

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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The Greek word *basileia* expresses two concepts: (1) rule, reign, authority, sovereignty, kingship; and (2) realm, domain, territory, kingdom over which authority is exercised. In contemporary, western, popular thought the second of these dominates. There is widespread agreement, however, that in the New Testament the kingdom of God is primarily his rule in the lives of those who submit to his authority. In many passages the idea of a place is not possible. In most instances therefore the term is used in a dynamic functional sense and not in a spatial, territorial, geographical, political, or national sense. In such instances therefore, use of the word "kingdom" is somewhat misleading. "Rule" or "reign" or "kingly rule of God" might be a better translation—as is sometimes the case in Moffatt, Goodspeed, and the New American Bible (1st ed. only).

Intertestamental Background

The kingdom of God is a subject of average importance in Jewish intertestamental literature commonly referred to as The Apocrypha and The Pseudepigrapha.¹ The exact term appears only in Wis. of So. 10:10: "She [Wisdom] showed him [a righteous man] the kingdom of God." Virtually identical is Pss. Sol. 17:3: "The kingdom of our God is forever over the nations in judgment." Similar are 3 Bar. 11:2 (Greek version) "We are not able to enter until Michael the holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven comes"; T. Benj. 9:1-2 "You will be sexually promiscuous...and the kingdom of the Lord will not be among you"; and Sib. Or. 3:47 "The most great kingdom of the immortal king will become manifest over men. For a holy prince

¹ Quotations of books of The Apocrypha are from the New Revised Standard Version. Quotations of books of the Pseudepigrapha are from James A. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vol. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983-85). Quotations from the New Testament are the writer's own translation.

will come to gain sway over the scepters of the earth.” Of course there are other references which employ the pronouns “my,” “your,” and “his”² and still others which use the word “kingdom” without a qualifier but where the reference is obviously to the divine kingdom.³ And there are still further references to God as king and to his throne and rule and to the kingship of the Messiah.⁴

The following conclusions can be made about the kingdom of God in the intertestamental Jewish literature. First, there are a few references to a nationalistic kingdom involving the triumph of Israel over her enemies. Second and more important, the kingdom is conceived of in ethical terms and in association with wisdom. Note especially 4 Macc. 2:23 where it is associated with four important virtues. Third and most important, it is described as an apocalyptic, eschatological kingdom which encompass the entire universe and not just Israel. In some passages God himself will reign; in others he will reign through the Messiah he sends. It is significant that these emphases reappear in the New Testament teaching about the kingdom of God.

² Tob 13 1 “His kingdom lasts throughout all ages”, Wis of Sol 6 4 “As servants of his kingdom you [the kings of v 1] did not rule rightly”, Pr Azar 33 “Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom”, T Judah 24 5 “Then he [the Star from Jacob of v 1 and the Shoot of God of v 4—thus the Messiah] will illuminate the scepter of my kingdom, and from your root will arise the Shoot, and through it will arise the rod of righteousness for the nations, to judge and save all that call on the Lord”, T Joseph 19 12 “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom which will not pass away” (possibly a Christian interpolation, however), T Moses 10 1,3 “Then his kingdom will appear throughout the whole creation For the Heavenly One will arise from his kingly throne”, Pss Sol 5 18 “In your kingdom your goodness is upon Israel”

³ Wis of Sol 6 20 “The desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom”, Wis of Sol 10 14 “She [Wisdom] brought him [a righteous man] the scepter of a kingdom”, 2 Esd 2 37 “The Lord has called you to the celestial kingdoms”, 2 Esd 3 35 “Be ready for the rewards of the kingdom”, 2 Bar 73 1 “After he [the Anointed One of 72 2] has brought down everything which is in the world, and has sat down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, then joy will be revealed and rest will appear”, T Abr A 7 7 “Let them [the sun and the moon of v 2] be taken up to the kingdom above”, T Abr A 8 3 “Almighty Mater, what do your glory and (your) immortal kingship command now?”, T Iss 5 7 “To one [Levi] he [God] gave the priesthood and to the other [Judah], the kingship”, and 4 Macc 2 23 “To the mind he gave the law, and one who lives subject to this will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous”

⁴ Pss Sol 17 32, 34 “He will be a righteous king over them Their king shall be the Lord Messiah The Lord himself is his king”, Jub 1 28 “I am the God of Israel and king upon Mount Zion forever and ever”, 1 Enoch 9 4 “He is Lord of lords, and the God of gods, and the King of kings”, 1 Enoch 12 3 “I, Enoch, began to bless the king of the universe”, 1 Enoch 25 7 “I blessed the Eternal King” (cf vv 3, 5), 1 Enoch 62 5 “Pain shall seize them when they see the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory”, 1 Enoch 63 4 “We should glorify and bless the Lord of kings—him who rules over all kings”, 1 Enoch 69 29 “The Son of Man has appeared and has seated himself upon the throne of his glory”, 1 Enoch 84 2 “Blessed are you, O Great King King of kings and God of the whole world Your authority and kingdom abide forever and ever, and your dominion throughout all generations, all the heavens are your throne forever, and the whole earth is your footstool forever and ever and ever For you have created (all), and all things you rule, Your throne has not retreated” (cf v 5 “Lord and Great King”), 1 Enoch 90 20 “I kept seeing till a throne was created in a pleasant land [Israel], and he [God] sat upon it”, 1 Enoch 91 13 “A house shall be built for the Great King in glory for evermore”, 1 Enoch 93 7 “A house and a kingdom shall be built” (cf v 8), T Dan 5 13 “The Holy One of Israel will rule over them in humility and poverty, and he who trusts in him shall reign in truth in the heavens”, T Benj 10 7 “We shall prostrate ourselves before the heavenly king”

