

We Must See the Kingdom Rightly

a) Only the Born Again Can Truly See the Kingdom

- Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).
- Regeneration opens our eyes to the kingdom. Yet even believers can misunderstand the kingdom.

b) The Kingdom Has Been Interpreted in Many Different Ways

- George Eldon Ladd noted that few themes in Scripture have received such radically different interpretations as the kingdom of God.
- The kingdom is woven throughout the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, Paul’s writings, and the book of Revelation.
- Yet many believers still see the kingdom through very different lenses.

c) Common Misunderstandings of the Kingdom

- Some reduce it to:
 - Politics
 - Social reform
 - Ethical living
 - Cultural dominion
 - Going to heaven when we die
- Some make it:
 - Merely inward spirituality
 - Future only
- Some believe it is:
 - Fully present now
 - Entirely future
 - Separated sharply from the church
 - Synonymous with the church

d) The Danger of Wrong Views of the Kingdom

- Many first-century Jews expected the Messiah to overthrow Rome and immediately establish a political kingdom.
- Because of this wrong expectation, many missed the King standing right in front of them.
- The same danger exists today.

- We can be so committed to our assumptions about the kingdom that we miss what Scripture actually reveals.
- We must not merely see the kingdom. We must see it rightly through Scripture, spiritual revelation, sound interpretation, and Hebraic thought.

Are the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven Different?

a) Some Teach They Are Different

- Some argue that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven refer to two separate realities.
- But this claim does not hold up under the testimony of Scripture.

b) Matthew Uses “Kingdom of Heaven” for a Jewish Audience

- Matthew primarily uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven.”
- Mark, Luke, and John usually use “kingdom of God.”
- Since Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish audience, he likely used “heaven” as a reverent substitute for God’s name.
- This reflects the Jewish tendency to avoid speaking God’s name directly out of holy reverence.

c) Parallel Passages Show the Terms Are Interchangeable

- Compare Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:20.
- “The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11) and “the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11).
- In Matthew 19:23–24, Jesus uses both phrases in the same conversation.
- Both refer to the same kingdom from different perspectives.
- “Kingdom of heaven” emphasizes the heavenly source of the kingdom.
- “Kingdom of God” emphasizes the divine King who reigns.

Defining the Kingdom of God

a) The Kingdom Is More Than Going to Heaven

- The kingdom is not merely a future destination.
- It is the present reign of Jesus Christ breaking into hearts, lives, families, churches, cities, and nations.
- The kingdom is present wherever Jesus is welcomed as Lord.

b) Every Kingdom Has Four Basic Components

1. A sovereign ruler who possesses authority and power.
2. A people who live under that ruler’s authority.

3. A realm where that rule is expressed.
4. The active exercise of rule through the ruler's will, government, and authority.

c) The Kingdom of God Includes These Same Components

- Jesus is the King with absolute authority and power.
- His people are those who submit to His reign.
- His realm is wherever He is surrendered to as Lord.
- His kingdom is expressed wherever:
 - His will is obeyed
 - His authority is submitted to
 - His power is manifested

d) A Summary of the Kingdom

- The kingdom of God is *entered* through salvation.
- It is *embodied* through Christ's indwelling life.
- It is *proclaimed* through the gospel of the kingdom.
- It is *demonstrated* through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- It is *advanced* through prayer, preaching, missions, healing, deliverance, discipleship, and spiritual warfare.

e) My Definition of the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is the reign of God through Jesus Christ as King, established wherever His will is done, His authority is obeyed, and His power is manifested.

f) The Kingdom Unfolds in Five Phases

1. The kingdom was *purposed* in eternity.
2. The kingdom was *promised* by the prophets.
3. The kingdom was *inaugurated* by Jesus.
4. The kingdom is *present* through the Spirit-empowered church.
5. The kingdom is *future* when Jesus returns.

1. The Kingdom Was *Purposed* in Eternity.

a) God's Eternal Purpose Centers on His Son

- Before time began, before creation existed, and before history unfolded, the Triune God had an eternal purpose.

