



The Kingdom of God Is at Hand  
Understanding Jesus' Proclamation



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK



✠ The Kingdom of God  
Is at Hand  
*Understanding Jesus’  
Proclamation*

STUDENT’S WORKBOOK

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# The Kingdom of God Is at Hand

## *Understanding Jesus' Proclamation*

### SYLLABUS

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#### § COURSE DESCRIPTION

*The Kingdom of God Is at Hand: Understanding Jesus' Proclamation* is a six-week course advancing the truth that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Jesus but not yet consummated. The course will seek to provide an understanding of Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry especially as it relates to the kingdom of God. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining key biblical passages, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians. The course will conclude with some reflections on the application of kingdom theology to the church's ministry and mission today.

#### § OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the King of Kings in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the kingdom of God—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five sermons from John Piper on the kingdom of God. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for “inaugurated eschatology,” especially as it relates to the present and future dimensions of the kingdom of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God's kingly reign and make appropriate application on both the personal and corporate levels.

## § REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

Note: In addition to inductive study of the Bible, students will be required to listen to five sermons by John Piper. This will require internet access to the *desiringGod* website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)). See each lesson for more specific instructions.

(*desiringGod* permits the reproduction and distribution of any of its material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of production. If you lack internet access, talk to your instructor about the possibility of receiving a CD with the sermons copied onto it.)

## § REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives first, then read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned sermon. As the student listens to the sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

## § SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Jesus' Kingdom Preaching
2		The Kingdom of Satan
3		The Gospel of the Kingdom
4		The Mystery of the Kingdom
5		Kingdom Presents
6		Kingdom Power and the Church's Ministry



# Jesus' Kingdom Teachings

# 1

## § INTRODUCTION

The word “kingdom” appears 157 times in the New Testament in the English Standard Version. Of those 157 occurrences, 124 occurrences are in the Gospels, and only 33 occurrences are outside of the Gospels. Of the 124 occurrences in the Gospels, 119 occurrences are in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, while only five occurrences are in the Gospel according to John.

The phrase “kingdom of God” occurs 53 times in the Gospels and 14 times outside of the Gospels (again, in the ESV). Of these 53 occurrences in the Gospels, 51 of them are in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The phrase “kingdom of God” only occurs two times in John. The related phrase “kingdom of heaven” only appears in Matthew, but it appears 32 times.

The following chart presents a visual comparison of how the terms “kingdom” and “kingdom of God/heaven” are distributed in the New Testament:

	<b>Occurrences in Matthew, Mark, and Luke</b>	<b>Occurrences in John</b>	<b>Occurrences in all the rest of the NT</b>
“kingdom”	119	5	33
“kingdom of God/heaven”	83	2	14

Thus, from a purely statistical perspective, the theme of the kingdom—and more specifically, the “kingdom of God”—is a major concern for the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), while it receives less emphasis in other parts of the Bible. Perhaps better put, the theme of the kingdom of God is expressed in other language in most of the rest of the New Testament.

The focus of this course will be on the Synoptic Gospels and Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. Understanding Jesus' proclamation will help us not only to understand Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but also the sovereign and unfolding plan of God in history and the earthly ministry of Jesus.

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- comprehend the centrality and importance of the kingdom of God and Jesus' ministry.
- form some initial thoughts and questions about the kingdom to address in this course.
- begin to think about why understanding a theology of the kingdom of God is practically important for the contemporary Christian and Christian church.



## THE FIRST RECORDED WORDS OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

How did Jesus begin his public ministry? It is interesting to compare Matthew, Mark, and Luke on this question. Setting aside the dialogue between Jesus and his parents (as relayed by Luke) and the dialogue between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness (as relayed by Matthew and Luke), the following text box reproduces the first words of Jesus in each of these Gospels:

### Matthew 4:17

*<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

### Mark 1:14-15

*<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

### Luke 4:16-21

*<sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

1. What similarities and differences do you observe between these three passages?

Yet preaching about the kingdom of God did not only start Jesus' earthly ministry—it characterized it throughout:

Matthew 4:23

<sup>23</sup> [Jesus] he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Luke 4:43

<sup>43</sup> [Jesus] said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

Luke 8:1

<sup>1</sup> Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:1-3

<sup>1</sup> In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF THE KINGDOM

Thus, in order to understand Jesus' preaching and earthly ministry, we must understand his message about the kingdom of God. Notice the following comments made by George Ladd, who had a tremendous influence on how evangelical Christians now think about the kingdom:

*Then came Jesus of Nazareth with the announcement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). This theme of the coming of the Kingdom of God was central in His mission. His teaching was designed to show men how they might enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20; 7:21). His mighty works were intended to prove that the Kingdom of God had come upon them (Matt. 12:28). His parables illustrated to His disciples the truth about the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:11). And when He taught His followers to pray, at the heart of their petition were the words, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). On*

*the eve of His death, He assured His disciples that He would yet share with them the happiness and the fellowship of the Kingdom (Luke 22:22-30). And He promised that He would appear again on the earth in glory to bring the blessedness of the Kingdom to those for whom it was prepared (Matt. 25:31, 34).<sup>1</sup>*

Although George Ladd argued that the kingdom of God was a central theme in Jesus' mission, he also admitted that it is a difficult theme to understand:

*If you will take a concordance of the Bible, look up every reference in the New Testament alone where the word "kingdom" occurs, write down a brief summary of each verse on a piece of paper, you will probably find yourself at a loss to know what to do with the complexity of teaching.<sup>2</sup>*

2. Without using a concordance or even looking up references in the New Testament, how would you summarize the New Testament's teaching on the kingdom of God? Record some of your initial thoughts (and questions) below:

## KINGDOM MINISTRY TODAY

This course is based on a sermon series preached in Bethlehem Baptist Church in 1990, entitled "Are Signs and Wonders for Today?" In the opening sermon of this series, John Piper explained some of the recent phenomena that prompted the series:

*More and more people today are taking seriously the tremendous reality of Satan and evil spirits in the work of evangelism and world missions. . . . Increasingly efforts are being made to identify territorial spirits and combat them in a direct way by prayer and spiritual authority, to prepare an area for more effective*

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<sup>1</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1959), 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 16.

*evangelism. . . . Unusual breakthroughs in world missions are increasingly being associated with spiritual warfare.*

*Another example of this movement and the kind of thing we will examine is what is called "power evangelism." The term has been popularized by John Wimber, the pastor of a church called the Vineyard in Anaheim, California (that has grown from one congregation to 270+ congregations in the last 10 years). He has drawn attention to the fact that almost every instance of successful evangelism in the New Testament involves some demonstration of supernatural power alongside the preaching of the Word—a healing, an exorcism, a prophecy, a resurrection from the dead, speaking of foreign tongues. His point is that this part of New Testament evangelism is missing in the western church for no good biblical reason and that this accounts for some of our weakness and ineffectiveness. . .*

*Another example of the kind of thing we will be talking about is the increasing use of the gift of prophecy. Wayne Grudem is a good friend of mine. I taught with him at Bethel for several years before he became a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and I came to Bethlehem. Wayne, an ordained Baptist minister, grew up in the BGC, has the highest view of the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture of anyone I know, and is a thoroughgoing Calvinist. But he has also written a very influential book on The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today (Crossway Books, 1988). His position is that prophecy in the New Testament is not the same as the infallible prophecies of the Old Testament prophets or the words of the apostles. The prophecy practiced by the New Testament church was simply "telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind." The telling is not infallible, but, as 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21 says, is to be tested: "Do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good." The purpose is not mainly to give details about the future but, as 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, to "speak to people for their upbuilding, encouragement and consolation" . . .*

*These then are some of the ways that our contemporary experience is raising for us the cluster of issues which we are summing up with the phrase, "Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God."<sup>3</sup>*

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3 John Piper, "Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God: An Introduction," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.org) website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)). Underlining added. Throughout this curriculum we will only provide titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons and articles at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.org) website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these resources.

In the last lesson of this course, we will consider more carefully the debate of whether all the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament have continuing validity for Christian ministry and missions today. As we progress through the first five lessons in this course, however, we will keep in mind how we might apply what we are learning about the kingdom of God.