New Testament References

The Greek word *basileia* appears 162 times in the Bible Societies' text of the Greek NT.⁵ Of these, 19 are references to a secular, earthly kingdom and will receive no further consideration in this study. Four are references to Satan's kingdom or that of his henchman the beast of Revelation,⁶ thus indicating that there is an evil counterpart to the kingdom of God. Of the remaining 139, 50 are in Matthew, 15 in Mark, 39 in Luke, 5 in John, 8 in Acts, 14 in the Pauline Epistles, 2 in Hebrews, 1 in James, 1 in 2 Peter, and 4 in Revelation.

The expression "kingdom of God" is found 4 times in Matthew, 14 in Mark, 32 in Luke, 2 in John, 6 in Acts, and 8 in the Pauline Epistles for a total of 66.⁷ The synonymous term "kingdom of heaven"⁸ is found 32 times in Matthew only.⁹ The total of the two is 98. When 23 parallel passages are excluded, the total number of separate references to the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven" is 75¹⁰

There are 9 references to God's kingdom without using the exact expression of "kingdom of God,"¹¹ and there are 15 references to Christ's kingdom.¹² The kingdom of God and Christ is referred to in

⁵ This text is found in the 3rd and 4th editions of *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1975, 3rd ed. cor 1983, 1993) and the 26th and 27th editions of the Nestle Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979, 1993)

⁶ Matt 12 26, Luke 11 18, Rev 16 10, Rev 17 12

⁷ Matt 12 28, 19 24, 21 31, 43, Mark 1 15, 4 11, 26, 30, 9 1, 47, 10 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 12 34, 14 25, 15 43, Luke 4 43, 6 20, 7 28, 8 1, 10, 9 2, 11, 27, 60, 62, 10 9, 11, 20, 13 18, 20, 28, 29, 14 15, 16 16, 17 20 (twice), 21, 18 16, 17, 24, 25, 29, 19 11, 21 31, 22 16, 18, 23 51, John 3 3, 5, Acts 1 3, 8 12, 14 22, 19 8, 28 23, 31, Rom 14 17, 1 Cor 4 20, 6 9, 10, 15 50, Gal 5 21, Col 4 11, 2 Thess 1 5 In John 3 5 "Kingdom of heaven" is substituted for "kingdom of God" in a few manuscripts

⁸ That "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are synonymous can be seen from the parallel passages in footnote 10 (excluding Matt 12 28//Luke 11 20 and Matt 19 24//Mark 10 25//Luke 18 25 where Matthew also uses "kingdom of God") Furthermore there is a rational explanation for why Matthew prefers "kingdom of heaven," although he does use "kingdom of God" four times His Gospel was written for a church composed primarily of believers of Jewish background They retained the Jewish reluctance to pronounce the divine name and often employed various substitutes for it Heaven was such a substitute

⁹ Matt 3 2, 4 17, 5 3, 10, 19 (twice), 20, 7 21, 8 11, 10 7, 11 11, 12, 13 11, 24, 31, 33, 34, 45, 52, 16 19, 18 1, 3, 4, 23, 19 12, 14, 23, 20 1, 22 2, 23 13, 25 1 The term appears a second time in 7 21 in some textual witnesses which add at the end of the verse, "He [a few manuscripts "This person"] will enter into the kingdom of heaven" And, as already indicated above, a few witness substitute "kingdom of heaven" for "kingdom of God" in John 3 5

¹⁰ Parallels in the Markan material Mark 1 15//Matt 4 17, Mark 4 11//Matt 13 11//Luke 8 10, Mark 4 30//Matt 13 31//Luke 13 18, Mark 9 1//[Matt 16 28 "his kingdom"]//Luke 9 27, Mark 10 14//Matt 19 14//Luke 18 16, Mark 10 15 [cf Matt 18 3]//Luke 18 17, Mark 10 23//Matt 19 23//Luke 18 24, Mark 10 25//Matt 19 24//Luke 18 25, Mark 14 25//[Matt 26 29 "my Father's kingdom"]//Luke 22 16, 18, Mark 15 43//Luke 23 51 Parallels in the Q material Matt 5 3//Luke 6 20, Matt 8 11//Luke 13 29, Matt 10 7//Luke 9 2 [cf 10 9], Matt 11 11//Luke 7 28, Matt 11 12//Luke 16 16, Matt 12 28//Luke 11 20, Matt 13 33//Luke 13 20, [Matt 22 2 cf Luke 14 15] Passages in brackets are not counted

¹¹ With a pronoun Matt 6 10, 6 33, Luke 11 2, 12 31, 1 Thess 2 12, 2 Tim 4 18 ("his heavenly kingdom"), kingdom of the Father Matt 13 43, 26 29, and "kingdom of our God" Rev 12 10

¹² With a pronoun Matt 13 41, 20 21, Luke 1 33, 22 30, 23 42, John 18 36 (3 times), 2 Tim 4 1, Heb 1 8, the Son of Man's kingdom Matt 16 28, a kingdom granted to Christ by his Father Luke 22 29, "The kingdom of [God's] beloved Son" Col 1 13, "the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" 2 Peter 1 11, and David's coming kingdom= Christ's messianic kingdom Mark 11 10