- That purpose was to place the Son at the center of everything in heaven and on earth.
- Paul said God purposed to “sum up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:9–10).
- God’s ultimate intention has always been to bring all things under the headship of His Son.

b) The Kingdom Was Not a Reaction to the Fall

- The kingdom did not begin as a reaction to sin, Satan, or Adam’s fall.
- It began in the eternal council of God.
- Jesus said the kingdom was “prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).
- Long before Adam fell, Israel was chosen, or Jesus came in the flesh, God had already purposed a kingdom centered in His beloved Son.

c) Jesus Is the Center of God’s Blueprint

- God’s eternal purpose is “carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11).
- Jesus Christ establishes the boundaries of God’s blueprint.
- He is the horizon, goal, and fulfillment of everything God planned from eternity.
- The Godhead has determined that Jesus will have first place in everything (Col. 1:18).
- All things are for the Son, through the Son, and unto the Son.
- The Son is not a secondary part of God’s plan.
- He is the center, circumference, goal, and glory of it all.

d) God’s Purpose and God’s Kingdom Are Connected

- What’s the difference between God’s eternal purpose and God’s kingdom?
- Jesus answers this question for us in the Lord’s Prayer.
- Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done” (Matt. 6:10).
- God’s kingdom is the reign by which His will is carried out on earth.
- At the deepest level, His ultimate will is His eternal purpose.
- God’s eternal purpose is the plan; God’s kingdom is the reign by which that plan is accomplished in Christ.
- Through the reign of Jesus, God is progressively fulfilling everything He planned before the foundation of the world.
- This includes:
 - Christ at the center of all things

- A family of Christlike sons
- A bride made ready for the Son
- A temple, house, and body for the Spirit
- The kingdom of God is the dynamic outworking of God's eternal purpose in time.

2. The Kingdom Was *Promised* by the Prophets.

a) Jesus Was Announcing What the Prophets Had Promised

- When Jesus declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17), He was not introducing a brand-new idea.
- He was announcing the arrival of what Israel had been waiting for, praying for, and longing to see.
- Their imagination had been shaped by the prophets.

b) The Prophets Promised a Messianic King

- Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and Zechariah all spoke of a coming King from David's line.
- This King would establish God's reign upon the earth.
- The prophets described a kingdom unlike anything the world had ever seen.

c) The Prophets Described the Coming Kingdom

- The Messiah would rule from Zion with righteousness, justice, holiness, and peace (Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1–5; Jer. 23:5–6; Zech. 14:9).
- The nations would stream to Jerusalem to worship the King and learn His ways (Isa. 2:2–4; Mic. 4:1–2; Zech. 14:16).
- War would cease. Swords would become plowshares (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3).
- The wolf would dwell with the lamb (Isa. 11:6–8; Isa. 65:25).
- Creation itself would be restored (Isa. 11:6–9; Rom. 8:19–21).
- The earth would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).
- Fear, oppression, violence, and anxiety would give way to the reign of the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6–7; Isa. 32:17–18).

d) The Coming Kingdom Would Include

- Healing and wholeness
- Joy
- Prosperity

- Security
- Peace
- Righteousness
- Rebuilt cities
- Restored creation
- The glory of God shining from Zion

e) First-Century Israel Lived with Kingdom Expectation

- This prophetic vision created a culture of expectation in Israel.
- The Jewish people longed for God's reign to break into history through the Messiah.
- They prayed for it. They sang about it. They taught it to their children.
- The kingdom shaped how they saw God, history, Israel, the nations, justice, creation, and the coming age.

f) The Modern Church Often Misses This Context

- Many twenty-first-century Gentile believers rarely study the prophets in context.
- The Old Testament prophets were written *for* us, but not *to* us.
- We must read them through a literal, historical, and grammatical lens.
- We must ask: What did the text mean to the original audience?
- We must pay attention to covenant context, kingdom expectations, and ancient Hebrew thought.
- Otherwise, we will miss how deeply the kingdom shaped Jesus and the apostles.
- The gospel of the kingdom is bigger than forgiveness. It is the announcement that God's reign has broken into history through Jesus Christ and will one day fill the whole earth.

3. The Kingdom Was *Inaugurated* by Jesus.

a) The Kingdom Was Near Because the King Was Present

- Jesus declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17).
- With those words, He announced that the long-awaited kingdom had arrived.
- The kingdom was not near merely because a new teaching had come.
- The kingdom was near because the King Himself was standing among them.
- Jesus told the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:21).
- In essence, He was saying, "The kingdom is standing right in front of you because I am the King."

b) Jesus Embodied the Kingdom

- The kingdom is not first a concept, system, or doctrine.
- The kingdom is embodied in a Person.
- Where Jesus is welcomed, His kingdom is present.
- Where His lordship is embraced, His reign begins to be expressed.

c) Jesus Proclaimed and Demonstrated the Kingdom

- At His first coming, God's reign broke into history through Jesus.
- Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom.
- Then He displayed the power of the kingdom through healing, deliverance, miracles, raising the dead, confronting religious systems, exposing darkness, and setting captives free.

