

## GOD'S STORY, NZ'S STORY

This week we all get a day off as it's Waitangi Day. It is quite easy to become cynical about Waitangi Day. We tend to view the Treaty in isolation. But the Treaty is just a part of the story of New Zealand. I want to suggest today that the early story of NZ is one that we all should know because it is part of God's story and it can inspire us.

God's story starts in the OT when God made a promise to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his descendants. Gen 22:18 Also see . Ps 82:8 Matthew 28:19 . Ps 22:27-28 In Isaiah we read of praise from the ends of the earth, and from the distant coastlands.

NZ is the furthest country from Jerusalem. Over 16000 km away. Every time you read ends of the earth in the Bible, think NZ. New Zealand was also the last major land mass to be settled by humans, around 1200 AD

So we have this promise of people coming to God at the ends of the earth. We have NZ being settled in 1200 AD. Last country. Furthest country.

**The Scriptures tell us that God speaks.** He is not silent As you read the Bible you repeatedly see God speaking to people: through prophets, directly at times, through dreams, through a donkey, through signs in the sky, through writing on a wall in Daniel, out of wind, out of fire, in visions. He speaks through God's people as well as those who are not believers. God speaks through the heavens. Stars and sky. God speaks by sending Jesus to earth. So we should be surprised when God begins to fulfil his plan for NZ by speaking.

He spoke through a Māori prophet. Toiroa I Kareki He was a seer but not a Christian because Christianity had not yet come to NZ. He prophesied 3 years before Cook arrived

He drew images in the sand of ships and cars and horses. He worked hard to prepare his people for this new civilization that he saw coming. He took these visions to villages around the place include Turanganui a Kiwa , the place where Cook would make his first land fall. He also said these words. "The name of their God will be "Tama i rorokutia " meaning "Son who was killed." He said he was a good God. However the people will still be oppressed. It was another 48 years before the gospel was first preached in NZ Christmas Day 1814,.

**The Scriptures tell us that God sends.** He is a sending God, a missionary God. He called : Abraham to leave his land and go to another, Moses to leave Egypt, Jonah to preach to Nineveh, the disciples to the ends of the earth, Paul to reach the Gentiles, Phillip to reach the Ethiopian. God send Jesus from the glories of heaven to earth. God is a missionary God

Every NZ Christian should know the story of Henry Williams: one of the great heroes of faith. He had been a officer in the

Royal Navy, and seen considerable combat over multiple wars. He retired from Navy and settled down to a quiet life with family in England. But God stirred in his heart and he retrained in theology, and came to NZ in 1823

He arrived to mess. The early missionaries lead by Marsden had focussed on civilizing Māori, rather than on teaching faith. Relationships had splintered. Some had had affairs with Maori and they were totally disrespected. To survive they ended up having to trade in muskets which fuelled the musket wars.

Later in life he is wrongly dismissed by the CMS mission, because some of his enemies including Wakefield and Governor Grey made false allegations against him. He was eventually reinstated after 5 years but was a broken man.

Henry Williams won the respect of Māori. He was involved in lots of peace making often risking his own life to do so. He along with his son translated the Treaty, and were the key reason it was signed by Maori. He said the treaty was "a fortress against any foreign power that might try to take possession of their country" It was described as "an act of love" towards Māori to secure their property, rights and privileges. He saw it as a sacred document. There would be no treaty with Henry Williams And Henry Williams was in NZ only because God is a missionary God.

**The Scriptures tell us that God's word is powerful.** Heb 4:12-13

Many of us have grown up with Bible can take it for granted. The early missionaries spent the first decade trying to supposedly civilize Māori with little success. But once Māori got hold of the Word of God in their own language, there was transformational change. In 1835 64,000 Māori were attending church services, half of all NZ Māori at the time.

**The Scriptures tells us that God transforms us. 2 Cor 3:18 , 1 Peter 2:9-10**

This is the gospel message. When we accept Jesus Christ, the Spirit comes and lives in us and changes us. If you are the same person as before, something is wrong. If you are not more like Christ today than 5 years ago, something is wrong. God transformed the 12 disciples into radical missionaries who gave their lives for him. God changed Zacchaeus from a greedy man to a generous Christ follower. He changed Saul from a murderer into a great missionary.

