

The Kingdom of God

A Sermon by Robert Jackson

(The handout on the final page of this document should be distributed at the beginning of the service.)

- This sermon will provide a technical analysis of the revelation of the Kingdom throughout Old Testament and New Testament history.
- One of the key megathemes of the Old Testament *and* New Testament is the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is the key link between the testaments as well.
- What is it? The concept of Kingdom could be used to generally to God's reign over the universe – “your kingdom stretches from everlasting to everlasting.”
- But *usually*, the Bible uses the term in a more restricted sense. The Kingdom of God has been defined as *God's people in God's place under God's rule*. Under the Old Testament, it was a nation. Under the New Testament, it is an assembly, which we call the church.
- This shift in the *nature* of the Kingdom is the key reason for the disjunctions between the Testaments. The Law of Moses was a constitution showing how to run a country under God. However, God's people no longer form a physical nation, and that is why the Law of Moses does not apply to us.

The text for this sermon is **Hebrews 12:18-29**. This passage is a key analysis of the glory of the New Covenant. Instead of analysing it, I will just note that it harks back to Mount Sinai, to the Law, to the Temple, and then says we have something greater. It is essential to understand develop of Kingdom throughout the Old Testament if we want to under the Kingdom today.

In regard to the handout, it is a very simple overview of some major occurrences of the Kingdom. It is nowhere near complete, but sometimes it's helpful to simplify in order to get a sense of the overall flow and scope of salvation history.

1. **Eden:** God's people are Adam and Eve, the place is Eden, and the rule is the Adamic Covenant. The Adamic Covenant includes all the commands and promises which established a relationship between God and Adam. (God always reaches out to people through a covenant). God said to be fruitful, to subdue the earth, to be united with your wife... Through these commands, God established our stewardship of the earth, the significance of marriage and the primacy of mankind in creation. The kingdom was lost in fall: Man rejected God's rule (by eating the apple) and therefore lost God's place (he was ejected from the garden). (There was a godly line that descended from Adam – the line of Seth. But since this is just a simple overview, we'll skip down to Noah).
2. **The Flood:** God works through Noah to save a faithful remnant in a sinful world. A mini-kingdom in a boat. The Noahide Covenant adds many new aspects to our standing before God (such as the need to secure justice for wrongdoings). The world is renewed after the flood... but then loses the plot again at Babel.

3. **Patriarchal Period:** Israel's history begins with the calling of Abraham. Many key promises are made to him: The land of Canaan, a nation, and to be a blessing to the earth. The Abrahamic Covenant is the covenant of salvation by faith ("Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness"). However, none of the promises are fulfilled and Jacob's descendents end up in slavery. All seems lost in during the bondage in Egypt.
4. **The Exodus:** The promises seem to be activated under Moses. The Exodus from Egypt is the most significant type of salvation in the Old Testament – it is constantly referred to as proof of God's faithfulness. However, a nation is *not* established – when the Hebrews *finally* reach Canaan, there is nothing but disunity, division and faithlessness during the Judges period.
5. **Judges Period:** The most complex period of Israel's history. Not really a kingdom period, but a time of several cycles of idolatry and repentance. Each righteous Judge brings about a "mini-salvation" for his people, and then the cycle repeats.
6. **United Monarchy:** The promises are realised. Under Saul, the Kingdom unites. Under David, there is (finally) spiritual leadership, and Jerusalem is captured. Under Solomon, the temple is built and the priesthood established. Solomon is both the perfecter of Israel and the architect of its destruction: As soon as the Kingdom is realised under Solomon, it is lost under his son (Rehoboam). The Kingdom divides almost immediately after Solomon's death. How can a divided Kingdom stand? The division of the Kingdom under Rehoboam is one of the greatest tragedies, and the rift is *never* healed.
7. **Nation of Judah:** Not much of a Kingdom period: More cycles, very similar to the Judges period. Eg: Gideon and Josiah are very similar leaders who rise up and rebuke idolatry, but as soon as they die the people relapse. The remnant nation is put to an end in the Babylonian Exile.
8. **The Kingdom in the Prophets:** One of the most significant representations of the Kingdom in the Bible is the Kingdom in prophecy. (The most heavy period of Prophetic activity was divided Kingdom period.) The prophets focus on the Kingdom coming in the Day of the Lord. Some aspects of these Kingdom visions are:
 - a. A faithful remnant will be spared. Eg: Isaiah prophesies the "root of Jesse".
 - b. Israel will be renewed. Eg: We will be at peace with animals; Ezekiel's vision of the rebuilt Temple.
 - c. There will be a New Covenant. It will be "written on our heart", we will all know the Lord, we will have a heart of flesh, the spirit will dwelling in us.
9. **The Return from Exile:** There were a number of returns under Haggai and Ezra, and Israel was re-established. Compare lines 8 and 9 on the sheet: All the *externals* of the Prophets' visions fulfilled (new nation, new Temple, mount Zion, Jerusalem, God's people, walls rebuilt...), but there was no heart! No spirit dwelt in the Temple, no new Covenant was given, no coming of the Lord! The Old Testament ends on a whimper.
10. **Jesus Christ:** Jesus brings in the Kingdom – a new, spiritual Kingdom. God's people are the followers of Christ, the place of the Kingdom is Jesus himself – there are about 50 references in the New Testament to Christians being those who are "in Christ". We must make out dwelling in Jesus to be the subjects of God's new Kingdom.

