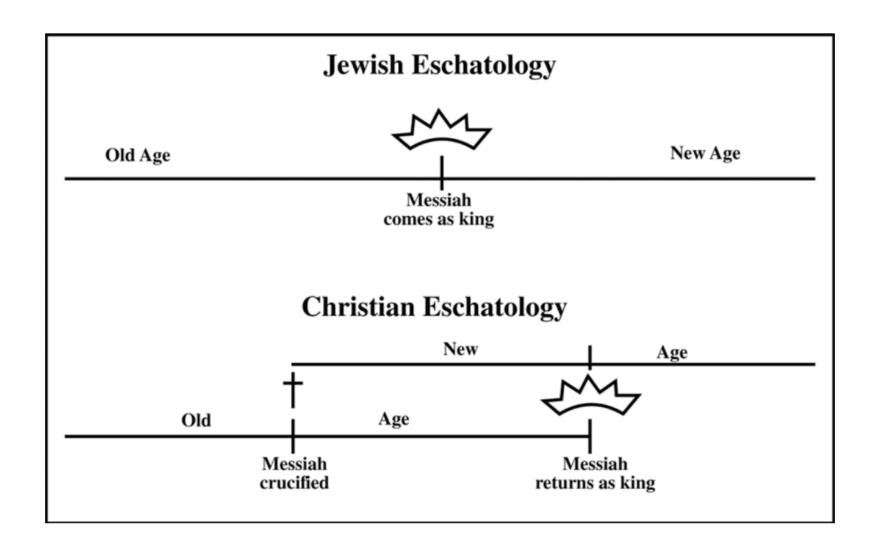


Thy Kingdom Come (Kingdom Chronicles 4)

Timothy Berg Monday, July 30, 2018 🔓 Like 1

The Future Kingdom

We have traced in broad strokes the teaching of the New Testament about the kingdom of God, defining it concisely as "the time of God's rule." We have especially noted that the essence of the teaching of the NT on the Kingdom is the way it reshapes Jewish eschatology so that the "two ages" actually overlap. God's promises are fulfilled in Christ, but not consummated until his second coming. Thus, the kingdom is both already and not yet.



We have examined at length the sense in which the Kingdom is already Present. But we would be remiss to not examine the teaching of the New Testament that the Kingdom is a still future hope that the believer waits for with eager anticipation. In fact, this future hope is one of the most essential messages of the New Testament. George Ladd brings balance to our understanding when he explains first the present nature of the kingdom, but goes on to note;

However, this message of fulfillment is accompanied by a view of the Kingdom of God which is futuristic and eschatological. Side by side with these sayings of a fulfillment in history are equally important sayings about a future apocalyptic coming of the Kingdom. This eschatological message may best be illustrated not by several proof texts but by the fundamental dualistic structure of Jesus' teaching. The Gospels constantly represent Jesus as teaching that the consummation of the Old Testament promise of God's Kingdom, which is in process of fulfillment, will occur only in the age to come.

(Ladd, G. E. (1974). The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism (Revised Edition, p. 114).)

The Dangers of Imbalance

We might think of two opposing dangers we can fall into when thinking about the Kingdom of God. If we stress the "not yet" element of the kingdom too much, we could easily lose sight of the sense in which the kingdom is already present with us through Christ. This leads to an "under-realized" eschatology which transfers all hope to the future realm, and sees no power on earth in the present. The church then gives into disease, demons, death, and despair, for nothing can be done except to wait for Jesus to come back. But on the other hand, if we stress the "already" element of the kingdom too much, we can lose sight of the opposite pole. While our hope has been accomplished and inaugurated in the cross and resurrection of Christ, it has not yet been consummated. Here we are in danger of an "over-realized" eschatology. The Corinthian church is often suggested to have fallen prey to a kind of over-realized eschatology.

Tom Schreiner has suggested a number of ways that these imbalances can appear in our lives; Politically, an over-realized eschatology might lead to a kind of Marxist Utopia. Things can be perfect now in this age. Yet this utterly fails to account for the continuing sinfulness of man that marks the present age. Politically, an under-realized eschatology might lead to a kind of quietism, which sees no point in any kind of social or political improvement. I grew up in a system that had so reacted against the "social gospel" of liberalism, that it eschewed any kind of social work at all. The Kingdom was entirely future. How dare we work to better the current world? A common mantra was, "Our job is not to make the world a better place, from which to go to hell."

An imbalance can affect a marriage as well. An over-realized eschatology might presume that marriage should be perfect. When the natural clashes of personality and sin natures that marriage brings come, this view might think such a fallen state surely should not be, and so a divorce might be sought as the only answer. On the other hand, an under-realized eschatology might simply accept the fallen status quo, with no hope that there was any present power that could transform what is broken.

