

*An Unshakable Kingdom*

**Daniel 7:13-14**

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“God bless this church and help us be all that you want us to be. May we be part of your unshakable and eternal kingdom.”

Here’s another time when one verse leads to others and we find connections with more places in the Bible. Here in Daniel, we see one like a son of man, that is, a human being, receiving a kingdom from God. Later in this chapter, we see God’s kingdom being given to God’s people. Earlier in Daniel, God sets up an indestructible kingdom that destroys and replaces the world’s kingdoms. The kingdom of God is a theme all over the Bible, especially in Jesus’ teaching. Even where the phrase “kingdom of God” isn’t used, God is often described as king, ruler, sovereign. One writer says that in a sense, the concept of the kingdom of God involves the total message of the Bible. “To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible’s gospel of salvation” (John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* 7).

So we could do a survey of the whole Bible. But instead, I want to look at this section of Daniel and then lift up a few New Testament texts that help us see the kingdom of God. We receive the kingdom as a gift and we participate in it as followers of Jesus, as the people God intends us to be, as the church God wants us to be.

Chapter 7 is the heart of the book of Daniel. And it’s one of the high points, like a mountain peak, in all of Scripture (Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* 137; Daniel Smith-Christopher, “The Book of Daniel,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*). The book of Daniel speaks to God’s people in troubling, desperate times. It’s set during the exile in Babylon. Daniel and his friends have to cope with being exiles and captives in a foreign land. The stories show how God preserves them and actually promotes them there. Daniel also addresses a time a few centuries later when Greek armies occupied Jerusalem and defiled the temple. In the first century A.D., it was a popular writing among Jews. Jesus refers to it on occasion. Jesus uses the phrase “Son of Man” as a way to talk about himself

—and that seems to be taken from this section of Daniel (Matthew 24:30; 26:64).

In this chapter, Daniel recounts a vision he had. In the vision he saw four wild beasts that represented four earthly kingdoms. Then he saw “one like a son of man” coming into God’s presence. This figure, who is like a human being, at this point represents Israel or the faithful people in Israel. When Jesus later uses this image to describe himself, he’s talking about his exaltation and glorification when he ascended to the right hand of the Father. He’s also describing his return when he comes in the clouds of heaven as the glorious Lord at the end of history. Jesus personifies and fulfills God’s purpose for God’s people.

Here in Daniel, there are echoes of the creation story: humans made in God’s image and given dominion. God intended to rule creation through the people he made. Recovering that purpose will be part of God’s restoring creation.

God here is described as “the Ancient of Days.” God’s not a newcomer. God is eternal. Now, this doesn’t mean that God is an old man. But it does say that God has the wisdom and authority associated with old age—especially in the culture when this was written.

The son of man who represents the people of God is given authority, glory, and power to rule. Every nation and people group serve him. His dominion will never end and his kingdom will never be destroyed. Amazingly, he shares his rule with his people (verses 18, 22, 27). It’s hard to imagine what that means. Maybe as we identify with Jesus and become more like him, we extend God’s rule of love, peace, justice, and joy into the world, into our little realms where we decide what happens.

God’s kingdom is where God decides what happens, where God’s will is done. In some sense, God already rules. In another sense, someday God will rule all things in reality, without any resistance or hindrance. And somehow, as God’s people, we’ll be involved in God’s ruling then.

Now, let’s move to the New Testament and look at just three places where God’s kingdom is mentioned. Again, if you’re paying attention, you can see God’s kingdom/rule/reign/sovereignty all over the Bible. Jesus emphasizes and highlights it in his teaching.

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:42-44)

Jesus tells the people of Capernaum that the good news isn't just for them, but for people in many cities as well. He's anointed with God's Spirit to bring the gospel, the good news to everyone. As his people, that's our mission too.

And this good news has specific content. It's the gospel of the kingdom of God. Mark tells us that Jesus began his ministry "proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the gospel'" (1:14-15).

What did Jesus mean when he talked about the kingdom of God? He was reminding people about the storyline and the hope that run all through the Old Testament. The prophets and others looked forward to the coming of God's kingdom as the time when God's promises and purposes would be fulfilled, Israel would be rescued from oppression, evil would be judged, and God would establish a new reign of justice and peace. In that kingdom, God would vindicate his people and set everything straight. The world would be turned right side up. When Jesus spoke of God's kingdom arriving in the present, he was reminding people of that story and announcing that it was finally happening. "God's future was breaking in to the present. Heaven was arriving on earth" (N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* 100).

The kingdom of God is God's action. "It is the range of God's effective will" (Dallas Willard). Now, in an ultimate sense, God rules everything everywhere. And yet, often God waits for us to seek God's rule, surrender to it, and cooperate with it before God exercises his rule. When we pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done," we're asking that God's rule be realized in and through our lives, in and through the church, and in all the world, now

and in the future. We commit ourselves to doing God's will as well as surrendering to God's will.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom in his preaching. He explained the kingdom in his teaching. And he demonstrated the kingdom in his miracles—healing, driving out evil spirits, and all the rest. In the Sermon on the Mount, where we find the Lord's Prayer, Jesus is teaching about life in the kingdom. The kingdom of God defines discipleship.

Praying the Lord's Prayer helps us learn the nature of the kingdom. Knowing what the kingdom is and what it's like interrupts our unthinking and routine prayers. When we get up from praying, it's important that our time, energy, influence and effort are going toward advancing God's kingdom and not the old kingdoms of the world. We can't really pray the Lord's Prayer without a commitment to God's kingdom.

The second line in this part of the prayer—"your will be done"—tells us something about the kingdom. God's kingdom is where God's will is done. The two phrases—"your kingdom come/your will be done"—say essentially the same thing.

