

 <p>The logo for Waiuku Assembly of God features a stylized sun with rays in yellow and orange, with the word 'Waiuku' written in a blue script font across it. Below the sun are three wavy blue lines representing water. At the bottom, the words 'ASSEMBLY OF GOD' are written in a grey, sans-serif font.</p>	<p><b>Chris Woodham</b>          Senior Pastor          PO Box 196          Waiuku 1852          PH: (09) 235 7341          MOB: (021) 187 1928          Email: <a href="mailto:waiukuag@wag.org.nz">waiukuag@wag.org.nz</a>          Web: <a href="http://www.wag.org.nz">www.wag.org.nz</a></p>
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<b>Sermon Title</b>	: <b><i>What is the Kingdom of God?</i></b>
<b>Series</b>	: Living in the Kingdom of God
<b>Date Preached</b>	: 15 <sup>th</sup> May 05

## Introduction

We're beginning our new series on "Living in the Kingdom of God."

Two weeks ago we concluded our series on fellowship in the Church. We looked at some of the incredible benefits of being in fellowship with one another, how it's necessary for our relationship with God to flourish and for all of us as individuals and united as The Church to fulfil God's plans, purposes and commands for us.

But it's not that simple – fellowship with each other relies on a right relationship with God as individuals, in fact, when we have a growing and committed relationship with God then fellowship with each other comes naturally.

So we're going to spend a couple of weeks exploring this concept of "Living in the Kingdom of God" because this is something that will cause us to grow in our relationship with God and our relationship with each other and in our usefulness to God.

Does anyone want to be useful to God?

Today we're going to begin this series by looking at three concepts of the Kingdom of God. There is the Kingdom of God as first described in the Old Testament, then there's the Kingdom of God which Jesus described in the Gospels, and then there's the future, or eternal Kingdom of God which is hinted to us throughout the New Testament and we see it revealed in the book of Revelation.

# The Kingdom of God – OLD TESTAMENT

The first we really hear of the Kingdom of God is in the book of Exodus.

In Exodus chapter 19, 2 months after the Israelites had left Egypt; God speaks to them through Moses.

## **Exodus 19:5-6 (NIV)**

*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."*

God reveals His plan for Israel – that they be a nation that exists for God. "Holy" means 'set apart' – so Israel was to be a nation of people devoted to God, ruled by God, living under God's blessing and serving God's purposes.

For the most part, the Old Testament view of the Kingdom of God was of God ruling over the nation of Israel.

A few pages back, in **Exodus 15:18 (NIV)**, The Song of Moses and Miriam, it says *"The LORD will reign for ever and ever."*

## **Numbers 23:21 (NIV)**

*"No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them."*

## **Deuteronomy 33:5 (CEV)**

*Then you and your leaders made the LORD your king.*

## **Isaiah 43:15 (NIV)**

*I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King."*

We see a view of God's Kingdom being expressed through His rulership and blessing of Israel. But God's Kingdom isn't just restricted to the nation of Israel, even in the Old Testament.

## **2 Kings 19:15 (NIV)**

*And Hezekiah prayed to the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.*

## **Psalms 47:2 (NIV)**

How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth!

**Psalm 96:10 (MSG)**

*Get out the message--GOD Rules! He put the world on a firm foundation; He treats everyone fair and square.*

God is shown to be King over the whole earth, not just the King of Israel. His Kingdom is the whole world and everything in it because He created it, He is in charge – He rules.

What we are given is the picture of Almighty God who, because of Who He Is, rules the World. The pictures given show an understanding of God ruling like the perfect king would rule; benevolent, fair, just, merciful – but also one who needs to be respected, to be held in Holy fear and awe, revered.

So God chose Israel to have a special place under His authority, and although He was not their king in a physical, earthly sense, there was an expectation that there would come a day when God would truly become King on earth and rule literally over His Kingdom here.

**Isaiah 24:23 (MSG)**

*Shamefaced moon will cower, humiliated, red-faced sun will skulk, disgraced, Because GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies will take over, ruling from Mount Zion and Jerusalem, Splendid and glorious before all his leaders.*

**Zechariah 14:9 (NLT)**

*And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one LORD--his name alone will be worshiped.*

**Old Testament Summary**

What we see in the Old Testament is the Kingdom of God being the earth – although not restricted to it – simply because God is God and He is in charge. From that angle the concept of the Kingdom of God doesn't extend beyond God's Kingdom being the place where God rules.

In a special way, God is King over the nation of Israel, His chosen people – and we see a better picture of God's Kingdom being where God is recognised and worshipped as ruler and where God's blessing, protection and judgement are evident. This revelation of the Kingdom of God is imperfect though, because the Israelites still rebelled against God's laws and authority, Israel didn't always win their wars and were constantly at threat from neighbouring countries.

