

QUEST 52

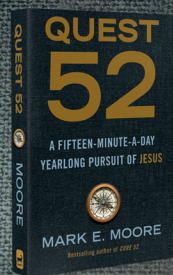
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Notes on the Kingdom of God

By Mark E. Moore, Ph.D.

- I. Definition: The Kingdom of God (KOG) is referenced 106 x's in 67 separate contexts in the gospels, 58 of those are in Matthew and Luke. There is wide attestation to the KOG in parables, prayer, sermons, beatitudes, prophecies, and miracle stories. It is almost exclusively a term of Jesus. Only rarely will the kingdom be mentioned by others (e.g., Luke 14:15) or as a parenthetical comment by the evangelists (e.g., Mark 15:43/Luke 23:51; Luke 19:11). Not only does the term “kingdom” appear far more in the Gospels than in any other literature, but only Jesus speaks of it in terms of “near”, “has come upon you”, “entering into it”, or “seeking it.” Prior to Jesus it was a rare term. The precise phrase “kingdom of God” (βασιλεία θεοῦ) is never found in the canonical Old Testament, though 1 Chronicles 28:5 uses the term “kingdom of Yahweh” (מַלְכוּת יְהוָה) and there are a number of related terms connected to God’s rule, e.g., Psa 103:19; 145:12 (מַלְכוּתוֹ); 145:11, 13 (מַלְכוּתֵךְ); 1 Chr 17:14 (מַלְכוּתִי); 1 Chr 28:5 and 2 Chr 13:8 (מַלְכוּת יְהוָה); 1 Chr 29:11 (הַמַּמְלָכָה); Obad 21 and Psa 22:29 [27] (מְלוּכָה). The Aramaic portions of Daniel also have a few instances of regal terminology related to Yahweh: Dan 3:33 [4:3] (מַלְכוּתַהּ מַלְכוּת); 4:32 [34] and 7:27 (מַלְכוּתָהּ); Dan 2:44 where the “God of heaven” establishes “a kingdom”. In the Apocrypha “kingdom of God” is used only once (Wis 10:10). It is equally rare in the pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Philo, and Josephus. Furthermore, after Jesus, usage of “the kingdom of God” is muted. Outside Paul (Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 4:20; 1 Cor 6:9–10 [2x]; 1 Cor 15:24, 50; Rom 14:17; cf. 1 Thess 5:12), and one reference in Revelation (Rev 12:10; cf. 11:15), the kingdom is seldom mentioned. Acts is the only book outside the Gospels to thematically develop the “kingdom of God” (cf. Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The conclusion is clear: While the symbol of God’s reign is found in various places in the OT and other Jewish literature, its formulation as the imminent kingdom of God in the gospel is unique and appears to be developed by Jesus (with due credit, of course, given to his predecessor, John the Baptist).
- A. The kingdom is when God rules just like he does in heaven (Matt 6:10; Luke 11:2), particularly through the Messiah (Mark 15:43; Luke 1:33; 23:51; Acts 1:6; Heb 1:8 [as perceived by righteous Jews of Jesus’ day]), though Jesus clarifies that this is not an earthly kingdom (John 18:36).
- B. It was the basic message of early Preaching. John the Baptist (Matt 3:2; Mark 1:15); Jesus (Matt 4:17; Luke 4:43; 8:1; Acts 1:3), often accompanied by healings (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Luke 9:11), and the Apostles (Luke 9:2), also often accompanied by healings (Matt 10:7). As well as all those that preach Jesus’ message (Matt 13:19, 52; 24:14; Luke 9:60; 10:9; 16:16; Acts 8:12); especially Paul (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).
- C. It is like:
1. A field sown in good seed that an enemy sabotages with similar looking weeds (Matt 13:24, 38, 41). Or a dragnet that catches all kinds of fish, some good, some bad (Matt 13:47). *It has imposters who will be purged at the judgment.*
 2. A mustard seed that starts very small and winds up huge (Matt 13:31; Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18); or leaven that permeates a huge batter of dough (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20). It grows night and day imperceptibly, like seeds in the garden (Mark 4:26). *It starts out small and ends up big.*
 3. A treasure hidden in a field (Matt 13:44) or a pearl of great value (Matt 13:45). *It is worth giving up everything else to gain.*
 4. A landowner who hires workers throughout the day but pays them the same (Matt 20:1ff.). It is also like a king who throws a wedding banquet for his son and invites all kinds of people to attend. *God’s grace will be dispensed (unequally) according to his choice and our response to the invitation.*



