

The Coming Kingdom - Part 43

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In this series, the biblical teaching on the kingdom has been surveyed to demonstrate that Scripture conveys that the kingdom is a future reality. Moreover, equating the church with the Messianic kingdom radically alters God's design for the church.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

Another area of monumental change occurs in the life of the church when it embraces "kingdom now" theology. As explained in the prior installment, this area relates to embracing hyper-Pentecostalism, which contends that signs and wonders are an absolute necessity in order to effectively evangelize. This approach is sometimes referred to as "power of evangelism." Hyper-Pentecostalism is rooted in "kingdom now" theology. The reason for this nexus between the kingdom and signs and wonders is because the kingdom will be a time of unprecedented miracles (Isa. 35:5-6). If the kingdom, a predicted time of unprecedented miracles, is now a present reality, then so should be the present age.

Interestingly, the late John Wimber, a leading advocate of power evangelism, was heavily influenced by "kingdom now" theology. Wimber derived much of his views of the kingdom from the writings of

George Eldon Ladd. Ladd taught a view called "Historic Premillennialism," which stands for the proposition that the kingdom is "already but not yet." While contending that some form of the earthly kingdom will ultimately come in the future millennial reign of Christ, the kingdom had also already been inaugurated in spiritual form in the present age. Ladd maintained that Jesus was currently seated on David's Throne in heaven orchestrating this present spiritual form of the kingdom. Wimber was explicit in linking his belief in modern-day signs and wonders to a present manifestation of the kingdom in his book *Power Evangelism*:

I was already acquainted with George Eldon Ladd's writings (he was a Fuller Theological Seminary professor), but it was not until I read his book *Jesus and the Kingdom* that I realized his work on the kingdom formed a theological basis for power evangelism. As I read Dr. Ladd's books, and read afresh the gospel accounts, I became convinced that power evangelism was for today.¹

Progressive Dispensationalists have also embraced a similar "already but not yet"

¹ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, Rev. ed. (Minn.: Baker, 2009), 19.

view of the kingdom. Interestingly, many Progressive Dispensationalists who have adopted an "already not yet" view of the kingdom have also moved gradually in the direction of Pentecostalism. For example, in a book examining the issue of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts entitled *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, leading Progressive Dispensationalist Robert Saucy opened the door to Pentecostal Theology in a chapter entitled *An Open But Cautious View?*² Other flirtations by Progressive Dispensationalists with charismatic theology can also be cited.³ Thus, the nexus between the kingdom now theology and modern-day signs and wonders has caused Ryrie to inquire how Progressive Dispensationalism and Cessationism are intellectually consistent and compatible. He asks:

Non-charismatic progressive dispensationalists have not faced the question as to why signs and wonders are not characteristic of the church if in fact Christ is already on David's throne. During our Lord's earthly life many signs validated His claim to be the promised Davidic king for Israel. Now that He is

allegedly reigning as Davidic King (according to progressives), why are there not miraculous signs happening today in the "already" stage of his Davidic reign?⁴

In actuality, the present age cannot be characterized as the kingdom for the simple reason that the wide-scale signs and wonders predicted for the kingdom are not a present manifestation. While not disputing the fact that God can and frequently does intervene providentially and miraculously in His creation at times (Jas. 5:14-16), these random occurrences do not correspond to the widespread miracles that will come to the world once the kingdom arrives. Interestingly, although Paul performed many miraculous signs throughout His ministry (Acts 14:8-12; 20:7-12), the New Testament also testifies to a gradual waning of the miracles performed through Paul as his ministry was coming to a conclusion. In 2 Timothy, his final letter, he wrote, "...but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Tim. 4:20). Church history also seems to testify of the cessation of certain New Testament gifts. Notice Chrysostom's (A.D. 345–407) commentary on First Corinthians 12, which is a key chapter dealing with the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our

² Robert L. Saucy, "An Open but Cautious View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today: Four Views*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 97-148.

³ Dan Wallace, "The Uneasy Conscience of a Non-Charismatic Evangelical," online: <https://bible.org/article/uneasy-conscience-non-charismatic-evangelical>, 1994, accessed 04 September 2015.

⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 177.

ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. And why do they not happen now? Why look now, the cause too of the obscurity has produced us again another question: namely, why did they then happen, and now do so no more?⁵

Notice also Augustine's (A.D. 354–430) remarks regarding the cessation of the sign gifts:

In the earliest times, the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spoke with tongues, which they had not learned, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4 These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away...If then the witness of the presence of the Holy Ghost be not now given through these miracles, by what is it given, by what does one get to know that he has received the Holy Ghost?⁶

If the cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit in the life of the church is indeed a reality, then the kingdom, a predicted era of miracles, cannot be confused with the present age. Yet, "kingdom now" theology alters this blueprint and in the process introduces hyper-Pentecostalism into the modern church.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Yet another errant view so predominant in the modern church and on so called "Christian" television is known as the "Prosperity Gospel." According to this theological perspective, the believer, as the child of the king, is entitled to a life of health and wealth. Thus, if a believer finds himself or herself in a state of financial poverty or physical illness it is because they either do not have enough spiritual knowledge or faith to claim their biblical promises of health and wealth or they have not accessed the various divine verbal laws necessary to speak these realities into personal existence.⁷ The Prosperity Gospel represents yet another theological error that finds its roots in "kingdom now" theology. Like the connection to "power evangelism," the relationship between the presence of the kingdom and the promise of health and wealth is easy to understand. The Bible notes the kingdom will be a time of

⁵ Chrysostom, Homily 29 on First Corinthians.
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220129.htm>.

⁶ Augustine, Homily 6:10 on the First Epistle of John.
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/170206.htm>.

⁷ For a book-length critique of the "Prosperity Gospel," see Michael Horton, ed. *The Agony of Deceit: What Some Teachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1990).

unprecedented healing (Isa. 35:5-6). In addition to universal healing, the kingdom will also epitomize an era of unprecedented material abundance. Amos 9:13-14 predicts that the "...the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine...My people...will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit." Thus, if the kingdom is indeed a present, spiritual reality as maintained by "kingdom now" theologians, then inevitable healing and worldly riches should also be now accessible to every child of God. D.R. McConnell, in his critique of the Prosperity Gospel, well explains the dependency of this false teaching upon "kingdom now" theology.

...The Faith teachers deny that the kingdom of God is in the process of realization, claiming that it is present in the earth to the point that believers can be delivered from all sin, sickness, and poverty of the devil. They...claim that the believer has absolute authority to conquer and eradicate these forces of evil completely from his life. The only process of realization is in the faith of the believer, not in the presence of God's kingdom. In the jargon of biblical theology, the Faith interpretation of the kingdom of God could be labeled as a "hyper-realized" eschatology. The Faith

eschatology is "hyper realized" because of its extreme promises to the believer of a life which is absolutely invulnerable to any type of evil. It claims "that the powers of the age to come" have completely come in this life and that these powers can be used at will by the believer with enough faith and knowledge of how to operate them. There is no process of realization of God's kingdom in Faith eschatology; the kingdom can be completely realized in the lives of those who exercise Faith principles. We see this hyper-realized eschatology in the Faith doctrines of healing, authority, prosperity, identification and deification. The over realized nature of Faith eschatology emphasizes the "Now" of the kingdom of God...The... "Not yet" mystery of the kingdom and its powers is distorted by the hyper-realized eschatology of the Faith movement.⁸

In actuality, the present age cannot be characterized as the kingdom since New Testament heroes, such as the Apostle Paul, did not enjoy lives of unlimited health and wealth. Paul suffered from frequent illnesses (Gal. 4:13) and learned to be

⁸ D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Bold and Revealing Look at the Historical Basis of the Word of Faith Movement*, Updated and electronic ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), loc. 4813-4846.

content both in financial abundance and material scarcity (Phil. 4:12). Illness as well as poverty can be identified in other godly New Testament examples such as Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23), the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:2-3), and the Church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:9). If poverty and illness can be a reality in the life of the Christian, then the kingdom, a predicted era of health and wealth, cannot be confused with the present age. Yet, "kingdom now" theology alters this blueprint and in the process introduces the false theology of the Prosperity Gospel into the modern church.