Eph. 5:5 and Rev. 11:15. The expression “gospel of the kingdom” is found in Matt. 4:23, 9:35, and 24:14; Matt. 13:19 has “the word of the kingdom”; and Matt. 8:12 and 13:38 speak of the “sons of the kingdom.” Still further there are 9 miscellaneous references to the kingdom.¹³

It is important to note that there are references to the divine kingdom in all strata of Gospel material: Mark and its parallels,¹⁴ Q (the material found only in Matthew and Luke which they apparently took independently from a now-lost collection of the sayings of Jesus),¹⁵ M (material found only in Matthew),¹⁶ L (the material found only in Luke),¹⁷ and John.¹⁸ The criterion of multiple attestation therefore strongly supports, not the authenticity of individual kingdom sayings, but the supposition that Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God. The criterion of dissimilarity does also to a lesser extent—this because Jesus appears to have used the term much more often than did the early church.¹⁹

Also relevant to the subject are the 36 references to Jesus as *basileus*/king²⁰ (although 25 of these are derisive uses by his enemies²¹) and the 4 to God as king.²² In addition the verb *basileuo*/reign is

¹³ Matt 25 34 (“the kingdom prepared for you”), Luke 12 32 (“give you the kingdom”), Acts 1 6 (“restore the kingdom”), 20 25 (“preaching the kingdom”), 1 Cor 15 24 (“when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God”), Heb 12 28 (“we have received an unshakable kingdom”), James 2 5 (“heirs of the kingdom”), Rev 1 6 (“he made us into a kingdom”), 5 10 (“you made them into a kingdom”) The word also appears in a variant reading in Matt 6 13, “Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever Amen”

¹⁴ Ten of the passages may be found in note 10 To these need to be added Mark 4 26, 9 47, 10 24, and 12 34 which have no parallels The total is 14 See also some other possibilities in note 17 Note well that the preceding list and the lists in notes 15, 16, 17, and 18 are not limited to the expressions “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” as in note 10 but include all references to the divine kingdom

¹⁵ Seven of the passages may be found in note 10 To these Matt 6 10//Luke 11 2 and Matt 6 33//Luke 12 31 must be added The total is 9 See also some other possibilities in notes 16 and 17

¹⁶ Matt 4 23 (probably rather than Q, cf Luke 8 1), 9 35 (probably rather than Q, cf Luke 8 1), 21 31, 21 43, and 22 2 (probably rather than Q, cf Luke 14 5) The total is 5 Considering the fact that Matthew has more references to the kingdom than any other Gospel, it is surprising that there are so few in material peculiar to his Gospel

¹⁷ Luke 4 43, 8 1 (probably rather than Q, cf Matt 4 23 and 9 35), 9 11, 60, 62, 10 9 (probably rather than Q, cf Matt 10 7 and Luke 9 2), 11, 13 29, 14 15 (probably rather than Q, cf Matt 22 2), 16 16, 17 20 twice, 21, 18 29 (probably rather than Mark, cf Mark 10 29 and Matt 19 29), 19 11, 21 31 (probably rather than Mark, cf Mark 18 29 and Matt 24 33), and 22 16, 18 The total is 18

¹⁸ John 3 3, 5, and 18 36 (three times) The total is 5

¹⁹ Many scholars question whether Jesus actually spoke many of the things attributed to him in the Gospels In order to determine which sayings are authentic, they have devised criteria of authenticity Two of these are multiple attestation and dissimilarity from Judaism and the early church

²⁰ Matt 2 2, 21 5, 25 34, 40, Luke 19 38, John 1 49, 6 15, 12 13, 15, Rev 17 14, 19 16 plus the ones in the following note The 20 passages which picture Jesus as sitting on the right hand of God also suggest kingship They are Matt 22 44, 26 64, Mark 12 36, 14 62, [16 16 variant reading], Luke 20 42, 22 69, Acts 2 33, 34, 5 31, 7 55, 56, Rom 3 34, Eph 1 20, Col 3 1, Heb 1 3, 13, 8 1, 10 12, 12 2, 1 Pet 3 22 Still further Christ is referred to as a ruler (Matt 2 6 which uses the participle of *hegemonas*, Rev 1 5 which uses *archon*) and as the head (1 Cor 11 3, Eph 1 22, 4 15, 5 23, Col 1 18, 2 10, 2 19—all *kephale*)

²¹ Matt 27 11, 29, 37, 42, Mark 15 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32, Luke 23 2, 3, 37, 38, John 18 33, 37, 39, 19 3, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21 (twice), Acts 17 7

²² Matt 5 35, 1 Tim 1 17, 6 15, Rev 15 3

applied 3 times to Jesus,²³ 2 to God,²⁴ and 4 to the saints.²⁵ Still further there are 42 references to God's throne,²⁶ 6 to Christ's throne,²⁷ 2 to the throne of God and Christ,²⁸ 3 to the thrones of the saints,²⁹ and 3 to the thrones of the twenty-four elders in the Revelation.³⁰

Synoptic Gospels and Acts

According to the Synoptic Gospels, the kingdom of God/Heaven was the most frequent and most important subject of Jesus' teaching. The emphasis on the kingdom by the Synoptic Jesus far exceeds that of the Old Testament, the intertestamental literature, and the remainder of the New Testament. Of the 139 New Testament references to a divine kingdom, 104 or 75 percent are in the Synoptics. Or, if 25 parallel passages are excluded, 79 out of 114 or 69 percent are.³¹

Mark

The importance of the kingdom in the proclamation of Jesus is indicated by the statement in Mark 1:15. It is near the beginning of Mark's Gospel and at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The kingdom proclaimed by Jesus was not altogether new but had already been prophesied. It had drawn near and had become accessible in the person and message of Jesus, although it was not yet fully manifest.³² It makes radical demands on people: a change of life and commitment to Jesus.

