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# THE PSALM, THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM

IDEAS OF MESSIANIC  
AUTHORITY IN NEW TESTAMENT  
TERMINOLOGY



BY  
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# THE PSALM, THE GOSPEL AND THE KINGDOM

## IDEAS OF MESSIANIC AUTHORITY IN NEW TESTAMENT TERMINOLOGY

*God raised Him from the dead and seated Him  
at His right hand in the heavenly realms;  
far above all rule and authority, power and dominion,  
not only in the present age but also in the one to come;  
and God placed all things under His feet  
for the church which is His Body*

(Ephesians 1:20-23)

## INTRODUCTION

A previous Olive Press Research paper I wrote examined the importance of Psalm 110:1 in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> In identifying the understanding which New Testament writers had of the authority of the risen Messiah, the paper referred in a footnote<sup>2</sup> to the idea of delegated authority being present in the New Testament concepts of Gospel and Church. The purpose of this present paper is to expand on that footnote and examine those ideas more closely.

## REVIEW: PSALM 110:1 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Firstly, a brief summary of the ideas in my previous paper. Psalm 110:1 is used by the writers of the New Testament more often than any other Hebrew (Old Testament) scripture, especially if we assume that any reference to the 'right hand of the Father' is derived from Psalm 110:1.<sup>3</sup> So it was the **single most significant Hebrew scripture** in the minds of the New Testament community.

Many of the New Testament references to Psalm 110:1 occur at key points of theological significance. There is Jesus' final confession of His identity to official Judaism during His trial in the Synoptic Gospels, comprising **His final announcement to the Nation** as to His Messianic mission.<sup>4</sup> Then there is Peter's **first announcement of the Gospel** at Pentecost,<sup>5</sup> the **seminal *midrash*** in Ephesians summarising the heart of Pauline belief,<sup>6</sup> and the **keynote theme** backing the elaborate and elegant arguments in Hebrews.<sup>7</sup>

These are not incidental texts, **they are keynote theological statements.**

By the end of the New Testament period, Psalm 110:1 was taken for granted as a **foundational scripture applying to Yeshua**. It could simply be implied in passing, a firmly entrenched tradition within the New Testament community, who through Psalm 110:1 expressed their complete confidence in the **rule and authority of Yeshua** as the risen Messiah.<sup>8</sup>

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE RISEN MESSIAH

The phrase "sit at my right hand" is misleading to modern readers. To us it implies casually resting around in heaven. That is not what it meant in Biblical times, nor how the New Testament writers would have understood it. To them "sit" meant to take a chief place, while "*at my right hand*" would have implied **exercising active authority**. We still use the phrase "my right hand man" meaning the one who gets things done.

So when we think of Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father, it cannot mean that He is just resting for a while, waiting for His return to Earth. David Anderson represents scholarly opinion when he insists it is not good enough to imply that "*the King is simply waiting around in Heaven while he rests up for the final battle*".<sup>9</sup> Rather He is in the place of executive authority, actively involved in putting the Father's will into effect. This is the significance which the New Testament writers intended, when they used this verse about the risen Jesus.

An insistence on the authority of the risen Messiah raises an obvious question – what does this mean in practice? The world seems to carry on much the same as before, so in what way is His authority being exercised? Scholars speak of an 'already but not yet' element to New Testament eschatology. This corresponds to the

'until I make' of Psalm 110:1. It implies an ongoing process, which has begun but has yet to reach fruition.

## AUTHORITY IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT

Authority is a big feature of New Testament thinking. We think of Jesus' encounter with the Roman centurion, where Jesus said He had not encountered such faith among the Jewish people as He did in this Gentile.<sup>10</sup>

Principally that happened because authority was the man's stock in trade, he knew how it functioned. He describes himself as coming "under authority". Because of the authority he represented, he could give orders which were instantly obeyed. Likewise, his faith in Jesus was based on what he had heard of Jesus' authority in action, and his expectation was based on his understanding of how authority functioned. He could recognise it when he saw it.<sup>11</sup>

As Donald Guthrie comments "*As an officer he was habitually snapping out orders to his subordinates and expecting prompt unquestioning obedience ... He had implicit faith that Jesus' authority over disease was just as real and efficient as was his own authority over men*".<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament understands that the Risen Messiah's authority is delegated to and exercised through the church. Not solely through the church, of course. New Testament writers make it abundantly clear that Messiah is head over all creation. John says "*through Him all things were made*",<sup>13</sup> and that "*the world was made through Him*";<sup>14</sup> likewise Paul affirms "*by Him all things were created*";<sup>15</sup> and Hebrews tells us that the Son "*through whom [God] made the universe*" is even now "*sustaining all things by His powerful word ... at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven*".<sup>16</sup>

Yet in Ephesians, Paul expounds Messiah's exalted place of spiritual authority, insisting it is "*for the Church*", emphasising "*which is His body*", meaning His hands and feet to carry out His will and purpose.<sup>17</sup>

The prose is expansive. God "*raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion ... and God placed all things under His feet, and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body.*"<sup>18</sup> Further on in Ephesians, Paul enlarges this to

describe how Messiah's authority works through the Body,<sup>19</sup> and that it will entail standing against opposing spiritual authorities, the “*spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*”.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in Colossians, we see Messiah's pre-eminence over “*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*”<sup>21</sup> because “*all things were created by Him and for Him; He is before all things and in Him all things hold together*”;<sup>22</sup> then Paul immediately links Messiah's authority to the church, insisting that “*He is the head of the body, the church*”.<sup>23</sup> The church is emphatically identified as the focus and channel for the authority of the Risen Messiah.

We can look back to the end of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus instructs His followers on their future mission. “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me; therefore go*”.<sup>24</sup> The word “*therefore*” implies that the authority given to Jesus is to be exercised through His followers. Their work is under His authority. The New Testament writings continually assume this delegated authority. The authority which Messiah has been given by being seated “*at the right hand*” is to be exercised through the church.