In Christian life, one error might tend towards perfectionism, thinking they can attain sinless perfection in this life. But the other error might grow complacent in their struggle for holiness, and simply accept rather than battle their personal sins. Parents might harshly expect perfection from their kids and push them unendingly. Or they might give up altogether on disciplining them, and give in to what they see as inevitable mischief.

Surely one of the ugliest manifestations of over-realized eschatology is what Gordon Fee called, "The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel." If one presumes all the blessings of the future can be ours now in an unqualified sense, then it is tempting to assume that this means that God want's every one of us to be fully healthy, wealthy, and happy, in the present age. No room is left for the suffering that has been promised to followers of Jesus. But on the other hand, if someone fails to acknowledge that the present kingdom does bring the blessings of the future life into the present, they might never pray for the healing of the sick, or the conversion of a lost family member, or the cessation of injustice in the world. It is clear that we must hold together in tension both strands of the NT teaching. While we have already emphasized the "already" element, Ladd warns us against forgetting the future one.

The Kingdom of God is, then, the realization of God's will and the enjoyment of the accompanying blessings. However, it is a clear teaching of the New Testament that God's will is not to be perfectly realized in this age. Central in Biblical Theology is the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ... The Bible conceives of the entire sweep of human history as resting in the hand of God, but it looks for the final realization of God's Kingdom in a realm "beyond history," i.e., in a new and different order of existence.

Ladd, G. E. (1959). The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God (p. 24).

The Future Kingdom in the Teaching of Jesus

We need not examine here every one of the passages we have listed before in the teaching of Jesus that makes evident the future nature of the kingdom (for example, Matt. 6:9-13;/Luke 11:2-4; Matt. 5:3-12/Luke 6:20-23; Matt. 8:11-12/Luke 13:29-29; Mark 9:43-48/Matt. 8:8-9; Matt. 7:21; Mark 10:23/Matt. 19:23/Luke 18:24; Mark 10:15/Matt. 18:3/Luke 18:17; Matt. 5:20; Matt. 21:31/23:13/Luke 11:52; Matt. 16:19; Luke 12:32; Mark 9:1/Matt. 16:28/Luke 9:27). One familiar passage that sticks easily in most every mind is a piece of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, They will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven" (KJV).

The Future Kingdom in the Kingdom Parables of Jesus

While a number of elements in many of Jesus' parables make plain that the kingdom is still future (Mark 4:30-32/Matt. 13:31-32/Luke 13:18-19; Matt. 13:33/Luke 13:209-21; Mark 4:26-29; Mark 4:1-9/Matt. 13:1-9/Luke 8:4-8; Matt. 13:24-30; 13:47-50; Luke 16:1-8; 18:1-8; Matt. 24:43-44/Luke 12:39-40; Matt. 25:1-13; 25:14-30/Luke 19:11-27), we focus in this lesson only on the broad strokes. A number of these parables points towards a time of future judgement. Mark Strauss urges us, to remember that,

"Jesus' teaching in parables is closely associated with his proclamation of the kingdom, and most parables illustrate or illuminate aspects of the kingdom. This is especially true of the parables of Mark 4, Matthew 13, and Luke 8, which frequently begin something like "the kingdom of God [or heaven] is like ..." The parable of the sower reveals various kinds of responses to Jesus' kingdom preaching (Mark 4:1–9, 13–20, par.). The parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven confirm that the kingdom will start small but grow to fill the whole earth (Matt. 13:31–33, par.). The parable of the wheat and the tares reveals that in its present phase, the kingdom will exist alongside the evil world system, but at the end, evil will be rooted out (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). The parable of the strong man demonstrates that through exorcisms Jesus' kingdom authority is defeating and binding the kingdom of Satan (Mark 3:22–27, par.). The parables of the new wine and unshrunk cloth teach that the kingdom is a whole new age of salvation which completes and fulfills the old (Mark 2:21–22, par.).

Strauss, M. L. (2007). Four portraits, one Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels (p. 450).

