

What is the Kingdom of God?

by Craig Paardekooper

What is the Kingdom of God?

The *Kingdom of God* in the Bible refers to **God's reign and rule over creation**, inaugurated through Jesus Christ. It is both a **present spiritual reality**—God's authority breaking into human life—and a **future hope** of justice, peace, and restoration when God's will is fully done on earth as in heaven.

But surely God's rule over creation began when He created it?

In the biblical vision, **God's rule is inherent in creation itself**—He is the sovereign source, so His reign begins the moment He speaks the world into existence.

Two layers of meaning

- **Creation sovereignty:** From Genesis 1, God's authority is absolute. The act of creating establishes His kingship over all that exists. In this sense, the Kingdom of God is eternal, beginning with creation itself.
- **Historical revelation:** Scripture also speaks of the Kingdom "breaking in" through Jesus. This doesn't mean God wasn't ruling before, but that His reign is being revealed in a new way—through justice, mercy, and restoration embodied in Christ.

Is it the case that the Kingdom "breaks in" through every covenant - since each covenant reveals His reign in a new way? I suppose that the incarnation was a perfect and complete example of God's reign in a human life.

The Kingdom of God is eternal, but each covenant is a historical revelation of that reign, breaking into human life in a new way. Jesus is the climax of this covenantal progression, where the Kingdom is both fully embodied and universally offered.

In Jesus, the eternal sovereignty of God is not just proclaimed but *lived*—every thought, word, and action aligned with the Father's will.

I agree that Jesus embodied God's reign in himself, and shows what God's reign looks like, but to be a kingdom, rather than a single person, the number of people modelling Jesus must be large?

Exactly—you've put your finger on the crucial distinction. A kingdom is not defined by a single ruler alone, but by a community living under that ruler's reign. In biblical terms, Jesus embodies God's reign perfectly, but the *Kingdom of God* becomes visible on earth when many people align their lives with Him, modeling His justice, mercy, and truth together.

Though God's rule is inherent in Creation itself, it is not realised in human lives, unless they align their free will with God's?

In biblical thought, God's sovereignty is absolute, but His Kingdom is only *realized* in human lives when people freely choose to align themselves with His will. Creation itself testifies to His rule, but human beings—endowed with free will—must consciously yield to it for the Kingdom to be manifest in their experience.

Thy will be done on earth as in heaven. Does this also indicate a Heaven as the Kingdom of God?

Heaven is the fullest expression of the Kingdom of God, but the Kingdom is not limited to Heaven—it is God's reign breaking into human lives now, and ultimately uniting Heaven and earth in restoration.

So, there are 3 senses in which God reigns –

- 1. As Creator he rules over creation**
- 2. He reigns in the lives of His holy people**
- 3. He reigns in heaven, afterlife.**

The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

The phrase “**Kingdom of God**” as such is not commonly used in the Old Testament, but the *concept* of God’s reign is woven throughout. Daniel is the clearest place where the language of God’s kingdom appears explicitly, but it is not the only place where the idea is present.

In Daniel

- **Daniel 2:44:** *“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed...”*
- **Daniel 7:14:** The Son of Man is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will never pass away.
- These passages directly use kingdom language, anticipating the eternal reign of God.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament

While the exact phrase “Kingdom of God” is rare, the idea of God’s kingship is pervasive:

- **Psalms:** *“The Lord reigns”* (Psalm 93, 97, 99) — God is portrayed as King over all the earth.
- **Isaiah:** Prophecies of God’s reign bringing justice and peace (Isaiah 9:6–7; 52:7).
- **Exodus:** God is described as King after delivering Israel from Egypt (Exodus 15:18: *“The Lord will reign forever and ever”*).
- **Zechariah 14:9:** *“The Lord will be king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.”*

The pattern

- The Old Testament emphasizes **God as King** and His reign over creation and Israel.
- Daniel uniquely develops the idea of a coming, eternal kingdom that will replace human empires.
- The New Testament picks up this thread, with Jesus proclaiming that this Kingdom has “broken in” through Him.