## AUTHORITY AND THE KINGDOM

It is hardly necessary to assert that the term '*kingdom*' has a prominent place in Christian terminology. Indeed “*more than any other phrase in the Synoptic Gospels, 'the kingdom of God' describes the essential feature of Jesus' mission*”.<sup>25</sup> For example, the term occurs twice in Jesus' model for prayer. At the start with “*your kingdom come, your will be done*”, and again at the end “*for yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory*”.<sup>26</sup> Repetition means emphasis. Again we meet the dual concepts of an affirmation of absolute authority, twinned with an 'already but not yet' ongoing process of implementing a coming kingdom. Either way the expectation is that the prayers of the New Testament community require an understanding of kingdom authority.

The Jewish expectation of a Messianic kingdom in Jesus' time was widespread, but quite varied as to what it might mean.<sup>27</sup> In general terms the expectation either involved the Land of Israel (with a political emphasis) or the Temple (so a more spiritual emphasis) or both; or alternatively was viewed as Messiah instituting God's wider rule of justice and peace over the nations.<sup>28</sup> Jesus proclaimed the

coming of the kingdom, while refusing to conform to existing assumptions of what that might mean.<sup>29</sup>

It is significant that “*The Hebrew word behind 'kingdom' refers to an ancient idiom referring to the reign and authority of a king; a rich, multifaceted idiom used by the rabbis. A simple way of translating 'kingdom of God' would be God's reign, or how God reigns, or those whom God reigns over.*”<sup>30 31</sup>

Luke says that Jesus' mission was to “*proclaim the goodnews (gospel) of the kingdom of God*”,<sup>32</sup> and further on describes Him as “*proclaiming the goodnews (gospel) of the kingdom of God*”.<sup>33</sup> Then at the end of Acts, Luke describes how Paul “*explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God*”;<sup>34</sup> and finishes his account of the apostolic mission with Paul “*proclaiming the kingdom of God*”.<sup>35</sup> So in both Luke's Gospel and in Acts, we find Luke repeating the phrase *the kingdom of God*, making a deliberate and conscious continuity between the ministries of Jesus and Paul.<sup>36</sup>

At the beginning of his gospel, Mark explains that “*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying ... the kingdom of God is at hand*”.<sup>37</sup> We find exactly the same connection in Matthew where Jesus says “*this **gospel of the kingdom** will be preached in the whole world*”.<sup>38</sup> In fact Matthew only uses the term gospel four times, and in three of these refers to the **gospel of the kingdom**.<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that Luke and the others consciously link the idea of gospel to the concept of kingdom. Luke's phrase the “*proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God*” is striking and deliberate. It is used to apply to Jesus' pre-resurrection ministry, where the term 'gospel' cannot be about Jesus' death, or atoning sacrifice, or many of the other post-resurrection theological tags we would nowadays normally associate with the word *gospel*.

The gospel, says Luke, is about the kingdom. He vividly illustrates what he thinks this means in Luke 4 where he depicts Jesus identifying His ministry as a fulfilment of Isaiah 61.<sup>40</sup> “*He has anointed me to bring good news (gospel) to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free*”.<sup>41</sup>

Later when John the Baptist sends messengers to ask Jesus to affirm His Messianic claims, Luke records Jesus' reply “*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead*

*are raised, the poor have good news [gospel] brought to them*".<sup>42</sup> In other words, says Jesus (and Luke), Isaiah 61 is being fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>

The Messiah is not only demonstrating His kingdom power, but fulfilling the Messianic mission foreseen by Isaiah. John, languishing in Herod's jail and fearing for his own future, was presumably hoping there would also be a political dimension to the kingdom fulfilment.

'What happened to the hope of Truth and Justice in the Messianic age?' we could imagine him thinking. Later Jesus was to insist "*My kingdom is not of this world*".<sup>44</sup> It was not easy, even for a prophetic figure such as John the Baptist, to sort out exactly what this kingdom was, and where the boundaries of Jewish expectations of a Messianic kingdom might legitimately fall.<sup>45</sup>

James Dunn identifies 'the kingdom of God' as "*the central motif of Jesus' teaching*" in Luke, and considers that

*"by being so specific, Luke ... indicates continuity between Jesus' pre-Easter message and his post-Easter teaching ... in addition, Luke goes out of his way to indicate that the 'kingdom of God' continued to be a feature of earliest Christian preaching and teaching. Particularly noticeable is the fact that Acts 1:3 forms an inclusio with Acts 28:31; the final note of Paul's preaching ('proclaiming the kingdom of God') matches the chief and last topic of Jesus' instruction."*<sup>46</sup>

It seems Luke was determined to make some emphatic points about the kingdom. Jesus' ministry was about the kingdom; the kingdom had come, or at least begun to come; the kingdom was demonstrated by power; the gospel and the kingdom were bound up together as part of the same package; and the same kingdom which Jesus proclaimed continued to be proclaimed by Paul.

Paul neatly demonstrates this kingdom continuity in Colossians. His language reverberates with expectations of a Messianic kingdom when he describes believers having been *rescued from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son*.<sup>47</sup> His subsequent extravagant description of the authority of the risen Messiah then affirms Jesus is "*seated at the right hand of God*",<sup>48</sup> the place of authority and power. The Colossian believers are seen as having been transferred into a Kingdom ruled over by the Risen Messiah.



## AUTHORITY AND THE GOSPEL

If Luke is determined to link 'gospel' with 'kingdom' in an understanding of Messianic authority, what are we to understand by the term 'gospel' (Greek *evangelion*)?

