

SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

CHRISTIAN HOPE AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

AN ESSAY ON A THEOLOGICAL THEME IN LUKE-ACTS SUBMITTED TO

DR. JOHN TAYLOR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT I

NEWTS 4313B

BY

BRET ALLEN ROGERS

NOVEMBER 9, 2004

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
THEME: KINGDOM OF GOD.....	1
APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	2
REALIZATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	2
PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	5
GIVING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	6
GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	7
ESCHATOLOGICAL COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	9
OVERALL MESSAGE OF LUKE-ACTS.....	10
ROLE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.....	10
DEVELOPMENT OF KINGDOM OF GOD FROM LUKE TO ACTS.....	10
CONCLUSION.....	11
WORKS CITED.....	13

INTRODUCTION

Christian hope is based squarely upon the passion of God to fulfill His promise in the spreading of His kingdom, so that all the nations will rejoice in His glory. The historian, Luke, captures this powerful motif of the kingdom of God in his two volume account, Luke and Acts. Through an exhaustive study of Luke-Acts, we will observe how Luke uses the “kingdom of God” theme to display the work God is accomplishing in Jesus Christ, and how His dominion continues to actively carry out that work now and forevermore.

THEME: KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke uses the word *βασιλεία* (kingdom) thirty nine times in his gospel, and eight times in Acts with direct reference to God’s (or Christ’s) reign. Most often it is seen in the phrase, “kingdom of God,” (abbreviated henceforward as KG) occurring an overall thirty eight times throughout Luke-Acts. Luke introduces the kingdom theme during the birth narrative of Jesus, when Gabriel foretells of the everlasting kingdom of Christ (Lk. 1.33). This shows the kingdom to be something of divine intervention, not of human efforts. According to God’s sovereign plan, it is Christ who must come to earth and endure the royal cross, so that the work of the kingdom may continue to completion. The KG is the very purpose for Jesus’ coming, for, this was His proclamation to the cities (Lk. 4.43). The KG is not something which is limited to an earthly realm, for, it is something which “has come near,” and “has come upon” humanity (Lk. 10.9, 11.20). Jesus is seen instructing His disciples to proclaim the kingdom message (Lk. 10.11), to pray for the kingdom’s coming (Lk. 11.2), and to realize its nature illustrated in

parables (Lk. 13.18, 13.20). The KG is something which is to be given (Lk. 6.20), and something that can be entered into (Ac. 14.22). It is also seen in Luke-Acts as something which is anticipated. In other words, not only has it *come near*, but it is understood to be *coming* in an eschatological day (Lk. 19.11, Ac. 1.6). The KG was also the heart and soul of the apostolic preaching throughout Acts (Ac. 8.12, 19.8). Therefore, with such word use, understanding the KG is essential to grasping the overall picture that Luke longs for his audience to recognize. This picture is of the sovereign hand of the Lord continuing to accomplish His work through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The KG theme is to magnify God's plan for the establishment of His moral kingdom, a plan that shall not be thwarted, even by the rejection of His own chosen race (Lk. 19.42). The kingdom is not to be limited to a mere physical realm in Luke-Acts, but more of one that is driven by the Spirit, expressing the active dominion of God in all things. Through this rule, the hearts of many will be conquered by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom will continue to advance on earth in the glorious hope of one day becoming fully realized when the King comes again. This is the pointed direction of the KG theme in Luke-Acts, and it is this which is further revealed in the study below.

APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

REALIZATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

There are at least five ways the KG theme appears in Luke-Acts, whether implicitly or explicitly. The first appearance shows the KG as something to be realized. In other words, it is something which is being made complete, and thus already a present reality. This progressive

establishment can also be referred to as its imminence, or the state of its nearness. This type of use will be referred to as the realization of the KG. It is seen predominately in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Beginning early in his gospel, Luke first mentions the kingdom in the promise given through the angel Gabriel to Mary (Lk. 1.33). Here one can see that Jesus, who is to be born into the world, will be given the throne of His Father David, and His kingdom will have no end. This mentioning is not only to prompt his reader to recall an Old Testament promise (Dan. 7.27), but also to give his reader an understanding that Jesus' coming is to be central to the realization of the kingdom's work being carried out. This is also meant in the words Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue (Lk. 4.18-19, cf. Is. 61.1-2),¹ testifying that His coming is to fulfill the promises associated with the kingdom – confirmed with the words, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4.21). The Expected One has arrived (Lk. 7.22)! Something greater than Jonah has come (Lk. 11.30-32)! Since John the Baptist, the gospel of the kingdom has been preached (Lk. 16.16)! It is Luke's intention to underscore the reality of the kingdom's progress, by emphasizing the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth.

