



THE BEREA PAGE

"Examining . . . to see if these things are so" ~ Acts 17.11

Kingdom in Context

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In seeking to understand the New Testament, it is essential to keep in mind that neither the documents nor the story they tell arose from a vacuum (see [The Bible's One Story](#)). Ideas that are brought to fulfillment in the New Testament originate and are defined in terms of their use in the Old Testament and Judaism. Everett Ferguson elaborated on this point relative to the references to the kingdom in the Gospels:

In the ministry of Jesus as described in the Synoptic Gospels, we hear much about the kingdom and meet for the first time in the canonical writings the exact phrase, "kingdom of God." Jesus, however, was clearly not introducing a new concept. The Old Testament passages referred to above, and others, as well as writings from the apocrypha, the pseudepigrapha, and Qumran make evident that the concept of God's kingdom was prominent and quite intelligible among Jesus' Jewish hearers (Ferguson 1996, 22).

Ferguson wrote those words after defining the word *kingdom* as used in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages ([more reign than realm](#)), and illustrating its meaning from Daniel 4, Revelation 11, and Luke 19. He then discussed Israel's use of the kingdom idea to depict God's rule over the world (Exod 15.18; Ps 103.19) and its connection with his glory, power, mighty deeds, and everlasting dominion (Ps 145.11–13; 1 Chron 29.11; Ps 22.28; Dan 4.3, 34) (Ferguson 1996, 19–21).

The kingdom theme is prominent in the prophets. They called Israel to account for not submitting to God's reign and also told the people to expect a time when it would be magnified (e.g., Isa 24.23; 52.7). The arrival of the reign would be a time of good news (Isa 40.9–10; 52.7) characterized by deliverance/salvation, peace, healing, joy, a return to God, and justice (Isa 42.1–7).

Isaiah's kingdom emphasis is noteworthy, and seventeen texts from the book have been singled out for their proclamation of the good news of God's coming deliverance (9.1–7, 11; 24.14–25.12; 26; 31.1–32.20; 33; 35; 40.1–11; 42.1–44.8; 49; 51.1–52.12; 52.13–53.12; 54; 56; 60; 61; 62) (Stassen 2006, 24). Because of its influence in Judaism, Isaiah's role in developing Jewish understanding of the kingdom is also especially important for Jesus' ministry, as Glen Stassen observes: "Jesus quoted Isaiah whenever he proclaimed the coming of the reign. With only one exception, no other literature in the first century speaks of 'the reign of God.' Logically, then, to understand what 'the reign of God' meant in Jesus' day, we should ask what it meant in the prophet Isaiah" (Stassen 2006, 22). Though a detailed study is well worth the time, we'll settle here for Stassen's summary of the emphasis of both testaments: "The reign or kingdom of God is about the self-revelation of God and God's presence coming to deliver us" (Stassen 2006, 24).

This is the necessary background for understanding the term *kingdom* (βασιλεία, *basileia*) in Luke, where it appears forty-six times (cf. Matthew, 55; Mark, 20), and in the author's continuation of Jesus' story in Acts, where it appears eight times (see also the cognate verb βασιλεύω, *basileuō*; in Luke 1.33; 19.14, 27). Elements of Luke's emphasis include the following:

- The central theme of Jesus' preaching is *the reign of God* (Luke 4.43) which is said to have "come near" (10.9, 11).
- The events surrounding Jesus' birth indicate that the time had arrived when God was "visiting" his people, as promised (Luke 1.68, 78; cf. 7.16; 19.44).
- When the angel announced Jesus' birth to Mary, he told her the child would one day sit on David's throne where he would "reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1.32–33; cf. 20.41; also Acts 2.30–31, 34–35; 13.22–23, 34–35).
- Jesus' triumphal entry was hailed as the arrival of the awaited King, evoking the imagery of Zechariah 9.9 (Luke 19.38; cf. Matt 21.5, 9; Mark 11.9–10; John 12.13).
- Using the titular term for one who had been "anointed," Luke consistently refers to Jesus as "the Lord's Christ," "the Christ of God," "Christ, a king," and so on (Luke 2.11, 26; 3.15; 4.41; 9.20; 20.41; 22.67; 23.2, 35, 39; 24.26, 46).

In general terms, these passages show that Jesus' mission was about God's reign. Other passages, notably Luke 4.16–30 and 7.18–23, elaborate what his reign looked like in action and are deserving of more detailed study.

Works Cited

Ferguson, Everett. 1996. *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
Stassen, Glen H. 2006. *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance*. Jossey-Bass.

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