

What Kingdom of God Did Jesus Proclaim in Luke?

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Jesus traveled about...proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

(Luke 8:1; see also 4:43; 9:2, 11, 60; 20:1)¹

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them...

“When you enter a town...Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’” (Luke 10:1, 2, 8, 9)

When you pray, say: “...your kingdom come....” (Luke 11:2)

The kingdom of God is within you. (in your midst, NASB; Luke 17:21)

A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. (Luke 19:12)

Introduction

Surely every person who loves what is good and right must welcome the idea of a kingdom of God. What an improvement that would be over the governments we have now! The sample verses quoted above make it obvious that the kingdom of God is a key theme in the Gospel of Luke.² It was the basic theme of Jesus’ ministry. He called it by different names, including “the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1), “my kingdom” (22:30), “a great banquet” (14:16), and “that age” (20:35). Often He spoke of it without labeling it. Even Jesus’ title *Christ* (literally, *Anointed One*, like *Messiah*) means primarily that He will rule in God’s kingdom; He is “Christ, a king” (23:2).

The story in Luke continues the story begun in the Old Testament. There, too, the theme was the kingdom of God. There can be no doubt what kind of kingdom that was; all the Old Testament books of history (Genesis through Esther) tell about it and its sequel. Genesis lays the foundation for that kingdom. Exodus recounts its beginning when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt.³ Second Kings (chapters 17 and 25) and 2 Chronicles show how God brought that kingdom to an end. This followed several centuries of warnings through the prophets (like Isaiah and Jeremiah). Through the same prophets God

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV). NASB stands for New American Standard Bible. KJV stands for King James Version.

² This study considers thirty-six Lukan passages in which the kingdom of God is clearly referred to, sometimes repeatedly.

³ The Israelites were already His chosen people, but at Mount Sinai He made them into His kingdom (Exod. 19:3-6; 25:22; Ps. 114:1-2).

often promised that He would some day restore the kingdom perfected and glorious (Micah 4:8). Read one such promise out of many in the book of Isaiah.⁴

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples.... On this mountain... he will swallow up death forever [and] wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6-8)

A great feast prepared by the Lord for all peoples on earth! No more death nor tears! No more disgrace for the Lord's people Israel! There are many such prophecies. Because of them, godly Jews in Jesus' day expected the coming kingdom of God to have material and political elements. Sure, it would be spiritual: God's Spirit would fill the Ruler and indwell every person. All would know and serve God. But the kingdom would also be earthly—over all the earth—with Israel restored and all nations in subjection to God. And it would be material. All effects of the curse—sin, suffering, sickness, and death—would be replaced with righteousness, wholeness, peace, and joy. In a new covenant the Lord would fulfill all His promises—even those of the land and the throne—to Abraham and David. “The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

Is it naïve to take such promises at face value? Would it be “unspiritual” for God to include such material and political elements in the kingdom He brings?⁵ Was the kingdom preached by Jesus identical to the predicted one? If so, why did it not come as described? Did it come in some way? These are all questions that one must decide if he is to understand Luke's Gospel.

There is no lack of evidence to consider. Yet, interpreters disagree. Some of them do not know or do not believe the Old Testament promises. Some of them get their definitions from current Christian culture rather than from Bible study. Some of them use one or two verses (which they misinterpret) to contradict all the rest. For these reasons many have wrongly concluded (1) that Jesus' kingdom is quite non-political and non-material⁶ and/or (2) that He has already inaugurated it.

⁴ Even before the prophecy quoted here, see those in Isaiah 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 16:5; 18:7; 19:23-25; 24:21-23. For sample prophecies in another book, read Zechariah 2:10-13; 14:1-4, 8-9, 16-21.

⁵ For those who believe in the God of the Bible, this is no question about His ability. He who created heaven and earth can surely make them new!

⁶ To prove this, many use these words: “the kingdom of God is within you” (from the KJV and NIV versions of Luke 17:21). As often happens, the one who constantly cites a proof text misunderstands it. See Part I, section D.

This study shows that the kingdom preached in Luke is identical to the predicted one—and will be inaugurated at Jesus' Second Coming.⁷ In order to show this, Part I summarizes and comments on much of the evidence from Luke. Part II adds personal observations and conclusions.