In 4:11 Mark writes about the "mystery of the kingdom." Paul uses the word "mystery" to designate a spiritual truth that was not known in the past, which can be known only by divine revelation, and which has been revealed through Jesus and the apostles. That is probably the meaning here also. The revealed truth is that the kingdom of God has drawn near in the teaching and mighty acts of Jesus Christ. Mark

²³ Luke 1:33, 1 Cor. 15:25, Rev. 11:15. Note also Rev. 12:2 and 19:15 where it is affirmed that Christ will rule (*poimaino*) the nations with a rod of iron.

²⁴ Rev. 11:17, 19:6.

²⁵ Rev. 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5. See also Rev. 2:26-27.

²⁶ Matt. 5:34; 23:22; Acts 7:49; Heb. 4:16; 8:1; 12:2, Rev. 1:4; 3:21; 4:2 (twice), 3, 4, 5 (twice), 6 (twice), 9, 10 (twice); 5:1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11 (twice), 15 (twice), 17; 8:3; 12:5, 14:3; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:11, 12; 21:3, 5.

²⁷ Matt. 19:28, 23:31, Luke 1:32, Acts 2:30, Heb. 1:8, Rev. 3:21.

²⁸ Rev. 22:1, 3.

²⁹ Matt. 19:28, Luke 22:30, Rev. 20:4

³⁰ Rev. 4:4 (twice), 11:16.

³¹ See note 10, and include Matt. 16:28 and 26:29 in the count.

³² The verb *engizo* means "to approach, to come near." It does not mean "to arrive" or "be present." The perfect tense indicates a present, continuing state of being which has resulted from a past, completed action. The kingdom drew near in the public manifestation of Jesus and continued to be near throughout his ministry. Presumably it also continues to be near throughout the Christian era.

4:11-12 also contrasts the revealed and understandable truth about the kingdom with the obscurity of truth which is conveyed by parables. At least some truth is obscure to some people in some parables. Nevertheless in the same chapter truth about the kingdom is conveyed by parables (4:26, 30 "the kingdom of God is like..."). In fact it is safe to conclude that the parable of the soils (vv. 3-8, 14-20), as well as the parables of the seed growing spontaneously (vv. 26-29) and of the mustard seed (vv. 30-32), tells something about the kingdom. It can be rejected or received. It would appear that more reject it than receive it. Yet its final triumph is great.

In 9:1 Mark quotes Jesus as saying, "Some of those who are standing here will not die until they see the kingdom of God come with power." Is the reference to the transfiguration which immediately follows the account, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the spread of the gospel and growth of the church, the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, or to the return of the Lord? There is no consensus among interpreters. Perhaps the reference should not be limited to one event. Perhaps it includes at least the resurrection of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the proclamation of the gospel throughout much of the Mediterranean world. In any event the kingdom is not only something which draws near in the ministry of Jesus but actually comes at a future time.

Mark 9:47, 10:14-15, and 10:23-25 indicate that the kingdom is something which people should enter/receive and that sometimes there are difficulties in doing so. Notice how in 9:43-47 entering the kingdom is equated with entering into life. The contrast of life with hell makes it clear that spiritual life is in mind. Also 10:14-15 compares those who enter the kingdom to children. Probably the idea is that they are characterized by such things as weakness, helplessness, dependence, humility, and trust. The kingdom is not a place for arrogant and ambitious people.

In 14:25 Jesus and Mark make it clear that the kingdom has a future aspect. It seems to be associated with the messianic banquet at the end of the age, which is probably also in mind in 11:10. Also 15:43 indicates that the kingdom is something that the righteous should expect and wait for.

Matthew

Even taking into consideration the differences in length, the kingdom plays a much larger role in Matthew than in Mark and a somewhat larger role than in Luke. This is what one would expect in a Gospel written for Christians of Jewish background.

Only Matt. 3:2 indicates that John as well as Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom.

Matthew takes over nine of Mark's fifteen kingdom sayings with little change.³³ The only one of significance is 16:28 which changes Mark 9:1 ("until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power") to "until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." The apparent effect of this redaction is to clarify the ambiguity of Mark (see the comments above) and to make the reference to the return of the Son of Man. The problem is that the Son of Man/Christ did not return within the lifetime of any who were present. Therefore some have tried to identify the return with Christ's resurrection or the coming of the Spirit or Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem in A. D. 70, but these are not natural interpretations. There is in fact no satisfactory solution to the problem, and "reverent" interpreters can only wait for more light.

Nor is there much significance in the six Markan kingdom sayings which Matthew omits,³⁴ although it is a little puzzling why he omits Mark 11:10 where the reference to David's kingdom would seem to serve his emphasis on the messianic aspects of the kingdom. In other words, Matthew does not redact Mark in order to set forth a different view of the kingdom.