It is becoming increasingly recognised that *evangelion* does not mean simply 'good news' as often assumed. The term is deliberately borrowed from the terminology belonging to the Roman Imperial cult, or Emperor worship.

Both before and after its adoption by the New Testament community, *evangelion* was often used in a particular way with regard to the **Emperor**, either in relation to his birth or regarding his visit to a locality.<sup>49</sup> Consider for example this extract from a Roman inscription dated 9BC:

*“Providence has filled Augustus with divine power for the benefit of humanity ... with the result that the birthday of our god [meaning Augustus] signalled the beginning of evangelion [good news] for the world”.*<sup>50</sup>

With regard to the whole inscription from which this extract is taken, Graham Stanton observes:

*“There is an unmistakable whiff of eschatology and soteriology here. The coming of the divine Augustus as **good news** had been eagerly expected. He came as saviour and benefactor, bringing benefits for all. He has brought peace and will continue to do so. He himself was the **good news**.”*<sup>51</sup>

It is easy to see why Paul and other New Testament writers adopted this word to describe their message concerning Messiah.

Nor is this an isolated example. Stanton cites a number of other examples from Roman inscriptions and writings, showing a consistent use over at least two centuries. With regard to an Emperor's birth, *evangelion* implied the inauguration of a benevolent rule, which the rhetoric asserts will bring much blessing to the populace. Regarding an impending visit from an Emperor, the proclamation of *evangelion* normally implied the visit would bestow privileges or delegated power on the prominent citizens of the city. Therefore in the context of the Imperial cult, the

expression *evangelion* is related either to a new ruler's birth, or to a proclamation of an Imperial visit which will devolve power and authority.

Gerd Theissen understands a similar connotation. Commenting on the form and content of the New Testament writings as literature, he observes that "*The message content of the gospels and letters was a proclamation of lordship, an evangelion. This was as true for Mark as it was for Romans.*"<sup>53</sup> Theissen observes that "*The noun 'gospel' is attested primarily in the imperial ideology*", and regarding Mark's Gospel he comments that "*the Gospel of Mark adopts the form of biography ... and fills it with the content of the proclamation of a ruler as good news (evangelion).*"<sup>54</sup>

Like Stanton, Theissen also points out that "*At the time when Mark's Gospel originated, when someone spoke of good news (evangelia) for the whole world the thought evoked was that of a new emperor. According to Josephus, the ascent of Vespasian as emperor was celebrated in the year 69 ... as evangelia.*"<sup>55</sup> Theissen observes that Mark uses the term in just such a context. Mark 13:10 says that the "good news" is to be preached "to all nations"; Mark 14:9 that it is to be "proclaimed in the whole world".<sup>56</sup> So Theissen implies, Mark is deliberately evoking the aura of an Imperial proclamation.

Rowan Williams describes an *evangelion* as an official designation for an important public announcement "*about something that alters the climate in which people live, changing the politics and the possibilities; it transforms the landscape of social life*".<sup>57</sup> Dick France endorses the idea of evangelion as a proclamation, and so supports "proclamation" as a valid translation for *evangelion* in Mark.<sup>58</sup>

Theissen and others also understand that Jesus' proclamation of the reign (or kingdom) of God as *evangelion*, is closely linked to the derivation of the concept of 'gospel/good news' in the Old Testament from passages such as Isaiah 52:7; and 61:1-11.<sup>59</sup>

It seems that what is happening is the Old Testament and secular traditions converge, so the New Testament writers had one eye on the prophetic writings while at the same time consciously adopting the specialist term for an Imperial proclamation from the language of the Roman Empire.<sup>60</sup> So Dunn similarly recognises the convergence of the trajectory from Isaiah 52:7 and Isaiah 61:1 with contemporary political overtones in Paul's use of the term gospel.<sup>61</sup>

We can now see why Luke and the other Gospel writers directly link these two concepts (*evangelion* & *kingdom*), when they say Jesus came proclaiming the **gospel of the kingdom**. They meant that both Jesus' preaching and ministry were in themselves a **proclamation** of the present and coming rule of God.

## AUTHORITY AND THE CHURCH

If, as we have already attested, the New Testament writers understood a Risen Messiah whose authority was intended to be exercised and expressed through the believing community, is there any significance in the particular term 'church' (Greek *ekklesia*) used to describe that community? Does it have any connotations in respect of the delegated authority implicit in being the Body of Messiah? Or are there any number of other terms they might just as well have used?

In fact there were all sorts of terms with the general meaning of gathering or assembly. Normally in New Testament writing, where several terms could apply we come across them all in various places. New Testament writers normally use a variety of terms, employing the different nuances in meaning for particular effect. However in this case, of all the words available, there is only one which carries connotations of devolved authority, which is the one which all the New Testament writers consistently use without fail. Their community is not just a loose association of like minded people. It has a specific function of **exercising delegated authority**, and they persist in using the one term which denotes this.

The term *ekklesia* should be understood to mean not simply 'called out' (as usually accepted), but rather 'called out **in order to exercise authority**'. The word originated as a term for the ruling council of Greek city states, and meant those called out from the community to exercise authority over the community. In Second Temple Judaism it was often used as a derived term to denote the ruling elders of a synagogue, but the implications were wider than just the religious sphere, it could apply to the ruling elders of any village or community.