The passages listed in Part I are those in Luke that most clearly refer to the kingdom. Each passage is classified according to its most obvious meaning as it is translated in the NIV. (That meaning is not necessarily correct.) This results in four categories of how the kingdom's coming is related to the time when the passage was spoken or took place:

- A. definitely future (20 passages)
- B. probably future (3 passages)
- C. possibly future or possibly present (9 passages)
- D. definitely present in some sense (4 passages)

In a cross reference, such as "A.2," the letter refers to the category and the number refers to the passage. Thus, "A.2" refers to category A, passage 2, which is Luke 1:69-75.

I. Passages in Luke Clearly Referring to the Kingdom

A. Passages in Which the Kingdom Was Definitely Future

1. 1:32-33 The angel Gabriel told Mary that her Son would be the Son of God and Son of David. He would sit on David's throne, over the house of Jacob, and would reign forever.
[This refers to the eternal kingdom on earth that God promised to King David by covenant in 2 Samuel 7—and described in many prophecies. Although other nations will be in subjection to God, the key nation is the one here called "the house of Jacob." It has descended physically from Abraham through his grandson Jacob.]
2. 1:69-75 Filled with the Spirit, Zechariah predicted that the descendant of David (Jesus, soon to be born) would save Israel from its enemies. This would allow God's covenant with Abraham to be fulfilled. (Both Simeon and Anna showed the same hope when the baby Jesus was later presented at the temple, 2:25-38.⁸)

⁷ See the summary statement at the end.

⁸ Simeon "was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him" (v. 25). The Holy Spirit had revealed that he would live to see "the Lord's Christ" (v. 26). "Moved by the Spirit," he took Messiah into his

[A.1 and A.2 give the “Jewish” view of the kingdom, based on Old Testament promises interpreted normally. That Jewish view, correct in general, was emphasized in Luke 1-2 as the proper background for the rest of the book.⁹ Though not included in this study, John the Baptist’s preaching about the coming Messiah was based on the same view (e.g., 3:9, 17). Many Jews, however—as both John and Jesus pointed out—neglected the spiritual aspects of the promised kingdom.¹⁰]

3. 9:26-27 Jesus promised (a) that He (“the Son of Man”) would come in glory and (b) that some of those present would see this future kingdom.

[The second part of this promise was fulfilled in the next event after the promise, as recorded by all three Synoptic Gospels. Three of the disciples “saw” Jesus’ coming and kingdom, as previewed on the Mount of Transfiguration.¹¹ Peter makes this clear in 2 Peter 1:16-18.]

4. 10:1, 8-12 During His final and deliberate journey to Jerusalem (9:51),¹² Jesus constantly announced, “the kingdom of God is near [literally, “**has drawn near to**”] you” (10:9, 11).¹³ He announced this through seventy-two messengers “sent...ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (10:1). [As Matthew shows us, both John (Matt. 3:2) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17; 10:7) had made this announcement from the beginning. Saying it at this nearly final stage in Jesus’ ministry gave powerful evidence that the kingdom had still not begun. It had only “drawn near,” which is the constant meaning of this common Greek verb. (For example, using the same form of the same verb, James 5:8 says that “the Lord’s coming **is near.**” Though near, Jesus’

arms and praised God for seeing His “salvation” who would bring “glory to your people Israel” (vv. 28, 30, 32). Anna “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (v. 38).

⁹ It would seem that to neglect or scorn the introduction provided betrays inexcusable arrogance.

¹⁰ Even Nicodemus, “Israel’s teacher” (John 3:10), did not realize that personal repentance and a new birth would be required to get into the kingdom. Yet, such requirements were specific in kingdom prophecies as well as in John’s and Jesus’ preaching. If Nicodemus had understood Ezekiel 36:22-32, for example, he would not have been surprised at Jesus’ teaching in John 3:3-10.

¹¹ Since this promise would be fulfilled before their death, it could not refer to heaven. Since it was only for “some” of them, it could not refer to (a) God’s universal rule or some spiritual kingdom (which all believers—not just some of them— would be in), or (b) the resurrection or Pentecost, which all saw.

¹² This journey occupies nearly eleven chapters of Luke, culminating with His royal entry into Jerusalem at 19:28-45.

¹³ The announcement was not for the godly only but also for those who did not welcome the spokesmen (10:10).

coming had certainly not arrived when James wrote—and still has not arrived.¹⁴)

However, some feel that Jesus would not have called the kingdom near if it were not going to start. Why not, if He was truly giving Israel a choice? The kingdom was near because everything was ready (Luke 14:17; see A.7) for Israel to accept. The King had come and shown, by His miracles, that He could start the kind of kingdom predicted. The choice was uncomplicated; God had not previously revealed to Israel that the King would come twice.]