The nine Q passages reveal no differences in the way Matthew and Luke understand the kingdom. They do, however, reinforce or add something to Mark. Matt. 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them")//Luke 6:20 indicate that the subjects of the kingdom acknowledge their dependence upon God rather than assert their self-sufficiency. Matt. 6:10 ("Let your kingdom come")//Luke 11:2 look ahead to the consummation of the kingdom. Matt. 8:11//Luke 13:28 conceive of a future banquet in the messianic kingdom at which God's people of old and God's new people will be present. Matt. 10:7//Luke 9:2 (cf. Luke 10:9) reaffirm that the kingdom is "at hand" (cf. Mark 1:15//Matt. 4:17). Matt. 11:11//Luke 7:28, however, make a distinction between the kingdom of God in the old and new eras and affirm the superiority of the new age to the old.

Matthew emphasizes the importance of proclaiming the kingdom.

³³ See note 10.

³⁴ Mark 4:26, 9:47, 10:24, 11:10, 12:34, and 15:43.

Whereas Mark has one statement about Jesus preaching the kingdom, Matthew has three (4:17//Mark 1:15, 4:23, 9:35). He has two more about the disciples proclaiming it (10:7//Luke 9:2) and 24:14. In 9:35 the proclamation of the kingdom is associated with Jesus' healings in such a way as to suggest that miracles are a sign of the coming of the kingdom.

Matt. 11:12//Luke 16:16 are perplexing passages. Does the verb *biazo* in both Matthew and Luke and the noun *biastes* in Matthew depict something good or something bad? The noun usually refers to a violent, brutal, impetuous person rather than one who is merely forceful when appropriate. The verb can be either middle voice "is exerting force" or passive voice "is being subjected to force." The middle is more common. In Matthew, if the verb is middle, the idea is "The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing, and violent men are trying to destroy it." If the verb is passive, the idea is "The kingdom of heaven is being subjected to force, and violent men are trying to destroy it." Probably the statement is an instance of Semitic parallelism, thus making the latter more probable. The absence of the noun in Luke makes the interpretation there more difficult, as does also the presence of the substantial adjective "everybody." Must the adjective mean "every person without exception" or may it mean "every kind of person" or even "many person?" If the verb is middle the idea could be that the common people as opposed to the pharisees are striving earnestly to enter the kingdom (a good thing), or that the Pharisees are trying to force their way in by legalistic obedience or the zealots are trying to force the kingdom to come by military action (bad things). If the verb is passive and if "everybody" is taken quite literally, the idea could be that everyone is strongly urged to enter the kingdom. But the verb really does not mean "to urge" or "invite". Perhaps the parallel in Matthew favors the idea that the Pharisees and/or the zealots were using some kind of force against³⁵ the kingdom of God.

Matt. 12:28 ("If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you")//Luke 11:20 emphasize the present aspect of the kingdom more than any passage in Mark. These passages seem to indicate that the kingdom is not only near but that it has actually arrived.³⁵ There is no contradiction, however. Both are true. The kingdom is near in the sense that it has not been consummated; it is present in the sense that the power of God which characterizes it began to manifest itself in the word and deeds of Jesus and

³⁵ The preposition *eis* can certainly bear this meaning.

continues to do so in the church. And Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20 indicate that the kingdom, like yeast, is pervasive in its influence.

It remains to consider the passages which appear in Matthew alone. Because of the large number, only those which add something to the Mark and Q teaching can be treated. Matt. 4:23 indicates that one manifestation of the kingdom was the healing ministry of Jesus. In 5:10 the kingdom is a reward for those who are persecuted. In 5:19 keeping the commands of Jesus is an indication of greatness in the kingdom. Chapt. 5, verse 20, demands for entry into the kingdom of heaven a righteousness greater than that of Judaism's most zealous practitioners, while 6:33 demands that the kingdom be sought more diligently than anything else. Then 7:21 associates it with doing the will of God.

It has already been seen that two of the three parables in Mark 4 are introduced by the statement "The kingdom of God is like...." Six of the seven in Matt. 13 are introduced in the same way. It is even more evident in Matthew than Mark that much of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom is in parables. The parables of the weeds (13:24-30, 36-43) and the net (13:47-50) teach that in the church are good and evil must exist side-by-side, but when the kingdom is consummated evil will be destroyed and good will reign supreme. The parables of the treasure (13:44) and the pearl (13:45-46) teach both the inestimable value of the kingdom and the imperative of diligently seeking it.

Matt. 13:52 associates the kingdom and discipleship. In 16:19 Peter is given the "keys of the kingdom" and the power to "bind" and "loose," i.e. to prohibit and exclude and to permit and admit. In 18:18 the same authority is given to all the disciples (note the plural "you"). The use of the future perfect tense in the second instance of these verbs in both verses may well indicate that Peter and the other disciples can bind and loose only people who or things which already have been bound and loosed in heaven, i.e. by God. And in 18:15-20 the subject is church discipline, not salvation.

Matt. 18:1, 4 indicates that there is rank in the kingdom and that the humble will have the highest place—a complete reversal of human values. Verse 28 introduces a parable which teaches that, inasmuch as God has forgiven his people an enormous debt of sin, they ought to forgive others lesser wrongs. In 19:12 there is the sobering statement that some may need to abstain from marriage for the sake of the kingdom. Chapter 20, v. 1, introduces another parable of the kingdom, the parable of the generous landowner, who represents God. He gives to those who labor in his kingdom far more than they deserve. Matt. 21:23 reveals that dishonest and immoral people—who no doubt

repent— will get into the kingdom before self-righteous ones. According to 21:43 the kingdom will be taken away from the Jews and given to a new people who produce the “fruit” which characterizes it.

