4:20-21
5. This statement broke the silence and immediately the room was filled with voices marveling at His words and His claims (4:22-23). The men were exultant at this news of God’s gracious favor (“gracious words”) at last coming upon Israel, but Jesus knew that their exultation betrayed their lack of understanding of how God’s graciousness was going to play out.

Hence His seemingly strange response: “*No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself...’*” Jesus recognized that the enthusiastic reception He was receiving was due to the assembly’s expectation of blessings that awaited them – the blessings of liberation, healing and peace that Jesus had referenced in His Isaiah reading. They’d already heard the news that their God had been doing mighty things through this man Jesus, and now here He was affirming that Isaiah’s words were indeed being fulfilled in Him. Surely they could expect the same miracles of healing and provision, especially since they were Jesus’ closest neighbors and the people He’d known from His childhood.

6. Jesus, however, answered their expectation in a way that not only deflated their enthusiasm, it filled them with rage; these men who moments earlier were singing Jesus’ praises were now determined to kill Him. This much is obvious from Luke’s account, but the reason for their sudden outrage is often missed, resulting in all sorts of speculations. One is that these men hotly resented Jesus’ disparaging and dismissive attitude toward them (4:24). Another possibility is that they sensed that Jesus found their praise disingenuous and motivated only by self-interest. But perhaps the most common view among Christians is that Jesus enraged these men by denying their hope of special favor as fellow Nazarenes when He indicated that God shows no preference in His mercy and provision. \* 4:25-27

There’s no doubt that Jesus was exposing His hearers’ unbelief, and some might argue that this was sufficient to provoke their outrage. But He was actually making a much more profound point, and this was what infuriated these men. Jesus wasn’t simply exposing their unbelief, but drawing out the *significance* of it. And not just for them as a community, *but as they were a microcosm of the Israelite nation.*

This is clear from the two parallel examples Jesus cited. These weren’t arbitrary examples demonstrating that God extends His mercy beyond Israel to the Gentiles, but pointers to a crucial time in Israel’s history – *a time of decision that would determine the nation’s fate as Yahweh’s covenant son.* This historical era is recorded in 1 Kings 16 through 2 Kings 5. Yahweh had withdrawn His favor from Israel because of their rebellion, demonstrated by His bringing severe drought and famine on the land. This episode reached its climax with Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel. There Yahweh demonstrated His supremacy over these fertility gods (He’d already shown His sovereign authority by shutting up the rains, which Baal was believed to control), leaving Israel to decide who they would serve going forward; He would no longer allow them to “hesitate between two paths” (1 Kings 18:1-21). The Israelite observers confessed Yahweh’s triumph and their solemn ownership of Him as the only true God (18:38-39), but this voiced fealty proved an empty conviction. Israel continued its idolatry and apostasy until the Lord finally destroyed them, with Judah following the same path and experiencing the same outcome.

Elijah (with Elisha) represented a crucial time of decision and the turning point in Israel’s history. The writing prophets emerged soon after with the message that a day of desolation and exile now awaited both houses of Israel. So Yahweh had appointed another day of decision for the nation, and He would send Elijah again to herald it (Mal. 4:5-6). Israel failed its first “day,” and the result was centuries of exile and oppression with an empty sanctuary. Now Elijah had come as promised (Mat. 11:1-14, cf. 3:1-12), and Israel was faced with its supreme day of decision: *Would the unfaithful nation embrace its God who’d returned to them in His messianic servant, or would they miss the day of their visitation and see their house left desolate while Yahweh’s mercy flowed out to the nations?* Jesus indicated the latter (cf. Luke 13:22-35, 14:1-24, 19:11-44), and this is why His hearers wanted Him dead.