5. 11:2 Jesus taught His disciples, when they pray, to say “Your kingdom come.” [This should be our constant prayer; the Greek word for “when” can mean “whenever.” Praying for the kingdom to come implies that it has not come yet.]
6. 13:23-30 When asked, “Are only a few people going to be saved?” (v. 23), Jesus said that the door was narrow. Many who knew Him would “see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God” but not be admitted (v. 28). However, other “people will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (v. 29).
[The question referred to future salvation, which Jesus’ answer equated with entering the kingdom. This future aspect of salvation was a common teaching in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 12:2, 3; 25:9), the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Matt. 10:22; 24:13), and the Epistles (e.g., Rom. 5:9-10 and 1 Thess. 5:8-9). See also A.9, in which “eternal life” is future.]
7. 14:15-24 Someone spoke of the blessedness of eating in the kingdom.¹⁵ Jesus responded that since the invited ones (Israel) would not attend God’s banquet, others would be brought in.
[The speaker believed literally the Isaiah 25 passage quoted in the introduction of this study. Jesus’ response implied that the kingdom was ready. But Israel was not. However, Israel’s refusal has opened the door for Gentiles, Romans 11:11. This does not mean that God has given up on Israel.]

¹⁴ Some interpreters, convinced that the kingdom began when Jesus’ ministry began, think that the verb here means “the kingdom is present.” They can show no place in the New Testament where it clearly means that. (See also the comment for A.8.)

¹⁵ What prompted this speaker was apparently Jesus’ promise to one who feeds the poor: “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14). That is another reference to the future kingdom and could have been added to the list under category A.

As Acts 1:6-7 implies, Messiah is going to “restore the kingdom to Israel.” Likewise, the Apostle Paul writes that “all Israel will be saved, as it is written” (Rom. 11:26).]

8. 17:20a, 22-37 This passage includes parts a and c of the following exchange.
 - a. 17:20a Unbelieving Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom would come.
 - b. 17:20b-21 This first part of Jesus’ answer was directed to those Pharisees and was enigmatic. Because of the way it has been translated, this part of His answer has been put into section D (see D.4).
 - c. 17:22-37 This second part of Jesus’ answer was directed to His disciples and was not enigmatic. In it He told His disciples that they would not see Him for a long time but that His day would come without warning, suddenly, and bringing a final separation of people.

[Part a: The Pharisees’ question clearly assumed that the kingdom was future. Why did they make that assumption? (1) Because they knew that the kind of kingdom the prophets had promised had not come. (2) Because Jesus through His seventy-two disciples had kept on announcing that the kingdom had drawn near (see A.4 and footnote there).¹⁶

Part c: Jesus’ answer to His disciples by no means suggests a present or purely spiritual kingdom.]

9. 18:18-30 When a ruler asked what to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus showed him that he (the ruler) was not as good as he thought. Then Jesus told His disciples that it is “impossible with men” for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

[The ruler’s question and Jesus’ answer both implied that eternal life is the same as entering the kingdom. That will happen, according to verse 30, in “the age to come.” For other examples equating eternal life with entering or inheriting the future kingdom, see Matthew 7:14; 25:46; and compare Romans 2:7.]

10. 19:11-27 Because the people thought that the kingdom would appear when He got to Jerusalem (v. 11), Jesus told this parable. In it (a) He prepared His disciples for the fact that the kingdom would not appear soon, and (b) He urged them to invest faithfully until (c) the King comes back [from heaven] with the kingdom.

¹⁶ The Pharisees’ question confirms that Jesus’ “has drawn near” did not mean “is present.” If it had meant that, the Pharisees would have asked for proof of the kingdom’s presence.

[The Lord could scarcely have chosen a clearer way to show that His kingdom (though “near”) would not come soon after all. Its inauguration would still be future even after His final arrival at Jerusalem.¹⁷]

11. 20:27-38 The Sadducees, “who say there is no resurrection” (v. 27) tested Jesus (vv. 28-33). They asked a question about life “at the resurrection” (v. 33)—a question they considered unanswerable. Jesus did answer, however, in two parts: (a) He gave information about changes in men’s condition in that future age (vv. 34-36).¹⁸ (b) He proved from Scripture (a statement by Moses) the certainty of the resurrection (vv. 37-38).

