

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

Summarized from *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, 131-134

In understanding Jesus' teaching and ministry, it is important to understand the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. The Jews of Jesus' day thought they were on the very brink of time, when God would step into history and bring an end to this age and usher in the age to come. The Greek word for the end they were looking for is *eschaton*. Thus to be *eschatological* in one's thinking meant to be looking for the end. The earliest Christians well understood this eschatological way of looking at life. For them, the events of Jesus' coming, his death and resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit were all related in their expectations about the 'coming of the end.'

The coming of the end also meant a new beginning—the beginning of God's new age — the messianic age. The new age was also referred to as the kingdom of God, which meant "the time of God's rule." This new age would be a time of righteousness (Isaiah 11:4-5), and people would live in peace (Isaiah 2:2-4). It would be a time of the fullness of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-30) when the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah would be realized (Jeremiah 31: 31-34, 32:38- 40). Sin and sickness would be done away with (Zechariah 13:1). Even the material creation would feel the joyful effects of this new age (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Jesus came and announced that the coming kingdom was at hand with his ministry (Mark 1:14-15). He cast out demons, worked miracles, and freely accepted the outcasts and sinners—all signs that the end had begun (Luke 11:20; Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 14:21; 15:1-2). Everyone kept watching him to see if he really was the coming one. Would he really bring in the messianic age with all of its' splendor? Then suddenly he was crucified—and the lights went out.

But no! There was a glorious sequel. On the third day he was raised from the dead and he appeared to many of his followers. Surely now he would "restore the kingdom of Israel" (Acts 1:6). But instead he returned to the Father and poured out the promised Spirit. Very early, beginning with Peter's sermon in Acts 3, the early Christians came to realize that Jesus had not come to usher in the final end, but the "beginning" of the end, as it were. Thus they came to see that with Jesus' death and resurrection, and with the coming of the Spirit, the blessings and benefits of the future had already come. In a sense, therefore, the end had already come. But in another sense, the end had not yet come. Thus it was "already," but "not yet."

The early believers, therefore, learned to be truly eschatological people. They lived between the times—that is, between the beginning of the end and the consummation of the end. Because the kingdom, the time of God's rule, has been inaugurated with Jesus' own coming, we are called to life in the kingdom, which means life under his lordship, freely accepted and forgiven. But also committed to Jesus' Kingdom priorities of the new age and to seeing them worked out in our own lives and the world in this present age.