This view of the Kingdom of God exists in a world where God's people were still subject to the evils of the world around them, but the prophets revealed there would be a day when God would literally rule over Israel and the whole world in person and presence. The main emphasis is on the hope of God establishing His perfect rule in the world.

## The Kingdom of God – Future

We're now going to look in a bit more detail at the Kingdom of God to come.

There are a few questions we'll be answering:

1. What will it be like?
2. What's the point of it all?
3. How will it happen?
4. When will it happen?

The Kingdom of God that the Old Testament prophets looked forward to and which we too can join in the hope of is a time when God's will is always and perfectly accomplished.

At this present age, which is known as the "Church Age", we still experience hardships, things don't always happen the way they should or the way we would like them to.

God is in control, but doesn't exercise His complete authority over the earth or over us – we voluntarily submit to God's desires and authority and as such can enjoy the benefits of a relationship with Him.

The closest picture we have of the Kingdom of God being fully realised on earth is the Garden of Eden where God walked with Adam and Eve and there was a close, intimate relationship. There was no decay as such and the Bible shows that Adam and Eve and their offspring had the opportunity to experience this for ever if they continued to obey God.

Obviously this illustration is deficient because of the presence of temptation – the influence of Satan. When God's Kingdom is again established on earth there will be perfection and *everything* will be subject to His perfect rule. His Kingdom will be one of restoration and redemption.

In Isaiah we are given a glimpse of this Kingdom; he describes an environment of untroubled joy, prosperity, peace and righteousness. God revealed Himself when He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, then He revealed Himself through Jesus Christ; His final visitation will be when Jesus returns. It will mean the redemption of the world for a redeemed world is the scene of the Kingdom of God we look forward to.

The prophet Isaiah paints this picture of the redeemed earth, this is from Isaiah 35: he talks about the desert blossoming, the burning sands made cool, and the dry places becoming springs of water. Further back in Isaiah he speaks of peace in the animal world resulting in there being no more injury or destruction.

All this is the result of Jesus returning and revealing Himself to the world so that the whole earth will come to the full knowledge of Him.

The story of history is the story of God's revelation to us; it reveals the nature of God who created people to love Him and for Him to love but left the choice up to them. It tells the story of God who made the perfect environment for His creation and assured them of everlasting peace and prosperity if they committed themselves to Him. The rest of the story reveals God maintaining His purity and standards but making a way for those who love Him to have fellowship with Him.

First through the imagery of the temple and the sacrifices God gave Israel a means by which they could come under His blessing and enter into fellowship with Him – this part of the story is a repetitive one of God's people rejecting and disobeying Him and pursuing their own agenda's, of them realising the effects of not being under God's blessing and out of relationship with Him. Time and time again they repented, returned to God, God blessed them and restored them until next time.

And then entered Jesus...

The Old Testament reveals that people cannot attain God's standards through their own strength or ability.

Jesus reveals God's love for us that makes that way possible.

When Adam and Eve failed to live up to God's standards the process of earth's decay began and hasn't stopped since. People get old and sick and injured and die; everything on and in the earth decays. This is not the world God intended, but it's one He has allowed to demonstrate both His love for us and our dependence on Him.

When Jesus returns, this process of decay will cease because in the redemption of the earth all things become as God created them to be.

This is the point of the Kingdom; God created us and the earth so we could have a perfect relationship with Him in a perfect environment. We were created to be objects of God's affection and attention and to love Him in response to Who He is. God didn't want a world full of mindless robots worshipping Him because they had to, so we have free will that we may *choose* to acknowledge God. History has proven that God's love for us is limitless and the culmination of it will be when everyone has been given the opportunity, whether they take it or not, to respond to God's love.

At that point God's Kingdom will be established by Jesus on earth and those who have, of their own free will, accepted God for Who He is will be able to enjoy the benefits of this Kingdom.

I'm not talking about heaven; this is when Jesus returns to earth. We're not going to get into any deep eschatology, or discussion about what happens when Jesus returns etc in this series, maybe some other day.

There's no point in discussing the future for its own sake, what we're setting the scene for is how this future that has been revealed impacts us today. We need to be looking at how God's will is present and working in our lives today, not some event that may or may not happen in our lifetimes.

What I want to paint a picture of is the purpose of God's Kingdom and how it has been revealed and how it will be revealed according to the Old Testament.

