

Theme: God Has a Plan for Us
Subject: **What Is the Kingdom of God?**
Reading: 2 Timothy chapter 4

After decades of fearless discipleship, the Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison preparing himself for his imminent execution. He did not know exactly when it would happen, but he knew that the time was short. So, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he wrote a letter of encouragement to his great friend Timothy. Our reading, **2 Timothy Chapter 4**, provides us with his final rallying words.

The Apostle looked forward to the return of Jesus Christ, the righteous judge, to raise him from the dead and to give him a place in his Kingdom. He looked forward to that wonderful time when all the faithful will be blessed with immortality. (See **2 Timothy 4:1,8**) Despite his forthcoming death, Paul was confident that God would not forget him. By the Lord's grace he would be in Christ's kingdom. This kingdom, which will be upon the earth with the 'promised land' of the Old Testament at its heart, is termed 'heavenly' – not because it is in heaven, but because it will be established upon God-given principles so that it becomes heavenly. The Apostle rejoices that he will be amongst the meek (*many of whom will, like him, have to be resurrected from the grave*) who will inherit the earth. (See **Matthew 5:5**)

All the faithful hold, most dearly, this great hope of Christ's coming Kingdom. The opening petitions of what we commonly call the Lord's prayer will be fulfilled: "*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**). The days of man's misrule and wickedness will, at last, come to an end. Jesus will return to the earth from heaven and "*The kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever!*" (**Revelation 11:15**)

The Apostle Paul, as he writes to Timothy about Christ's coming Kingdom, has uppermost in his mind God's promises to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and to faithful King David. We shall consider now the promises given to David that are recorded for us in **1 Chronicles Chapter 17** (please read the whole chapter).

King David, at that time secure and strong in his rulership over all Israel, asked God through the prophet Nathan whether he would be allowed to build a great Temple for his God. The answer came back that this honour would not be for him but for his son Solomon instead. However, in addition to this, David would be blessed with an even greater son who would not only build a physical house but also a dynasty - a royal house consisting of faithful men and women.

"And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever."
(**1 Chronicles 17:11-14**)

Now it is true that, in part, Solomon fulfilled these promises when he built a magnificent Temple during his reign – but they have a far greater fulfilment through Jesus. This is made abundantly clear about a thousand years later when the angel Gabriel speaks of these precious promises given to David when he says to the virgin Mary:

"Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.'"(**Luke 1:28-33**)

The child would also miraculously have God as his father as was prophesied. (See **1 Chronicles 17:13**) According to the long-standing prophecy of Micah, he too would be born in Bethlehem (See **Micah 5:2**). Amazingly, the Roman authorities (under the providence of God) proclaimed a special tax census that led Mary to make a long journey to the home of her ancestors, despite being heavily pregnant. Jesus was therefore born of the tribe of Judah, of the royal line and in the same birth-place as King David!

Throughout Jesus' ministry, those of faith recognised Jesus to be the promised seed (descendant) of King David. Despite much opposition, they believed he was the promised Messiah. In faith they called him the '*Son of David*'. Remember the occasion for example when Jesus healed two blind men: "*When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.' And their eyes were opened.*" (**Matthew 9:27-30**) There were even Gentiles (those who are not Jews) who, knowing of the promises given to King David, called him the '*Son of David*'. "*And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!'*" (**Matthew 15:22**). The woman's faith was rewarded that day and she will be blessed again at Christ's second coming.

During Jesus' ministry, he was eager to speak of his Kingdom. So, for example, we read in Luke's gospel: "*He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.'*" (**Luke 4:42-43**). He encouraged men and women to believe that he was the Messiah and to live faithfully before him.

After a life of perfect obedience, Jesus laid down his life in sacrifice that the problems of sin, disease and death may be addressed. We are thankful that he was "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (**John 1:29**) We also rejoice that God then raised him from the dead. He is now at the right hand of God and awaits the time when he shall return to the earth to establish his long-promised Kingdom in Israel.

The present events in the Middle East – in particular those involving the modern state of Israel – indicate that Jesus will soon return, according to Bible prophecy. He will make Jerusalem his capital city, as did his ancestor King David. He will sit upon the throne of David. Initially, there will be opposition at his coming – but the Lord's purpose will not be frustrated as we learn from the Psalms:

"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.' 'I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" (**Psalms 2:4-9**)

The borders of this realm will go beyond the disputed borders of the present State of Israel (See **Genesis 15:18-21**) and although he will be known as '*the King of Israel*' his rulership will extend throughout the whole earth. In him will all the nations of the earth be blessed. We should pray like the psalmist King David: "*Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, And the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, And will break in pieces the oppressor.*" (**Psalms 72:1-4**)

In fulfilment of the Davidic covenant, there will be a physical Temple built in Jerusalem – just as there was in King Solomon's days. The peoples of the earth will go up to Jerusalem to seek the righteousness, truth and blessing that the King will provide. The faithful of today (who are blessed with Jesus' immortality and righteousness at his coming judgement) will help in his wonderful administration.

The land of Israel will be like the Garden of Eden and as his reign takes root and flourishes, so all the dry lands of the Middle East will become more and more fertile. Eventually, all the physical earth will be cleansed and made beautiful. The problems of global warming, waste and want will all be overcome. Even more importantly, all the peoples of the earth will rejoice in the light of his wisdom and teaching.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:2-4)

It was the Apostle Paul’s rich understanding of what the Kingdom of God will be that gave him such an unshakeable conviction. He was confident of his reward. We too can join him in eager expectation. An invitation is given to us now to seek something far better than what this life and this age can provide as we read in Isaiah:

*“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; **And I will make an everlasting covenant with you —The sure mercies of David.**” (Isaiah 55:1-3)*

We can proceed now to learn even more about Jesus and his wonderful kingdom. We can become a disciple by confessing our sins and by being immersed into his saving name. We have a God-given opportunity to receive his forgiveness, to serve him faithfully and to wait, like the Apostle Paul, for Jesus’ appearing.

“Indeed, I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you – because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” (Isaiah 55:4-6)