So as well as identifying that "*the Greek word 'ekklesia' was one of the equivalents for the Hebrew 'keneseth' and Aramaic 'kenishta' (synagogue)*", F. F. Bruce confirms that in "*Greek cities the 'ekklesia' was the citizen body in its legislative capacity*". Bruce means that in Greek cities the *ekklesia* was an elite body making city laws and exercising localised authority.<sup>62</sup>

Rowan Williams comments on a similar use of the term *ekklesia* in Roman society. He notes that in the Roman empire only the minority who were Roman citizens had full rights, including to own property, to marry without permission, and to go to law. The vast majority of the population were *peregrini*, and below them were slaves at the bottom of the heap. In Roman usage *ekklesia* was the term reserved for a meeting solely of citizens, in other words of a ruling elite who were empowered with rights and authority to which the rest did not have access. Williams understands that Paul's usage of *ekklesia* in a Roman context therefore implies the exercise of spiritual authority, although combined with a revolutionary concept of social inclusion.<sup>63</sup>

Greek and Roman society had a number of social and voluntary associations. Some of these were purely for social purposes, others had a connection with pagan religious cults. There were a number of terms used for such clubs, such as *thiasos*, *factio*, *curia*, *corpus* and so on. Wayne Meeks comments that “*nowhere in the Pauline letters are any of the terms used that are characteristic of Greek and Roman associations*”. The only use he can find of *ekklesia* regarding the clubs, is an occasional use relating to business meetings. The term *ekklesia* was only used within the club for a ruling committee, drawn out from amongst the ordinary membership to make decisions and exercise authority. Meeks concludes that “*The commonest use of ekklesia was to refer to a town meeting of free male citizens of a city of Greek constitution*”.<sup>64</sup>

James Dunn has made a wide ranging survey of the different terms used in the New Testament to describe the fledgling Messianic movement and its varied constituent communities.<sup>65</sup> He concludes that “*if there is a single term in the New Testament writings which denotes the existence and character of the embryonic Christian movement ... that term is ekklesia*”; normally “*its predominant usage was for the regularly summoned citizen body in legislative assembly*”.<sup>66</sup>

In their discussion of why *ekklesia* was the New Testament term favoured to describe a gathering of believers, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch comment:

*“Remember Paul didn’t invent the term ekklesia. It was already part of the vernacular of his time. ... Most dictionaries will tell you that ekklesia literally means ‘the gathering of the called out ones’. It comes in two words ek meaning ‘out’, and kaleo meaning ‘to call’. But in its original usage an ekklesia was not just an assembly or a gathering, as many suppose. If that’s all Paul wanted to convey, he could have used agora and panegyris as well as heorte, koinon, thiasos, and*

*synago, all of which refer to an assembly. The word ekklesia had a political aspect to it.”*

*“In Paul’s time, an ekklesia was a gathering of the elders of a community. In smaller villages and towns across Judea, local elders would gather regularly to discuss and deliberate over a variety of political and social dilemmas facing the community. Neighbourhood disputes, arguments over estates of deceased persons, communal responses to natural disasters, these were the kinds of things the council of elders would consider. ... In other words, an ekklesia was a gathering of wise community leaders. ... Paul takes this term and [uses] it for his fledgling communities.”<sup>67</sup>*

So according to Frost and Hirsch, the New Testament writers could have used any number of words if they only wanted to refer to an assembly or gathering or community. Their insistence in using only the one term is remarkable and identifies clearly their understanding of their mission. They were under Divine authority. The authority of the Risen Messiah was delegated to and exercised through the New Testament communities of believers, the *ekklesia*.

Dunn and others make the point that *ekklesia* is normally used in the New Testament in a local context, which only later broadens out to a more universal application, and in this connection he notes the influence of the Septuagint<sup>68</sup> use of *ekklesia* to translate the Assembly (*qahal*) of Israel.<sup>69</sup> Meeks also notes that Christian usage was influenced by the Septuagint relating to the 'assembly of YHWH' (translated by the Septuagint as *ekklesia tou kyriou*), and by subsequent similar usage by the Qumran community, then later Jewish writers nearer the time of Paul.<sup>70</sup>

So the eventual wider application of the term to denote all believers recalled the use of *ekklesia* in the Septuagint to denote the congregation of all Israel before the Lord at Sinai, and subsequent assemblies at annual religious feasts. *“In the Septuagint ... 'ekklesia' was used to render the Hebrew word 'qahal', the congregation of Israel, the nation in its theocratic character”.*<sup>71</sup> The idea of local spiritual authority is thus expanded to a wider understanding of the universal Body of Christ, following in the theocratic legacy of Israel.

## AUTHORITY AND THE NAME

Another interesting insight into the delegation of authority to believers is found in references to “in the Name of Jesus”, “in My Name” and so on. In certain such cases the word 'name' could perhaps be paraphrased as 'authority'. We can see this in books and plays where the slightly dated phraseology “Open up in the Name of the Law!” is used. It means the person concerned is not presenting his own credentials, but is standing as an official representative of the Law of the Land, and all that it means.

This was the kind of authority which the Centurion understood, since he represented the full authority of the Roman Empire, and in the last analysis even of Caesar himself. As someone who was “under authority”,<sup>72</sup> so long as he acted correctly, understanding his official capacity, and not outside the bounds of his authority, the full weight of Rome was effective through him. Conversely, not to act and use the authority delegated to him would be a dereliction of duty, just as much as exceeding or abusing it.

This all helps us to understand what Jesus means when says “*The Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name*”.<sup>73</sup> It does not mean that if we tack the right form of words on to the end of a prayer we automatically get our request. Rather, the paraphrase “*whatever you ask in My authority*” implies correctly understanding the authority we have been given in any particular situation; through a combination of scriptures, experience, the voice of the Holy Spirit, and so on; and praying accordingly. David Stern comments on John 14:14 “*We are to make our requests in Yeshua's name, that is, as His followers, on His authority*”.<sup>74</sup>

## AUTHORITY IN PRACTICE

“*Majesty, Kingdom Authority, flows from His throne, unto His own.*” Millions of Christians have sung those words from the chorus “Majesty”. Do we always know what they mean? When Jack Hayford, who wrote them, pastored a pioneering church in California in the 1970's, he based his ministry on a theology of 'kingdom', and what in practical terms it meant to say that 'kingdom authority flows' from the throne of the Risen Messiah to His followers. When he called the church 'The Church on the Way', he meant on the Way to being, doing, and becoming 'Kingdom'.<sup>75</sup>

Sometimes, it can be helpful to use Ephesians 1:20-23 as a form of prayer. It is not being prescriptive, we are not trying to tell God what to do. Rather we are just proclaiming the authority of the Risen Messiah over a particular situation, and leaving Him to work out the practical details.