## **The Kingdom of God – New Testament / Today**

Jesus' teachings were consumed with the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist proclaimed to the people "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."<sup>1</sup>

Matthew describes the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry "from that time on Jesus began to preach "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."<sup>2</sup>

On nearly every page of the Gospel's Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. He promised it to those who are not self-reliant, to those who are humble before God, to those who are righteous. He prayed that God's Kingdom may come. Jesus' ministry was all about the Kingdom of God. His life, death and resurrection were all for the Kingdom.

Jesus taught that God's Kingdom could be known and experienced today, right now, this very present day, but that it was also a future hope where we will experience the Kingdom of God completely.

J I. Packer writes: "The kingdom is present in its beginnings though future in its fullness; in one sense it is here already, but in the richest sense it is still to come."<sup>3</sup>

One aspect of the Kingdom of God that was very present in the Old Testament, but which I purposely left until now was the coming of God's Kingdom with the Messiah. A metaphor of God's Kingdom was revealed through King David in the Old Testament, but the coming Jesus, the Messiah, heralded that God's Kingdom has come and is present on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3:2 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:17 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> J I. Packer *Concise Theology: A Guide to Christian Beliefs*

As I mentioned, it's not present in its full revelation, but through Jesus coming to earth, His death and resurrection and ascension to heaven, the Kingdom of God was thrust into history.

This aspect of the Kingdom of heaven is the fulfilment of the redemptive work of God, by that I mean that through Jesus the Kingdom of God has come in its completeness but will not be fully revealed until He returns.

The Kingdom of God is where God reigns and people's fellowship is restored with Him. This is what Jesus has done; this is what we enter into when we begin a relationship with Jesus.

### **Luke 4:16-21 (MSG)**

*He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,*

*God's Spirit is on me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act!"*

*He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."*

The Old Testament spoke of the Messiah and of the *future* coming of the Kingdom of God, John the Baptist said that it was *near*, Jesus said "*here it is, right here, right now.*"

It's not about a future kingdom but a present salvation which enables Christians to enter into the place of God's rule and blessing and power and authority *today* – then, when Jesus returns, the fullness of God's Kingdom will be realised in that "every knee will bow before [Him]; every tongue confess to God."<sup>4</sup>

God's offer of salvation is the present reality of His Kingdom. When we voluntarily acknowledge that God is our God, that we are subject to Him, and that our lives must be lived according to His desires, then God's Kingdom has come in our lives."

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 4:11 (NIV)

*“God’s future kingdom rule brings to his people the blessings of that kingdom. Yet if God’s kingdom is also his rule invading history before the end of time, then we may expect God’s rule in the present to bring a preliminary blessing to his people.”<sup>5</sup>*

By accepting Jesus as Lord of our lives we are entering the place of God’s rule which is part of His future Kingdom. If God’s future rule over earth is something we can embrace now, then obviously the things that accompany God’s future rule, like peace and power and righteousness and blessing, these things are future reality’s that we can experience now.

## **What is the Kingdom of God?**

The Kingdom of God is wherever God rules. Officially, God rules everything because He is God, but He does not enforce His authority because His plan is for humans to accept His revelation to us of His love voluntarily submit to His Kingship out of love for Him, not obligation.

When Jesus returns, as He promised He will do, He will establish God’s Kingdom here on earth in all its fullness. But when Jesus first came He made available the experience of living in that future Kingdom possible to a certain degree today for those who would accept Him.

This series we have begun will be focusing solely on Living in God’s Kingdom today.

## **Conclusion**

‘Seeking God’s Kingdom’ in our lives today means making Jesus King of our lives. It’s a process possible only with the help of the Holy Spirit and an attitude of surrender to self.

Once we’ve accepted that we need God’s mercy and forgiveness to enter a relationship with Him then we’ve only come to a place where this process can begin.

This is where we need to begin asking ourselves: Is Jesus King of our time? Is Jesus King of our desires? Is Jesus King of our ambitions and dreams? Is Jesus King of our attitudes? Is Jesus King of the things we say? Is Jesus King of our wallets? Is Jesus King of our relationships?

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<sup>5</sup> I. Packer *Concise Theology: A Guide to Christian Beliefs*



God's Kingdom is where His rule and authority are accepted and are absolute. It's where we can experience life in God's Kingdom as Jesus and the Disciples did.

Let me conclude with this well-known passage from Luke.

### **Luke 12:22-34 (MSG)**

#### ***Steep Yourself in God-Reality***

<sup>22</sup>He continued this subject with his disciples. "Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. <sup>23</sup>There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. <sup>24</sup>Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.

<sup>25</sup>"Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? <sup>26</sup>If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? <sup>27</sup>Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance--but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. <sup>28</sup>If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?

<sup>29</sup>"What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving. <sup>30</sup>People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. <sup>31</sup>Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. <sup>32</sup>Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.

<sup>33</sup>"Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bankrobbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. <sup>34</sup>It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.