3. In your view, what relationship might there be between contemporary spiritual warfare, “power evangelism,” the gift of prophecy (among other spiritual gifts), and the topic of this course—the kingdom of God?

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- John Piper, “Compassion, Power, and the Kingdom of God: An Introduction,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.





# The Kingdom of Satan

# 2

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## § INTRODUCTION

There are only a few, sporadic references to Satan and demons in the Old Testament. In the ministry of Jesus, however, it seems as if demons are lurking everywhere. The spiritual realm is much more manifest than it had been before Jesus came. Why was there so much visible and manifest demonic opposition to the ministry of Jesus? Where were all these demons before the first coming of Christ?

It is likely that the demons, that had been hiding behind idolatry and pagan opposition to God's people in the Old Testament, were forced to expose themselves when they were decisively confronted in Jesus' ministry. A new kingdom arrived to challenge Satan's kingdom. And as an army may be well concealed when it lies in ambush, the full strength of that army may be perceived when its power and reign is challenged. John Piper explains:

*It is amazing to consider that in the whole Old Testament only about five of the 39 books even mention Satan. And nowhere does any prophet or priest or king or wise man cast out any demons. But as soon as Jesus is on the scene, he is in conflict with Satan in the wilderness and his ministry involved casting out "many demons" (Mark 1:34); and in Matthew 10:1 it says, "Jesus called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out . . ."*

*So it is clear that something unprecedented is in the offing here with the coming of the kingdom. The spiritual conflict hidden behind idolatry and national conflict in the Old Testament is brought out in the open and Jesus gives his people a new kind of authority and armor to make war with the evil one.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "How Is the Kingdom Present?" an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

Our study of God's kingdom begins by looking at the biblical teaching concerning Satan's kingdom. By understanding Satan's power and the deadly effects of his reign, we will understand and appreciate better why God needs to establish his own kingdom and rescue his people from the kingdom of darkness in which they had been living. In other words, understanding Satan's kingdom and the need for the inbreaking of God's power is the necessary background for the rest of our study of the kingdom of God.

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ identify the nature of Satan's kingdom and his relationship to this present world.
- ▷ understand what God has delivered Christians from and why God needed to establish his kingdom in the world even though he has created the world and is all-powerful.
- ▷ articulate the various ways in which Satan is active and at work in this present world.



## THE STRONG MAN

The following passages record one of Jesus' "power encounters" in the spiritual realm. What is significant about these passages for our study is that Jesus speaks explicitly of Satan's kingdom:

### Matthew 12:22-29

*22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." 25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?"*

### Luke 11:14-22

*14 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. 15 But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," 16 while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. 17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. 18 And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; 22 but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil."*

Furthermore, in confronting Satan's kingdom and casting out demons, Jesus

is demonstrating the presence of the kingdom of God. (Notice the logic in Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20.) In Jesus' earthly ministry there was a clash of the kingdoms—the kingdom of Satan versus the kingdom of God. Therefore, in order to better understand Jesus' proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God, we need to understand what the Bible teaches about Satan—the “strong man”—and his kingdom.

The following passages describe Satan with some language that is important for forming our thinking about Satan's kingdom:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

*<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Ephesians 2:1-3

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

John 12:31

*<sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.*

John 14:30-31

*<sup>30</sup> I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, <sup>31</sup> but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.*

John 16:7-11

*<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.*

1. Underline all the various titles for Satan mentioned in the passages above. What do these titles indicate about Satan's relationship to the world?

*"As an instrument of His juridical righteousness, God has permitted Satan to exercise such influence in This Age that Paul can speak of him as though he were the god of This Age."<sup>5</sup>*

#### THE STRONG MAN'S HOUSE

Remember from Matthew 12:22-28 that Jesus spoke not only of the strong man, but also the strong man's "house." We read in other places in the New Testament of Satan's kingdom described in temporal language:

Galatians 1:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Ephesians 5:15-16

*<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

The "age" in which Satan's kingdom has power is called the present evil age, or more simply elsewhere, "this age" in contrast to the "age to come." This age is characterized by evil and unrighteousness—an age in which God's will is not done on earth as it is in heaven.

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<sup>5</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 30. Ladd's translation of 2 Corinthians 4:4 is more precise than the English Standard Version. The phrase *ho theos tou aionos toutou* is more literally rendered "the god of this age" and not "the god of this world" (ESV).

Here are two additional descriptions of Satan's kingdom:

Colossians 1:13-14

<sup>13</sup> [The Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 John 5:19

<sup>19</sup> We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

2. How might these four passages (Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 1:13-14; and 1 John 5:19) indicate the need for the arrival of God's kingdom?

In reading a verse like 1 John 5:19, it is important to remember that God is still in ultimate control. He is absolutely sovereign. Any power that Satan has in this world is power that has been granted to him by God, and Satan cannot do anything without the sovereign permission of the Almighty God. Ladd explains:

*"It is obvious from these verses that the Kingdom of God does not belong to This Age, for Satan is called the god of This Age. This is not to suggest that God has been dethroned or His hand removed from the control of the universe. It remains eternally true that "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). Even when evil is strongest on the earth, when God's people are most violently attacked by Satan, God is still the "King of the ages" (Rev. 15:3)."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 31.

## SATAN'S WORK IN THE WORLD

Finally, we will examine more carefully the way in which the Bible describes Satan's work in the world. The following passages describe Satan's activity within his kingdom:

### 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

<sup>3</sup> *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

### Matthew 13:19

<sup>19</sup> *When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.*

### 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10

<sup>9</sup> *The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

### Revelation 12:9

<sup>9</sup> *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

### 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

<sup>17</sup> *But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, <sup>18</sup> because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.*

### Revelation 2:10

<sup>10</sup> *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

1 Peter 5:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

John 8:43-44

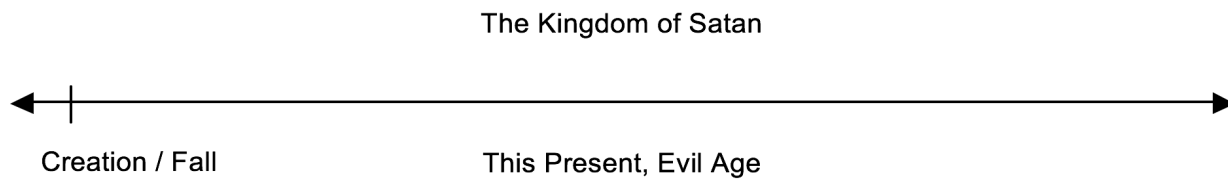
<sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

3. How might you summarize all of the various activities of Satan in the world? What is his chief purpose? What is the chief means he uses to accomplish his chief purpose?

The following diagram is a visual summary of what we have learned in this lesson. In each subsequent lesson we will add to or modify the diagram of the previous lesson. Hopefully in this way we will be able to present our growing understanding of the New Testament's teaching on the kingdom of God.

In this lesson we have learned that God has granted Satan a measure of authority and influence in this present age. Through deception and other means, Satan is able to keep men and women in bondage to sin and death. Satan's kingdom creates the need for God to intervene in this world in order to bring salvation and sanctification to his people and to glorify to his name.





#### A SERMON ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Listen to the sermon “**What Are We Up Against?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, “Satan Takes the Word Away,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “Ten Aspects of God’s Sovereignty Over Suffering and Satan’s Hand in It,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ David Powlinson, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995)
- ▷ John Piper, “Satan, World, Providence, Christ,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “Why Does God Allow Satan to Live?” an online question and answer at the [desiringGod](#) website



# What Are We Up Against?

JOHN PIPER, 1990

1 John 5:18-21

Kingdoms in conflict

“The whole world is in the power of the evil one”

“The present evil age” and “the dominion of darkness”

“The god of this age” and “ruler of this world”

A radically different worldview

The war is not over

“The decisive blow in the war of the kingdoms was struck, the atom bomb has fallen, but [even though] the decisive battle is won, the war is not \_\_\_\_\_.”