In 22:2 and 25:1 there are two more parables that explicitly reveal something about the kingdom—thus making a total of eleven such parables in Matthew. The parable of the wedding banquet again affirms that the kingdom will be taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentile church. There is, however, further selection. The man without wedding clothes represents any person who is excluded from the kingdom because he or she does not have good character and good deeds. The parable of the ten virgins deals with the future consummation of the kingdom. The time of the groom’s/Jesus’ return is unknown. Therefore disciples must be ready for it at any time. The “kingdom prepared...from the foundation of the world” (25:34) is also the eschatological kingdom (note the context of the final judgment). Finally 23:13 warns against hindering others from entering the kingdom as the Pharisees did.

Luke-Acts

It is difficult to know whether to treat the references in Luke and Acts separately or together. On the one hand, Luke and Acts were originally two volumes of a single work. This would seem to dictate treatment together. On the other hand, if Acts contains an accurate report of the teaching of the early church about the kingdom, its references ought to be treated separately from those in Luke’s Gospel about the teaching of Jesus. In this section the references in Luke will first be considered and then those of Acts. Finally a comparison will be made.

Luke’s two parallels with Mark alone and his eight with Mark and Matthew³⁶ exhibit no significant differences,³⁷ and, as has already been indicated, neither do his nine with Matthew only. What then do the kingdom sayings found only in Luke contribute to the development of the subject?

In Luke 1:33 the angel Gabriel affirms to Mary that her son’s kingdom will be a continuation of that of David and will have no end. Luke, like Matthew, emphasizes the proclamation of the kingdom by both Jesus and his disciples (4:43, 8:1, 9:2//Matt. 10:7, 9:11, 9:60). Only those who are faithful and persevere are fit for the kingdom according to 9:62. The nearness of the kingdom is a recurring theme

³⁶ The Greek verb is *phthano* “to come, to arrive, to reach, to arrive beforehand.” The aorist indicative, as it is here (*ephthasen*), ordinarily depicts a past, completed action.

³⁷ See note 10

in Luke also (10:9, 11; 21:31)³⁸. The kingdom is something which is given to God's people (12:32 and 22:19). Luke 13:29 shows that the kingdom will be comprised of people from all over the world. In 14:15 a hearer of Jesus spoke of a future "feast in the kingdom of God." Thereupon Jesus compares the kingdom and the messianic feast connected with it to a banquet to whom various people were invited but declined to come. Then the host had his servant bring in people from the lower strata of society in order to fill the banquet hall. The final statement is, "Not one of those men who were invited will taste my banquet" (v. 24). The reference is to the exclusion of the Jewish nation from the kingdom because of its rejection of Jesus.

A significant aspect of the kingdom is revealed in 17:20-21: "The kingdom of God does not come with things that can be observed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is' or 'There it is.' Look, the kingdom of God is within you" (or "among you" or "in the midst of you"). To say the least, this statement insists that the kingdom is not a political entity which can be located geographically. The exact meaning of last statement, however, is much debated. Certainly the kingdom was not within the Pharisees whom Jesus was addressing (v. 20). Yet the kingdom is not identical with Jesus who was there among them. Probably Jesus was not making any statement about the relationship of the Pharisees to the kingdom but was simply showing that, in his time and that of the church, the kingdom was not a realm but the reign of God in the lives of those who give him their allegiance.

Luke 18:29-30 indicates that there will be a reward for those who leave their families for the sake of God's kingdom. In a quite different vein, 19:11 indicates that an earthly kingdom was not going to be established when Jesus went to Jerusalem. Perhaps Luke also understood that no such kingdom would appear during the church age. Therefore this saying may also contribute to Luke's explanation of the delay of the return of Christ. It may also emphasize the internal aspect of the kingdom. It does not rule out the possibility of a future, earthly kingdom.

Indeed, 22:16, 18 indicates that Jesus would not eat the Passover again until "it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (NEB "finds fulfillment in, "GNB" is given its full meaning in") and "until the kingdom of God comes." There is no indication here of an earthly kingdom but there is of a future one. See also 22:30. Finally in 23:42 the dying thief

³⁸ In 9:27, however, Luke has "see the kingdom of God" rather than "see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1). It is often claimed that a purpose of Luke was to explain the delay of the *parousia*. If so, it is possible that his omission of "has come with power" serves that purpose by suggesting that Jesus' promise was fulfilled in the transfiguration rather than his return to earth. But it is difficult to have much confidence about the matter.

says to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into [variant reading "in"] your kingdom." If, as is probable, "into" is authentic, the kingdom is evidently identified with Jesus' reign in heaven following his resurrection and ascension—a new concept. If perchance "in" is original, the reference is simply to a future kingdom.³⁹

Consideration may now be given to the references in Acts. Acts 1:3 indicates that Jesus continued to teach the disciples about the kingdom during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. While he was doing so, the disciples asked if he were going to "restore the kingdom to Israel" at that time (v. 6). He insisted that the disciples should not be concerned with the time but with witnessing (vv. 7-8). There may be an implication, however, of a kingdom at an unknown time in which Israel will have some part. In 8:12 Luke indicates that Philip reached the good news about the kingdom of God. In 14:22 Paul and Barnabas are quoted as teaching that entrance into the kingdom must be through many tribulations—a statement which supports Luke's concept of the difficulty of the Christian life. Chapt. 19, v. 8, merely indicates that Paul taught about the kingdom of God for three months in the synagogue in Ephesus, and in 20:25 Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he preached the kingdom to them. And 28:23 and 31 state that Paul first testified about the kingdom of God to the Jews in Rome and that he then preached it openly and without hindrance to all who came to his place of house arrest.

