

# The Kingdom of God



## The Kingdom

In his book *God's Big Picture*, Vaughan Roberts sees "the kingdom of God" as the unifying theme that binds the whole Bible together.<sup>1</sup> Roberts divides the Bible into eight sections, "which are the main epochs in God's unfolding plan to restore his kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

### Old Testament

1. *The pattern of the kingdom.* Eden as a model of what God's kingdom was meant to be.
2. *The perished kingdom.* The results of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God's rule.
3. *The promised kingdom.* God's promise to Abraham to re-establish his kingdom through Abraham's seed (offspring).
4. *The partial kingdom.* Partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Israel's history.
5. *The prophesied kingdom.* (see below)

### New Testament

6. *The present kingdom.*
7. *The proclaimed kingdom.*
8. *The perfected kingdom.*

The following notes use some of Vaughan Roberts' headings, though the order does not follow the chronological sequence of his presentation.

## The Prophesied Kingdom

Isaiah<sup>3</sup> prophesied concerning the kingdom of God. Isaiah 11:3-5 says the Messiah will bring righteousness and justice upon the earth.<sup>4</sup>

1. What other characteristics of the kingdom are mentioned in the following verses?

⚙ Isaiah 11:6-9

⚙ Isaiah 25:6-8



<sup>1</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 21. Actually, 'the kingdom of God' is one of several 'unifying themes.' This course has taken more of a 'promise (or covenant)/fulfillment' approach.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, 23-26. The eight headings listed below form the structure of Robert's presentation.

<sup>3</sup> Most scholars date Isaiah's prophetic ministry around 740-690 BC. See Lesson 11.

<sup>4</sup> Associated with the Messiah's reign is Israel's return to the 'promised land' (*Isaiah 11:10-16*). The Bible records a partial return between 537 and 445 BC, but this falls short of Isaiah's prophecy, as well as numerous other prophecies (e.g. *Jeremiah 32:37-38; 33:1-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Amos 9:11-15*). So how are these prophecies fulfilled? Bible scholars differ. Dispensationalists say the prophecies concerning the land will be literally fulfilled in the millennial kingdom, and apply specifically to ethnic Israel (see 'Millennial Kingdom Definitions' on page 4). Some say Israel's establishment as a state in 1948 is part of this fulfillment. Other scholars say God's promise of the physical land (in Palestine) was conditional, and its realization was forfeited by Israel's disobedience and rebellion. Covenant theologians tend to see the prophecies as pointing to a greater fulfillment in the new heaven and the new earth, which is the final state of the kingdom of God (*Revelation 21:1-2*). Some covenant theologians see a future earthly millennial kingdom, while others do not. See *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, edited by Robert C. Clouse (InterVarsity Press, 1977).

## The Promised Kingdom

In about 5 BC, a baby was born and given the name Jesus. This child was *the* promised seed of Abraham through whom all peoples and nations on earth would be blessed. He was the fulfillment of the Law. The Law pointed to Him. Jesus was *the* High Priest and *the* final atoning sacrifice for sins. His death on the cross provided the way for forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation (restored relationship) between God and humans from every nation, resulting in a new people of God. Jesus was the promised son of David, who would rule over God's kingdom forever.



## The Proclaimed Kingdom

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah Jesus. He proclaimed, "Repent (turn from your sins and turn to God), for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (*Matthew 3:2, NIV*). When Jesus began his public ministry, he proclaimed the same message (*Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15*). And Jesus told his disciples to proclaim the same message (*Matthew 10:7*).

## The Present Kingdom

When Jesus was accused of driving out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus replied that he cast out demons by the Spirit of God. He said, "if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (*Matthew 12:28, NIV*).<sup>5</sup>

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." (*Luke 17:20-21, NIV*).<sup>6</sup>

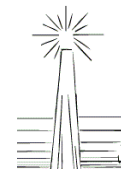
Thus Jesus indicated the kingdom was present in some way. But Jesus also said things that indicated the kingdom was future.<sup>7</sup> For example, when Jesus was eating the last supper with his disciples, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (*Luke 22:17-18, NIV*).

## The Perfected Kingdom

The future and greatest aspect of the kingdom may be called "the perfected kingdom."

2. What characteristics of the kingdom are mentioned in the following verses?<sup>8</sup>

⚙ Revelation 21:1-5<sup>9</sup>



<sup>5</sup> 'has come' (*epthasen*) – the kingdom has arrived and is present. The 'kingdom of God has come' because the King (Messiah Jesus) has arrived and the Spirit of God is overpowering the rule of Satan. The kingdom, as 'the dynamic reign of God,' is not yet fully visible, but can be realized in the hearts of those who submit their lives to the King.

<sup>6</sup> 'is in your midst' (*entos hymōn estin*) – the kingdom is in their presence because Jesus, the King, is in their presence.

<sup>7</sup> If we continue to read in Luke 17 (verses 22-37), it is obvious that something more needs to happen.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that these verses refer to the final state of the kingdom of God. 'Premillennialists' believe that a 'millennial kingdom' (*Revelation 20:1-6*) will precede the final state – the new heaven and the new earth.

<sup>9</sup> The kingdom is totally new. Isaiah also spoke of a new heaven and a new earth (*Isaiah 65:17*). God will dwell with his people (as promised in the new covenant, *Jeremiah 31:33-34*). The effects of sin (death, crying, pain) will be abolished (*cf. Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54*).