The *phrase* “Kingdom of God” is explicit in Daniel, but the *concept* of God’s kingship and reign runs throughout the Old Testament—in Psalms, Isaiah, Exodus, and the prophets. Daniel gives the clearest apocalyptic vision, but it builds on a much older theme.

The Kingdom of God in Daniel

In the book of Daniel, the Kingdom of God is described as an **eternal, indestructible reign** that will replace all human empires. It is symbolized by a stone that shatters worldly kingdoms and by the Son of Man who receives everlasting dominion from God

Daniel 2:44–45: In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue, Daniel explains that God will set up a kingdom that will **never be destroyed**. It is symbolized by a stone cut “not by human hands” that smashes the statue of earthly empires.

Daniel 7:13–14: Daniel sees “one like a Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven, who is given authority, glory, and sovereign power. **His kingdom is everlasting**, and all nations will serve Him.

Daniel 7:27: The vision concludes with the Kingdom being given to “the people of the saints of the Most High,” showing that God’s reign is shared with His faithful ones.

How Change Comes About

In what sense does the Kingdom of God smash empires? I can see that if everyone aligned with God then the change would destroy the mechanisms of empire, since those mechanisms are often built on violence, greed and lies? I can also see that the fall of an empire might be orchestrated directly by God, i.e. Egypt and the plagues.

Daniel's imagery of the stone "smashing" the statue of empires (Daniel 2:44–45) isn't about Rome or Babylon literally vanishing overnight—it's about the foundations of empire being judged and shown to be fragile compared to God's eternal reign.

In what sense the Kingdom "smashes" empires

- Symbolic overthrow: The statue represents human empires built on violence, greed, and lies. The stone "not cut by human hands" shows that God's Kingdom is of divine origin and exposes the impermanence of those systems.
- Moral inversion: Where empires thrive on domination, exploitation, and fear, the Kingdom thrives on justice, mercy, and truth. In that sense, it "smashes" the logic of empire by offering a radically different foundation.
- Historical continuity: Rome did continue politically, but the rise of the Christian movement—rooted in Jesus' embodiment of God's reign—undermined Rome's ideological monopoly. The empire eventually adopted Christianity, showing how the Kingdom reshaped its cultural and spiritual foundations.
- Ultimate fulfilment: Daniel's vision points beyond any single empire. It anticipates the final judgment when all human systems of oppression collapse, leaving only God's eternal reign.

Your insight about alignment

You're right: if people truly aligned their free will with God, the mechanisms of empire would dissolve.

- Violence would be rejected as incompatible with God's justice.
- Greed would be displaced by generosity and stewardship.
- Lies would be exposed by truth-telling and transparency. In that sense, the Kingdom "smashes" empires not by armies but by transforming hearts and communities until the machinery of domination cannot function.

The smashing in Daniel is less about immediate political collapse and more about revealing the fragility of human empires and introducing a new order that, if embraced, dismantles the mechanisms of oppression from within.

Recently we have seen how when individuals align with God's will and speak truth, then the narratives and power of bad authorities begin to unravel. Ultimately, all power is based on consent, and so an oppressive power is built on consent to be oppressed - upon a narrative of lies, and a violent and greedy leadership willing to impose those lies.

You've articulated the paradox of power with real precision. Oppressive authority is never absolute—it depends on consent, even if that consent is coerced or shaped by lies. When individuals align with God's will and speak truth, they withdraw that consent, and the façade of authority begins to crack.

Dynamics of oppressive power

- **Narrative of lies:** Authority sustains itself by controlling the story—who is “right,” who is “dangerous,” what is “necessary.”
- **Consent to oppression:** People comply because they believe the narrative, fear punishment, or feel powerless to resist.
- **Violence and greed:** These are the tools of enforcement, but they cannot sustain power without at least tacit agreement from the governed.
- **Fragility of false power:** Once truth is spoken and believed, the lies unravel, and the consent dissolves. Without consent, violence becomes naked and unsustainable.