Satan’s strategies to obstruct evangelism and world missions

“Evangelism and world missions is the centerpiece of \_\_\_\_\_ in the mission of the church”

1. Satan blinds the \_\_\_\_\_ of unbelievers
2. Satan snatches the \_\_\_\_\_ away from people who hear
3. Satan does deceptive \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
4. Satan uses \_\_\_\_\_ to hinder others from believing
5. Satan hinders \_\_\_\_\_ efforts in general
6. Satan throws \_\_\_\_\_ in prison and persecutes them

“He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world”



# The Gospel of the Kingdom

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# 3

## § INTRODUCTION

As we learned in the last lesson, the basic message of Jesus' preaching could be summarized by Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." What is curious, however, is that the phrase "kingdom of God" does not occur even once in the Old Testament. So what does Jesus mean when he says that "the time is fulfilled"? What does the Old Testament teach about God's kingdom?

This lesson will explore the important Old Testament backdrop to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. Furthermore, we will look more closely at the meaning of the phrase "kingdom of God."

## § LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain precisely what the word "kingdom" means in the Bible.
- describe what the Old Testament taught regarding the coming kingdom of God.
- describe what the early church believed regarding the kingdom of God and Jesus.



## AN EVERLASTING DOMINION

Although the phrase “kingdom of God” never explicitly appears in the Old Testament, there are nevertheless several passages which describe God’s kingdom:

1 Chronicles 29:11

*<sup>11</sup> Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.*

Psalm 103:19

*<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*

Psalm 145:10-13

*<sup>10</sup> All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! <sup>11</sup> They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, <sup>12</sup> to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. <sup>13</sup> Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

Daniel 4:34

*<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation . . .*

Daniel 6:26

*<sup>26</sup> I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.*

Underline every occurrence of the word *kingdom*. Then double-underline or otherwise mark those words or phrases that are in a parallel construction with the word *kingdom*.



1. According to these passages and your underlining, what is the “kingdom of God”? Explain your choice below.
  - a. The people over whom God reigns since the time of Jesus—a synonym for the church.
  - b. The realm over which God has ruled since the fall of Adam—a geographic area.
  - c. The reign of God that will last forever—his rule and authority.
  - d. An ideal pattern for human society—a standard for justice and peace.

George Ladd helps us to think about what the word “kingdom” means by examining how the word is used outside of those descriptions of God’s kingdom:

*This primary meaning of the word “kingdom” may be seen in its Old Testament use to describe a king’s rule. Ezra 8:1 speaks of the return from Babylon “in the kingdom” of Artaxerxes, i.e., his reign. II Chronicles 12:1 speaks of the establishment of Rehoboam’s kingdom or rule. Daniel 8:23 refers to the latter end of their kingdom or rule. This usage of “kingdom” as a human reign may also be found in such passages as Jeremiah 49:34; II Chronicles 11:17, 12:1, 26:30; Ezra 4:5; Nehemiah 12:22, etc.<sup>7</sup>*

Therefore, here is Ladd’s conclusion about the primary meaning for the Hebrew and Greek words that are often translated with the English word “kingdom”:

*The primary meaning of both the Hebrew word malkuth in the Old Testament and of the Greek word basileia in the New Testament is the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king. A basileia may indeed be a realm over which a sovereign exercises his authority; and it may be the people who belong to that realm and over whom authority is exercised; but these are secondary and derived meanings. First of all, a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king.<sup>8</sup>*

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7 Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 19-20.

8 Ibid.

Ladd's conclusion is also the position of this curriculum: the kingdom of God refers to God's sovereign authority and dominion—his rule as king.

## THE KINGDOM TO COME

From the Old Testament passages we surveyed above, we might conclude that God's kingdom is equally manifest in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In a sense this is true—God has always reigned over his creation with an absolute authority. Daniel 4:34 and 6:26 (reproduced above) both testify to the everlasting dominion of the living God.

The book of Daniel, however, also speaks of the kingdom of God being established at a future time. Therefore, although it is clear that God is reigning at the time of Daniel (“God does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’; Daniel 4:35), it is also true that his kingdom was in some sense not yet established. Note the very important prophecy made in Daniel 2 about the coming of the kingdom of God:

Daniel 2:40, 44-45

*<sup>40</sup> And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. . . . <sup>44</sup> And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, <sup>45</sup> just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.*

This Old Testament hope is also a central theme of the book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:1-10

*<sup>1</sup> Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup> A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places*

a plain.<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”<sup>6</sup> A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.<sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.<sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.<sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

Notice that Isaiah 40 (above) and Isaiah 52 (below) connect the hope of God’s coming kingdom to the gospel or “good news” (see the underlining):

Isaiah 52:7-10

<sup>7</sup> How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”<sup>8</sup> The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion.<sup>9</sup> Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

2. According to Daniel 2, Isaiah 40, and Isaiah 52, what was the Old Testament expectation about what would happen with the establishment of God’s kingdom?

*In the Old Testament perspective, the coming of God’s Kingdom is viewed as a single great event: a mighty manifestation of God’s power which would sweep away the wicked kingdoms of human sovereignty and would fill the earth with righteousness.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 53.

*We need to understand what people were expecting in relation to the coming of the kingdom. According to passages like Daniel 2:31-35, 44-45, we can see that people expected the coming kingdom of God to crush all competitors in a cataclysmic event. The old order with all its evil would be abolished and the new order free from all evil would be ushered in.<sup>10</sup>*

Once the Old Testament expectation is rightly understood, this explains a lot of the crowds' response to Jesus and the confusion of Jesus' own disciples. As we will see in the next lesson, Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God and the "mystery" of the kingdom.

### THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

If there is any doubt from the Gospels that Jesus has in fact brought the kingdom in his earthly ministry, the ministry of the early church and the Apostle Paul should confirm that Jesus had established the kingdom. Notice the following parallels in the book of Acts, underlined below:

Acts 8:5-7, 12

<sup>5</sup> *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

<sup>6</sup> *And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. . . . <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*

Acts 19:8-10

<sup>8</sup> *And [Paul] entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

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<sup>10</sup> This excerpt is taken from Tom Steller's unpublished teaching notes on the Kingdom of God. Used with permission.

Acts 28:23, 30-31

<sup>23</sup> When they had appointed a day for [Paul], they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. . . . <sup>30</sup> [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

According to Acts, to preach the kingdom of God was to preach about Jesus, the Messiah.

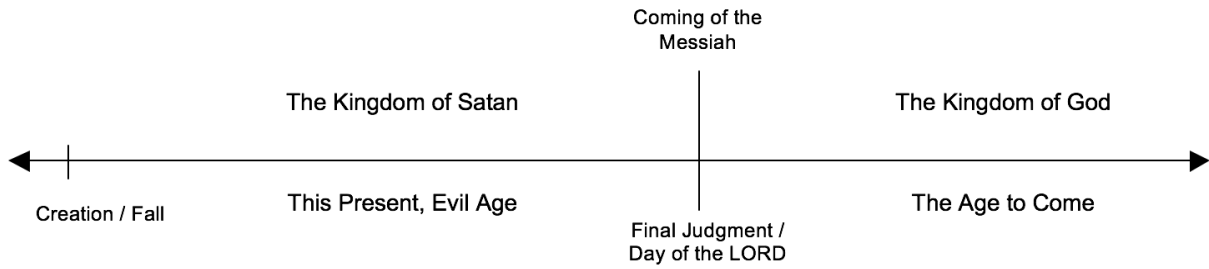
Notice one more passage from one of Paul's letters:

Colossians 4:10-11

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

3. Using these passages in Acts and Colossians, how might you respond to someone who claimed that Jesus offered the kingdom to Israel, but that when they rejected it, the kingdom was withdrawn during the church age until a future time when it would be offered to Israel again?

We are now ready to summarize what we have learned in this lesson in diagram form. According to Old Testament expectation, the coming of the Messiah and the return of the LORD to Zion would result in the establishment of God's kingdom and a final judgment in which wicked kingdoms would be swept away. This would usher in "the age to come" and the fullness of the kingdom of God.