The Future Kingdom in Jesus' Eschatological Discourse

The Eschatological Discourse of Jesus (sometimes called the Olivet Discourse) in Mark 13, Luke 21, and Matthew 24-25, has been for millennia a breeding ground for controversy and dispute. One of the largest areas of dispute has to do with how much the discourse has to do with the historical destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and how much it has to with the future second coming of Jesus. There are three broad positions; futurism, preterism, and various more reasoned combinations of the two. Extreme futurists see the discourse as entirely future, with essentially no part of it relating to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Mark Hitchcock, etc.). Extreme historicists (i.e., preterists) view the entire discourse as relating to the destruction of Jerusalem, with essentially no part of it relating to a future coming of Christ (N.T. Wright for example). It is worth noting that futurists tend to focus on the form found in Matthew (which seems to emphasize the future), while historicists tend to focus on Luke (which seems to focus most on the destruction of Jerusalem). The vast majority of interpreters fall somewhere between these two extremes, and allow that the discourse deals both with the destruction of the temple, and with the future second coming of Christ. There is an incredible amount of disagreement about what parts of the discourse deal with which. But if we recognize that almost all of this disagreement is related to Matt. 24:1-35, we will be helped along in our present purpose without being sidetracked by an attempt to answer some of the most difficult questions in the Bible. While there is much disagreement about what parts of Matt. 24:1-35 deal with the AD 70 temple and what parts deal with the second coming, there is virtually unanimous agreement that Matthew 24:36-25:46 deal with the still future Second Coming of Jesus.

Matthew 24:36-25:46 takes up the issue of vigilance until the second coming of Jesus. 24:36-42 function like an introduction, explaining that "no one knows about the day or the hour" (24:36), and that life will continue until that time as before it. Therefore, believers must "...stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42). Following this general introduction comes a series of parables on watchfulness; the owner and thief (vv. 43–44), the servants (vv. 45–51), the ten bridesmaids (25:1–13), and the talents (25:14–30). Craig Blomberg perceptively explains of these four parables that,

"The first three parables create an interesting series. In the first Christ's return is completely unexpected; in the second, sooner than expected; in the third, later than expected. Jesus covers all bases; Christians must remain prepared for him to come at any time. The fourth parable then explores more fully what that preparation involves—good stewardship of all God has committed to us. Jesus' discourse culminates with a quasiparabolic picture of final judgment, elaborating the theme of Jesus' return, which each of the preceding parables has depicted more briefly (25:31–46)." (Blomberg, C. (1992). Matthew (Vol. 22, p. 364).)

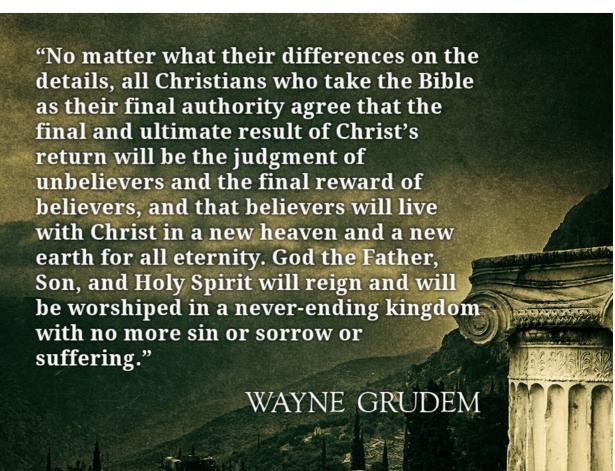
The Future Kingdom in Evangelical Theology

Before he digs into the numerous sharp controversies about eschatology, Wayne Grudem spells out a series of aspects of the second coming that all evangelicals agree on;

- 1. There will be a sudden, Personal, Visible, Bodily Return of Christ one day.
- 2. We should eagerly long for Christ's return.
- 3. We do not know when Christ will return.
- 4. All evangelicals agree on the results of Christ's return.
- 5. There is disagreement Over the details of future events.

He goes on to explain,

"No matter what their differences on the details, all Christians who take the Bible as their final authority agree that the final and ultimate result of Christ's return will be the judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers, and that believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for all eternity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will reign and will be worshiped in a never-ending kingdom with no more sin or sorrow or suffering."



Grudem, W. A. (2004). Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine (p. 1094).