Biblical resonance

- The prophets often confronted kings with truth, exposing lies and greed. Their words destabilized oppressive narratives.
- Jesus embodies this dynamic: by speaking truth, He revealed the emptiness of Rome's and the Temple's claims to ultimate authority. His crucifixion was the system's attempt to silence truth, but resurrection showed that oppressive power cannot endure.
- The Kingdom of God is the opposite of empire—it is built not on coerced consent but on free alignment with God's will.

Oppressive power is parasitic—it feeds on silence and consent. When individuals align with God's reign and speak truth, they cut off that supply, and the empire begins to unravel from within.

So, the Kingdom of God can destroy human empires by changing internal motivation, by changing the social dynamic, and by revealing truth.

The **Kingdom of God doesn't topple empires by force of arms**, but by undermining the very foundations that make them possible.

How the Kingdom dismantles empire

- **Changing internal motivation:** When individuals align their free will with God, they no longer serve greed, fear, or ambition. This erodes the psychological fuel that empires depend on.
- **Changing the social dynamic:** Communities shaped by justice, mercy, and truth refuse to play by the empire's rules of domination and exploitation. They create alternative structures of belonging that weaken oppressive systems.
- **Revealing truth:** Lies are the scaffolding of empire. When truth is spoken and lived, the narrative collapses, consent dissolves, and authority is exposed as illegitimate.

Biblical resonance

- Jesus' parables (mustard seed, yeast) show the Kingdom working quietly but pervasively, transforming from within until the whole system is changed.

- The early church lived this dynamic: by embodying generosity, equality, and truth, they destabilized Rome's ideological monopoly without raising a sword.
- Revelation envisions the final stage: all false powers judged, and God's reign fully manifest.

The Kingdom of God destroys empires not by external conquest but by **internal transformation, social reconfiguration, and truth-telling**. It is a revolution of conscience and community that makes domination unsustainable.

The stone smashing the statue indicates that all the empires are removed prior to the kingdom of God, then the stone grows to become a mountain. The removal seems abrupt, but the subsequent growth of the stone seems transformative.

The imagery deliberately holds together two different dynamics:

1. Abrupt removal of empires

- The smashing of the statue represents the sudden exposure of human empires as fragile and transient.
- The stone "cut without hands" (divine origin) doesn't negotiate with the statue—it shatters it. This symbolizes that God's Kingdom is not a reform of empire but a replacement.
- The abruptness reflects judgment: when truth confronts lies, when justice confronts violence, the legitimacy of empire collapses in an instant, even if its outward structures linger for a time.

2. Transformative growth of the Kingdom

- After the shattering, the stone grows into a mountain filling the whole earth. This is slow, organic, and expansive.
- The growth symbolizes transformation: God's reign spreads through changed hearts, communities, and societies, gradually reshaping the world.
- This is the "already/not yet" dynamic—empires are judged and shown to be doomed, but the Kingdom's full manifestation unfolds progressively.

Symbolic resonance

- Abrupt judgment: The moment of truth that exposes empire's fragility.
- Gradual transformation: The long process of God's reign becoming visible in human lives and communities.
- Mountain imagery: In biblical symbolism, mountains represent permanence, stability, and divine presence (e.g., Sinai, Zion). The stone becoming a mountain shows the Kingdom's permanence compared to the fleeting nature of empires.

Daniel's vision combines sudden judgment with gradual transformation. The Kingdom of God doesn't just topple empires—it grows into a new, enduring reality that fills the earth.

The Syrian empire was removed abruptly. This left a more tolerant space where lives could transform.

Yes—that's a strong historical example of the dynamic Daniel's vision captures. The abrupt removal of the Seleucid (Syrian) empire in the second century BCE, after the Maccabean revolt, illustrates how oppressive systems can collapse suddenly, leaving space for transformation.