This realization of the KG can also be observed by the authority and power in the ministry of Jesus. For example, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, for His words were spoken with authority (Lk. 4.32, 36, 20.2). Jesus had the authority on earth to forgive sins (Lk. 5.24), and to cast out demons (Lk. 4.41), and to reign over the Sabbath (Lk. 6.5, cf. 13.14-17,

¹ Graham N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 2 ed., The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 203.

14.3-6). Power flowed from His being and people were healed (Lk. 6.19). He rebuked the winds and the water, and they obeyed while crowds stood fearful and amazed (Lk. 8.25). After the seventy returned, Jesus said, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father” (Lk. 10.22). Indeed, the desire of Luke is for his audience to behold the truth not merely of the kingdom’s power, but of its present realization in Jesus, the King. This is what Jesus means when He says, “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk. 10.9, 11, 11.20, 17.21). In other words, “know that the presence of the sovereign Lord is now at work amongst you.” Further awareness of this reality is seen when Jesus teaches His disciples, what we know as, “the beatitudes” (Lk. 6.20-45), which outline the pure moral characteristics of the KG and its rule. The authority and power observed in the life and ministry of Jesus, shows through Him, the establishment of the presence of the KG.

Accompanying this reality, we also find a divine reversal in the presence of the KG. When the KG comes upon a fallen creation, events which normally stand contrary to the confines of humanity unbelievably occur. Luke shows this by the healing of the sick (Lk. 5.13, 8.44, 7.22, 14.4), the restoring of the crippled (Lk. 5.24, 6.10), the blind receiving sight (Lk. 18.42), the casting out of demons (Lk. 4.41, 9.42, 13.12), and the raising of the dead (Lk. 8.54). According to his gospel, these miraculous events occur when the presence of the kingdom is near. For, this is why Jesus sent the twelve and the seventy with instructions to both heal the sick and preach the KG (Lk. 9.2, 9.11, 10.9); and why Jesus associates the casting out of demons with the coming of the KG (Lk. 11.20). Luke also illustrates this in Acts. After Jesus spoke to the apostles concerning the KG (Ac. 1.3), we then see the same type of association in the healing

acts of God’s power through their ministry (Ac. 3.7, 4.29-31, 5.15-16, 8.7, 9.34, 9.40, 14.8-10, 19.11-12, 20.9-10, 28.3-6, 8-9). This divine reversal is also recognized in the repeated promise that those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last (Lk. 1.52, 7.28, 13.30, 14.11, 18.14). The repentance and conversion of hostile and depraved men – who then are described as sharing in each other’s possessions and joining in the breaking of bread – is also a picture of this heavenly turnaround (Ac. 2.42, 46, 4.32). Therefore, it is to be noted that when the KG comes upon the disorder of mankind, God’s perfecting grace causes a divine transformation. Thus, we can conclude here that the realization of the KG is seen in the arrival of Jesus, the authority and power of His ministry, and the divine reversal of things on earth.

PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The second categorical appearance of the KG in Luke-Acts can be recognized in the public proclamation of its presence, power, or coming. In other words, the KG is something preached. It is a declaration to the nations, announcing the sovereign “work of God and His appeal to man.”² This is seen predominately in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

It was Jesus who told the crowds, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Lk. 4.43). He is then seen fulfilling that purpose moving from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the KG (Lk. 8.1, 9.11, 9.27). Jesus also taught others to do the same. This is seen in the sending out of the twelve (Lk. 9.2), the instruction to the seventy (Lk. 10.9), and the imperative command, “proclaim” (*διάγγελλε*), to

² Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 583.

another (Lk. 9.60). In Acts, Luke begins with the witness of Jesus appearing to the apostles after His resurrection, “speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Ac. 1.8).

With the presence of the Holy Spirit, those things concerning the kingdom were now understood in the apostles’ hearts, and they too went forth as bearers of good news. Five times throughout Acts, Luke writes that the apostles were proclaiming³ the KG (Ac. 8.12, 19.8, 20.25, 28.23, 28.31). The movement of the KG is also seen implicitly throughout the apostolic ministry. In Peter’s sermon’s, we see the evidence of the King’s authority when he quotes Psalm 110.1, “The LORD said to my LORD, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (Ac. 2.35). After Peter’s sermon, we see God’s sovereign work in the repentance of people for the forgiveness of sins (Ac. 2.35, 3.19, 10.43). Peter refers to Jesus as the ἀρχηγὸν τῆς ζωῆς (Prince of life), and life is certainly what the kingdom brings (Lk. 23.42-43). At Thessalonica, the enraged Jews gave clear witness that the apostles were saying that there is “another king, Jesus” (Ac. 17.7), thus verifying what kind of message Paul was preaching – indeed, it was that of the kingdom. Therefore, through the words of Jesus and the apostles, Luke gives us clear evidence that the KG is something which is preached. The message it contains is the clear representation of the centrality of God in the eternal work and establishment of His kingdom amongst men.