ANTI-ISRAELISM

A final area of ecclesiastical change as a consequence of embracing "kingdom now" theology pertains to the advent of anti-Israelism within the church. When the church views itself as the kingdom of God on the earth, it has a tendency to become either apathetic about or even belligerent toward the notion that God will one day establish His future kingdom upon the earth through His work with the nation of Israel. After all, why be concerned about a future kingdom that will come to the earth through the Jew if we are in a spiritual form of the kingdom now and the church has become the new, spiritual Israel. Alva J. McClain notes, "The confusion of our Lord's rule...leads to serious consequences...it makes the present age the period of the Mediatorial Kingdom...it

dissolves the divinely covenanted purpose in the nation of Israel."⁹

Thus, it comes as no surprise to discover that the teachings of "kingdom now" theologians are replete with anti-Israel sentiments not only against God's future work through Israel but also toward His precursor to this work as represented by the existence of the modern state of Israel. For example, Gary DeMar expresses such "kingdom now" sentiments when he says, "God has not called us to forsake the earth, but to *impress heaven's pattern on earth*."¹⁰ He similarly notes, "Christians must be obedient to the mandate God has given to extend His kingdom to every sphere of life, to every corner of the globe (Gen 1:26–28; Matt 28:18-20)." Yet just as clear, or perhaps even clearer, than his "kingdom now" theology is DeMar's anti-Israel mentality, when he proclaims:

Where is this "super sign" found in the Bible? Not in the New Testament. There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that says anything about Israel becoming a nation again. Nothing prophetic in the New Testament depends on Israel becoming a nation

⁹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom; an Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 438.

¹⁰ The following quotes (and sourcing) from various "kingdom now" theologians, such as Gary DeMar and Gary North, can be found in H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), 409-11.

again. If Israel becoming a nation again is such "a significant sign," then why doesn't the New Testament specifically mention it?¹¹

We find this identical pattern in the teachings of "kingdom now" theologian Gary North. North notes, "The goal of establishing Christ's international kingdom can be presented to citizens of any nation." Elsewhere North observes, "Christians are required to become active in the building God's visible kingdom." He similarly explains, "If the Christian church fails to build the visible kingdom by means of biblical law and the power of the gospel, despite the resurrection of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit, then what kind of religion are we preaching?" North also teaches, "The parable (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43) refers to the building of the kingdom of God, not simply to the institutional church." As is the case with Gary DeMar, the anti-Israel sentiment is just as clear in the teachings of Gary North as is his "kingdom now" belief system. Thomas Ice reports, "Gary North has boasted that he has a book already in his computer for when 'Israel gets pushed into the sea, or converted to Christ.'"¹² This disturbing pattern makes it quite apparent that the

church runs the risk of becoming progressively more anti-Israel, both in its sentiment toward a future kingdom through Israel as well as toward the modern state of Israel, the further she experiences an ecclesiastical drift into "kingdom now" theology. All things considered, "kingdom now" theology has a deleterious impact on the perspective, purpose, mission, and life of the church in very real, tangible, and practical ways.

CONCLUSION

As promised at the onset, due to the dominance of "kingdom now" theology in modern evangelical thought, we have completed a lengthy series on the subject of the kingdom. *First*, the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God has been surveyed from Genesis to Revelation. *Second*, this series set forth some general problems with a New Testament based "kingdom now" interpretation. *Third*, this series examined the isolated New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians use in order to demonstrate their insufficiency to convey "kingdom now" theology. *Fourth*, this series noted why the trend of equating God's present work in the church¹³ with the messianic kingdom is a matter believers should be concerned about since this theology radically alters God's design for the church. My hope and

¹¹ Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2001), 203.

¹² Personal letter from Gary North to Peter Lalonde, April 30, 1987 on file; cited in Thomas Ice, "Answering Those Who Oppose Israel," online: www.pre-trib.org, accessed 21 October 2015, 1.

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<http://www.bibleprophecyblog.com/2012/05/nature-of-church.html>

prayer is that God will use this series, and other like-minded resources, to strengthen God's people to stand against the pernicious tide of "kingdom now" theology that is so prevalent in our day.

(End of Series)



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