4. The Kingdom Is *Present* Through the Spirit-Empowered Church.

a) Acts Shows the Continuing Ministry of Jesus

- Acts begins with “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).
- This means Jesus's earthly ministry was only the beginning.
- What Jesus began in His physical body, He continues through His spiritual body—the church.
- Acts ends with Paul preaching the kingdom “unhindered” (Acts 28:31).

b) Jesus Multiplied His Ministry Through the Church

- When Jesus ascended, He did not end His ministry—He multiplied it.
- Just as Elijah ascended and left his mantle for Elisha, Jesus ascended and poured out His Spirit upon the church.
- Pentecost was the King clothing His people with power to continue His ministry in the earth.
- Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also” (John 14:12).
- You are called to minister like Jesus with power.

c) Jesus Taught the Disciples About the Kingdom After His Resurrection

- Jesus spent forty days speaking to His disciples about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).
- The disciples understood the prophetic hope.
- They knew the prophets promised a coming kingdom.
- They knew Israel would one day be restored.

- That is why they asked, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

d) Jesus Did Not Correct Their Kingdom Expectation

- Jesus did not correct their understanding.
- The kingdom will one day be restored to Israel.
- But before its final restoration, the kingdom would advance through the outpouring of the Spirit.

e) Pentecost Was a Kingdom Event

- Peter connected Pentecost directly to the exaltation of Jesus by quoting Psalm 110:1.
- Jesus had been raised, enthroned, and seated at the Father’s right hand.
- The Spirit was poured out because the King had taken His seat (Acts 2:33–35).
- Pentecost was not merely a spiritual experience.
- It was a kingdom event.

f) Jesus Rules Through His Spirit-Empowered Church

- The Father says to His Son, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies” (Ps. 110:2).
- Jesus rules now through His body on the earth.
- The church is joined to Christ the Head.
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church becomes the earthly expression of His heavenly reign.

g) Pentecost Began the Day of His Power

- Psalm 110:3 says, “Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power.”
- This day of power began at Pentecost.
- In Psalm 110:3, the word translated “power” can also mean “army.” In context, it portrays the Messiah’s willing people as a holy army in the day of His kingly power.
- The exalted King now has a willing, holy, Spirit-filled army—the church—who carries His authority, proclaims His gospel, demonstrates His power, and advances His kingdom among the nations.

h) The Spirit Was Given for Testifying of the King and His Kingdom

- Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).
- The Spirit was not given for private blessing, personal comfort, an emotional experience, or better church services.
- He was poured out to empower the church to be witnesses, to testify of the risen King, and to advance His kingdom to the ends of the earth.

i) The Kingdom Is Present Wherever the Church Lives Under Christ's Reign

- The kingdom is present wherever the Spirit-empowered church:
 - Submits to Jesus
 - Obeys His Word
- The kingdom is advanced whenever the Spirit-empowered church:
 - Proclaims the gospel
 - Demonstrates Jesus's power
 - Makes disciples
 - Heals the sick
 - Casts out demons
 - Intercedes for the kingdom to come
 - Lives as a visible community under His reign

j) The Kingdom Is Present, But Partial

- The kingdom has broken into this age, but not yet in fullness.
- Satan has been defeated, but he is still active.
- Christ reigns, but all things are not yet visibly subjected to Him.
- The church experiences the first fruits of the kingdom and taste the powers of the age to come.
- In this present age, the church is called to be a preview of the coming kingdom—a Spirit-filled people who embody the life of the King, proclaim the message of the King, demonstrate the power of the King, and prepare the nations for His return.

5. The Kingdom Is *Future* When Christ Returns.

a) King Jesus Will Take Possession of the Earth

- Revelation shows the Lamb taking the scroll and opening its seals.
- Through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, God confronts the rebellious kingdoms of this age.
- The kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15).

b) Jesus Will Establish an Unshakable Kingdom

- Daniel said Jesus will establish a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44).
- Every kingdom of man that resists His reign will be crushed.
- His kingdom will endure forever.

c) Jesus Will Judge Those Who Refused His Reign

- At His return, Jesus will judge those who rejected His rule.
- He will overthrow the antichrist and destroy his evil system.
- He will bring justice against those aligned with rebellion, deception, and darkness.
- The nations will discover that resistance to the King of kings is futile.

