

Session 8

Case study: the kingdom of God

In this session we select a Bible topic for investigation—the kingdom of God. We begin by using tools covered earlier, then we complete the task by answering some specific questions. You will be amazed at the wonders laid up in store for this earth when sin is overcome at last and God’s plan is perfected in his son Jesus, and all those willing to become his friends.

The good news to come

In this final session, let us apply the ideas covered in the earlier sessions. Already you have gained confidence in the Bible as the word of God on the basis of:

- your own reading;
- the amazing story of how our Bible has come down to us;
- archaeology, biblical medicine and the resurrection of Jesus;
- Bible prophecy; and
- Bible echoes.

In the previous session, you applied some Bible study tools in researching some simple Bible ideas.

Having taken this course, you should now be able to investigate topics for yourselves. To get you started, we will use what you have learned in investigating an important Bible theme. Later, you can undertake similar investigations yourself with confidence.

What topic would be worthy of our investigation in this last session? Most human beings seem to be optimistic at heart, and this leads us to ask about the future and what it holds for us as individuals, families, and nations. What does the Bible hold out for us as good news? This is partly prompted by what the world is like now; it is in a sad state. So let's use this last session to explore *what God promises about the future*. Will there even be a new tomorrow?

Aren't we all looking for a time, and hoping for it, when there will be:

No more pain
 No more suffering
 Nor persecution
 Nor cruelty
 Nor hunger
 Nor neglect
 Nor disillusionments
 Nor broken promises
 Nor death.

(Taken from an old sermon by Peter Marshall.)

Can the Bible, the word of God, tell us whether such a time will ever come, and if so just when these hopes will be realized? Let's find out.

A good start

The idea of a world without pain and suffering sounds familiar to Bible readers—it is an echo of things we've read before. If you can't remember where, a concordance is a good tool to use. We can try the words 'pain' and 'suffering', or 'tears' and 'mourning', and the ideas of them being "no more". Very quickly you will find verses like this one:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. *(Revelation 21:4)*

So there is a time coming when our hopes will be realized. Remember the use of cross references, to let the Bible explain itself by leading you to other verses with similar ideas to the one you're checking. Cross references from Revelation 21:4 lead us to verses like this:

... and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. *(Isaiah 35:10)*

Elsewhere, the Bible refers to this “new tomorrow”, as the *kingdom of God*.

Matthew's gospel calls it the “kingdom of heaven”.

A prophetic Bible echo

Read Jeremiah 23:5 and then Luke 1:32–33, which was written about 600 years after Jeremiah's words.

“The days are coming”, declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.”
(Jeremiah 23:5)

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. *(Luke 1:32–33)*

- What similarities do you observe in the two quotations?
- To whom are the quotations referring? How can you be sure?
- Both quotations mention David, who lived several hundreds of years before Jeremiah. What covenant did God make with David that is relevant here?
- To what time(s) do these prophecies refer?
- Isaiah 11 also refers to a special “branch” and says that it will come from the roots of Jesse. Who was Jesse and what is meant by his roots?

So you have worked it out for yourself! A son of David will be in charge: the righteous son of David—the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you continue to read, you will find more Bible echoes—things that remind you of other things that you have already read.

Filling in the details

We could continue in this way to build up a Bible picture of the kingdom of God, the time in the future when this world will be made right. But it would take too long for this session. So, instead, we will ask leading questions and go over the Bible answers together. This way you can see the whole picture now, and be able to check the details for yourself at your own speed later.

► What have we seen already?

That Jesus will be king, that tears and mourning will be forgotten, and that happiness and joy will be the norm.

► When will this happy time begin?

It will be when Jesus returns to this earth. We see this plainly in many Bible verses. In fact, we are told about 300 times that Jesus will return. For example, soon after Jesus rose from the grave, and just before he was taken to heaven, the disciples were with him. They asked (in Acts 1:6) whether he would restore the kingdom of Israel *then*. Jesus replied that first the gospel had to be preached “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

As the disciples stood with Jesus he was taken away from them into heaven, but immediately God sent angels with the promise:

This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven,
will come back in the same way you have seen him go into
heaven. (Acts 1:11)

Although Jesus did not tell them exactly when he would come, he had already told them of things that would happen just before he returned. In a long prophecy (often called the Olivet prophecy) he spoke about a terrible time of distress to come, but that it would be shortly followed by:

the Son of Man [Jesus himself] coming on the clouds of the
sky, with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

Pointers to the time of Jesus' return

What do we learn from each of the following passages about the time when Jesus will return?

- Forecasting the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, Jesus said in **Luke 21:24**:
They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.
- Jeremiah prophesied of happier times that would come in the future, even before Israel was conquered and many of its inhabitants taken captive to Babylon in about 586 BC. Read **Jeremiah 23:5–9**. What two significant events are mentioned in these verses?
- Read **Luke 21:25–31**. Are any of the signs that Jesus mentions in these verses applicable to the present time?

To share in the joy of God's kingdom after the return of Jesus we must be ready for his return at *all* times because we don't know the *exact* time (Matthew 24:44). Jesus warns us not to follow false signs (Matthew 24:24–26) because:

... as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

(Matthew 24:27)

► How long will the kingdom of God last?