What is also clear, however, is that Jesus' first coming is connected to this Old Testament hope for the kingdom of God. So a dilemma is created. Did Jesus fulfill the Old Testament's expectation for the kingdom of God or not? How is it possible that the Messiah has come but that the wicked kingdoms of this world (and Satan himself) still appear to be reigning? These questions will be addressed in the next lesson.

#### 🔗 A SERMON ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Listen to the sermon "**The Importance of the Kingdom Today**" by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.org) website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).

## § DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes to remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Is the kingdom of God the central theme of the entire Bible? Defend your answer.
  
2. Have you ever encountered the teaching of classic dispensationalism? If so, what does that teaching assert about the kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus?

## § YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

••••• § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God's Love As the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), chapter 2, "The Gospel—The Biblical Scope of Its Meaning"
- ▷ George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), chapters 1-2
- ▷ Graeme Goldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament," an online article at <http://www.beginningwithmoses.org/articles/golds1.htm>



# The Importance of the Kingdom Today

JOHN PIPER, 1990

Matthew 24:1-14

What is the “gospel of the kingdom”?

Matthew 4:23; 9:35

“The gospel of the kingdom is the message of \_\_\_\_\_.”

Mark 1:14-15

What time is fulfilled?

Psalm 103:19; 145:13

“Let’s get out of our head any thought that there was a time when the kingdom was \_\_\_\_\_, that God was not \_\_\_\_\_ over all, forever and ever blessed in heaven.”

The Old Testament expectation

Zechariah 14:9; Isaiah 24:23

“God is about to exert his \_\_\_\_\_ in an unprecedented way in the world to save his people and defeat their enemies and establish his righteousness and glorify himself.”

Isaiah 40

Isaiah 52

The gospel that the apostles and early church preached

Acts 8:12

“The new thing that comes with the apostolic heralding is the making explicit that \_\_\_\_\_ is the center of the kingdom message—that the death and resurrection of Jesus now are the center of the proclamation of the way God has chosen to begin to establish his rule in the lives of men and bring his kingdom into the world.”

Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:30-31

Colossians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 4:20; Romans 14:17

Conclusion



# The Mystery of the Kingdom

# 4

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

One of the key questions to be answered in any study of the Synoptic Gospels is why the disciples did not understand that Jesus needed to suffer and die. The disciples' lack of understanding may be nowhere clearer than in Mark 8. Immediately after Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus rebukes Peter, calling him Satan and accusing him as having his mind of the things of man:

Mark 8:27-29, 31-33

*<sup>27</sup> And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." . . . <sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

How could Peter be so right and yet so wrong? Did Peter understand Jesus' identity and the Jesus' message that the kingdom of God had come? This lesson will investigate one of the central truths of Jesus' ministry, a reality which caused confusion among his disciples and sometimes hatred among the people of Israel.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ answer the question of whether the kingdom of God is present or future.
- ▶ define the term "mystery" from a biblical perspective and apply this understanding to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom.
- ▶ explain the basic message that Jesus was teaching in the parables of Matthew 13.



## IS THE KINGDOM PRESENT OR FUTURE?

Is the kingdom a present spiritual reality or a future inheritance reserved for the end of the age?<sup>11</sup>

Romans 14:16-19

*<sup>16</sup> So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. <sup>19</sup> So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building.*

Matthew 25:33-34

*<sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

Is the kingdom a realm into which believers have already entered or is it a future realm which we will enter when Christ returns?

Colossians 1:13-14

*<sup>13</sup> [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

2 Peter 1:10-11

*<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Is the kingdom now here in your midst (not coming with signs to be observed),

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<sup>11</sup> The following questions and texts are drawn from Tom Steller's unpublished teaching notes on the Kingdom of God. Used with permission.

or is it coming in the future attended with great glory?

Luke 17:20-21

<sup>20</sup> Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, <sup>21</sup> nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

Matthew 24:30

<sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Notice that this verse is based on Daniel 7:13-14, which describes the Son of Man receiving a kingdom. Is the kingdom present and at work in this world or not of this world?

Luke 13:18-21

<sup>18</sup> He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? <sup>19</sup> It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” <sup>20</sup> And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? <sup>21</sup> It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.”

John 18:36

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

1. How do you reconcile these tensions?

## WHAT DOES “MYSTERY” MEAN BIBLICALLY?

Dictionary.com lists one of the meanings for the term “mystery” as follows: “anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown”.<sup>12</sup> If this definition is brought to our interpretation of the Bible, we will misunderstand what the Bible teaches about the mystery of the kingdom of God. Ladd explains:

*We must first establish the meaning of the term “mystery.” A mystery in the Biblical sense is not something mysterious, nor deep, dark, profound and difficult. In modern English, the word may bear such connotations, but we cannot interpret the Bible by modern English.*<sup>13</sup>

Here are three key passages in which Paul defines what a “mystery” is:

### Romans 16:25-27

*<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— <sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

### Ephesians 3:4-6

*<sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

### Colossians 1:24-26

*<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery*

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<sup>12</sup> “Mystery.” Dictionary.com. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/mystery?s=t>. Accessed April 4, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 19-20.

*hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.*

Now here is a passage in Matthew 13 in which Jesus mentions “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”:

Matthew 13:11, 16-17 (New American Standard—Updated Version)<sup>14</sup>

*“Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. . . .’<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.<sup>17</sup> For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

2. Do Paul and Jesus (as presented by Matthew) have the same understanding of what a “mystery” is? How would you describe their understanding of a “mystery” using your own words?

You may see, then, that the biblical definition of a “mystery” is almost directly opposed to the dictionary definition of “mystery” that many English readers might assume while reading the Bible. This issue becomes very important because the tensions created by the texts listed for the first lesson question don’t form something beyond understanding; the present and future aspects of the kingdom don’t form a paradox. Rather, as we will see, the fact that the kingdom is both present and future is explained in a coherent way by the concept of “inaugurated eschatology” (which we will define shortly). So rather than being a paradox or even contradictory, Jesus’ teaching is a mystery as Ladd describes it in a biblical sense:

*Here is the biblical idea of mystery: something which has been kept secret through times eternal but is now disclosed. It is a divine purpose which God has designed*

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<sup>14</sup> The English Standard Version translates the Greek word *mysteria* as “secrets” instead of the more literal “mysteries.” This Greek word is the same word that appears in Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:4; and Colossians 1:26.

*from eternity but has kept hidden from men. At last, however, in the course of His redemptive plan, God reveals this purpose, and by the Scriptures of the prophets makes it known to all men. A mystery is a divine purpose, hidden in the counsels of God for long ages but finally disclosed in a new revelation of God's redemptive work.<sup>15</sup>*

## PARABLES THAT PROCLAIM THE MYSTERY

In Matthew 13:11 Jesus told his disciples that it had been granted to them to know “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” We will now examine this chapter more carefully as a chapter representing a critical idea in Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom. How is it that the kingdom can be both present and future?

**Read Matthew 13:1-23** with an eye to how Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom was expressing a new idea to the first-century Jewish worldview.

Now **read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**, again paying special attention to the way in which Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom would be unexpected and shocking.

The following three parables, also in Matthew 13, again express the basic truth that Jesus is seeking to teach:

### Matthew 13:31-33

*<sup>31</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” <sup>33</sup> He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

### Matthew 13:47-50

*<sup>47</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

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<sup>15</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 19-20. Therefore, a mystery, biblically speaking, is a disclosed secret or a hidden plan now revealed.



3. How would you summarize the main point of all these parables? How would Jesus teaching in these parables clash with first-century Jewish expectation? (Hint: Review your answer to the second lesson question from Lesson 3.)