There may be times when prayer becomes proclamation, speaking directly into a situation. Normally scripture directs us to make our requests known to God.<sup>76</sup> That is the general principle. But sometimes the Father wants us to pray a “Matthew 17 type” prayer, where He expects us to “*say to this mountain*”.<sup>77</sup> “Say to” doesn't mean to pray and ask Father. Of course that is the normal way, but that is not what Jesus is saying here. There may be times when the Spirit will give us a particular gift of faith to speak to the mountain. Then we have to speak directly.

Steve Lightle is a well known Jewish believer in Yeshua, who for many years travelled behind the Iron Curtain throughout the old USSR, seeking out Jewish communities, showing them the scriptures relating to aliyah, and preparing them for a time when God would force the Soviet authorities to let them go home. Earlier in his life, when Steve prayed asking the Lord to intervene in a particular situation where an offensive poster had been put up adjacent to his business, he received an unexpected reply.

*“No” the answer came back. “You do something. I have given you the ‘rod of authority’. You have My word and My authority. In My name, use it”.* So Steve stood in front of the sign, pointed at it with his finger, and spoke out loud *“I command you in the Name of Jesus to fall down”*. He spoke ‘to the mountain’, as commanded in scripture. The result was very dramatic. The next morning the offending poster had fallen down. The ground was littered with paper, and the advertising company never put up another offensive poster while Steve was in business there.<sup>79</sup>

Steve relates that over time *“I learned to know the power of the Holy Spirit in a very practical way, and to use the authority we have in the name of Jesus”*. Subsequently on many dangerous missions behind the Iron Curtain he testifies that *“time and time again while I was travelling in Eastern block countries, and challenging situations occurred, I dared to use the authority we have in the name of Jesus.”*<sup>80</sup>

Another kind of delegated authority is described in a prophetic trip throughout the Soviet Union which Steve Lightle made in 1985. *“We made the trip into the Soviet Union to open the gates to the various cities which had Jewish populations. This trip was*

*made so that at the set time, the Jewish people would be allowed to leave those areas. We were simply to go to the gates of those cities and in prayer cooperate with God, prepare the way for the people ... By prayer a banner was placed on the gates so that the Jewish people would be able to immigrate to the nation of Israel.”* Steve believes his prophetic actions, under Holy Spirit authority, were instrumental in releasing the Jewish people to go home.<sup>81</sup>

In 1988 Steve was preaching in Nome, Alaska at a time when a summit conference was being held between the United States and the Soviet Union. A large naval ship from each nation was anchored in Malta harbour, with Presidents George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachov aboard their respective vessels. One of the key topics to be covered was the plight of the Jews in Russia, and the release of the Jewish people from the USSR. The Russians were demanding that American support for the Jewish cause should cease, because it amounted to interference in Soviet internal affairs.

During the Friday evening service Steve felt he should pray “*a very bold, prophetic prayer based on what I saw in the Spirit*”. He prayed for such a violent storm to take place that the anchored ships would be tossed to and fro, the naval sailors would even be vomiting over the sides, and that the summit conference would be cancelled “*so that the topic of the Soviet Jews could not even be spoken about*”.

The people of Nome were most certainly not impressed with Steve's prayer; they viewed his prayer as extreme presumption, quickly distanced themselves, and went home. However, during the following day there was indeed a tremendous storm in Malta, the summit conference was indeed cancelled, and CNN News showed Russian and American sailors being sick over the sides of the ships anchored in the harbour. Word got round Nome very quickly, and that evening the church was full of hungry people seeking God.<sup>82</sup>

There are many other examples which involve coming **under authority**, recognising the voice of the Holy Spirit, **before** we can exercise authority.

There is a story of a man named Ananias who was told to do something which was irrational, dangerous, and well outside his comfort zone. Sensibly he objected. But he had been chosen because he knew the voice of the Holy Spirit when he heard it. So when the Spirit told him again, he went. He came under the authority of the Holy



Spirit, and exercised the authority of Messiah Yeshua over Saul the Pharisee, and a new ministry of gospel and Kingdom began.<sup>83</sup>

This is not to ignore normal daily Christian obedience; coming under the authority of scripture and seeking to serve God by day to day walking in faith. Of course that is our normal experience. As we seek to serve, in whatever way we are obedient, so we 'come under authority', then the Kingdom can flow through us. Daily prayer, washing feet, obeying scripture, loving the Father, loving others, loving Israel; let's not disparage our normal Kingdom walk. These all extend the Kingdom. Of course they do.

There are different areas of delegated authority for us all to grow in. Paul's favourite metaphor of the Body of Messiah always deeply emphasises the variety of ways to serve; different ways to be under authority; different ways of becoming Kingdom as the hands, feet and so on, of Messiah.<sup>84</sup> We are all different. But we all have a calling to find out in what way Messiah wants to exercise His reign through us.

## SUMMARY: MESSIANIC AUTHORITY IN KINGDOM, GOSPEL AND CHURCH

I have tried to show why a **revolutionary understanding of spiritual authority**, which requires a servant heart and a listening ear, **influenced even the very terminology** used by the New Testament writers.