Forever, because as we saw above in Luke 1:33, it will never end! Here are just a few of the many other verses with this same wonderful news.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. *(Daniel 2:44)*

May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. *(Psalm 72:17)*

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. *(Revelation 11:15)*

► How far will God's kingdom extend?

We have seen already that it is on the *earth*; just imagine this earth being changed and made glorious. Isaiah saw something of this when he wrote:

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." *(Isaiah 35:1–4)*

God's kingdom will fill the earth—it will be worldwide, for:

He will rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth... All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. *(Psalm 72:8,11)*

► Will God's kingdom have a capital?

Yes it will. Jesus Christ will rule from Jerusalem, the city he once called "the city of the Great King" (Matthew 5:35). The prophet Jeremiah wrote

At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the LORD', and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. *(Jeremiah 3:17)*

► What about peace, security, health and justice?

One of the first things you would ask for would be *security*: freedom from fear, and peace to enjoy the fruits of your labour. In fact, you

would probably have a picture in your mind something like the one the prophet Micah gives us.

He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. *(Micah 4:3–4)*

When Jesus lived on earth nearly 2,000 years ago, he brought health to many who were sick by using the power that God had given him. In the kingdom of God, this power will again be seen. So we read:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. *(Isaiah 35:5)*

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. *(Isaiah 9:6–7)*

What does the Bible say about the resurrection and judgment?

- Who will be raised to life?
John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15; Daniel 12:2.
- Is it only those who have been raised to life who will receive the reward of immortality if they are judged to be worthy?
2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53.
- After the faithful have been rewarded with eternal life, what will they do?
2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; Revelation 20:4.
- In the kingdom of God, will everyone be immortal?
Isaiah 65:18–23; Zechariah 14:16–17.

► **Who will the people in the kingdom of God be?**

The first 1000 years of the kingdom will be somewhat different from the time following that. In the first 1000 years (commonly known as the “millennium”) some people will be immortal, and some not.

First Jesus will raise **those who have died** and who have known enough about God to be responsible to him. They will be raised from their graves to be judged at what is called the “judgment seat of Christ”. For example, the Bible teaches:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. *(2 Corinthians 5:10)*

After this judgment, the kingdom of God will commence with Jesus as the immortal king. He will also have immortal helpers who will be those judged worthy at that judgment.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. *(2 Timothy 2:11–12)*

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. *(Revelation 20:6)*

Those who have been judged unworthy will be destroyed, in what the Bible calls the second death.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. *(Revelation 2:11)*

But what of all **those still alive** when Jesus returns? We know that in the times of trouble when Jesus returns many will die, but there will still be many alive in this first stage of the kingdom. The Bible does speak about this a little, and what is said is fascinating. These people will be like we are now—mortal, aging and finally dying.

For the mortal population, conditions in God’s kingdom will exceed their most fervent hopes. They will live long and contented lives.

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. *(Isaiah 65:20)*

In Micah 4 we read of people who beat swords into farming tools, bring up children, plant vines and fig trees, sow seeds and enjoy great fruitfulness, all in an atmosphere free from fear. People will be taught God's ways and, if they are obedient, they will be finally changed by Jesus and granted immortality. The only other pictures of these closing times of the millennium are given in Revelation 20:7–15 and 1 Corinthians 15:24–28.

So we see that the people who will be in God's kingdom, whether they are dead or alive when Jesus returns, are the people who want to be there because it is God's kingdom. Wanting to be there will have caused people to change, to have learned God's ways and to have tried to lead a new life in Jesus Christ. Those in the kingdom will be those who have remembered that there is a judgment seat and that the decision of the judge is based on "the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Paul puts it this way

God will give to each person according to what he has done.
To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor
and immortality, he will give eternal life. (*Romans 2:6–7*)

Good news indeed

We began this session with the question: What Bible topic would be worthy of investigation, and would also test our newfound skills of Bible reading? We chose to investigate God's new tomorrow, or in his own words, the kingdom of God. A lot has been covered but you will see that there are many more questions to answer—for you to answer—to fully appreciate what God holds in store for those who love him.

It is our prayer that your life will become a living investigation of these things as you continue through daily Bible reading and prayer to draw closer to God our Father, and to feel the intimacy of the words

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal
life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn
the world, but to save the world through him. (*John 3:16*)

Homework

A refresher course on the kingdom of God.

In this session we have investigated the kingdom of God. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible talks about this worldwide kingdom on earth. It will be a time of prosperity, peace and righteousness. Here are some examples of the theme from different parts of the Bible.

What do you learn about the kingdom in each passage?

- Genesis 22:15–18
- Genesis 49:10
- 2 Samuel 7:12–16
- Psalm 72
- Isaiah 2:1–4
- Isaiah 35
- Jeremiah 30:18–22
- Ezekiel 37:24–28
- Daniel 2:44
- Zephaniah 3:8–9
- Zechariah 14:9–16
- Matthew 6:10
- Matthew 19:28
- Mark 13:26–27
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18
- Revelation 11:15–19
- Revelation 22:20

Further reading

- *Thine is the kingdom* by Peter Southgate.
- *Great news for the world* by Alan Hayward.

Ask the presenter if you wish to borrow a copy of either of these books.