Theologians have called the core insight which is communicated by Matthew 13 “inaugurated eschatology.” The things pertaining to the end (eschatology) have been introduced (inaugurated) into salvation history, but not yet completely fulfilled. Theologians sometimes also speak of the “already but not yet” dimension to Jesus’ preaching related to the kingdom. Tom Steller offers additional commentary on Matthew 13:

*The mysteries of the kingdom as revealed by Jesus in the parables are that even though the kingdom has great power and value it can be rejected; the kingdom can appear small and insignificant; there will continue to be ambiguity and the activity of Satan for a period of time. In the parables, Jesus brings to light for the first time “the already . . . but not yet” dimension of the kingdom. In Jesus’ preaching and ministry the kingdom is fulfilled but not yet consummated.<sup>16</sup>*

George Ladd also writes concerning the mystery of the kingdom:

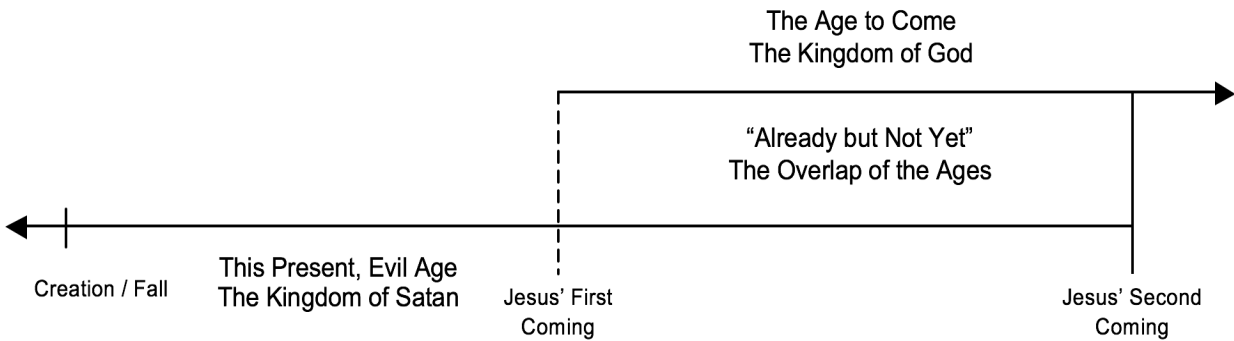
*This is the mystery of the Kingdom: Before the day of harvest, before the end of the age, God has entered into history in the person of Christ to work among men, to bring to them the life and blessings of His Kingdom. It comes humbly, unobtrusively. . . . It comes quietly, humbly, without fire from heaven, without a blaze of glory, without a rending of the mountains or a cleaving of the skies. It comes like seed sown in the earth. It can be rejected by hard hearts, it can be choked out, its life may sometimes seem to wither and die. But it is the Kingdom of God. It brings the miracle of the divine life among men. It introduces them into the blessings of the divine rule. It is to them the supernatural work of God’s grace. And*

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<sup>16</sup> This excerpt is taken from Tom Steller’s unpublished teaching notes on the Kingdom of God. Modified slightly. Used with permission.

*this same Kingdom, this same supernatural power of God will yet manifest itself at the end of the age, this time not quietly within the lives of those who receive it, but in power and great glory purging all sin and evil from the earth.*<sup>17</sup>

The following diagram presents a visual representation of “inaugurated eschatology.” Jesus’ first coming has inaugurated the kingdom of God and initiated the overlap of the ages. Until the second coming of Jesus, we live in a time in which the age to come has already started in some sense, yet the present, evil age has not been ended.



## 🔗 A SERMON ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Listen to the sermon “**Is the Kingdom Present or Future?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod website \(www.desiringGod.org\)](http://www.desiringGod.org).

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<sup>17</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 64-65.

## § DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes to remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Are you convinced that Jesus teaches “inaugurated eschatology” with regard to the kingdom? If so, why? If not, what other theological options are there for explaining the present and future dimensions of the kingdom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does a clear understanding of the kingdom as already here but not yet in its fullness have any practical implications for your church and your personal walk of faith? Explain.

## § YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

..... § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), chapters 3-5
- ▷ Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2004), chapter 2
- ▷ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), Part 1 “Inaugurated Eschatology”

# Is the Kingdom Present or Future?

JOHN PIPER, 1990

Luke 17:20-21

Is the kingdom of God present or is it future?

The importance of the question

The kingdom is present: Luke 17:20-21

The kingdom is not yet present: Luke 19:11-12

The mystery of the kingdom

Matthew 13

The parable of the sower

The parable of the wheat and the tares

“The mystery of the kingdom is the division of the coming of the kingdom into a \_\_\_\_\_ coming that is mixed and partial . . . from a \_\_\_\_\_ coming which will finish the job.”

The parable of the mustard seed

“The mystery of the kingdom is that the kingdom came as a mustard seed and not a \_\_\_\_\_.”

The parable of the net

Matthew 7:22

“ . . . Even in the sway of kingdom power, people are swept into religion and die. Why? Because they love healing more than \_\_\_\_\_, because they love power more than \_\_\_\_\_, because they love wonders more than they love the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.”

A warning

An encouragement



# Kingdom Presents

# 5

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## § INTRODUCTION

The title for this lesson is a deliberate play on words. We will further consider in this lesson the way in which the kingdom of God is “present” now—in other words, what are the manifestations of “kingdom presence”?

We learned in the last lesson that we are now living in the overlap of the ages: the age to come is here, but not yet in its fullness; the present, evil age is passing away, but it will not end until the second coming of Jesus. Living in this present, evil age we experience “foretastes” of the age to come. God’s kingdom breaks into the present with blessings from the future. Therefore, this lesson will focus on the “presents” (blessings) we enjoy as part of our present experience of God’s reign since the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

## § LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the relationship between the kingdom of God and spiritual deliverance.
- explain the relationship between the kingdom of God and physical healing.
- identify ways in which Jesus’ proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God are similar and different from the ministry of his first disciples.



### THE KINGDOM BRINGS SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE

We have already learned that in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' teaching focused on the kingdom of God. Over and over again we read miracle stories, parables, controversy narratives, and sermons that relate to the kingdom. It is equally apparent, however, that Jesus' ministry also focused on two main activities: casting out demons and healing the sick. We will first consider Jesus' work of casting out demons. Does this central activity of his ministry have any relation to his proclamation of the kingdom?

Matthew 12:22-29

*22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." 25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house."*

Luke 11:14-22

*14 Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. 15 But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," 16 while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. 17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. 18 And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?"*



*Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>20</sup> But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup> When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; <sup>22</sup> but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.”*

1. Underline those verses which clearly associate the kingdom of God with spiritual deliverance. How do the two passages (above) relate to what you learned in Lesson 2?

Tom Steller relates this issue of spiritual deliverance to the framework of inaugurated eschatology that we introduced in the previous lesson:

*The Kingdom of God is the dynamic reign of God in Christ which is breaking into this present evil age with salvation and with foretastes of the age to come. Through the preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the kingdom of God is now in the process of delivering men and women from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation from their own sin and from Satan’s oppression. It is here now in part, and one day will come in all its fullness and banish evil once and for all.<sup>18</sup>*

Notice also that Jesus’ ministry of spiritual deliverance is closely connected to his ministry of physical healing. Luke informs us that the woman who was bent over had a disabling *spirit* (Luke 13:11). Jesus also diagnoses her physical disability as a Satanic bondage (Luke 13:16).

Luke 13:10-17

*<sup>10</sup> Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup> And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her*

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<sup>18</sup> This excerpt is taken from Tom Steller’s unpublished teaching notes on the Kingdom of God. Used with permission.

over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”<sup>13</sup> And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.<sup>14</sup> But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”<sup>15</sup> Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?<sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”<sup>17</sup> As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

#### THE KINGDOM BRINGS PHYSICAL HEALING

As noted above, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom also was attended by physical healings. Notice how the kingdom of God is connected to healing in a similar way to how the kingdom of God was connected to spiritual deliverance:

Matthew 4:23-24

<sup>23</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

Luke 10:1-3, 8-11

<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. . . . <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. <sup>9</sup> Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ <sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup> ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’”

John the Baptist proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God as Jesus did. When he was thrown into prison, however, it is likely that John began to have doubts about whether Jesus was really bringing the kingdom. His expectation was probably formed by the Old Testament so that he was expecting the Messiah to come to bring immediate judgment. Notice Jesus' response to John the Baptist in the following passage:

Luke 7:18-23

*<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, <sup>19</sup> calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" <sup>20</sup> And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" <sup>21</sup> In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. <sup>22</sup> And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>23</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."*

2. How is Jesus' response an answer to John the Baptist's question? (Hint: Read the broader context of Jesus' citation of the Old Testament.)

