

Kingdom Now

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I recently read a book titled “The Coming Kingdom” by Andy Woods. Among the things it addressed was that in general, the term “*kingdom*” has a technical meaning referring to what will be the Millennial Kingdom even in the New Testament.

- I used to think this term referred to a present spiritual kingdom such as indicated by the “*kingdom of heaven*” parables. But even there, Jesus referred to those who were part of the *kingdom of heaven* as “*sons of the kingdom*” indicating that they would inherit the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 13:38).

So, is there a spiritual kingdom during the Church Age?

While there is effectively a spiritual kingdom of Christ-followers during the Church Age, we need to be careful that we don’t associate with it attributes of the Millennial Kingdom.

Who are those who associate Millennial Kingdom attributes to the current spiritual of the Church Age?

They are considered “Kingdom Now” advocates. And, in general, they are amillennialists who do not believe there will be a physical Millennial Kingdom. They think the spiritual kingdom of the Church Age is the Millennial Kingdom with the church replacing Israel in God’s promises.

- They convert the physical reality of the Millennial Kingdom to a spiritual reality only, a radical change from Old Testament teaching.
- And Jesus speaks of the kingdom as a future physical reality:
Matthew 26:29 – But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

If we are in a spiritual kingdom with attributes of the Millennial Kingdom, does Christ reign perfectly in the believer today?

No, this is seen in admonitions about grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19 respectively).

- Also we are commanded not to let sin reign in our mortal bodies (Romans 6:12).

Let’s take a look at some passages of Scripture that sound like it is referring to a spiritual kingdom but is really referring to the Millennial Kingdom...

How do we know the following passages are not referring to a spiritual kingdom?

Luke 17:20-21 – *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation;²¹ nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

To whom was Jesus speaking? The Pharisees who were plotting to kill Him. So, how could these murderous Pharisees be in the spiritual kingdom of the church?

- Also, Scripture portrays people entering the kingdom, not the kingdom entering people (Matthew 5:20, 23:13, John 3:5)
- A better translation of verse 21 is, “*the kingdom of God is in your midst.*”
- Indeed, the King was in the midst of the Pharisees when He said that and the kingdom was being offered to Israel.

Matthew 6:33 – *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

The context here is Christ’s model for prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) where we are to ask for the kingdom to come 3 times (!) along with 4 requests for temporal needs prior to the kingdom.

- So, seeking the kingdom of God is asking the Father to bring it on and prioritizing our lives according to the values of the coming kingdom.

What does it mean to live the values of the coming Millennial Kingdom?

Watch for Jesus to return, sanctify our lives to be more like Jesus, work to bring more people with us into the kingdom, and work to make the gospel of Jesus more broadly known.

Matthew 12:28 – *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.* Thinking that this refers to a spiritual kingdom fails to recognize Christ’s “offer of the kingdom” to Israel. Which was rejected by Israel, postponed and will be re-offered during the Tribulation.

- Miracles, exercising of demons, even Jesus’ transfiguration were tokens of the coming kingdom. As it says in Hebrews 6:5 the first century Jew, *have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come ...that which foreshadowed the kingdom age to come.*

John 3:3-5 – *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* ⁴ *Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*

⁵ *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*

Reading a spiritual kingdom into this assumes the kingdom is active now but Jesus did not say when the kingdom would be established.

- During this age, you must be born again now to enter the kingdom when it is established.
- Since the term kingdom is undefined here it must be developed from the Old Testament. Jesus refers to Old Testament concepts in this conversation...

John 3:14 – as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up

And Nicodemus should have been familiar with other Old Testament teaching that having a new human spirit will be a prerequisite for Israel entering the kingdom...

Ezekiel 36:24-27 – For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

John 18:36 – Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

Jesus was not denying that there’d be a future arrival of an earthly kingdom.

- Jesus made this statement after the offer of the kingdom had been rejected by Israel. Therefore, this was no longer a threat to Pilate’s kingdom.
- By saying “*now*” *the kingdom is not from here*, Jesus was denying the kingdom’s immediate arrival.
- By saying *My kingdom is not of this world* makes it clear that the Millennial Kingdom would not develop from the world, it will come down to earth from heaven.