The concepts of Messianic authority, gospel and kingdom are intertwined. One should not be separated from the others. For the New Testament writers, the varied expectations of a Messianic kingdom which were prevalent in Second Temple Judaism became subsumed into the idea of a Messiah ruling in the place of authority and power, whose authority was exercised in and through the New Testament community.<sup>85</sup>

The widely recognised concept of **kingdom and authority** is closely linked to the concept of **gospel**. All three Synoptic writers consciously make the direct link. The word *evangelion* does not simply mean 'good news', but is deliberately borrowed from the jargon of Imperial Rome to denote an official proclamation of a life changing nature, which will impart blessing and authority to those called to receive it.

The link to *ekklesia* then becomes obvious. It relates to those called out to exercise such authority. The New Testament writers persistently used the one and only term, among the many they could otherwise have chosen, to denote gathering or assembly, to carry through this pervasive theme of delegated authority.

**The Psalm, the Kingdom, the Gospel and the Church:** taken together these central New Testament themes demonstrate a theological insistence that Yeshua the Risen Messiah is actively reigning now, with His delegated authority being exercised through His Resurrection community, the *ekklesia*.

## APPENDIX

### i JAMES DUNN'S ANALYSIS OF TERMS USED OF NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITIES

As already noted, James Dunn has made a wide ranging survey of the variety of terms used in the New Testament and other early Christian literature to describe the fledgling Messianic movement and its varied constituent communities. This Appendix summarises briefly his observations.

Among the many terms which he notes are: *ekklesia*, *synagoge*, *mathetai*, believers, brothers, saints, the elect, sect, the Nazarenes, the Galileans, the poor, the righteous, friends, those being saved, and the way.

Of these *ekklesia* is the most frequent, being used 114 times in the New Testament.<sup>87</sup> He notes that use of *ekklesia* is initially to describe an assembly in a particular place, rather than the broader movement, and suggests that “*the ideal in the singular use may reflect the sense of continuity with Israel (the qahal Yahweh) rather than a single universal entity*”.<sup>88</sup>

*Synagoge* (also denoting assembly) appears occasionally in second century, though not first century Christian literature, as a description of a Christian gathering.<sup>89</sup>

“Disciples” (*mathetai*) is only used in the Gospels and Acts. “*Since talk of someone's 'disciples' was familiar in the ancient world, to speak simply of 'the disciples' indicates an insider's perspective*”.<sup>90</sup> It was not a widespread description in the first century, presumably because the word 'disciple' implied a “*disciple-to-teacher*” relationship “*familiar in the ancient world*”, but soon “*perceived as inadequate among the first*” believers.<sup>91</sup> Indeed “*In New Testament literature 'believers' is actually the first collective term to be used of the emergent community*”.<sup>92</sup>

'Brothers' is another term much used in New Testament writings. But “*while the term works well in personal address and to denote internal relationships, there is little encouragement in New Testament usage*” to apply it to the movement as a whole.<sup>93</sup>

'Saints' indicating those set apart or sanctified to God, “*is a self designation for the people of Israel peculiar to the tradition of Israel*”, so its use in the New Testament

is seen “*as a way of claiming participation in the inheritance of Israel*”.<sup>94</sup> Similarly 'the elect' has strong overtones from the Hebrew scriptures, so that its use in the New Testament serves to demonstrate continuity between the New Testament community and historic Israel, an indirect claim to participate in Israel's heritage. Both the 'elect' and the 'saints' are therefore seen by Dunn as only meaningful in the context of a dialogue taking place within Judaism, and not as a meaningful social description to the Gentile world.<sup>95</sup>

Other occasional terms which only make sense within Judaism, include the 'sect of the Nazarenes' and even more potentially derogatory 'the Galileans', both clearly regarding the movement as a Jewish sect, “*yet another of the factions which were a feature of late Second-Temple Judaism*”.<sup>96</sup>

Four terms which may be noted in passing as having occasional use, but which can hardly amount to more than casual descriptions include 'the poor', 'the righteous', 'friends' and 'those being saved'. Finally with *hodos* ('the Way') there are some echoes of Qumran and other Jewish thought, not least Isaiah 40 and its reference to the 'way of the Lord', which John the Baptist was sent to prepare for.<sup>97</sup>

Dunn notes the vocabulary used expresses a perspective from inside Second Temple Judaism because the embryonic movement was self-consciously Jewish in its self-designation.<sup>98</sup> He concludes “*if there is a single term in the New Testament writings which denotes the existence and character of the embryonic Christian movement ... that term is ekklesia*”, and normally “*its predominant usage was for the regularly summoned citizen body in legislative assembly*”.<sup>99</sup>

Like others Dunn makes the point that *ekklesia* is normally used in the New Testament in a local context, which only later broadens out to a more universal application, and in this connection he also notes the influence of the Septuagint use of *ekklesia* to translate the 'Assembly (*qahal*) of Israel',<sup>100</sup> indicating Paul's conscious “*claim to be in direct continuity with the Israel that God had called out to be his people in the world*”.<sup>101</sup>

## ii JENNIFER EYL – EKKLESIA IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL<sup>102</sup>

Jennifer Eyl has an interesting perspective of Paul's use of *ekklesia*. Like Dunn she understands that Paul is referencing the assembly of God's people at Sinai. While she is not alone in this view, the inference she draws is pertinent for Jewish-Christian relationships, especially perhaps in Israel. From his choice of word, she understands that Paul “*is not making Christians of his pagan followers, but quasi-Judeans of his gentile followers*”; so that Paul's work is to adopt Gentiles into the household of Abraham. Therefore “*contrary to almost all interpretations of Paul, the apostle is not **converting** but **incorporating***”.<sup>103</sup>

Regarding Paul's 'in-grafting' metaphor in Romans, she argues that “*Paul's use of *ekklesia* is instrumental in his effort toward the in-grafting of these gentiles ... Paul's *ekklesia* is an assembling of the people of the deity of Israel*”; an argument which is “*bolstered by examining the general use of *ekklesia* in Greek ... and the Septuagint*”.<sup>104</sup>

