

The Kingdom of God in the Prophets: A Slice of Biblical Theology

Mark Snoeberger
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

OT KINGDOM BACKGROUNDS

The Kingdom Anticipated in Genesis

The Kingdom Outlined in Deuteronomy

The Kingdom Inaugurated in Samuel

The Kingdom Suspended in Jeremiah

THE PROPHETIC KINGDOM ANNOUNCED AND DESCRIBED

The General Features of the Prophetic Kingdom

- (1) The Kingdom's arrival is not *gradual*, but *sudden* and *catastrophic* (Ps 110:2, 5–6; Mal 3:1, 5; 4:1–2; Zeph 1:12, 18; Joel 3:1–4; Dan 2:44–45).
- (2) The Kingdom's arrival is not *natural*, but *supernatural* (Isa 52:7–10; 60:1–5; Ezek 20:33–34).
- (3) The Kingdom's arrival is not *immaterial*, but *material* (Isa 33:17; 40:5; 52:7–10).

The Specific Features of the Prophetic Kingdom

- (1) The Prophetic Kingdom will have a spiritual/religious basis.
 - It will be populated (initially at least) by persons regenerated by God, most of them quite suddenly, and many of them Jewish (Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 36:24–28).
 - The Jewish delegation within the Kingdom will function as a kingdom of priests for the nations, fulfilling the terms both of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:6).
 - Jerusalem, the religious center for the Kingdom, will feature a temple with elements and dimensions that do not match any historical building (Isa 56:7; 64:11; Hag 2:6–9; Ezek 40–48). The Shekinah will again take up residence in it (Ezek 43:1–3, 7), and a sacrificial system will again be enacted. Cf. also Isa 1:26; 60:14, 18; 62:3, 7; Jer 31:6; Zech 8:3; 14:16.
- (2) The Prophetic Kingdom will have a prominent political aspect
 - “Behold a King shall reign” (Isa 32:1) in Jerusalem, the city of the great King (Ps 48:2; cf. Isa

2:3; 24:23; Jer 3:17; Ezek 48:16; Zech 2:1–5)—not a heavenly Jerusalem, but rather one “in the land that I gave to Jacob my servant, and in which your fathers lived” (Ezek 37:25).

The Kingdom will feature a law founded on principles of perfect justice (Pss 89:14; 97:1–2; Jer 23:5; Zech 8:3), which will be enforced with a “rod of iron” (Ps 2:9):

This Kingdom will supplant certain historical kingdoms (Dan 2, 7) and subordinate others, which will be ruled by vice-regents in service to the King of Kings (Dan 7:27; cf. Ps 72:11; cf. Zech 14:9, 20–21; Isa 2:2; Dan 2:35; Rev 19:16).

(3) The Prophetic Kingdom will have a robust socio-economic/welfare policy.

Military conflict will cease (Ps 46:9; Isa 2:4; 9:6–7), military training, standing armies, and implements of war will be decommissioned (Mic 4:3; Hos 2:18), and universal peace will be enjoyed.

(True) social justice will prevail (Jer 33:10–11, 15; Zech 8:4–5). This will include:

- The establishment of property and labor rights (Isa 65:21–22; Amos 9:11, 14).
- The achievement of poverty relief through industry (Ps 72:1–4, 12–13; Isa 42:1–4).
- The restoration of proper family values, including proper regard of young and old (Jer 33:10–11, 15; Zech 8:4–5; Ps 126:1–2).
- The resolution of ancient racial tensions (Ezek 37:21–22; Zech 8:13, 23).
- The reversal of the curse of Babel, restoring free communication (Zeph 3:9).

(4) The Prophetic Kingdom will also have physical policies/features.

- Environmental damage will be undone (Ps 72:16; Isa 61:4).
- Beneficial changes of climate will occur (Isa 4:5–6; 30:23–26).
- Beneficial geographical and geological changes will occur (Isa 30:23–26).
- Meteorological changes will ensure that timely and abundant rainfall will occur worldwide (Joel 2:23; Ezek 34:26b), even in traditionally barren places (Isa 30:25; 35:6–7; 41:18), leading to the elimination of famine (Ezek 34:29).
- Fertility and productivity will abound (Isa 35:1–2; Ezek 34:25, 29; Amos 9:13).
- Animals will become docile (Isa 11:6–8; 65:25; Ezek 34:25; Hosea 2:18).
- Disease and deformity will be eliminated (Isa 33:24; 35:5–6; 65:22).
- Long life (though not necessarily *eternal* life) will be the norm (Isa 65:22).
- Even ordinary hazards associated with clumsiness will be reduced (Ezek 34:23–31; Ps 91:10–12).