How this fits the Kingdom imagery

- Abrupt removal: Like the stone smashing the statue, the Seleucid empire's grip on Judea was broken quickly, especially after Antiochus IV's harsh decrees provoked resistance.
- Space for transformation: Once the oppressive narrative and violent enforcement were dismantled, Jewish life could breathe again—restoring worship, law, and community.
- Tolerance and growth: The Hasmonean period that followed was far from perfect, but it allowed greater religious autonomy and cultural renewal compared to the suffocating control of the Seleucids.
- Symbolic resonance: This shows how the collapse of an empire's mechanisms (violence, greed, lies) can open a more tolerant space where God's reign can be realized in human lives.

The pattern

- Empire collapses abruptly → its legitimacy is exposed, consent withdrawn.
- Kingdom grows gradually → people realign with God's will, communities transform, truth spreads.
- This matches Daniel's imagery: the stone smashes suddenly, then grows into a mountain filling the earth.

Key takeaway: The fall of the Syrian empire is a historical echo of Daniel's vision—oppressive power can collapse abruptly, and the space left behind becomes fertile ground for transformation under God's reign.

Ideas can seed change, and when enough people live according to their belief then non-compliance, truth-telling, mutual protection and mutual aid break the hold of abusive power.

This is the Kingdom dynamic in action. Ideas, when rooted in truth and aligned with God's reign, become seeds that grow into communities of resistance and renewal. When enough people embody those ideas, the mechanisms of abusive power—violence, greed, and lies—lose their grip.

How ideas seed change

- Non-compliance: Refusing to participate in false narratives or unjust systems removes the consent that sustains them.
- Truth-telling: Exposes the lies that empires depend on, un-ravelling their legitimacy.
- Mutual protection: Communities safeguard one another against retaliation, making resistance sustainable.
- Mutual aid: Generosity and solidarity replace greed, creating alternative structures of belonging and survival.

Biblical resonance

- Jesus compared the Kingdom to a mustard seed—tiny at first, but growing into something vast that shelters many.
- The early church practiced mutual aid (Acts 2:44–45), embodying a new social dynamic that undermined Rome’s monopoly on power.
- Prophets like Jeremiah and Amos modelled truth-telling, that destabilized oppressive narratives.

Abusive power collapses when enough people live by truth and mutual care. The Kingdom of God spreads not by conquest but by ideas embodied in lives, transforming the social fabric until domination becomes impossible.

A Kingdom that Lasts Forever

Daniel 2:44: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed...” Is this the case, because you cannot destroy an idea?

That’s a very insightful way to read Daniel 2:44. The text says God will set up a kingdom that “shall never be destroyed,” and one way to understand this is that the Kingdom of God is not like human empires—built on armies, wealth, or territory—but on something indestructible: **truth, justice, and divine reality**.

Why the Kingdom cannot be destroyed

- **Not material, but spiritual:** Human empires fall because they rely on fragile structures—violence, greed, lies. The Kingdom of God is rooted in God’s eternal will, which cannot collapse.
- **Ideas and truth endure:** You’re right—truth cannot be destroyed. Even if suppressed, it resurfaces. The Kingdom is like an idea embodied in lives: once planted, it grows and spreads.
- **Divine origin:** Daniel emphasizes the stone “cut without hands.” This signals that the Kingdom is not human-made, so it cannot be undone by human power.
- **Shared inheritance:** In Daniel 7:27, the Kingdom is given to “the people of the saints of the Most High.” Because it is distributed among faithful lives, it cannot be extinguished by removing one ruler or one nation.

Symbolic resonance

- **Empires = statues:** impressive but brittle, vulnerable to collapse.
- **Kingdom = stone/mountain:** small at first, but grows into permanence.
- **Ideas as seeds:** Once truth is embodied, it spreads through communities, and no empire can erase it.

Daniel’s vision points to a Kingdom that is indestructible precisely because it is not built on fragile human power but on God’s eternal truth. In that sense, yes—it is like an idea that cannot be destroyed, because it is rooted in divine reality and embodied in transformed lives.

The Kingdom of God is a grass-roots movement. It manifests in each individual. So, it cannot be extinguished by bribing a single leader, or by corrupting a single party?