[Notice that the question and both parts of the answer had to do with resurrection, not immortality. Not just whether believers live on after death but whether they will some day live in new bodies. From the Scriptures He proved that “Even Moses said that **the dead rise**,” not that they survive. When did Moses say this? When he, centuries after the patriarchs’ deaths, “call[ed] the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’” (v. 37). Since God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (v. 38), the patriarchs still exist. But how does their survival prove that they will rise? The logic is not stated but is implied in God’s character. If (a) they still exist and (b) are still God’s special people, God must raise them in material bodies to inherit the material things He promised them. If we are His people, He must raise us for the same reason. The kingdom will be material as well as spiritual.]

12. 20:41-43 Jesus cited Psalm 110 to point out two things about Messiah (Christ): (a) He is David’s Lord [and is therefore divine] and (b) He is to sit at God’s right hand until His enemies are subjected to Him.

[According to Hebrews 10:12-13, “he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.” In other words, though highly honored, He still waits to fully exercise His royal authority. According to Revelation 3:21, the throne where He now sits is

¹⁷ Nevertheless, some interpreters insist that Jesus started His kingdom during His ministry. (See A.4.) If He did start it, where did He say so as plainly as He spoke in 19:11-27 of its futurity?

¹⁸ Luke 20:35-36 is quoted below. Notice in verse 35 that Jesus refers to the resurrection as future (“that age”). Yet, in verse 36 He switches the tense and talks about it as though it were present (“they are”). “35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.” All the present-tense verbs in verse 36 refer to the future resurrection. (So do the present-tense verbs in 1 Corinthians 15:12, 13, 15, 16.) It is evident that present-tense verbs do not in themselves prove that the kingdom is present.

His Father's, not His own. His own, of course, will be the throne of David (A.1.)]

13. 21:25-36 Jesus said that signs in the heavenly bodies and among nations must precede His coming in glory to reign.
[No such signs took place before the Day of Pentecost, which could not, therefore, have inaugurated His kingdom.]
14. 22:16-18 Jesus said that He would not partake of the bread and wine again until the kingdom of God comes.
[Therefore, each time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we should look forward to His return and kingdom.]
15. 22:29-30 Jesus conferred the kingdom on the apostles, so that they may eat with Him in His kingdom and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel.
[Such "rule" has certainly not begun yet (see 1 Cor. 4:8). Neither does "the twelve tribes of Israel" now mean the church. "The twelve tribes" and "Israel" both refer only to physical descendants of Abraham.]
16. 23:42 The criminal on his cross asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His kingdom.
[Even that day they went in spirit to "paradise," v. 43. They could not go to Jesus' kingdom, which is not in heaven and will not begin until Jesus "comes" back to earth.]
17. 23:50 Joseph of Arimathea was waiting for the kingdom.
[So was Nicodemus (see John 3:3, 5 and A.2 comment and footnote). As seen in the Introduction and A.1, 2, there can be no doubt what kind of kingdom they were waiting for. Jesus had not tried to change their Jewish views about the kingdom—but only about how to enter it.]
18. 24:21 The two walking to Emmaus told their unrecognized companion (the risen Lord) that they had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel.
[The "redemption of Jerusalem" and of Israel were part of Luke's original definition of the kingdom in 1:68 and 2:38. This hope, though delayed, will be fulfilled.]
- 19-20. 24:25-27, 44-46 The resurrected Jesus affirmed that all must be fulfilled that the prophets said about the Messiah (Christ).

[This includes all they said about (a) His suffering and (b) His glory, v. 26 (cf. 1 Peter 1:11). The suffering is finished; the glory has barely started.]

B. Passages in Which the Kingdom Was Probably Future

1. 6:20 Jesus announced that the kingdom belongs to His “poor” ones: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours **is** the kingdom of God.”
[Jesus here referred to the kingdom with a present-tense verb (“is”). Yet, that alone cannot prove that the kingdom was present (see A.11). By not defining the kingdom here, Jesus approved the Jewish view (see Introduction, A.1, and A.2). Thus, He was not changing the definition but telling who would enter the kingdom. The fact that it was still future agrees with the future promises in the two beatitudes that follow: “will be satisfied... will laugh” (v. 21). Also, according to a parallel passage, the kingdom will be granted and inherited “when the Son of Man comes in his glory” (Matt. 25:31, 34).]
2. 7:28 Jesus declared that (a) up to John, none was greater than John; yet, (b) the least in the kingdom “is greater than [John].”
[If the kingdom had started, John had been inexplicably demoted—to less than “the least”—or excluded. Since neither option is reasonable, we conclude that the kingdom was still future. Regarding the present-tense verb, see A.11.]
3. 12:31-32 Jesus said that disciples should seek the kingdom (rather than seek what they would eat or drink, v. 29). The Father was pleased to give them this kingdom.
[We don’t seek what we already possess. When will He give it? See B.1.]