d) The Kingdom Will Fill the Whole Earth

- The kingdom will become like the great mountain Daniel saw, filling the whole earth.
- Jesus will reign from Jerusalem.
- Zechariah declared, “The LORD will be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9).
- His bride will rule with Him over the nations.
- Every sphere of society will come under His righteous rule, including government, economics, education, business, culture, and worship.

e) His Reign Will Be Strictly Enforced

- In this age, God invites voluntary surrender.
- In the next age, after Jesus returns, His reign will be strictly enforced.
- Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- What is now contested will then be unquestioned.
- What is now resisted will then be fully subjected to the authority of the King.

g) The Millennial Kingdom Will Be Unlike Anything in History

- When Christ returns, Satan will be bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–6).
- Jesus will reign with His overcoming saints (Rev. 20:1–6).
- He will usher in an age of peace, justice, righteousness, holiness, healing, restoration, prosperity, joy, and divine order.
- The nations that survive the tribulation will stream to Jerusalem to worship the King.
- The glory of the Lord will radiate from Zion.
- Creation will begin to taste the restoration it has been groaning for.

Common Distortions of the Kingdom

- A biblical view of the kingdom must hold two truths together: the kingdom is already present, but not yet here in fullness.
 - If we lose either side of this tension, we distort the message Jesus preached.
- a) Distortion 1: The Kingdom as Completely Future
- This is common in some forms of dispensationalism.
 - This view often makes a sharp distinction between the church and the kingdom.
 - It is also often reinforced by cessationism—the gifts of the Spirit passed away after the apostolic age.
 - When the kingdom is only future, present kingdom power is neglected.
 - The result can be Christianity with correct doctrine about the future but little expectation for the Spirit's power in the present.
- b) Distortion 2: Kingdom Now and Over-Realized Eschatology
- Kingdom Now theology rightly emphasizes that the kingdom is present now.
 - But it often pushes this truth too far.
 - It claims for this present age what Scripture reserves for the future kingdom.
 - This view blurs this age and the age to come.
 - Some expressions of this are invading the culture with the kingdom, dominionism, a hyper-focus on prosperity, and a belief that people should be healed one hundred percent of the time.
 - When the future is pulled too completely into the present, it can produce triumphalism, unrealistic expectations, disappointment, and an unhealthy pursuit of earthly power.
 - People can be made to feel condemned when they are not healed.
 - They may be told they lacked faith, failed spiritually, or were hiding secret sin.
 - Jesus still heals. Healing is for today. Yet we still live in a fallen world where sickness, suffering, and death remain.
 - For reasons we do not always understand, not everyone is healed in this present age.
- c) Distortion 3: A Hyper-Focus on Revival and Signs, Wonders, and Miracles
- The kingdom of God should be demonstrated in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - But this becomes distorted when signs, wonders, and miracles become the main focus rather than Jesus Himself.
 - Even God-given moves of healing and miracles can become idolatrous when they eclipse Jesus, as Israel's bronze serpent eventually did (2 Kings 18:4).

- The purpose of kingdom power is to reveal the King, confirm the gospel, set captives free, heal the sick, and glorify Jesus.
- When miracles are disconnected from discipleship, people may chase power without being conformed to the character of Christ.
- When manifestations are elevated above Scripture, discernment is weakened and deception can enter.
- When revival becomes the goal, people may seek experiences more than the Lord Himself.
- When signs and wonders are pursued without the cross, humility, holiness, and sound doctrine, the result can be spiritual immaturity.
- Jesus warned that some would prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles in His name, yet still not truly know Him.
- We should eagerly desire the power of the Spirit, but never separate kingdom power from the lordship of Jesus, the truth of Scripture, and the fruit of the Spirit.
- The kingdom is not merely demonstrated by miracles; it is also embodied through righteousness, peace, joy, holiness, love, humility, obedience, and Christlike character.
- A healthy kingdom theology welcomes revival and the gifts of the Spirit while keeping Jesus, the gospel, Scripture, discipleship, and holiness at the center.

d) Distortion 4: The Seven Mountain Mandate

- The Seven Mountain Mandate is popular in some charismatic and Pentecostal movements.
- It teaches that Christians should influence seven major spheres of society: 1) government; 2) media; 3) education; 4) business; 5) arts and entertainment; 6) family; and 7) religion.
- Christians should influence culture, pursue righteousness, and serve with excellence.
- We should bring kingdom values into every sphere where God places us.
- But Scripture doesn't teach that the church will take control of society and establish the kingdom fully before Christ returns.
- We should influence culture without being captured by culture, and we should seek transformation without confusing cultural influence with the fullness of the kingdom.