GIVING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

³ The word “proclaiming” is used here as an umbrella word. Luke actually uses the words, “preaching the good news,” “reasoning and persuading,” “preaching,” and “solemnly testifying.”

The third appearance of the KG is stated in a manner which shows that it is given, and received; however, there are certain conditions included. For instance, this type of language occurs when Jesus says in “the beatitudes,” “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk. 6.20). In other words they will receive the KG. The kingdom will be given to them, that is, only to those who are poor in spirit (Matt. 5.3 = Lk. 6.20). In Luke 8.10, the disciples have been granted, or given the understanding, to know the mysteries of the KG. The condition here is being a disciple of Jesus. Later in verse 12.32, Jesus says it is the Father’s delight to give His flock the riches of the kingdom. As part of the flock, the condition is to seek first the KG (Lk. 12.31). When Jesus called for the children to come to Him, He again makes a conditional statement, that one must receive the kingdom like a child, otherwise their can be no entering it at all (Lk. 18.17). Immediately following that narrative, Jesus encounters the rich young ruler (Lk. 18.18-30). We are shown two things. One, the kingdom can be entered; and two, the condition is for the rich young ruler to rid himself of everything that hinders him from fully submitting to Christ. The rich young ruler could not bring himself to do it. In such astonishment from Jesus’ words in verse 24 and 25, the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus responds, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God.” Here one must see that it is not humans that bring the saving work of the KG upon themselves, but the giving of the sovereign hand of God. Only by grace will one submit himself to any of the conditions given above, and therefore, the hope for the world to receive the things of the kingdom rests not in human hands, but in the hands of a giving King.

GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The fourth appearance of the KG in Luke-Acts addresses its expansion here on earth, both physically and spiritually. This use can be classified as the growth of the KG. Illustrated in parables, the kingdom's growth is compared with two things – the growth of a mustard seed, and the spreading of leaven (Lk. 13.18-19, 20-21). Both the seed and the leaven are items of small proportion, yet respectively, both grow and spread to be something of a larger significance. The small mustard seed grows into a tree – one which even the birds of the air desire to nest – illustrating the multiplication of souls which would gradually be entering the kingdom from the beginning to end. The leaven – usually used in small amounts for baking purposes – causes all three pecks of flour to become leavened, thus signifying the inward work of Christian truth spreading throughout humanity.⁴ Indeed, this is the type of growth reflected by the kingdom through the fullness of the cross. Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension were central to God carrying out His kingdom plan. For, Jesus' atoning death was not only key to allowing sinners a way into the kingdom, but His ascension would now bring the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – the One who is necessary for kingdom growth. It is for this reason Jesus instructed the disciples to wait first for the Holy Spirit to come (Ac. 1.8). After these instructions, the reality of the parables begins to unfold. What began with Jesus and the apostles (Ac. 1.2), then becomes 120 (Ac. 1.15), and then 3,000 (Ac. 2.41), and then 5,000 (Ac. 4.4), and from thence forth, multitudes were constantly added to their number (Ac. 5.14). Luke also displays this kingdom

⁴ A. B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, a Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord*, 3 ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1904), 112.

growth through the apostles missionary journey's (Ac. 8.5, 14, 26, 10.23, 11.19-26, 13.2-3), especially that of Paul, who is last seen sharing the gospel of the kingdom in Rome (Ac. 28.30-31). Therefore, the growth of the KG in Luke-Acts is modeled through the life and teaching ministry of Jesus, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the ministry of the early church.

ESCHATOLOGICAL COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The fifth appearance of the KG can be recognized by the eschatological language Luke uses to describe it. Thus, Luke intends not only for his reader to understand the kingdom as a present reality, but also as a future reality – as a kingdom still to come. This is what Graham Stanton calls, “a present experience and a future hope.”⁵

This is first seen in Luke 1.33 when the angel Gabriel promises Mary that Jesus' kingdom will have (*ἔσται*) no end. It is also seen when Jesus instructs His disciples how to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Lk. 11.2); when Jesus spoke of one day seeing Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets in the kingdom (Lk. 13.28-29); when He also answered the disciples question of, “When therefore will (*ἔσται*) these things happen” (Lk. 21.7, cf. 21.31); and when He uses the phrase, “until the kingdom of God comes,” at the “Last supper” (Lk. 22.18). A future kingdom is also known in the heart of the thief on the cross when he pled, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom” (Lk. 23.42). Luke also uses the anticipation of Israel to reveal the eschatological coming of the kingdom. When Jesus was nearing Jerusalem, the people were supposing that “the kingdom of God was going to appear *immediately*” (Lk. 19.11 emphasis

⁵ Graham N. Stanton, *Gospels and Jesus*, 206.

added). In Luke 22.30 Jesus tells the disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones in His kingdom, judging Israel. A man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, was *waiting* for the KG (Lk. 23.51 emphasis added). And lastly, in Acts 1.6, the apostles questioned, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” Thus, according to the evidence above, the kingdom is not only present, or in our midst, but is still to come. It is in this day that Israel will have their long awaited King, and the dominion of Christ will be fully realized upon the earth.