C. Passages in Which the Kingdom Was Possibly Future or Possibly Present

- 1-6. 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 11, 60; 20:1 Jesus and His disciples preached the (good news of the) kingdom.¹⁹
[By not defining the kingdom, they assured that the Jews would understand it in the same way as in chapters 1-2. See Introduction and A.1, 2.]
7. 8:9-10 Jesus revealed “the secrets of the kingdom” to the disciples only.

¹⁹ 16:16a could also be here but because of 16b is included in D.3.

[These “secrets” were revealed by Jesus in parables to His disciples. They do not reveal a secret (or “mystery”) kingdom, as some think, but new truths about the expected kingdom. Luke does not develop the new-revelation purpose of these parables to the extent Matthew does (but see C.8).²⁰ Instead, the parable in Luke 8:4-15 (found also in Matthew 13 and Mark 4) emphasizes the different kinds of people who “hear” God’s word. Of four groups described, only one group “hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (v. 15).]

8. 13:18-21 Facing opposition, Jesus told His disciples the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. In each case a small beginning leads to amazing results. [These are also “secrets of the kingdom” (see A.7). Jesus’ Jewish disciples would be encouraged by rightly seeing the kingdom not in the small beginning but in the grand conclusion—not as the mustard seed but as the resultant tree.²¹]
9. 18:16-17 Jesus promised that the kingdom is for those like children. [Although He used the present tense, the interview that followed showed that He referred to the future. Both here and in verses 24-25, the “kingdom of God” to be entered would be in “the age to come,” v. 30. See A.11.]

D. Passages in Which the Kingdom Was Definitely Present in Some Sense

1. 9:62 Jesus declared that the one who looks back is not fit for service **in the kingdom**. [A better translation is “for the kingdom,” as in the KJV and NASB, which would put this passage into category C.²²]
2. 11:20 Jesus declared that the kingdom “has come to [upon] you.”

²⁰ Matthew 13, for example, reports several parables that contrast a small beginning with a grand conclusion (in some cases, sowing versus harvest). In each case Jesus’ Jewish disciples would naturally understand the kingdom to be the conclusion. That is where the explanation in 13:41-43 puts it.

²¹ Some interpreters, however, insist that the “secrets” reveal a new form of the kingdom. For evidence they cite the introduction to some of these parables: “What is the kingdom of God like?...It is like....” But this introduction did not mean that the next thing mentioned would be the kingdom. (Sometimes that was impossible, as in Matthew 13:24 and 25:14, where the next thing was “a man.”) Instead, it was a common Jewish way to begin a parable about any subject. In the parable each person would see the subject (here, the kingdom) according to his prior understanding. Jesus’ disciples would naturally see the kingdom in the grand conclusion of each parable.

²² In 9:62 KJV and NASB follow a slightly different—and better supported—Greek text from the one for NIV. That better text is also found in Colossians 4:10-11, where Paul names three “fellow workers for the [future] kingdom of God.”

[How can this statement be harmonized with the constant message that the kingdom had drawn near (A.4)? By recognizing that the kingdom was present only in the person and power of Messiah (the King) and His representatives. This was one reason Jesus did many kinds of miracles, not just “moral” and “spiritual” ones. He thereby showed that He could bring the kind of kingdom—with all its elements—that the prophets had described. That was the meaning of His answer to John in Matthew 11:1-6 (see also D.3 and D.4).]

3. 16:16 Jesus declared that since the time of John, the kingdom was being preached and **“everyone is forcing his way into it.”**

[This is a good example of translators’ theology determining their translation. Another translation better agrees with the historical facts and with the normal meaning of the Greek: **“everyone is doing it violence.”** Although the kingdom was present in Jesus and His representatives (including John), no one was entering it (Matt. 23:13). Instead, the Jews were doing it violence in the way they treated John, Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples. The parallel passage in Matthew 11:11-12 uses similar language to say the same thing. See the technical information in the appendix.]

4. 17:20b-21 The Pharisees asked when the kingdom would come. Jesus told them that it would not come with “careful observation...because the kingdom of God **is within you**” (v. 21).