Kingdom Now advocates use this verse to indicate that the kingdom promises were taken from Israel and given to the church... why is that erroneous?

Matthew 21:43 – Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.

There is no indication here that the kingdom would not involve Israel as a whole, only first century Israel when Jesus was on earth.

- The church is not a nation...
Romans 10:19 – Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation”
- The church is made up of believers from all nations:
Revelation 5:9 – You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation
- The nation that would receive the kingdom would be the nation of Israel... a future generation of believing Jews.

What problems come from applying Millennial Kingdom promises to the Church Age spiritual kingdom as the Kingdom Now advocates practice?

Eschatology (view of the future kingdom) affects one’s ecclesiology (doctrine of the church).

What does the Bible reveal as the church’s purpose?

Ephesians 3:21 – to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever

The church exists to glorify God.

Ephesians 4:11-12 – He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the ^[e]edifying of the body of Christ

The church exists to help its members be built up to be more like Christ.

Matthew 28:19-20 – Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you

The church exists grow the sons of the kingdom through evangelism and discipleship.

What might this passage lead to if applied to the current Church Age?

Revelation 5:10 – *And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.*

This leads to a desire for political control of the state by the church (that which unbelievers fear)

- The activity of the church becomes a mandate to rule among men.
- Instead of being in the world but not of the world, Christians become in the world **and** of the world.
- Nowhere are Christians are not called to rule and reign in this present age where Satan rules
- Christians no longer consider themselves as pilgrims but as being at home in the world.
- The pursuit of worldly power distracts the church from the Great Commission.
- Satan has duped Kingdom Now advocates into thinking they can fulfill that which only Jesus can fulfill.

How is the social gospel trend in churches a result of Kingdom Now mentality?

If the church is mandated to build the utopian society of the kingdom it will substitute social causes in lieu of preaching the gospel.

- The church perceives its central purpose as fixing society's ills and embraces the world's social justice
- The collective physical salvation of nations or communities replaces individual salvation of souls.
- Many liberal churches today are going woke embracing Critical Race Theory as a solution for society's problems. The Salvation Army recently came out as woke putting people on a guilt trip for being white.

What kind of alliances do churches make as a result of Kingdom Now mentality?

Alliances are made with non-biblical groups... in order to establish God's kingdom on earth, it becomes necessary to find common ground to build a political coalition.

- This distracts from the true mission of the church and renders it helpless as a redeeming force.
- Ecumenism becomes a driving force of the church building bridges to Catholicism, Islam, and other salvation-by-works religions.
- Builds the kingdom of the Antichrist

What are the main differences between biblical Christianity and Catholics?

- Sola Fide – faith alone
- Sola Gratia – grace alone
- Sola Christus – Christ alone
- Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone
- Sola Dio Gloria – to the glory of God alone

How do Kingdom Now advocates treat Bible prophecy?

They pretty much ignore it since spiritualizing what should be taken literally is a futile, worthless exercise.

- Robs the church of an eternal perspective and blessed hope.
- Robs the church of explanations for the craziness that is increasing in the world today
- Turns Christians into scoffers
- Neglects over a quarter of Scripture

How does the following passage influence those who believe Millennial Kingdom promises are for today?

Isaiah 35:5-6 – *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

⁶ Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

There will be amazing signs and wonders associated with the Lord ruling on earth. So, the Kingdom Now mentality has given rise to the charismatic movement which believe in the perpetuity of spiritual gifts that provide signs and wonders.

- Cessationists believe the revelatory gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues, along with the conformatory gifts of miracles and healings ceased with the closing of the New Testament canon while the edificatory gifts remained (teaching, mercy, giving, leadership, etc.).
- There is a "hyper-Pentecostalism" where it is believed that signs and wonders are necessary to win people to Christ.

How does the following passage influence those who believe Millennial Kingdom promises are for today?