⚙ Revelation 22:1-5<sup>10</sup>



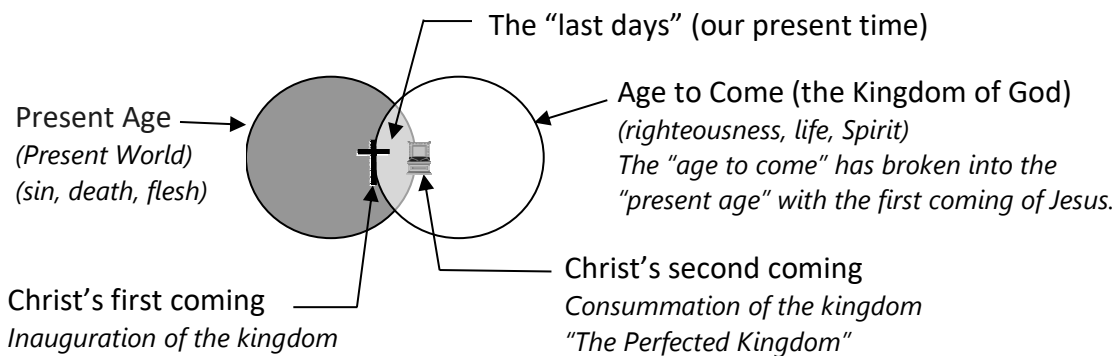
The future, perfected kingdom will bring restoration of the harmony and purpose experienced in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 1:31*), but it will be much better. It will last forever!

**Living in the Kingdom**

To experience and enjoy the benefits of the kingdom of God we must enter the kingdom.

3. Read John 3:3. What is needed for a person to see or enter (*3:5-7*) the kingdom of God?
  
4. As he talks about "the true light" (Jesus Christ), John says what is needed for a person to be "born again" or "born of God."<sup>11</sup> Read John 1:9-13. What is needed?<sup>12</sup>

We enter the kingdom when we believe in Jesus Christ and entrust our lives to him. But we still live in this present fallen world, which is full of struggles and troubles. So we look forward to the future, perfected kingdom. See the diagram below.



5. As Christians, how should we live our daily lives in relation to the kingdom of God? How can the kingdom encourage us when we face difficulties, disappointments and troubles?

📖 *Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-10, NIV)*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The flowing river symbolizes eternal life flowing from God. The 'tree of life' (*Genesis 2:9*) will provide fruit to eat continuously. The curse (due to sin) will be removed. They will 'see his face,' representing the ultimate relationship with God (*Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2*). God's presence/glory will provide the light (*cf. Isaiah 60:19-20*). They will 'reign for ever and ever.' When God created the earth, he said, 'let them rule over [the creation]' (*Genesis 1:26*).

<sup>11</sup> 'Born again,' 'born from above,' 'born of God' – refers to the new life (regeneration) brought by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, God's grace is needed! We are born 'of God.' But human response (belief/faith in Christ) is also involved.

<sup>13</sup> This request includes the future establishment of God's kingdom when Christ returns. But it is not limited to that. The King *has* come, and the kingdom has broken into this age. Thus praying for God's kingdom to come also includes expansion of his kingdom, and a greater manifestation (visibility) of his kingdom on earth through God's people.

- 📖 *Jesus said, "seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33, NIV)*<sup>14</sup>
- 📖 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe." (Hebrews 12:28, NIV)
- 📖 "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:13-14, NIV)
- 📖 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." (1 Peter 1:3-6, NIV)



## Reflection & Application

- Do you want the blessings of the kingdom of God? You must be "born again" through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you have questions about this? Do you need to trust in Jesus?
- Brothers and sisters, realization of the kingdom is both present and future. In what ways is God's rule evident in your life today? In what ways does looking forward to the perfected kingdom make a difference in your daily life? Read and reflect on the above verses.

## Millennial Kingdom Definitions

Millennium (Millennial Kingdom) – the period of time referred to in Revelation 20. There are various interpretations of the "millennium" relative to the eternal kingdom described in Revelation 21:1-22:5. The three most common views are defined below:<sup>15</sup>

- Dispensational Premillennial View – Christ will return and establish a visible, earthly kingdom for 1000 years, prior to the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. The prophecies concerning Israel's return to the promised land will be literally fulfilled in the Millennium. Thus ethnic Israel has a distinct position in the Millennium.
- "Covenant Premillennial" View – Christ will return and establish a visible, earthly kingdom for "1000 years,"<sup>16</sup> prior to the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. The prophecies concerning Israel's return to the promised land are fulfilled in the Church. Thus ethnic Israel is not necessarily distinct in the Millennium.
- Amillennial View – the millennium describes the present kingdom. Christ will return and establish the new heaven and new earth of the eternal kingdom. There will be no temporal, earthly kingdom prior to the final state of the eternal kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> To 'seek God's kingdom' is to seek God's rule or reign. That begins with God's rule in our own lives. And we must seek to advance his kingdom through the gospel of Christ. To 'seek God's righteousness' is to promote the will of God on earth. We should seek God's moral will for our own lives, and we should seek God's moral will for this earth.

<sup>15</sup> It may be difficult to decide which view is best. However, all Christians should accept the fundamental teaching that Christ will visibly return; judge the world; and establish his everlasting, glorious kingdom. Another major view (more popular in the past) is the 'Postmillennial View,' which says the millennium describes a prolonged period of peace and prosperity prior to Christ's return, brought about by Christianization of the world.

<sup>16</sup> According to this view, the '1000 years' is not necessarily a literal 1000 years.

<sup>17</sup> The new heavens and new earth fulfill the land promise given to the patriarchs.