[In the verses immediately before and after this statement, the kingdom was definitely future—see A.8. But here Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees was enigmatic, probably on purpose.²³ Surely He did not mean that the kingdom being announced as near was a spiritual reality “within” the unbelieving Pharisees. It makes better sense to translate instead, with NASB, “in your midst.” That means that the kingdom was there because Jesus was there—and absent while He is absent. When it does come, it will not be with “careful observation”—such as that by a doctor watching the progress of disease symptoms. Instead, as Jesus immediately suggested to His disciples, it will be here in complete form just as soon as He returns.]

²³ It is sad how many modern commentators use this answer to the Pharisees—to outweigh nearly all the evidence in Luke. They suppose that by it Jesus defined the kingdom as present and solely spiritual.

II. Observations and Conclusions about the Kingdom in Luke

References in parentheses are to the list of passages in Part I.

1. **The kingdom was a constant theme in Luke.** Jesus constantly preached the good news of the kingdom. He did so in person (C.1-6) and through His representatives (A.4). Preaching it seems to imply that it was available then or would be available soon. Even if its coming were delayed, however, that kingdom would be good news to those who loved God.
2. **In most references in Luke to the kingdom, it was future.** Jesus and others usually spoke of the kingdom as future when they spoke. That is true in most of the thirty-six Lukan passages—all clearly referring to the kingdom—considered in this study. Thirty-two of those passages (categories A, B, and C) either must or can refer to the kingdom as future. As translated by the NIV, only four passages (D.1-4) must refer to the kingdom as then present. If the Greek text used by NASB for Luke 9:62 is correct (see D.1), that number is only three. Those three, of course, do not contradict all the rest. Even the three were spoken during a period when Jesus was announcing through His representatives that the kingdom had drawn near (Luke 10:9, 11). In other words, even though the kingdom was present in some sense (see observation 13), at the same time it was near and future.
3. **By not defining the kingdom, Jesus affirmed the Jewish definition of it.**²⁴ Interpreters agree that the Jewish definition included material and political elements. There would be an earthly throne for the king, freedom for Israel, and all nations in subjection. The Jewish hope for such a kingdom was not unworthy, since it was supported by (a) Old Testament Scriptures (see page 1), (b) God’s angel and prophets in Luke 1-2 (see observation 4), (c) Jesus Himself (see observation 5).
4. **Luke’s introduction affirmed the Jewish view of the kingdom.** In chapters 1 and 2 Luke provides a beautiful introduction to his Gospel. Surely it is the proper background for the rest of the book. That introduction repeatedly affirms the Jewish view of the kingdom. For example, consider what the angel Gabriel (who came from “the presence of God,” 1:19) told Mary about her Son. He would sit on “the throne of his father David, and...reign over the house of Jacob forever” (1:32-33; A.1). Such a kingdom would certainly have national and political elements. So would “salvation from our enemies” for Israel (1:71, 74; A.2; see also 2:38), as predicted by John’s father, Zechariah. Zechariah was not naïve but “filled with the Holy Spirit”(1:67).

²⁴ We assume that in general Jesus intended to communicate and not confuse. Communication requires mutual understanding of major terms.

Such prophecies in Luke's introduction affirmed the material kingdom the Jews expected. Yet, the Jewish hope was not fulfilled; that material kingdom did not come. Therefore, the student of Luke must decide if the Jewish view was mistaken. Was the definition in Luke's introduction later transformed? Or was that kingdom simply delayed?

5. **Jesus Himself affirmed the Jewish view of the kingdom.** He did not contradict their view but assumed it and reinforced it. For example, He related the kingdom to His coming in glory (A.3, 13). He would establish it by slaying His enemies (19:27). It would include feasting (A.6, 7, 14, 15). In fact, He said, "everything must be fulfilled that is written about [Him] in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (24:44).
6. **Jesus' "secrets of the kingdom" revealed that the expected kingdom would be delayed.** These secrets revealed no present kingdom but a delay for the predicted one (C.7, 8). These secrets were new truths revealed to disciples in parables in order to conceal them from others (8:9-10). They neither redefined the kingdom nor introduced a new form of it. They described the same glorious kingdom the disciples were waiting for. But there would be an unexpected stage in preparing for it. For the first time it was revealed that Messiah would come twice, with an unforeseen age between His two comings. No prophet (not even John the Baptist) had previously known or explained this (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Jesus' explanations of these parables did not change how His disciples understood the kingdom. He explained them only to the disciples—and they understood (Matt. 13:51-52). But they continued to look for the same kind of kingdom. For example, they struggled for places of honor "in your kingdom" (Matt. 20:21; cf. Luke 22:24-30). Jesus did not contradict their assumption. "These places," He explained, "belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father" (Matt. 20:23). Even after Jesus' post-resurrection teaching, they kept their "Jewish" view of the kingdom. "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). After that they asked Him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).²⁵ The kingdom was still future and still honored Israel.