Amos 9:13-14 – *"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it."*

The Millennial Kingdom will be a time of unprecedented material abundance and healing as indicated in Isaiah 35:5-6 that we just looked at. So, if you apply the promises of wealth and health today, this naturally gives rise to the prosperity gospel.

What is the problem with the Prosperity Gospel?

It is not true that our health and wealth is tied to how close we are to the Lord. We live in a fallen world and unpleasant things happen which has no relation to how close we are to the Lord.

Matthew 5:45 – *He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Also, the prosperity gospel is essentially a salvation-by-works message that says you have to give to be blessed. That is why it is so popular with television evangelists.

What does a Kingdom Now mentality cause people to think about modern day Israel?

If the church has replaced Israel in the promises of God then modern day Israel in no way is considered fulfilled prophecy that is setting the stage for God to redeem them as a nation.

- When the church views itself as the kingdom of God on earth, it becomes apathetic or even belligerent toward the idea that God will one day work through Israel again.
- The BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) has been embraced by some churches. It masks its anti-Israel sentiments by claiming it is fighting for Palestinian rights. But it is the new antisemitism... their hatred for Israel is really the age-old satanic hatred for God's people the Jews.

How has the Kingdom Now mentality given rise to the false doctrine of Lordship Salvation?

Lordship Salvation is the idea that the sinner who wants to be saved must not only trust in Christ as having paid the penalty for his sin but must also surrender every area of his life to the complete control of the Lord.

- They say, "if Jesus is not Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all."

The kingdom era will represent a time in history when Jesus will reign over His subjects with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9, Revelation 12:5). Disobedience of any sort will be immediately dealt with (Zech 14:17, Rev 20:9). Perfect justice will be quickly imposed by Christ (Isaiah 2:5, 11:4).

- Thus, if the kingdom is now present, it is logical to assume that those in the kingdom should be submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

What are the problems with Lordship Salvation?

Matthew 18:3 – *Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

It alters the gospel which requires only simple child-like faith to be right with God.

- There are 150-200 New Testament passages indicating that salvation is a function of belief in Christ alone (like John 3:16).
- Lordship Salvation perverts the gospel making it something we do for God rather than something He does for us.

2 Peter 3:9 – *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

It places an impossible requirement upon the unsaved... repentance is a matter of changing one's mind about Christ (who He is, why He came, etc.)

- It is not biblical that a person must change their behavior in order to come to Christ.
- Belief in Christ is the only requirement for salvation.
1 John 4:15 – *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 – *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ²I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*

It ignores the possibility of immature, carnal Christians who are not completely surrendered to Christ.

- Examples: Lot is called righteous but he exhibited unrighteous behavior; 1 Corinthians 1:2 refers to the Corinthians as saints but the rest of the epistle reveals a lot of unsaintly behavior in the Corinthian church.

Romans 8:29-30 – *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*³⁰ *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

It confuses sanctification with justification. Being *conformed to the image of His Son* is sanctification, a process where by the believer responds to the Holy Spirit to be more like Christ... this is salvation present.

- Justification is a function of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, paying the penalty of our sins so that we can be seen as righteous before the Father... this is salvation past.
- Glorification is receiving our resurrected bodies ...this is salvation future.

Christ's Lordship in our lives is a prerequisite for sanctification, not justification.

- Scripture teaches Lordship Sanctification, not Lordship salvation.

John 10:29 – *My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*

It is essentially a salvation-by-works doctrine that destroys assurance of salvation... how much surrender is necessary for salvation?

- It steals the joy that accompanies the understanding that one's eternal destiny is sealed.
- Service to God becomes motivated by fear rather than gratitude.

What applications can we see from our discussion today?

- Applying promises of the coming Millennial Kingdom to today causes all kinds of doctrinal problems.
- Having a correct view of eschatology (doctrine of the end times) is essential for not falling victim to false doctrines.
- The Kingdom Now mentality is pervasive in Christendom today as seen by amillennialism being the dominate view of the end times.
- The Kingdom Now mentality is contributing to the apostasy of the church.