## WAS THE KINGDOM UNIQUELY PRESENT IN JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY?

Thus far in this course we have considered Jesus' understanding of the kingdom and the various aspects of his ministry that were connected to his proclamation of the kingdom. At this point, this course will transition to a consideration of how Jesus' kingdom ministry was continued by his first disciples, and whether and how that ministry should be continued today. The latter issue will be the focus of the next lesson, but we will address the former issue now.

First, read the following passages that describe Jesus' kingdom ministry. How does casting out demons and healing the sick in these passages relate to Jesus' identity and mission?

**Matthew 8:14-17**

*<sup>14</sup> And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. <sup>15</sup> He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. <sup>16</sup> That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."*

**Matthew 17:14-20**

*<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, <sup>15</sup> said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>20</sup> He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."*

**Mark 2:3-12**

*<sup>3</sup> And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. <sup>4</sup> And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." <sup>6</sup> Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" <sup>8</sup> And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?" <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup> "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." <sup>12</sup> And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*

The perspective on Jesus' ministry reflected in the texts above must be balanced with the perspective of the following texts below. Any explanation of how Jesus' ministry relates to the ministry of his first disciples must wrestle with all the relevant biblical data.

Matthew 10:1, 5-7

*<sup>1</sup> And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. . . . <sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."*

Luke 9:1-2, 6

*<sup>1</sup> And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, <sup>2</sup> and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. . . . <sup>6</sup> And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.*

John 14:12

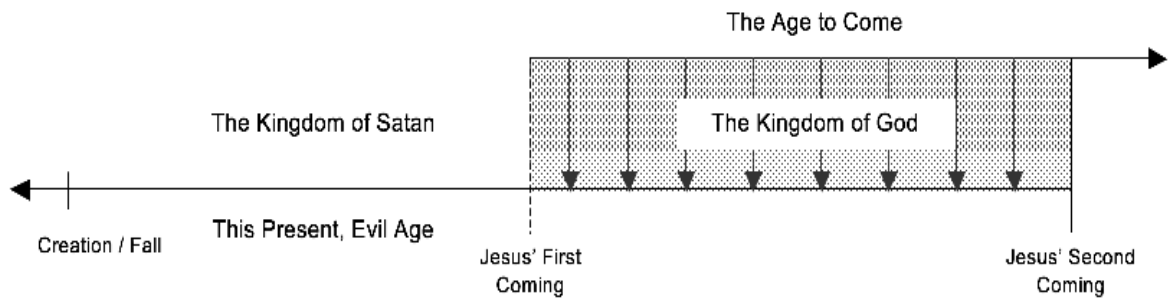
*<sup>12</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.*

Acts 5:12-16

*<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, <sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

3. Did Jesus' disciples extend Jesus' ministry of proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God in the same way that he did?

The only addition we will make to the concluding diagram for this lesson is to portray more clearly that in the overlap of the ages, “foretastes” of the age to come are granted in this present, evil age. Or, to use other language, the power of the kingdom of God is breaking into the kingdom of Satan to bring spiritual deliverance, physical healing, and many other “presents” or blessings from God. It is not as if the age to come is merely running parallel to this present age; rather, the age to come intersects this present age when the Spirit of God touches men and women.



### 🔗 A SERMON ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Listen to the sermon “**How is the Kingdom Present?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).

## § DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes to remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Why is it so important to distinguish between how the kingdom of God was present in the ministry of Jesus and to how the kingdom of God might be present in the ministry of Jesus' first disciples or in our ministries today? In other words, what dangers are possible in failing to discern this distinction?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why aren't more people healed or more demons cast out by the evangelical church in America today?

## § YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

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•••••  **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, “The Kingdom of God Is Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ George Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959), chapters 6-7



# How is the Kingdom Present?

JOHN PIPER, 1990

Luke 11:14-23

Review

How is the kingdom present? (two questions)

Turning water to wine; the resurrection of Lazarus

“There will always be a difference between the way the Son demonstrates the \_\_\_\_\_ of his Father and the way sons and daughters demonstrate the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Father.”

Eight ways that the kingdom is present:

1. The kingdom overcomes physical misery and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The kingdom overcomes death and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The kingdom overcomes demonic oppression and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The kingdom overcomes rebellion and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The kingdom overcomes condemnation and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The kingdom overcomes wrongdoing and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The kingdom overcomes sadness and brings \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The kingdom overcomes aimless futility and brings purposeful \_\_\_\_\_.



# Kingdom Power and the Church's Ministry

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# 6

## § INTRODUCTION

The previous five lessons have argued that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God and that the consummation of God's kingdom will only be realized at Jesus' return. The kingdom is here, but not yet in its fullness. What remains for this concluding lesson is to consider more pointedly what relationship the kingdom of God has to the ministry of the church. Yes, we are to proclaim the kingdom of God, but should we also expect our proclamation to be attended with kingdom power? Should signs and wonders demonstrating God's power be pursued by the church today?

The sermon series from which this course draws, "Are Signs and Wonders for Today?" preached in 1990, was preached partly in reaction to the ministry and teaching of John Wimber. John Wimber believed that the church's ministry should be carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit and attended by signs and wonders. Wimber was an advocate for what he called "power evangelism," which he describes in the following quotation:

*By power evangelism I mean a presentation of the gospel that is rational but that also transcends the rational. The explanation of the gospel comes with a demonstration of God's power through signs and wonders. Power evangelism is a spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, empowered presentation of the gospel. Power evangelism is evangelism that is preceded and undergirded by supernatural demonstrations of God's presence.*

*Through these supernatural encounters people experience the presence and power of God. Usually this takes the form of words of knowledge, healing, prophecy, and deliverance from evil spirits. In power evangelism, resistance to the gospel*

*is overcome by the demonstration of God's power in supernatural events, and receptivity to Christ's claims is usually very high.*

*Many of us are suspicious of a story in which supernatural knowledge of personal sin is used in evangelism. This demonstrates how far Christianity in Western society has drifted from experiences that were everyday occurrences in New Testament times.<sup>19</sup>*

How should we think about “power evangelism,” spiritual gifts, and kingdom power? What does Paul mean when he says, “For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20)? We will seek to answer these types of questions in this lesson.

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- articulate arguments for why signs and wonders might be confined to the ministry of the apostles.
- articulate arguments for why signs and wonders might characterize the overlap of the ages and the ministry of the church.
- argue for an understanding of how the kingdom of God relates to present-day experience.

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<sup>19</sup> John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 135.



## WERE SIGNS AND WONDERS CONFINED TO THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLES?

In this course we have examined many manifestations of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus, his first disciples, and the early church. A crucial question of application then becomes whether such manifestations—signs, wonders, and visible demonstrations of spiritual gifts—should also be expected and pursued in our churches today.

There are some—commonly called “cessationists”—who argue that the Bible teaches that signs and wonders were confined to the ministry of the apostles.<sup>20</sup> Two of the passages that are often cited in support of this position are as follows:

### 2 Corinthians 12:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*

### Hebrews 2:1-4

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

1. What argument could be made from these passages to support the idea that signs and wonders were confined to the ministry of the apostles? Are you convinced by such an argument? Explain.

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<sup>20</sup> Some also argue on the basis of their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 that signs, wonders, and spiritual gifts ceased with the completion of the biblical canon.

Here is one of Richard Gaffin's arguments for cessationism:

*To observe that in Acts others than apostles exercise miraculous gifts is beside the point. To offer that as evidence that such gifts continue beyond the time of the apostles pulls apart what for Luke belongs together. Others exercise such gifts by virtue of the presence and activity of the apostles; they do so under an "apostolic umbrella," so to speak.<sup>21</sup>*

Please note also that in the assigned sermon for this lesson, John Piper will present five pieces of evidence for the view that signs and wonders were limited to the "apostolic age."