²⁵ Many modern interpreters who see no future for Israel or Israel's kingdom cast scorn on the disciples' question in Acts 1:6. Jesus did not. By saying that "it is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7), He clearly implied that such a time will come.

7. **At no time during His ministry did Jesus begin a purely “spiritual” kingdom.** Many claim that He did, but no one can point to its inauguration day. Some try to prove their claim from their own interpretation of the “secrets” you have just considered (observation 6). Others appeal to the verses in section I.D, in which the kingdom was referred to as present. If present, they say, it must have begun. If it began, they say, it must be purely spiritual, because it has no political/material elements. Of course it does not have such elements now, because it did not begin.

Convinced that the kingdom began, some interpreters claim that the many kingdom prophecies (both Old Testament and New Testament) are being fulfilled. They are not hesitant to “spiritualize” all the political/material language. In effect, they do not believe what God has promised.

Others, however, believe in a purely spiritual kingdom now but a glorious kingdom (its final form or stage) in the future. One objection to their teaching is that it makes many Scriptures ambiguous. If the “kingdom” now has two meanings (present and future), which one should we take in a given passage? We might mistakenly look at the supposed “present” kingdom when the Lord instead wants us to look ahead to His triumph.²⁶ Why did He give us no means of avoiding such confusion? Why did He and the New Testament writers never speak of stages or forms of the kingdom?

8. **During His last months of ministry, Jesus—through many spokesmen—emphasized that the kingdom had drawn near (not begun).** This was His great emphasis on His final, elaborate journey toward Jerusalem (9:51; 10:1, 8-12; see A.4). Since the kingdom had “drawn near,” there are two obvious conclusions about it: (a) It had not always been present. Therefore, it was not God’s universal rule over everything or His spiritual rule in obedient hearts. Both of those are always present. Instead, this kingdom could (and will) come. (b) As long as it had “drawn near,” it had not yet begun.²⁷
9. **Just before reaching Jerusalem, Jesus announced that the kingdom would appear only after a substantial delay.** At Jericho, the last stop before reaching the Jerusalem area, He announced this by telling the Parable of the Ten Minas (19:11-27;

²⁶ Consider, for example, Matthew 18:3: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” At least one well-known dispensationalist believes that this refers to the alleged present form of the kingdom. According to him, the present kingdom is a “sphere of profession” containing both wheat and tares. Thus, he interprets Matthew 18 to say that humility is required even to enter that sphere!

²⁷ Since Messiah had come, nearly everything was ready for the kingdom to begin. Why did it not begin? Because of the predicted role of the key nation, Israel (see Isaiah 53). Israel rejected the Messiah, and the kingdom was “postponed” until Israel repents (Luke 19:41-44; Acts 3:17-21; Romans 11:22-32).

A.10). In it He explained that the kingdom would not appear immediately. There would be a substantial delay while He “went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself” (19:12, NASB). Then He would return “after receiving the kingdom” (19:15, NASB). We are living during the delay.

10. **When mentioned by name in the last chapters of Luke, the kingdom was still clearly future.** This happened several times (e.g., A.13-15). For example, in His prophetic discourse to His disciples (Luke 21), Jesus stated clearly that the kingdom would again be near only after certain signs would take place (21:24-36). None of these signs took place immediately.²⁸
11. **After His resurrection, Jesus affirmed the prophecies about the kingdom.** He emphasized to His disciples that they should “believe all that the prophets have spoken” and that the Messiah must both suffer and be glorified (24:25-26, 44-46). Since the predictions of His suffering were fulfilled as written, so will be fulfilled the predictions of the glory of His kingdom.
12. **Though Jesus often spoke about the future kingdom, He rarely gave much information about it.** Why not? Possibly because (a) those interested could consult the Old Testament prophecies, (b) His great concern was for disciples to live right in this present age.²⁹
13. **Though the kingdom was future, it was also present in a temporary way.** In only three or four passages in Luke was the kingdom definitely present. In one of these it was suffering violence (D.3). In two others it had come to (upon) them and was in their midst (D.2, 4). How could it be present when it was near and future? In the person and power of Messiah (and His representatives; see A.4). When He was here, the kingdom was here. Now that He is gone, the kingdom is gone. This is the meaning of His full answer in Luke 17:22-37 (A.8).
14. **For at least the first two centuries, nearly all church writers looked at the kingdom as future.** They considered the kingdom to be their future goal (as does Luke’s next book, Acts—see 14:22). It was only after they began identifying the church as the kingdom and neglecting or spiritualizing Old Testament prophecies, that they started talking about a present kingdom. In many cases the result has been to consider

²⁸ Most or all of these signs—depending on interpretation—did occur during the same generation, a possible meaning for 21:32.