Exactly—that’s the radical strength of the Kingdom of God. Unlike human empires, which concentrate power in rulers, armies, or parties, the Kingdom is distributed. It manifests in each individual who aligns their free will with God’s reign.

Why the Kingdom cannot be extinguished

- **Grass-roots embodiment:** Every believer becomes a living witness of God’s reign. It’s not centralized in one throne or institution.
- **Immune to corruption of leaders:** Because the Kingdom is not dependent on a single ruler, bribing or corrupting one person cannot destroy it.

- Decentralized consent: Oppressive powers rely on mass consent to lies. The Kingdom spreads through truth embodied in countless lives, making it resilient.
- Community resilience: Mutual aid, truth-telling, and non-compliance create networks of resistance that cannot be dismantled by targeting one node.
- Divine permanence: Daniel's vision of the stone growing into a mountain shows that the Kingdom is rooted in God's eternal will, not fragile human structures.

Symbolic resonance

- Empires are statues—impressive but brittle, vulnerable to collapse when their foundations are exposed.
- The Kingdom is a stone—small, ordinary, but indestructible, growing into a mountain that fills the earth.
- Because it is embodied in individuals and communities, it is immune to the “single point of failure” that makes empires fragile.

The Kingdom of God is a grass-roots movement of transformed lives. It cannot be extinguished by corrupting leaders or parties, because its power is decentralized, embodied in truth, and sustained by God's eternal reign.

I suppose that the will of God is by nature Good, so it does not need force for enforcement. It spreads from person to person, in a sense like a viral email, self-perpetuating and independent of enforcement by any authority, nation or leader?

Yes—that's a profound way to put it. The will of God is inherently good, so it doesn't require coercion or external enforcement. Unlike human empires, which rely on violence, fear, and manipulation to sustain themselves, the Kingdom of God spreads organically—through truth, love, and justice embodied in people's lives.

Why God's will spreads without force

- Intrinsic goodness: Because it aligns with what is true and just, it resonates deeply with conscience and doesn't need compulsion.
- Person-to-person transmission: Like your “viral email” analogy, the Kingdom spreads through testimony, example, and lived witness. Each life aligned with God becomes a message that inspires others.
- Self-perpetuating dynamic: Once truth is embodied, it generates more truth; once mercy is practiced, it inspires more mercy. The Kingdom multiplies without centralized enforcement.
- Independent of authority: No nation or leader can monopolize or extinguish it, because it is decentralized and rooted in God's eternal reign.

Biblical resonance

- Jesus compared the Kingdom to yeast that works through the whole batch of dough (Matthew 13:33)—quiet, invisible, but unstoppable.
- The mustard seed parable shows how something small grows into shelter for many, without force or decree.

- The Spirit at Pentecost empowered ordinary people, not rulers, to carry the Kingdom forward.

Key takeaway: The Kingdom of God spreads like living truth—self-perpetuating, resilient, and independent of coercion. It doesn't need armies or decrees because its power lies in goodness itself, embodied and shared.

Love begets love

Yes—love begets love is the essence of how the Kingdom of God spreads. Unlike empire, which multiplies fear and violence, the Kingdom multiplies love through reciprocity and resonance. When one person embodies love, it awakens love in another, creating a chain reaction that no authority can suppress.

How love generates more love

- Reciprocity: Acts of kindness invite kindness in return, breaking cycles of hostility.
- Resonance: Love resonates with the deepest human longing for connection and meaning, making it contagious.
- Transformation: When love is practiced, it changes both giver and receiver, expanding the circle of God's reign.
- Resistance to empire: Love undermines systems built on fear and greed, because it refuses to comply with domination.

Biblical resonance

- *"We love because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19): God's love initiates the cycle.
- Jesus' command to *"love one another as I have loved you"* (John 13:34) shows how divine love multiplies through human relationships.
- The early church's mutual care was so radical that outsiders remarked, *"See how they love one another."*

Love is self-perpetuating. Once embodied, it multiplies across lives and communities, becoming the grassroots engine of the Kingdom of God.