The Story of Wiremu Tamihana is an incredible one. He had been a warrior involved in his chiefly fathers war parties. But he became disillusioned with killing and became a Christian. His father, on his death bed told him to give up on Christianity and seek revenge. But he refused. When he became chief much of his tribe did not want to follow Christianity. So to ease the tension, he built a separate pa



for those who wanted to follow Christ. The chapel that he built in 1842 seated 1000 people. Then he started a second pa, near where Hobbiton is now. It was known as a model Christian community, with clusters of homes, orchard and gardens, a school that could take 100's, a post office and flour mill. Tamihana established an ethical code of law within these villages. It was described as a village where the best of European and Māori technology co existed.

But Tamahere was deeply concerned at the double standards happening in regard to law. The police used one criteria for Māori and another for Europeans. He went to see the Governor, who snubbed him, and would not meet with him.

So he left disillusioned and started advocating for the Kīngitanga Māori king movement so that Māori had someone of mana to advocate for them. Tamihana anointed the first Māori king, and instead of anointing him with oil, anointing him with the Word of God. This infuriated Governor Grey, who set out to destroy the reputation and mana of Tamihana, as well as amassing troops.

In 1863, the first year the NZ Herald came out, they choose Governor Grey as the NZer of the year, because of his noble campaign against the barbarous natives. In 2013 the Herald admitted they got it wrong and named Tamihana as one the top 10 greatest NZer of the past 150 years.

**The Scripture tells us that God cares about justice** ie Amos 5:4, Is 1:17 It is a constant theme of the prophets .

It's important to realize that justice often involves laws and politics. God passionately cares about issues of justice, and therefore he is concerned about politics.

Octavius Hadfield was one of the early missionaries. He battled serve asthma most of this life, and did not expect to live long but it did not stop his influence, He arrived in NZ a year before the signed of the treaty.

At one point in time , he was considered the most hated person in the country. ] The reason? He stood up to Governor Gore Brown, when he invaded Wiremu Kingi's land. The Governor had bought Kingi's land from Te Teira, who falsely claimed it was his. Hadfield warned him that the land was not Te Teira's to sell.

When the women pulled on the survey pegs, Brown ordered troops and warships in and declared war. The Taranaki land wars caused much death and the confiscation of a huge amount of land. Hadfield was furious at this betrayal of the Treaty, and waged a relentless media campaign against Brown, that eventually resulted in Brown being sacked.

He was made Bishop of Wellington and he used his position to passionately advocate for the treaty, and Māori rights, often at considerable cost to himself. He stood up for justice because God is a God of justice.

The story of NZ of which the Treaty is a key part of , is God's story. We need to know it and celebrate it.

Our God, who is God of the nations is still at work in the nations of the world. Oru God, who speaks, is still speaking today. Our God who is a sending God, is still sending today. He called Henry Williams to leave the comfort of life in Britain to go to one of the most isolated and dangerous places in the world. He is still asking people to cross over . It might be across the room, across the road, across the city, across the sea. But God sends people. Where is he sending you?

God's Word is sill powerful . It has not lost it's power to change and transform. But if we never read it, then it will not transform us. If we are not hungry for it, it can't change us. Do we believe the Bible is still powerful today?

Our God is still transforming lives. Wiremu Tamihana reminds us of this. He has not stopped. Have we lost faith in the power of God to change people?

Our God still cares about issues of justice. He has not stopped caring. Octavius Hadfield story reminds us that we should be at the forefront of defending the treaty and seeking justice.

Don't get me wrong. The early history of NZ is full of mistakes and tragedy. The early Christian missionaries and converts were flawed, just like we are. But the good new is, that despite their flaws and character weakness, and dumb mistakes God used them.

And that tells us that God can use me, and you.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Why have we often not been taught NZ's history?
- Do you think that Henry Williams as a missionary should have translated and promoted the Treaty when asked? What would have happened if he had not been involved?
- What issues of justice do think God is concerned about in NZ currently? How can we be involved in this?
- Waitangi Day has often involved protest. Should Christians be involved in protest on issues?
- What are some lessons we can learn from the early missionaries successes and failures?
- If in the early history of NZ we can see God's story unfolding, what is God saying and doing in NZ at the moment?
- Which story/ aspect of God's character do you think is most relevant to the church in NZ at the moment.?
- Of the 5 stories told in this message, which story inspires you the most. How could you learn more about this story?
- What is God challenging you to do as a result of this message?



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