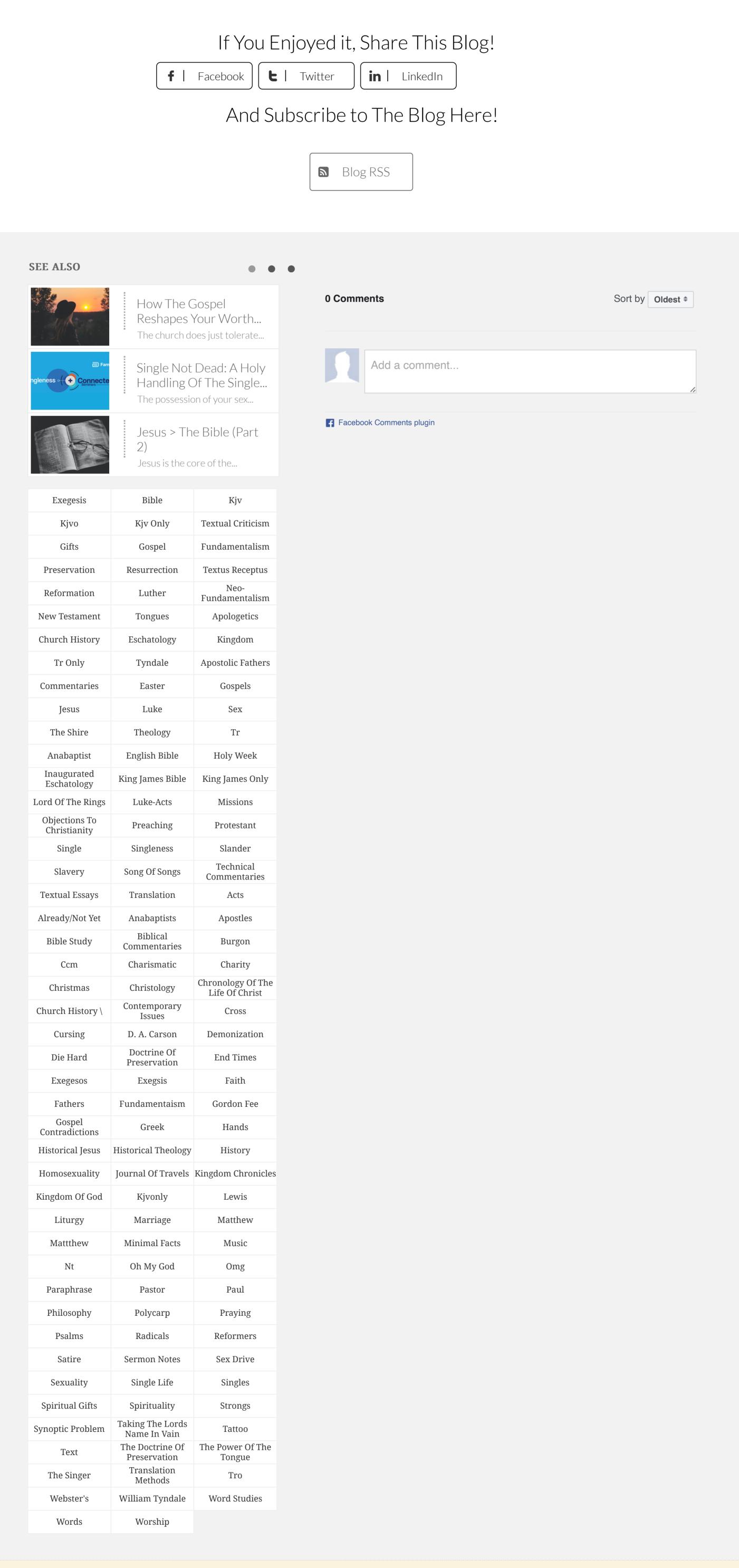
A Concluding Word

As we finish up our four weeks of "Kingdom Chronicles," we can reflect on some lessons learned. The Kingdom of God was the message of Jesus, and of the early church. That kingdom, contrary to expectations, was both present in the ministry and passion of Jesus, but also still future. It is already and not yet, and we must always hold together the tension of both elements. George Ladd draws together the lessons of the present kingdom for us, and we can fittingly end by recounting his words, and echoing in our hearts the prayer Jesus taught us, the call with which our canon ends;

Several important conclusions emerge from this study. It is the Biblical teaching that we shall never experience the full blessings of God's Kingdom in This Age. There are those who have identified the Christian hope with a warless world or with a world completely subdued to God's will through the preaching of the Gospel. People who fix their hopes upon a Kingdom which is to be consummated in This Age are certain to be disillusioned. The perfected Kingdom of God belongs to The Age to Come. We shall never know the fulness of its blessings so long as This Evil Age lasts...Furthermore, the Kingdom of God will never be fully realized apart from the personal, glorious, victorious Coming of Christ. Men cannot build the Kingdom of God; Christ will bring it. The powers of Satan and of evil can be finally overcome only by the mighty act of the return of Christ. But that day is coming! The Word of God urges us to watch, to be awake, to be ready and waiting for that Day. What assurance, what comfort, what stability it gives to our hearts and minds to know that our prayer will certainly be answered: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Yea, come quickly, Lord

Jesus!

Ladd, G. E. (1959). The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God (p. 39).



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