

The King, his kingdom, and the gospel in Acts

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The kingdom of God was the central theme of Jesus' ministry. So why does the book of Acts appear to neglect it? The term "kingdom" occurs forty-two times in Luke's Gospel, but just eight times in his book of Acts.

How could such an important theme to Jesus appear to almost vanish for the early church? Let's take a closer look at Acts and see.

The kingdom at the beginning of Acts

As Acts opens Jesus, risen from the dead, is meeting with the disciples over a period of forty days. Luke tells us that content of his teaching during that important time of preparation for world mission was the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). During this time the disciples pressed him be definite about the restoration of Israel as a united people under the kingship of the Messiah. They asked "is this when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

They longed to see the divided kingdom, made up of Judea and Samaria united more under the Messiah's rule, free from the oppressive rule of Rome.

The disciples may have hoped that the reign of Jesus would mean that Caesar would no longer rule over Jerusalem or Palestine. But since Jesus rules as King over all the earth, it means Caesar no longer rules anywhere.

The kingdom at the end of Acts

Acts closes with Paul under house arrest in Rome. Despite this constraint, from morning to evening, he is boldly proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:17-31).

Luke intentionally highlights the theme of the kingdom of God at the opening and closing of the story of missionary expansion. He's telling us that everything that happens in between expands and demonstrates the message of the kingdom.

For Luke, the book of Acts is a commentary on the kingdom of God.

The kingdom throughout Acts

When Phillip went down to Samaria to proclaim Christ, heal the sick, cast out demons, and baptise new believers, Luke tells us he preached "the good news of the kingdom" (Acts 8:12).

When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, made many new disciples and planted churches on their first missionary journey, they returned to strengthen the disciples and remind them that, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

In Ephesus, Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly about the kingdom of God until he was forced out (Acts 19:8).

In his farewell speech on the beach at Miletus Paul reminded the Ephesian elders how he had gone among them preaching the kingdom and thus proclaiming to them the whole will of God (Acts 20:25-27).

In Acts, kingdom ministry involves pioneer evangelism, disciple making, church planting, and church strengthening. There is also a future element to the kingdom and disciples must persevere through many hardships before they experience the fullness of the kingdom in the life to come (Acts 14:22).

Acts refers to the kingdom eight times. Five of references occur in the context of “preaching the kingdom.” The kingdom is coming in its fullness at the end of time. Right now the reality of the kingdom can be experienced through repentance and faith.

Implications

The kingdom in Acts cannot be separated from the risen King who rules from heaven. Jesus is in heaven, but he is not absent from earth. He is the active ruler over his kingdom. The building and equipping of his church is exactly what his kingly rule is designed to produce until his return in glory.

The gospel of the kingdom is not an alternative to the gospel of Christ crucified for our sin. Jesus has been sent not only to announce the coming reign of God, but to perform the decisive event through which God will bring in that reign. Talking about the kingdom of God requires us to talk about the cross.

The gospel of the kingdom as we find it in Acts is the announcement of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit that flow necessarily from the throne of the crucified and risen Saviour-King.

Source: Chris Green, “The King, His Kingdom and the Gospel: Matthew, Mark and Luke-Acts” in [*God's power to save: One gospel for a complex world?*](#) ed. Chris Green (London: IVP, 2006) 104-37.