Regarding the general use of *ekklesia* in Greek she follows the views we have already discussed, that it is a political word denoting a gathering concerned with ruling an autonomous self-governing community. Regarding its use in the Septuagint, originally deployed as a translation of the Hebrew *qahal*, “*it most frequently denotes the assembling of the people of the God of Israel*”.<sup>105</sup>

So like Theissen and Dunn she sees an adoption of the word from its Septuagint usage, but also pregnant with contemporary associations; so that Paul's use of *ekklesia* is “*an innovative first-century harkening back*” to the time when Israel gathered at Sinai, through which Paul is proposing a means for Gentiles to consider themselves as part of his Jewish heritage.<sup>106</sup>

This growing insistence among academics that the *ekklesia* – the church – was seen by the New Testament writers as incorporated in, rather than distinct from, the *qahal* of Israel, demonstrates again why Christians today should support and identify more closely with Israel in our generation.

## iii EXCURSUS – FROM MARK TO JOHN

We have seen how the New Testament writers borrowed certain terms which had an Imperial motif to express their message. Today we would call it being “culturally relevant”.

Their use of *evangelion* in particular, very much identified their message regarding Messiah in terms normally associated with the Emperor. When Mark opens his account of Jesus' ministry, he commences "The Beginning of the *Evangelion* of Jesus the Messiah". He identifies the coming of Jesus, both His activity and His words, as an Imperial proclamation.<sup>107</sup> Similarly Luke has an angel proclaiming an *evangelion* regarding Jesus at His birth.<sup>108</sup> As we have seen, the Synoptic writers all use this term, frequently linking *evangelion* and kingdom closely together.

However, it is striking how this "culturally relevant" language disappears from the Johannine writings. The term *evangelion* appears only once, in Revelation 14:6.

The term "kingdom" appears some 50 times in Matthew, 19 times in Mark, 52 times in Luke-Acts, but only 4 times in John's Gospel. Two of these are in the meeting with Nicodemus,<sup>109</sup> which emphasises a mystical kingdom which cannot be seen, and which requires a spiritual rebirth; the other two are where Jesus stresses to Pilate, "*My kingdom is not from this world; if my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting ... but my kingdom is not from here*".<sup>110</sup> This declaration to Roman officialdom could not be more explicit.<sup>111</sup> John only uses the term "kingdom" where he stresses as strongly as possible that it is not a political kingdom, that Jesus is not heading a political movement or Jewish rebellion.

We noted how Psalm 110:1 had become an entrenched tradition within the New Testament community, frequently implied by a reference to "at the right hand" as an expression of the rule and authority of the Risen Messiah. But not in John. Nowhere in John's Gospel, letters, or in Revelation, is this expression used or implied.

Why might this be? Some of course put it down to a "Johannine school", a community somehow isolated from the mainstream flow of other New Testament thought. This is not the place to rehearse various theories about New Testament authorship, but I find it unconvincing for a number of reasons. Quite apart from anything else the whole tenor of what we know of both Roman and Christian society in that period supports Dick France's view of a "*fluid process of mutual influence between the various centres of Christian gospel writing as people travelled around the empire and visited and consulted with one another*".<sup>112</sup>

A more convincing explanation, to my mind, would be that John saw this "culturally relevant" idiom as having backfired, as having created enough of a misunderstanding

in Roman minds to be dangerous, as giving too much ammunition to the enemies of the Messianic movement who wanted to portray it as a rebellious, subversive group. His Gospel therefore deliberately avoids any terminology which carries connotations of a political challenge to Caesar.

Indeed John's appeal to the Logos in his prologue is a strategic move at the commencement of his Gospel to move the idiom out of any Imperial context and place it firmly in a wider, deeper, and much earlier culturally relevant setting, thus immediately avoiding and by-passing any implication of a political clash with the Empire.

As long as the nascent Messianic community flew under the radar, and was unnoticed by the Roman authorities, the use of a culturally relevant idiom consciously borrowed from the Imperial cult was fine. It was used as an attempt to describe the unfathomable nature of God's kingdom and Messiah's ministry using imagery of that generation. The New Testament writers and readers were well aware they were describing a spiritual reality, not posing a political threat to Rome. However all that changed once Roman persecution of the Christian community broke out after AD 64; the situation becoming even more precarious after the Jewish War of AD 66-70.

It is interesting that while some scholars are willing to date one or more Synoptic Gospels before AD 64, they tend to disagree on which ones.<sup>113</sup> However if all three Synoptics were written prior to AD 64, with John of course being post AD 70, this would in fact fit in very well with a change of heart within the New Testament community regarding politically dangerous cultural idioms.

One interesting point from a CMJ perspective might be whether this could help us to interpret John's various references to "the Jews", many such references being considered 'difficult', indeed in modern eyes veering towards being anti-semitic.<sup>114</sup> If such comments are seen in a context where John deliberately avoids the word *evangelion* because of its Imperial connotations, and where he is consciously defensive in his use of the word 'kingdom', then John's 'difficult references' should be seen as another defensive ploy, with more than half a glance at Roman officialdom, attempting to distance the Messianic movement from accusations of political subversion.