CONCLUSION

While it is true that certain terms such as *seed*, *Israel*, and *kingdom* have a semantic range of meanings in Scripture, no one meaning of those terms can supplant the others. The kingdom anticipated in the prophets is *not* the eternal, uninterrupted kingdom of God that he rules from his heavenly throne; *nor* is it the “kingdom” of the church; but is the earthy, Jewish Kingdom described in the prophets. And if our idea of kingdom doesn’t include these elements, it’s not the kingdom.

The Kingdom of God in the Gospels: Another Slice of Biblical Theology

Mark Snoeberger
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

THE KINGDOM IN THE GOSPELS, Part 1

- (1) The message of Christ's early public ministry may be summed up in the statement that "the kingdom *as described in the prophets* is at hand."
- The Gospels begin with prenatal announcements of Jesus's credentials to reign as a Davidic King to both Mary (Luke 1:32–33) and Joseph (Matt 1:20–23)
 - John the Baptist is introduced in distinctly OT terms as an "Elijah" who will prepare the way for Messianic King (Luke 1:17).
 - John's announcement (Matt 3:2) that "THE Kingdom of heaven is at hand," repeated many times by Jesus both at the beginning and throughout his public ministry (Matt 4:17; Luke 10:8–22; 11:20; 17:20–21) points to a kingdom with which his hearers were aware.
 - That the Apostles dart out to broadcast the same message spontaneously without even pausing to grab food or clothes (Matt 10:7) is a testimony to the excitement that THE kingdom anticipated in the OT was at hand
 - At Christ's baptism, further, Christ's identity as a member of the Davidide is established with an appeal to the coronation language of Psalm 2 (cf. also the Transfiguration).
 - The kingdom, we find, is offered specifically to "the lost house of Israel" (Matt 10:5–6 cf. John 1:11), and has a decidedly Jewish flavor. Christ is announced as one who will reign "over the house of Jacob" from "Jerusalem, the city of the great king" (Matt 5:35 cf. Ps 48—not the heavenly city, but the earthly city of Jerusalem), where he will "sit on his glorious throne," judging the nations, and adjudicating admittance into the Kingdom (Matt 25:31–46).
 - The Kingdom also has a spiritual foundation: no one can even *see* the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3). In order to prepare for the Kingdom that was "at hand," one had to "repent," "believe" and "make straight one's ways." And while the Kingdom is distinctly Jewish, one could not get in based on ethnicity alone (Matt 3:7–10).
 - Jesus describes himself, further, as Daniel's "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" that will crush historical powers and establish God's indestructible Kingdom (Luke 20:13–18 cf. Dan 2:31–45).
 - Jesus also takes upon himself extraordinary authority to grant exceptions to divine laws, decide where one might legitimately worship, and so forth—because he is the Messianic lawmaker.
 - His miracles, too, seem strategically designed to highlight incidental features of the "age to come"—abundant food, absence of disease and physical handicap, control over the weather, even the extension of life, and are often prefaced by appeals to the Kingdom.

Conclusion: The kingdom Christ was offering had perfect continuity with the historical and prophetic kingdoms of the OT. There can be no doubt of this. Unless we have very clear textual warrant for redefining “kingdom” between Christ’s early ministry and the start of the church, this is the kingdom with which we are dealing. Anything else is bald equivocation.

- (2) The message is not, however, that the Kingdom was established at this time (note the future tense of Matt 5:19–20; 7:21; 8:11; etc.). While imminent, the Kingdom had not been enacted, because its offer met with relentless “violence” (Matt 11:12) and ultimate rejection (Matt 12:25–45).

THE KINGDOM IN THE GOSPELS, PART 2

- (1) The balance of the Gospels features a “weeding” of Christ’s followers and introduction of mysteries of the kingdom (Matt 13), an interim administrative structure—the Church (Matt 16, 18, etc.), and instruction about a new (and distant) timetable for the implementation of the kingdom (Matt 24–25)—no contemporary “re-offer,” despite the “gospel of the kingdom” language in Acts and elsewhere.
- (2) Questions about the timing of the kingdom are routinely couched in terms of postponement:
 - Luke 19:11–27
 - Acts 1:6–9

CONCLUSION

If, in fact, the church IS the kingdom, or the “best manifestation” of the Kingdom today, or a “realized” component of the kingdom, then the definition of the church’s mission expands from being **the Great Commission** to being the **establishment of the Kingdom**, and *all that this entails from both testaments*.

The Kingdom must be kept spectacular by keeping the contemporary Church out of it. And the Church’s Great Commission must be kept central by keeping the Kingdom out of it.