#### SHOULD SIGNS AND WONDERS BE PURSUED BY THE CHURCH TODAY?

Disagreeing with the cessationists are some—commonly called "continuationists"—who argue that the Bible teaches that signs and wonders should be pursued by the church today. Continuationists argue that signs, wonders, and all the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament are given to the entire church for her ministry and mission until Christ returns.

Continuationists will point to passages such as Galatians 3:1-5, which seems to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit and the working of miracles apart from direct apostolic presence or oversight:

Galatians 3:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? <sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith . . .*

Furthermore, continuationists contend that signs, wonders, and the miraculous gifts are not solely intended to function as confirmations of the apostolic witness.

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<sup>21</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (edited by Wayne A. Grudem; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 39.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . <sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

1 Corinthians 14:1-4, 12

<sup>1</sup> Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. <sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. . . . <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

2. According to these two passages, what are some purposes for spiritual gifts, including the “miraculous” gift of prophecy?

Sam Storms, a continuationist, makes the following assertion:

Nowhere in the New Testament is the purpose or function of the miraculous or the charismata reduced to that of attestation. *The miraculous, in whatever form in which it appeared, served several other distinct purposes. For example, there was a doxological purpose. . . . Miracles also served an evangelistic purpose. Much of our Lord’s miraculous ministry served to express his compassion and love for the hurting multitudes. . . .*

*There are several texts that indicate that one primary purpose of miraculous*

*phenomena was to edify and build up the body of Christ.*<sup>22</sup>

In the assigned sermon for this lesson, John Piper will also present four reasons for why “signs and wonders were not limited to the apostles or to that age, but are available for today and should be sought for the good of the church and the spread of the gospel.”

#### PRAYING FOR BOLDNESS, HEALING, AND SIGNS AND WONDERS

The debate between cessationists and continuationists continues. It is the perspective of this course that signs and wonders should be pursued today—but for the right reasons. An emphasis on signs, wonders, and all the spiritual gifts should not come at the expense of sound doctrine, biblical preaching, or Christ-like suffering. Notice the following prayer which the early church prayed after experiencing opposition in the spread of the gospel:

Acts 4:23-31

*<sup>23</sup> When [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’— <sup>27</sup> for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup> And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

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<sup>22</sup> C. Samuel Storms, “A Third Wave View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, 191. Zondervan, 2011.



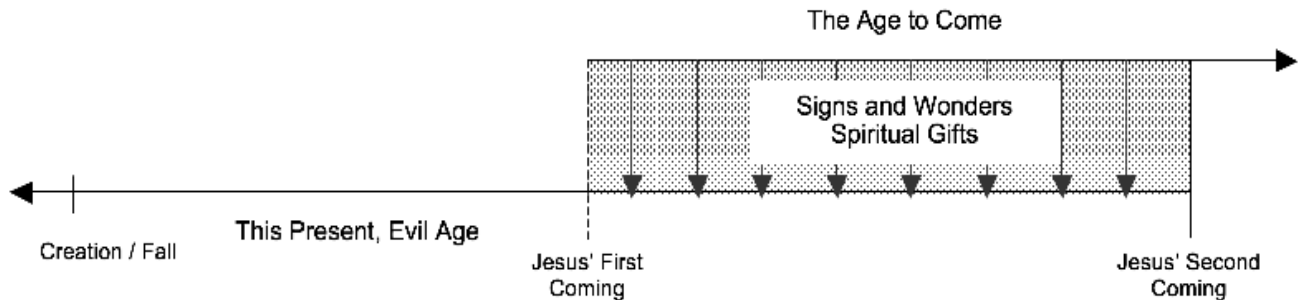
3. Have you ever prayed in words similar to this prayer (especially verses 29 and 30)? Should Christians today pray in this way? Explain.

Here are some helpful comments made by Sam Storms on this passage (Acts 4:23-31):

*“This text is important for at least two reasons: It shows that it is good to pray for signs and wonders and that it is not evil or a sign of emotional and mental imbalance to petition God for demonstrations of his power; it also shows that there is no necessary or inherent conflict between miracles and the message, between wonders and the word of the cross. . . .*

*It is good, helpful, and honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ to seek and pray for the demonstration of his power in healing, signs, and wonders.”* <sup>23</sup>

The final diagram of this course does not modify the previous lesson’s diagram in a substantial way, but simply presents our conviction that signs and wonders and all the “miraculous” spiritual gifts, as displays of God’s mighty power, are experienced occasionally in this present, evil age as foretastes of the age to come. Therefore, while respecting the ways in which Jesus’ own kingdom ministry was unique, it is our aim to pray for more of the Spirit’s power for the edification of the church and the advancement of the gospel.



<sup>23</sup> Storms, “A Third Wave View,” 196.

.....  A SERMON ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Listen to the sermon “**Are Signs and Wonders for Today?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.org) website ([www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).



The following list of application points is taken from Tom Steller's unpublished teaching notes on the Kingdom of God. Read through the application points and then review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

### What Is to Be Our Response to the Kingdom?

1. We must be changed inwardly!
2. We must believe in the gospel of the kingdom.
3. We must repent.
4. We must worship the King with thankfulness, reverence and awe.
5. We must regard the Kingdom as our highest priority and our greatest treasure:
  - a higher priority than riches (Matthew 19:23)
  - a higher priority than personal prestige (Matthew 20:25)
  - a higher priority than our own body (Mark 9:47)
  - a higher priority than our family (Luke 18:29)
  - a higher priority than sexual fulfillment (Matthew 19:12)
  - a higher priority than other attractive options (Luke 9:26)
6. We must cultivate attitudes of the heart that are in accord with the Kingdom: for example, poverty of spirit, sorrow for sin, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peacemaking, and willingness to joyfully endure persecution.
7. We must cultivate emotional responses appropriate to the good news of the kingdom: for example, peace and joy (Romans 14:17) and fearless confidence in the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32).
8. We must seek to obey the mandates of the Kingdom by:
  - doing the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21)
  - surpassing the scribes and Pharisees in righteousness (Matthew 5:20)
  - keeping the Great Commandment (Matthew 12:32-34)
  - producing the fruit of the kingdom (Matthew 21:43)
9. We must seek to avoid the deeds of the flesh which if practiced will

*keep us from inheriting the kingdom. The deeds of the flesh include: sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, prostitution, homosexual practice, stealing, greed, drunkenness, slander, swindling; impurity, sensuality, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, carousings, filthiness, silly talk, coarse jesting, and “things like these.”*

10. *We must pray for the Kingdom to come—for its fullness to come at the consummation of the age and for measures of its power to come now, mercifully breaking into this present evil age.*
11. *We must preach and teach the Kingdom of God.*
12. *We must seek to be agents of forgiveness.*
13. *We must seek to heal the sick.*
14. *We must seek to deliver the demonized.*
15. *We must work together with others to advance the Kingdom.*
16. *We must be willing to suffer for the sake of the Kingdom.*
17. *We must be alert, ready and waiting for the coming of the King and the consummation of His Kingdom.*

1. Of these 17 application points, which ones are especially relevant to the situation of you or your church? Why?

2. Do you believe that signs and wonders are for today?

## § YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

## § ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (edited by Wayne A. Grudem; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996)
- ▷ John Piper, “How Signs and Wonders Helped Add Multitudes to the Lord,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, “Using Our Gifts in Proportion to Our Faith, Part 1: The Gift of Prophecy,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ Sam Storms, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2002)
- ▷ John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), and *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987)

# Are Signs and Wonders for Today?

JOHN PIPER, 1990

Acts 4:23-31

Piper's question and prayers

Two stacks of books

Reasons why signs and wonders might be limited to the apostolic age

1. The special ministry of the apostles in Acts
2. 2 Corinthians 12:12
3. Hebrews 2:4
4. The uniqueness of Jesus' ministry
5. No parallel in church history

Reasons why signs and wonders should be pursued today

1. Continuity between Jesus' ministry and church's
2. Signs and wonders done in Acts by non-apostles
3. Galatians 3:5
4. Gifts of Healing and Miracles

What shall we say now in conclusion?