God's reign will be complete at the end of this age. In glory God's will *will* be done perfectly. But the power of the future has broken into this present age. We've already seen that Jesus began his ministry announcing that the kingdom of God is near (Mk 1:15). He told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God "is among you" (Lk 17:21). When accused by the Pharisees of being in league with the prince of demons, Jesus said, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mt 12:28).

God's kingdom has come in Christ. It has invaded this world's realm where the devil had asserted his rule. The kingdom was already there and many of those around Jesus didn't know it. Spreading like yeast in the dough, growing like a tiny mustard seed. It was so close to them that they could reach out and touch it, and they weren't aware of it. It takes faith to be aware of the kingdom's reality, to touch it, to enter it, to participate in it.

Jesus not only announced the future coming of God's kingdom, he embodied God's rule and reign. He's the King. He's the kingdom in person.

The kingdom that came and was established in Jesus is present now. The Holy Spirit makes real for us the rule of God that Jesus brought. The Spirit gives us the first fruits of the kingdom yet to come. Although the kingdom is God's gift, God's design and God's doing, Jesus still directs us to pray, "Your kingdom come." Jesus knows that what we focus our hearts and minds on will become a reality in our lives.

Maxie Dunnam offers another definition of God's kingdom:

The kingdom of God means the reigning activity of Christ over human hearts and society. So, wherever Christ's rule or reigning activity is experienced (be it in peace, human justice, in healing, in shared love, in reconciliation), there is the kingdom of God. (*Workbook of Living Prayer*, 20th Anniv. Ed., 64)

During W.W. II, the American strategy for capturing islands in the Pacific was to send an invasion force to establish a beachhead. They would capture a portion of the beach and then use that as a base for attacking and possessing more of the island. The beachhead expanded until the entire island was under American control.

The kingdom of God is here in Christ. It's already establishing its beachhead—in us. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, we're asking that it come in us. When we pray for God's will to be done, we're asking that it be done in us and that we have strength to do God's will. We're offering ourselves to God for him to use us as his beachhead in the world. We're asking for God's reign and will to begin in us and spread to others.

The church is God's beachhead. The church is an outpost of God's kingdom. We're citizens of that kingdom even while we live here. We're strangers and aliens in this world as we represent the kingdom of God.

Notice where and how we ask for God's kingdom to operate: "on earth as it is in heaven." *On earth*—here and now in our present reality is where we long for God's rule to be realized, for God's will to be accomplished. God's rule invades all of life. We want to do God's will with every part of us, wherever we are. William Tyndale, one of the first translators of the Bible into English, said that when it comes to pleasing

God, there's no difference between washing dishes and preaching the word (Paul Marshall on *Mars Hill Tape* #30). Doing God's will is not just being "spiritual." It's seeking to honor God in all that we do. It's living under God's rule wherever we are.

Ronald and Alice had been married forty-four years when he started sinking into Alzheimer's disease. He lost memories, hopes, and dreams. But Alice remained faithful and continued to guard the memories, honor the dreams, and keep both of them alive in her own life.

In a very similar way, we are called to be "keepers of the kingdom." We go through life praying "Thy kingdom come," all the while planting [the kingdom's] seeds of peace, love and justice in our own small way. Like Alice, we guard and honor God's intention—we keep it alive—by what we say and how we live. (Albert Haase, *Living the Lord's Prayer* 96-97)

One example of how we can do that is in the story of a woman who spent a year in the desert of Sudan, feeding starving children during famine. Within a week of arriving there, she was overcome by the magnitude of human misery and the thousands of children who needed to be fed at the refugee camp. A medical doctor who was also volunteering there noticed her depression and discouragement. He said to her, "Remember: we just focus on the single child in front of us. We feed the particular boy or girl and leave the others in the hands of God and the other volunteers. One-on-one is how it's done" (Haase, 95).

The presence of God's kingdom empowers and encourages us. The promise of God's kingdom gives us hope and leads us forward. We live now in a time of overlap when the old kingdoms of the world are still active but the new kingdom of God has been inaugurated, though not yet fully realized. Still, we live in anticipation of God's kingdom coming in its fullness. We start acting now like the kingdom is here, because it is.

Knowing that gives us security and confidence. Hebrews 12 points out the contrast between Mt. Sinai, where God gave the Law to Israel through Moses, and Mt. Zion, the heavenly city that represents the new covenant.

The writer borrows from the prophet Haggai where God says he will shake the earth and the heavens. All that can be shaken will be removed, but what can't be shaken will remain. Then it says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (28-29).

E. Stanley Jones was in Russia in 1934. Communism was coming on strong and Jones was shaken and challenged by its apparent success. Needing reassurance, he turned to the Bible. In his quiet time in Moscow, this verse spoke to him, "Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks." Jones realized that all human kingdoms are shakable: both communism and capitalism are shakable. The kingdom of self is shakable. "Center yourself on yourself as the center of your kingdom and the self will sour and go to pieces." The kingdom of health is shakable. We hear about all kinds of remedies and attempts to hold physical life together, but we still die. Only God's kingdom, God's reign, God's will and way of life, is unshakable. A little later in Hebrews we read, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

Jones writes, "I came out of Russia with two things in my mind and heart: an unshakable Kingdom and an unchanging Person" (*A Song of Ascents* 149-50).

We can live in the spirit of adoring gratitude because we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. It's the kingdom Daniel saw that can't be destroyed and that lasts forever. It's the kingdom Jesus embodied and taught us to pray for. It's the kingdom the Holy Spirit works now to extend. It's the kingdom that will ultimately fill and rule over all when Jesus appears again in glory.

Will we receive that kingdom as a gift? Will we take our place in it? Will we participate in it by making it our priority and arranging our lives so we can live in the kingdom like Jesus?