²⁹ The passage about the resurrection (20:34-38) is an exception. Even there He does not satisfy our curiosity about the kingdom but simply gives enough basis for steadfast hope today.

the real kingdom—the one described in the prophecies and Luke 1-2—as a Jewish misunderstanding. Thus, many have lost much of the Old Testament and twisted Jesus' and the apostles' teaching. By not understanding this basic teaching, they are unprepared to understand many others. And they mistakenly substitute pitiful Christendom, or their own church, or their own soul, for the glorious coming kingdom!

15. **The kingdom is far greater than we know.** Those who define the kingdom from the New Testament alone, without the Old Testament background, tend to repeat the mistake of the five blind men. Each felt a different part of the elephant and thought he could describe the whole elephant. Not one realized how big this thing was!

16. **To conclude, what kingdom of God did Jesus proclaim in Luke?**

The kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed in Luke's Gospel will begin when Jesus returns to establish it and rule—and will have all the elements predicted by the prophets.

Appendix

What Does Luke 16:16 Say Was Happening to the Kingdom?

The technical discussion that follows is summarized in the table at the end.

According to the NIV in Luke 16:16, the kingdom was being preached and “everyone is forcing his way into it.” The quoted words represent Greek *pas eis auten biadzetai*, literally, “everyone into/against it uses violence.” What were they doing to the kingdom? The verb *biadzetai* normally means “uses violence” (see Deut. 22:25, 28) and rarely suggests entering. But here it is followed by the preposition *eis*, which most often means “into.” So some, convinced that the kingdom could be entered in Jesus’ day, take that unusual meaning for *biadzetai*.

Their translation of Luke 16:16, however, disagrees with Matthew 11:11-12, which gives another version of the Lord’s words on that occasion. Though the same verb is used (*biadzetai* in a slightly different form), NIV translates it quite differently in Matthew: “the kingdom...has been forcefully advancing.” NASB, in contrast, sticks with the usual meaning of *biadzetai*, “suffers violence.” (So do the Louw and Nida lexicon, “suffers violent attacks,” and the NET Bible, “has suffered violence.”) What confirms that usual meaning is the parallel thought in verse 12b, that “violent men take it by force” (NASB). “Violent men” is Greek *biastai*, never used elsewhere of good men. What these evil men do (“take by force”) is expressed by a common verb (*harpadzousin*) meaning “snatch” or “plunder.” (Except for Matthew 11:12, NIV always translates this verb as take quickly or forcibly: see Matt. 12:29; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:28, 29; Acts 8:39; 23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; 1 Thess. 4:17; Jude 23; Rev. 12:5.) We can conclude that Matthew 11:11-12 does not speak of men entering the kingdom but plundering it. Since this passage is parallel to Luke 16:16, we should stick with the usual meaning for *biadzetai* there—“uses violence.” In that case, the preposition *eis* does not mean “into” but “against,” showing where this violence lands. (*Eis* is also used this way in Matt. 5:39 and 27:30, for striking “on the cheek” or “on the head.” See also Luke 12:10; 15:18, 21; 22:65.)

How could “everyone” (people in general) or “violent men” use violence against the kingdom or plunder it? By their selfish treatment of its representatives: John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus’ own representatives. Instead of submitting to it humbly, they tried to use it for their own purposes. What is your attitude toward it?

Matthew 11:12 in Two Translations			
Greek for Bolded Words	NIV (has unusual meanings)	NASB (has normal meanings)	Comments
<i>biadzetai</i>	From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing,	And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence,	This verb means rape in Deut. 22:25, 28. In Matt. 11:12, Louw & Nida translate, “suffers violent attacks”; NET, “has suffered violence.”
<i>biastai</i>	and forceful men	and violent men	Never used elsewhere of good men.
<i>harpadzousin</i>	lay hold of it.	take it by force	Elsewhere NIV always translates this verb as take quickly or forcibly: see Matt. 12:29; 13:19; etc.