"I want my \_\_\_\_\_ to be so long and deep that it just goes way down into biblical revelation . . . and I want my \_\_\_\_\_ all the way unfurled so that if the slightest winds [of spiritual power] are blowing . . . I want to pick it up and go."

# Kingdom Ministry in the 21st Century



## Appendix A

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[The following appendix is reproduced, with slight modification, from Tom Steller's unpublished teaching notes on the kingdom of God.]

**Key Question: Should healing and casting out of demons continue to be part of the proclamation of the kingdom of God in the 21st century?**

We must avoid two extremes in seeking to answer this question, both of which are not biblical:

*There is an extreme adopted by a minority of Pentecostal and charismatic groups sometimes referred to as the "health, wealth, and prosperity gospel." This view teaches that since Christ has already purchased our total salvation (including healing) on the cross, all that is left for us to do is to claim it by faith. It is always God's will to heal now and the only reason people are not healed is due to lack of faith. This view fails to understand the "already but not yet" of the kingdom of God and thus can be accurately referred to as "an over-realized eschatology." In other words, the error here is to insist that all the blessings of the age to come are meant to be enjoyed now during this present evil age, when Scripture makes it clear that the presence of the kingdom in this age does include foretastes of the blessings of the age to come, but the full consummation of the kingdom's blessings will not come until the return of Christ. Paul addresses the problem of an over-realized eschatology in 1 Corinthians 4:6-13.*

*There is an extreme on the other side of this issue as well. Some people argue that signs and wonders and supernatural gifts of the Spirit went out with the close of the apostolic age after the church was established or after the New*

*Testament canon was completed. Thus, any supernatural manifestation in our day is either fraudulent or demonic. One of the main problems of this view is a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 which talks about certain spiritual gifts ceasing “when the perfect comes.” Most scholars today, however, are convinced that “when the perfect comes” refers to the second coming of Christ and the consummation of the age. Only then will we see “face to face,” only then will we “know fully just as [we] also have been fully known” (verse 12). Thus, instead of this passage teaching that certain gifts will cease at the close of the apostolic age, it teaches that the gifts will be in operation until the return of Christ.*

Further reasons why we should be open to, pray for, and expect God to break into this present evil age with signs and wonders and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Jesus wanted His power ministry to be passed on:

- ▷ Matthew 9:35-10:15 (the twelve)
- ▷ Luke 9:1-6 (the twelve)
- ▷ Luke 10:1-9 (the seventy)
- ▷ John 14:12, 13 (he who believes in Me)
- ▷ Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations” (the gospel Jesus preached included healing and casting out of demons)
- ▷ Matthew 28:18-20, “Teach them to observe all that I commanded you” (wouldn’t his missionary instruction of Luke 10 be included?)

Jesus’ power ministry was owing to his anointing with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38; Matthew 12:28; Luke 4:14; cf. Luke 5:17). This same Spirit is given to believers (Acts 1:8; notice in Acts 1:1 that what happens through the church in Acts is meant to be understood as a continuation of all that Jesus in His earthly ministry “began to do and teach”).

Non-apostles were engaged in power ministry:

- ▷ Stephen (Acts 6:8)
- ▷ Philip (Acts 8:6)
- ▷ Barnabas (Acts 14:3)
- ▷ The Spirit manifests Himself through every believer (1 Corinthians 12; see also Galatians 3:5)
- ▷ Everyone is commanded to pray for the sick (James 5:16)



Signs and wonders play a significant role in evangelism and establishing the church among the unreached peoples (cf. Acts 9:34, 35, 40-42; John 4:39-42; Acts 13:6-12; Romans 15:18-20).

#### TOWARDS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF HEALING AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. God is sovereign and has ultimate control over all sickness. (“I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand,” Deuteronomy 32:39.)

*Therefore:* Let us humble ourselves before him in all lowliness and recognize his hand in all things without rebellion or grumbling.

2. Sickness, death, and all human suffering were introduced into the world as a result of man’s fall into sin (Genesis 3:14ff.; Romans 8:20ff.). Just as Satan had a hand in man’s fall into sin, so all sickness in some sense can be viewed as being “oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7; Luke 13:16—on some occasions sickness may be the direct result of an evil spirit; Matthew 9:32; 12:22; Luke 13:11). Yet this does not contradict God’s sovereignty over sickness because God is sovereign over Satan. Satan can do nothing without God’s permission (Job 1 and 2; Luke 22:31).

*Therefore:* We will regard sickness as a manifestation of the kingdom of darkness and seek to follow the example of Jesus and His disciples in resisting all sickness. This resistance will always take the form of prayer (James 5:16; 2 Corinthians 12:8) and, as needed, legitimate medical means (1 Timothy 5:23).

3. The death of Jesus Christ purchased a redemption for his people which includes spiritual rebirth unto eternal life, progressive sanctification until we are perfected at Jesus’ coming, and physical wholeness experienced partially now and fully at the resurrection when we are given a body like Christ’s (Ephesians 1:7, Romans 8:22-25, 32; Isaiah 53:4, 5; Matthew 8:17).

*Therefore:* Let us rejoice and be thankful and look always to Christ as

our only hope for spiritual and physical well-being in this world and the next.

4. Though an individual's sin is not always the cause of a particular sickness (John 9:3), unconfessed sin can be a cause of sickness and misery (1 Corinthians 11:27-32; Psalm 32:3-5).

*Therefore:* We will seek to obey the biblical command as recorded in James 5:16: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."

5. God is our merciful heavenly Father who, in Christ, secured everything good for us (Ephesians 1:3; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:28, 32). He is very willing to give good things to those who ask him (Matthew 7:11).

*Therefore:* Let us have complete trust that when we pray for healing God will hear our prayer and respond in the most loving way. His response may be a miraculous and instantaneous healing; it may be a gradual healing over time through prayer and perhaps medical care; it may be the withholding of healing in part or in full until the ultimate healing takes place when God transforms our physical body at His second coming (Philippians 3:20, 21).

6. Even though the healing power of Jesus and the apostles may have been unique (John 3:34; 2 Corinthians 12:12), there is no biblical reason to doubt that various "gifts of healings" are available to the church today (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30).

*Therefore:* Let us earnestly desire these gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1), and let us take opportunities to pray for the sick among us (James 5:14-16).

7. The healthy, rich man went to hell. The poor man full of sores went to heaven (Luke 16:19-26).

*Therefore:* Let us never exalt physical healing above spiritual and ethical transformation. Compared to the need for conversion and sanctification, the need for physical health in this age is very small. Let us pray passionately for the spiritual condition of the sick as well as for their bodies.

8. Jesus and the apostles made healing a significant part of their ministry (Matthew 9:6; 10:1, 7-8; 11:2-6; Luke 10:9) and used it to confirm the truth of their witness (Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4; Acts 2:22, 43; 4:30; 5:12-14; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12). Healing was not for its own sake. It pointed men to the beauty and compassion of Christ. Over every healing we could write the words of Jesus: “See, you are well! Sin no more that nothing worse befall you” (John 5:14).

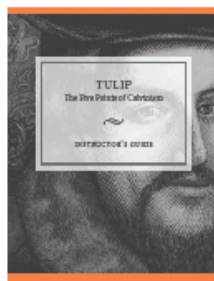
*Therefore:* Let us pray that the ministry of healing in our churches never be an end in itself, but a sign of Christ’s spiritual power and beauty. Let us pray as the early church did in Acts 4:30 that the Lord would put forth his hand to heal so that men and women might be led to see that Jesus is Lord. Let us pray that along with the ministry of the Word and other ministries of mercy, the ministry of healing would become a more and more powerful part of our strategy for local and world evangelization, until the knowledge of the glory of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea!

# The Kingdom of God Is at Hand

## Understanding Jesus' Proclamation

*The Kingdom of God Is at Hand: Understanding Jesus' Proclamation* is a six-week course advancing the truth that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated by Jesus but not yet consummated. The course will seek to provide an understanding of Jesus' preaching and teaching ministry especially as it relates to the kingdom of God. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining key biblical passages, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper and other theologians. The course will conclude with some reflections on the application of kingdom theology to the church's ministry and mission today.

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