What can be said about the relationship of the references to the kingdom in Acts to those in the Third Gospel? One is immediately struck by the fact that there are only a fifth as many kingdom sayings as in the Gospel. One gets the impression from the letters of Paul, Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation (below) that the kingdom was not a frequent subject in the early church despite all that the Synoptic Jesus spoke about it. The paucity of references in Acts therefore seems to reflect the situation in the early church and is an indication of the accuracy of its account. Otherwise the reference in Acts add little to what the Gospel has already revealed about the kingdom.

John

When one goes outside the Synoptic Gospels, reference to the kingdom of God become fewer. This is especially noticeable in John where there are only five occurrences in two passages. In 3:3, 5 Jesus tells Nicodemus that without being born again (or from

³⁹ The first two verses affirm the nearness of the kingdom in the mission of the seventy-two, the last at the end of the age. Two different aspects of the kingdom are in mind. It is interesting that Luke does not picture Jesus himself as proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom.

above (—the word can mean either) one cannot enter or even see the kingdom. The new birth involves being born of water—whatever that means—and the Spirit. Then in 18:36 Jesus affirms to Pilate that his kingdom is not a worldly kingdom but a heavenly and spiritual one.

It is difficult to reconcile the Synoptic emphasis upon the kingdom of God as the most important subject of Jesus' preaching and teaching and the paucity of references to it in John. Note, however, that it is closely related to eternal life in 3:15 and 16—a term which appears a total of seventeen times in John and which probably would be looked upon as the most prominent subject of Jesus' teaching in the Fourth Gospel.⁴⁰ Mark 9:43 and 47, Mark 10:17 and 23//Matt. 19:16 and 23//Luke 18:18 and 24, and Matt. 25:34 and 46 equate entering into life or eternal life with entering or inheriting the kingdom of God. Even so the two concepts are not identical, and kingdom of God could not be substituted for eternal life in most of the passages. John also records that Nathaniel and the crowd hailed Jesus as the king of Israel (1:49 and 12:13). There are several other instances where Jesus is called king in a derisive way, including the inscription on the cross. Irony pervades John's Gospel, and even the derisive appellations indicate that Jesus really was a king. In 18:37 Jesus admits to being a king. Even so the difference in the Synoptic and Johannine treatment of the kingdom remains, and there is not adequate explanation of John's deemphasis of the kingdom, although his emphasis upon realized rather than futuristic eschatology is often suggested.

Pauline Epistles

The kingdom is not a major subject in the Pauline Epistles. It is mentioned only fourteen times.⁴¹ These references can be surveyed briefly. Rom. 14:17 states that "the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." Similar is 1 Cor. 15:50: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," except that there the future kingdom is in mind. 1 Cor. 4:20 says that it does not consist of words but power. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 indicates that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Likewise Gal. 5:21 indicates that those who practice such things as envying, drunkenness, and carousing shall not inherit the kingdom. Along the same line Eph. 5:5 affirms: "An immoral, impure, or covetous person (who is an idolater) does not have an

⁴⁰ Of course no authority need be attached to the statement of a private individual and an uninstructed one at that, but Luke would not likely have recorded the statement in the way he did if he did not think it corresponded with truth.

⁴¹ The word "life" without the qualifier "eternal" appears nineteen times. When these are included, the total number of reference grows to 36.

inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” 1 Cor. 15:25 states that at the end of the age, after he has subdued all rule, authority, and power, Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father.

In Col. 1:13 the Apostle indicates that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” In Col. 4:11 Paul mentions some “fellow workers for the kingdom of God.” Then 1 Thess. 2:12 exhorts believers to live in a way that is worthy of the God who called them, whereas 1 Thess. 1:5 expresses the desire that the readers may be worthy of the kingdom of God on behalf of which they were suffering. 2 Tim. 4:1 looks ahead to Christ’s appearing and kingdom, and in 2 Tim. 4:18 the Apostle affirms his confidence that Christ will deliver him safely into the heavenly kingdom.

It is clear that Paul, like Jesus, conceived of the kingdom as both present and future. The ethical demands of the present kingdom are emphasized. There is also emphasis on inheriting the kingdom, i.e. receiving it from God as a gift.

Hebrews and the General Epistles

In this portion of the New Testament, references to the kingdom approach the vanishing point. There are two in Hebrews and one each in James and 2 Peter, and they reveal little about the nature of the kingdom. Heb. 1:8 is a quotation of Psalms 45:6 and says: “Your throne, O God, will be forever and ever, and the scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.” Heb. 12:28 describes the kingdom as eternal. James 2:5 claims that the poor are heirs of the kingdom. And 2 Peter 1:11 affirms that “entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied” to those who confirm their “calling and election” (v. 10) by exhibiting the virtues in vv. 5-7.