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- D. It has suffered violence from the hands of forceful men trying to take hold of it (Matt 11:12). It is in opposition to the kingdom of Satan (Matt 12:25–28; Mark 3:24; Luke 11:18–20; Eph 2:2; Rev 16:10). The Pharisees shut out sincere people from the kingdom (Matt 23:13).
 - E. It is a present reality (Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; 10:11; 17:20–21), manifested in Jesus’ Messianic ministry (Mark 11:10; Luke 19:11 [as Jesus’ society interpreted it]), that will have eschatological fulfillment (Matt 8:11–12; 13:43; Luke 14:15; 21:31; 22:16, 18; 30; 23:42; 1 Cor 15:24; Heb 12:28; Rev 11:15; 12:10), at Jesus’ return (Matt 25:1, 34; 26:29; Mark 14:25; 2 Tim 4:1). Ultimately, it will become equivalent to “heaven” (Mark 9:47; 2 Tim 4:18; 2 Pet 1:11), but now is embodied in the church (Col 4:11; Rev 1:6; 5:10).
 - F. It is not about earthly things (“eating and drinking”) but about spiritual things (“righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”), (Rom 14:17). It is not about “talk but of power” (1 Cor 4:20). In fact, flesh and blood cannot inherit it (1 Cor 15:50).
- II. “Membership” in the Kingdom:
- A. Who gets in:
 - 1. The poor (in Spirit) and the Persecuted (Matt 5:3, 10; Luke 6:20; James 2:5).
 - 2. These “least” people are greater than John the Baptist, the greatest man ever born of a woman (Matt 11:11; Luke 7:28). Little children are the greatest in the kingdom (Matt 18:1–4; 19:14; Mark 10:14–15; Luke 18:16–17).
 - 3. Repentant sinners will have access before religious leaders who do not accept Jesus (Matt 21:31; Mark 12:34).
 - 4. On the other hand, the rich will have a difficult time entering (Matt 19:23–24; Mark 10:23–25; Luke 18:24–25). And the wicked and sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5).
 - B. Many outsiders will enter but insiders will be excluded (Matt 8:11–12; Luke 13:28–29).
 - C. Peter has the keys to it (Matt 16:19). All the Apostles were given the secrets of the kingdom, but others excluded from it (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10)
- III. It demands of its citizens:
- A. Righteousness based on obedience to the law of God (Matt 5:19–20). Many will say “Lord, Lord” but only the obedient will be saved (Matt 7:21). The fruit we are especially to “produce” is the acceptance of Jesus (Matt 21:43). God particularly requires filial forgiveness (Matt 18:23).
 - B. It is to be our ultimate priority above secular concerns (Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31–32), even above our family commitments (Luke 9:60–62; 18:29). Some have even become eunuchs to better serve God in his kingdom (Matt 19:12). This will require enduring many hardships (Acts 14:22; 2 Thess 1:5; Rev 1:9).
 - C. One must humble himself like a little child (Matt 18:3–4; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17) and be born again (John 3:3–5).
 - D. Although God is pleased to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32), and essentially, he is the one who calls us and qualifies us for the kingdom through Jesus (Col 1:12–14; 1 Thess 2:12; Rev 1:6; 5:10). Moreover, he will compensate us extravagantly for pursuing it above all other things (Luke 18:29).

¹The author understands this to be a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem, rather than the end of the world. However, (a) it is still eschatological vocabulary, (b) Jesus does not differentiate clearly between 70 C.E. and the Second Coming, and (c) the destruction of Jerusalem is paradigmatic for the kind of things that will happen at the end of the world. Thus, this becomes an appropriate picture for “End Times” events.

²This refers to the work of Jesus on the cross, not the end of time. Yet, like Luke 21:31 it is still phrased in eschatological language.