OVERALL MESSAGE OF LUKE-ACTS

ROLE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

All five of these appearances play a penetrating role in the overall message of Luke-Acts. First, the realization of the kingdom reveals the progress of God’s plan through the arrival of Jesus Christ. Second, as the central proclamation of Jesus and the apostles, the KG message announces its current presence and development. Third, the giving of the kingdom provides great hope which rests in the sovereign hands of God to continue His mighty work. Fourth, the kingdom’s growth shows the plan of God being carried out through the power of the promised Holy Spirit. And fifth, Luke’s eschatology confirms the hope of Christ’s everlasting kingdom in a coming day when God’s rule will be manifested in full. Thus, the role of the KG theme in Luke-Acts is to reveal the steadfast work of God through the life and ministry of His beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit, so that the promises of Zion might be fulfilled in the establishment of His rule with the fullness of His people. These five appearances not only describe the nature of

the kingdom, but they also call the readers attention to Luke's development of God's plan within the context of Luke-Acts.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD FROM LUKE TO ACTS

The development of the KG theme between the birth narratives and Paul's Roman captivity does not change in its fundamental nature – for the sovereign plan of God will be carried out – but by the way Luke communicates it in his writing. For instance, this development is first portrayed in the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus. Here he defines God's saving work not only as the coming salvation for Israel (Lk. 1.32-33, 54-55, 69), but also by the anticipated “inclusion of the Gentiles”⁶ (Lk. 2.32). Indeed Israel awaits their Savior throughout Luke's gospel, but because it is hidden from them (Lk. 19.42), Jesus will suffer the cross, and the work of the kingdom will now proceed in the proclamation to the Gentiles (Lk. 24.47). Thus, the commission that Jesus leaves with His disciples at the end of Luke's gospel now becomes a reality in Acts,⁷ when the rule of God is brought in and exercised by the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Jesus Christ. Following this is when we see a dramatic decrease in Luke's explicit use of βασιλεία (kingdom), yet it seems that the authority of the kingdom message is present with his use of “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Ac. 2.38, 3.6, 16, 4.10, 18, 5.40, 8.12, 9.15, 21.13).⁸ The apostles ministry is then seen fulfilling what Jesus spoke of in the parables of the mustard

⁶ Robert C. Tannehill, *What Kind of King? What Kind of Kingdom? A Study of Luke*, Word & World XII, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 18.

⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁸ Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 589.

seed and the leaven, as we see an increase of believers from 120, to 3000, to 5000, and more (Ac. 1.15, 2.41, 4.4, 5.14). Luke's development, therefore, is revealed particularly in the kingdom's persistent growth despite Israel's rejection of their long awaited Savior. God's plan for the kingdom's expanse shall not be thwarted, and thus will go forth steadfast, so that "all flesh will see the salvation of God" (Lk. 3.6).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the kingdom message of Luke-Acts, Luke reveals God's steadfast plan for the establishment of His kingdom through His active dominion in all things. Through this rule, the hearts of many will be conquered by the sovereign Holy Spirit, and the kingdom will continue to advance on earth in the glorious hope of one day becoming fully realized when the King comes again.

Again, Christian hope is based squarely upon the passion of God to fulfill His promise in the spreading of His kingdom, so that all the nations will rejoice in His glory. Thus, the desire of all Christians today should be to earnestly seek the divine rule of God, both in their own lives, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Indeed, this is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Your kingdom come." Only then will the gospel be preached to the poor, the sick healed, the blind made able to see, and the lame able to walk. Only then will the gates of Hades be shaken by a people who go forth in the might of their victorious King. Only then will the nations say together, "Hallowed be thy Name."

WORKS CITED

- Bruce, A. B. *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ, a Systematic and Critical Study of the Parables of Our Lord*. 3 ed. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son. 1904.
- Kittle, Gerhard, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. vol. I. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, Mich.: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967.
- Smalley, Stephen. *Spirit, Kingdom and Prayer in Luke-Acts*. *Novum Testamentum XV*. fasc. 1. January 1973.
- Stanton, Graham N. *The Gospels and Jesus*. 2 ed. The Oxford Bible Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2002.
- Tannehill, Robert C. *What Kind of King? What Kind of Kingdom? A Study of Luke*. *Word & World XII*. no. 1. Winter 1992.