Revelation

And there are only four references to God’s kingdom in Revelation. In 1:6 and 5:6 the writer avows that Christ has made the faithful into a kingdom in order to serve God and to reign on the earth. In 1:9 the writer affirms that he is the brother of his readers and a sharer with them in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance. Rev. 12:10 describes the final triumph of the kingdom: “Now the salvation, power, and kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come because the accuser of our brothers [and sisters] has been thrown down.” A fifth passage, however, requires mention. Although the Greek text of 11:15 does not explicitly mention the kingdom of God,

that kingdom must be understood. It reads literally, "The kingdom of the world has become that of our Lord and of his Christ." This passage also deals with the final triumph of the kingdom of God and Christ. That is the thrust of the references in Revelation.

Conclusion

The kingdom of God is a pervasive concept in the New Testament. Although the references are concentrated in the Synoptic Gospels, there are some in all the divisions of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, the so-called General Epistles,⁴³ an Revelation. The term is found in nineteen of the twenty-seven books.⁴⁴

The kingdom of God is a comprehensive concept which deals with many different aspects of divinely revealed religion. I summarize the message of Jesus and, to a much lesser extent, that of the apostles also.

The kingdom is also comprehensive in the sense that it is both present and future thus encompassing all of the Christian era and beyond. Nineteenth century liberal theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl conceived of the kingdom only as a present, mystical, ethical entity. About the turn of the century Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer reacted against such one-sidedness but went to the other extreme by claiming that the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus was exclusively future (although Schweitzer thought that Jesus was deluded about such a kingdom). C. H. Dodd in the middle of the present century, with his emphasis upon "realized" eschatology, moved back toward the present realization of the kingdom. About the same time Rudolf Bultmann tried to eliminate the element of time and see in the kingdom the existential moment of decision for the person who would achieve authentic existence. All such approaches fail to keep a proper balance between the kingdom present and the kingdom future.

There are so many references in the New Testament to both the present and future aspects of God's reign that both must be embraced in any theology that is truly biblical. Nor do the two aspects contradict each other. The kingdom drew near and in a meaningful sense was actually present in the message and miracles of Jesus. He embodied it and made it available to his disciples by a personal relationship with

⁴³ Paul's letters are about twice as long as Matthew and Luke; yet he has just less than a third as many references to the kingdom as Matthew and just over a third as many as Luke. His letters are about three times the length of Mark, but he has one less reference than Mark. Frequency of occurrence is about the same in Paul and Acts (the Epistles are about twice the length of Acts, and they have a little less than twice as many references to the kingdom as Acts.)

⁴⁴ For convenience Hebrews may be included here. Certainly it should not be placed among the Pauline Epistles.

⁴⁵ It is found in all except 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, 1 John, 2 John 3 John, and Jude. In 1 Timothy, however, God is referred to as king.

him. Yet it was not fully realized in the ministry of Jesus, nor has it been up to the present time, nor will it be anytime during the present age. It will not be consummated until Jesus returns to earth. He will inflict final defeat upon all the enemies of God. The last enemy that will be defeated is death itself. Only then will God's reign be universal as it should be and must be if God is omnipotent.

A crucial element in the present aspect of the kingdom is its ethical demand. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus proclaimed that the nearness of the kingdom demanded repentance. Biblical repentance involves not just a change of mind (the basic meaning of the Greek word) but a change of all of life. It involves more than sorrow for sin; it involves forsaking of sin. The subjects of the kingdom must not only repent of sin but produce in their lives the virtues taught by Jesus and the apostles. Furthermore, life in the kingdom is one of discipleship, ministry, and service. The ethical aspect of the kingdom, however, is not confined to the present age. In the eschaton evil, sin, and imperfection of all kinds will be destroyed.

"The kingdom is greater than the church."

Still further the kingdom is a comprehensive concept because it incorporates all people and not just the nation of Israel. "Many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [and Jesus!] in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). Here is a place where the teaching of Jesus transcends that of the Old Testament.

Something needs to be said about the relationship of the kingdom to the church. The kingdom is related to but different from the church. Both aspects may be seen in Matt. 16:18-19: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom in its dynamic aspect is the reign of God in the lives of his people. The church is the people of God over whom he reigns between the two comings of Christ. The church is a result of the kingdom. It in turn proclaims the kingdom and primarily in this way possesses the keys to the kingdom. The kingdom emphasizes the divine aspect of the relationship between God and his people, the church, the human aspect. An important part of that human aspect is fellowship among believers. The kingdom is greater than the church. To equate the kingdom and the church, as Augustine (d. 430) did, is to make a body of human beings equal with God. The disastrous results of that should be obvious to any perceptive person. God is the sovereign of the universe. Today his rule is realized primarily in the lives of his own people who constitute the church, and it is realized imperfectly. When Jesus returns and consummates the king-

dom, God's reign will at last be universal.

Finally, it ought to be asked if the kingdom is a meaningful concept in twentieth-century, Western Christianity—even in a country like Great Britain which retains the trappings of a kingdom without the reality. No doubt it is foreign to the thought-world of most. It is, however, a biblical concept, and a biblical concept can become meaningful to a sympathetic person who wants to learn the reality behind the symbol. The great truth conveyed by the term 'kingdom of God' is the absolute sovereignty of God. Western Christians desperately need to learn anew that the church and the kingdom are not a democracy. God is an absolute monarch, although a very benevolent one. Jesus Christ is Lord. The believer's part in his or her relationship to God through Christ is complete submission to the will of God and humble acknowledgment of God's authority. Some may not like the idea of God's reign, but all need to experience it.

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