- Under the new Kingdom, there is no civil law, no country, no temple, no priests, no human king, no Zion – there are *no externals* of the old Kingdom at all! But, we have all the internals: A new heart, God’s spirit indwelling, our souls enthroned in heaven, we’re spiritually adopted, we receive perfect mercy and new life, we are heirs of an eternal Kingdom, we have come to thousands of angels... this is what Hebrews 12 is all about!
- True fulfilment of Prophetic hope is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ *is* the new Kingdom of God – he embodies it within his flesh. The Kingdom of Israel failed to be a priest to the nations, failed to show God’s love, failed to be a light to the Gentiles... but Jesus succeeded – *He* was light of world, *He* showed God’s love, *He* embraced Gentiles... Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God.
- All mankind failed. All of God’s people failed to stay faithful to Him and establish His Kingdom. But that is all irrelevant. Jesus Christ succeeded, and we share in his victory. That is why we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- The revelation of the New Testament is that the goal of the Kingdom is not a nation or a temple; it is not a priesthood or a dynasty – it is Jesus Christ: For us to receive him and live in Him forever.

The Kingdom of God Revealed through Biblical History

	Kingdom Type	Description/ Function	God's People...	In God's Place...	Under God's Rule	When was it lost?
1	Eden	Garden Paradise	Adam and Eve	Eden	Adamic Covenant (Gen 1-2)	Fall
2	The Flood	Mini-Kingdom	Noah's family	The Ark	Noahide Covenant (Gen 9)	Tower of Babel
3	Patriarchal Period	Kingdom Promised	Abraham's family line	Canaan	Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12, 15)	Bondage in Egypt
4	The Exodus	Promises Activated	The Hebrews	Israel	Sinai Covenant (Ex, Lev, Numb, Deut)	Falters after Joshua (Judges Period)
5	Judges Period	Mini-Salvations	Tribes of Israel	Israel	Sinai Covenant, Righteous Judges	(Cycles of rebellion and repentance)
6	United Monarchy	Kingdom Realised	Nation of Israel	Israel, Zion, Temple	Sinai Covenant, Davidic Dynasty, Aaronic Priesthood	Division under Rehoboam
7	Nation of Judah	Kingdom Remnant	Nation of Judah	Judah, Zion, Temple	Sinai Covenant, Davidic Dynasty, Aaronic Priesthood	Babylonian Exile
8	Kingdom in Prophecy	Kingdom Hope	Faithful Remnant	Restored Israel	New Covenant	(An eternal Kingdom)
9	Return from Exile	Kingdom Restored	Remnant of Exiles	Restored Israel	Sinai Covenant, Zadokite Priesthood	Conquest by Seleucids
10	Jesus Christ	Spiritual Kingdom	Followers of Christ	In Christ	Christ's Rule	(An eternal Kingdom)