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## **Further Reading**

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## **Abbreviations**

Black's NTC      Black's New Testament Commentary

NICNT            The New International Commentary on the New Testament

NIGTC            The New International Greek Testament Commentary

Pillar NTC        The Pillar New Testament Commentary

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## ENDNOTES

1. 'Risen and Exalted' Olive Press Research Paper No 21 2014
2. 'Risen and Exalted' OPRP21 Note 14 p5
3. Psalm 110:1, The LORD says to my Lord, "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."
4. Matthew 26:62-65
5. Acts 2:32-36
6. Ephesians 1:20-23
7. Hebrews 1:3; 1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2
8. 'Risen and Exalted' OPRP21 p10&12
9. David Anderson 'The King-Priest of Psalm 110' p 294
10. Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13
11. So also RT France 'Matthew NICNT' p 314; See also James Edwards 'Luke Pillar NTC' p 212
12. Donald Guthrie 'Jesus the Messiah' p 96
13. John 1:3
14. John 1:10
15. Colossians 1:16
16. Hebrews 1:2-3
17. So James Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p1110.
18. Ephesians 1:20-23
19. Ephesians 4:10-13
20. Ephesians 6:12
21. Colossians 1:16
22. Colossians 1:17
23. Colossians 1:18
24. Matthew 28:18-19
25. Edwards 'Luke: Pillar NTC' p149
26. Matthew 6:9-13 Later manuscripts add "for Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."
27. See for example Brad Young 'Jesus The Jewish Theologian' pp 59-62
28. See RT France 'Matthew NICNT' p103
29. For insights into how Jesus' understanding of the kingdom inter-acted with Jewish and Rabbinical ideas of His time see David Flusser 'The Sage From Galilee' pp 76-96

30. Ann Spangler & Lois Tverberg “Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus” p183 (also 180-195)
31. Similarly Dick France insists on an active sense of “God ruling” rather than “a specific time, place or situation called 'the kingdom'.” RT France 'Matthew NICNT' p 102 & 151
32. Luke 4:43
33. Luke 8:1
34. Acts 28:23 (NRSV)
35. Acts 28:31 (NRSV)
36. In academic terms an inclusio identifying the continuity of the gospel/kingdom activity in Luke-Acts.
37. Mark 1:14-15 (RSV)
38. Matthew 24:14
39. RT France 'Matthew NICNT' p150
40. “It has become axiomatic in studies of Luke that Jesus' sermon at Nazareth is programmatic for our understanding of the mission of Jesus” Joel Green in 'The Theology of the Gospel of Luke' p76; Likewise James Edwards sees this as the “Keynote Address” of Jesus' ministry. Edwards 'Luke Pillar NTC' p132
41. Luke 4:18 (NRSV)
42. Luke 7:22 (NRSV)
43. Edwards 'Luke: Pillar NTC' p 132
44. John 18:36
45. See also Brad Young on the differing expectations of Jesus and John the Baptist in “Jesus The Jewish Theologian” pp 56-59
46. James Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p143; see also n217 p1005 where Dunn reinforces the same point.
47. Colossians 1:13 (NRSV)
48. Colossians 3:1
49. Graham Stanton 'Jesus and Gospel' p31-35
50. Stanton 'Jesus and Gospel' p32
51. Stanton 'Jesus and Gospel' p32
52. Stanton 'Jesus and Gospel' p31-32
53. Gerd Theissen 'The New Testament: A Literary History' p201
54. Theissen 'NT Literary History' p56
55. Theissen 'NT Literary History' p55
56. Theissen 'NT Literary History' p55
57. Rowan Williams 'Meeting God in Mark' p6

58. R T France 'Mark: NIGTC' p52
59. Theissen 'NT Literary History' p55-6
60. Theissen 'NT Literary History' p269 n14
61. Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p552 & p914 esp n229
62. FF Bruce 'The Spreading Flame' p71
63. Rowan Williams 'Holy Week Lectures 2012'
64. Wayne Meeks 'The First Urban Christians' p79
65. See the Appendix to this paper for a summary of Dunn's survey
66. Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p599
67. Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch 'ReJesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church' p31
68. Septuagint - The Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures existing by Jesus time.
69. Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p552
70. Meeks 'The First Urban Christians' p79 & p108
71. Bruce 'The Spreading Flame' p71
72. Luke 7:8
73. John 15:16; see also 14:14; 16:23; 16:26.
74. David Stern 'Jewish New Testament Commentary' p199
75. Jack Hayford 'The Church on the Way' See especially p 61-86
76. Philippians 4:6
77. Matthew 17:20
78. 1 Corinthians 12:9 My personal experience puts Matthew 17:20 and 1 Corinthians 12:9 together.
79. Steve Lightle 'Exodus II' p27
80. Lightle 'Exodus II' p28
81. Steve Lightle 'Operation Exodus II' p21
82. Lightle 'Operation Exodus II' p118-120
83. Acts 9:10-19
84. Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:5-31; Ephesians 4:11-13
85. For an analysis recognising the Imperial implications of these terms, playing down their intended political significance in view of Paul's insistence on submission to the authorities, see Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' p550-555 especially p554 n148
86. James Dunn 'Beginning From Jerusalem' pp 6-17 & p599
87. Dunn p6 n11
88. Dunn p7 n14

89. Dunn p8
90. Dunn p8 n25
91. Dunn p9
92. Dunn p9
93. Dunn p11
94. Dunn p12 n45
95. Dunn p12-13
96. Dunn p14-15
97. Dunn p13-14
98. Dunn p15-17
99. Dunn p599
100. Dunn p552
101. Dunn p600 see also p7 n14
102. Jennifer Eyl “Semantic Voids, New Testament Translation and Anachronism – The Case of Paul's Use of Ekklesia” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014) pp315-339
103. Eyl p321
104. Eyl p322
105. Eyl p323
106. Eyl p335
107. So R.T. France 'Mark NIGTC' p52/53
108. Luke 2:10
109. John 3
110. John 18:36 NRSV
111. Carson notes that the phraseology 'so defines his kingdom as to remove all possibility of offence against the Empire'. D A Carson 'The Gospel According to John' p594
112. RT France 'Matthew NICNT' p21
113. Dick France speaks of a growing number of scholars who argue for a date before AD 64 for Luke's Gospel, with obvious implications for Mark and Matthew. RT France 'Luke: Teach the Text' p4
114. See for example Andrew Lincoln 'The Gospel According to Saint John' pp70-81 for a review of the passages referencing “The Jews”.

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