STUDY GUIDE

The Kingdom in 1st Century Christianity

by Terry Stueck

Companion to the 5-Video Study Series + Introductory Trailer

Series Overview

This study guide accompanies a short video series designed to walk through

The Kingdom in 1st Century Christianity two chapters at a time.

Core thesis of the book: The first three centuries of Christianity were a functioning Kingdom under King Jesus—not a religion. Believers were citizens of a borderless nation, not members of a religious organization.

Key Contrasts

- Citizens, not Members
- A Nation, not a Church
- A Kingdom, not a Theology
- A Government, not a Religion
- Followers, not Lawyers
- Servants, not Theologians

Seek first the Kingdom of God and be in good standing with its laws. (Matthew 6:33)

Video Series Structure

Video	Chapters	Focus
Trailer	Introduction	Why early Christians were different
1	1–2	Shadow Government & Commonwealth
2	3–4	Upside-Down Kingdom & Gold Standard
3	5–6	Kingdom vs. Religion & Kingdom Lost
4	7–8	Reformation Blues & Translation Trials
5	9–10	Prove It & What Difference Does It Make?

Introductory Trailer

Discover the Kingdom Jesus Came to Restore

Why the first three centuries of Christianity looked nothing like today.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think only the early Christians (and not other religious groups) were so severely persecuted by Rome?

2. In your own experience, does modern Christianity feel more like a religion/organization or like a living Kingdom under a King? What evidence do you see either way?
3. What would change in your daily life if you truly saw yourself as a citizen of a borderless Kingdom rather than a member of a church?
4. Which of the contrasts listed (citizens not members, a nation not a church, etc.) challenges you the most right now? Why?

Video 1: Chapters 1 & 2

Shadow Government & Kingdoms Are Commonwealths

Key Points

- Early believers functioned as a separate nation with allegiance to King Jesus, not Caesar.
- The Kingdom is borderless—existing in the hearts of citizens wherever they are.
- Kingdoms are commonwealths: the King owns everything but shares it with His subjects.
- Jesus came to restore the Kingdom Adam lost, not to start a religion.

Discussion Questions

5. How does the idea of a “shadow government” or borderless nation change the way you read the book of Acts?
6. In what ways have you previously thought of Christianity primarily as a religion or theology rather than as a government under King Jesus?
7. What does the concept of a “commonwealth” mean for how you view your possessions, time, and relationships?
8. How does the early Christian understanding of the Trinity differ from how you have typically heard it explained?
9. Where in your own life do you still tend to say “mine” instead of recognizing the King’s ownership?

Video 2: Chapters 3 & 4

The Upside-Down Kingdom & The Gold Standard of Kings

Key Points

- Jesus’ Kingdom reverses worldly values (the last are first, the servant is greatest, etc.).
- The early believers turned the world upside down by living as citizens of a different government.
- Jesus is the gold standard of kings—the perfect King of Kings who restores what Adam lost.

Discussion Questions

10. Which of the Beatitudes (or other “upside-down” teachings of Jesus) most clearly reverses the values of the world around you today?
11. How did the early believers practically live out the upside-down Kingdom for nearly three hundred years?
12. In what ways is Jesus the “gold standard” of kings compared with both biblical and historical rulers?
13. Why is it significant that Jesus came to restore the Kingdom Adam lost rather than simply to start a new religion?
14. Where do you still expect the Kingdom to operate according to worldly patterns of power, status, or success?

Video 3: Chapters 5 & 6

Living in a Kingdom vs. Practicing a Religion & Kingdom Lost

Key Points

- A religion creates obligations that make people feel good; a Kingdom requires entering and remaining a law-abiding citizen.
- The Kingdom has never ceased, but it has been overshadowed by a religious replacement.
- Understanding God's ownership ("bought with a price") is the key to rest and freedom.

Discussion Questions

15. What are the practical differences you see between "living in a Kingdom" and "practicing a religion"?
16. How has the idea of church membership shaped your understanding of following Jesus, and how does citizenship change that picture?
17. Where do you see the Kingdom still present today, even if it is often overshadowed?
18. What role did Constantine's era (and later developments) play in transforming Christianity from a Kingdom into a religion?
19. How does understanding God's ownership affect your sense of rest or freedom?

Video 4: Chapters 7 & 8

Reformation Blues & Translation Trials

Key Points

- The Reformation recovered important truths but did not fully restore the Kingdom vision.
- Elevating Paul's writings over Jesus' own words has obscured the Kingdom message.
- Translation and religious frameworks have softened the governmental language of the New Testament.

Discussion Questions

20. In what ways did the Reformation recover important truths while still leaving the Kingdom vision incomplete?
21. How has the emphasis on Paul's writings over the plain words of Jesus affected the way many Christians read the Bible today?
22. Can you think of specific biblical words or concepts that lose their force in common English translations or teaching?
23. Why is it crucial to treat Jesus' own words as the primary source rather than allowing later commentators to override them?
24. Where have tradition or translation most hidden the Kingdom message in your own background or church experience?

Video 5: Chapters 9 & 10

Prove It & What Difference Does It Make?

Key Points

- The evidence is in the plain reading of the Gospels and Acts and the practice of the early believers.
- Living as a citizen rather than a member changes daily life: provision, forgiveness, rest, and allegiance.
- The Kingdom is available now. Seek it first.

Discussion Questions

25. What evidence from the Gospels, Acts, or early history most convinces you that first-century Christianity was a living Kingdom rather than a religion?
26. How does knowing the Kingdom has never ceased change the way you look for it today?
27. Which of the practical differences listed in Chapter 10 would make the biggest impact in your life right now?
28. How does the reality of God's ownership make radical forgiveness more natural or possible?
29. What is one concrete step you can take this week to live more fully as a citizen of the Kingdom rather than simply as a religious person?

Personal Reflection

As you complete this study, take time to answer these questions privately or with a trusted friend:

30. Where am I still functioning more as a member of a religion than as a citizen of the Kingdom?
31. What would it look like this month to "seek first the Kingdom" in a concrete way?
32. How does knowing Jesus is King right now change the way I face the challenges in front of me?

Jesus is King. The Kingdom is here. Seek it first.