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The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels

Introduction: A Brief Recapitulation of the Old Testament Story

We begin with the kingdom of God, which certainly is of prime importance in NT theology.¹ Goldsworthy remarks, “The idea of the rule of God over creation, over all creatures, over the kingdoms of the world, and in a unique and special way, over his chosen and redeemed people, is the very heart of the message of the Hebrew scriptures.”² In the pages of the NT it is made clear that God’s promises are fulfilled, the end of the ages has come (1 Cor. 10:11), the new creation has dawned, eternal life has arrived, and the new covenant is a reality. In the first part of this book we will explore these themes, for the NT continues the narrative begun in the OT. It picks up the story of salvation from the OT, where God promised to bless the whole world through Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 3:15; 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:4–5; 17:4–8, 19; 18:18–19; 22:17–18; 26:3–4; 28:14–15; 35:12–13).³ In particular, the Lord promised Abraham land, seed, and universal blessing. Genesis relates the story of the seed, or descendants, pledged to Abraham. The promises were not

1. For a brief survey of the kingdom in the OT and Jewish Second Temple literature, see Meier 1994: 243–70.

2. Goldsworthy, *NDBT* 618.

3. For two illuminating windows into OT theology from a canonical perspective, see Alexander 2002; Dempster 2003.

easily fulfilled, as both Sarah and Rebecca struggled with barrenness, and it was a long road before the birth of Isaac and Jacob and Esau. Nor were the land promises fulfilled, inasmuch as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were nomads in the land of promise, and Genesis concludes with Israel in Egypt.

Still, God was slowly fulfilling his promise. Jacob had twelve sons, and the promise of countless seed begins to become a reality in the book of Exodus. Indeed, so many Israelites were born that Pharaoh began to fear for the survival of his people and power. If the promise of many descendants was slowly becoming a reality, Exodus–Joshua recounts how the Lord fulfilled his promise that Israel would possess the land of Canaan. Yahweh rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt with remarkable signs and wonders, and Moses led the nation to Sinai, where God made a covenant with them and gave them his law. Still, the nation was recalcitrant and stubborn, for they made a golden calf, tested the Lord in numerous ways, and failed to believe that he would give them victory in Canaan. The Lord judged the adults of the wilderness generation, condemning them to forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Only after the death of Moses did Joshua lead Israel into the land of Canaan, and the Lord again worked in stunning and miraculous ways to help Israel conquer their enemies and take possession of the land. Two of God's promises were fulfilled: Israel was in the land and amply populated.

It is not enough, of course, that Israel resided in the land in large numbers. They had a mandate to live as the people of the Lord, to trust in God and do his will. We see in the period of the judges that Israel failed miserably. Instead of living as a holy and distinct people, they adopted Canaanite ways and turned against the Lord. The Lord judged his people by raising up other nations to oppress and subject them. When Israel cried to the Lord for deliverance, he raised up deliverers to save them from their oppressors. Unfortunately, the obedience of Israel was always short-lived, and hence they were caught up in a seemingly endless cycle of deliverance-defection-judgment-repentance.

Judges ends on a rather dour note. The behavior of the tribe of Dan in attacking a quiet and peaceful people and in hiring a priest to support their own agenda was a far cry from what the Lord commanded. The rape and murder of the Levite's concubine and then the subsequent support from the tribe of Benjamin relay the depth to which Israel had fallen. The narrator remarks that Israel had no king and the people did as they pleased (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The degradation of Israel is apparent with the opening of 1 Samuel, for Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, represent the corruption of the priesthood. The Lord raised up Samuel as a prophet and judge, but the accession of Samuel did not constitute a long-term solution, since his sons were corrupt and the nation as a

whole did not truly trust in Yahweh. Israel longed for a king so that they could be like the other nations, but such a desire demonstrated a refusal to accept God's kingship. Israel did not live under God's lordship as his holy people but rather longed to be like the nations that had kings leading them into battle. Nevertheless, the Lord agreed that Israel should have a king. Though Israel's motives were stained, the king anticipated the Lord's future reign over his people.⁴ As the first king, Saul recapitulated the history of Israel. Initially he was humble and pliable in the Lord's hands, but soon he forsook his trust in God and conducted the kingdom in his own way and in accord with his own wisdom. Therefore, God rejected Saul as king and refused to raise up a dynasty after him.

Instead the Lord appointed and exalted David as king. David became the model of a "man after God's own heart," showing in his refusal to avenge Saul that he trusted wholly in the Lord. Because of his reliance upon the Lord, David was granted victory by God over Israel's enemies. For the first time Israel appeared to be the people of the Lord, living under his lordship in the land. David desired to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem to show his devotion to the Lord and to centralize worship in accord with Deut. 17. But God forbade David to build the temple because he had spilled blood in war. David's successor and son, Solomon, a man of peace, would build the temple. However, God enacted a covenant with David in which he promised that his dynasty would last forever. David desired to build a house for God, but the Lord pledged that he would build a house for David that would last forever. Individual descendants of David would be punished and even rejected if they sinned, but the dynasty would never end. The covenant enacted with David would last forever (2 Sam. 7; Pss. 89; 132). It is clear, then, that the promises of blessing for the whole world and the hope that Israel would become a people truly obedient to the Lord would be realized through a king, a descendant of David. Often in the prophets the hope of a future king, an offspring of David, is featured. God's saving promises would be realized upon the coming of the promised king.

Despite all of David's strengths, clearly he was not the ideal king. His adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah caused Israel to spiral downward, and he came startlingly close to losing the kingship. David pointed forward to a future king, one who was more devoted to the Lord and nobler than he. The reader is poised to think that the greater

4. Scholars have long wrestled over the fact that Israel was wrongly motivated in desiring a king, while at the same time it seemed to be the Lord's plan that Israel have a king. A future king for Israel was not an accommodation to the nation, as if the kingship were inferior to God's original plan. The problem was Israel's motive in desiring a king, for they longed to be like the nations in having a king go before them and fight their battles (rightly D. Howard 1990).

king could be Solomon. He began his reign with a desire to rule Israel wisely, and as a man of peace he built the temple of the Lord. As time passed, however, Solomon strayed from the Lord, as he was enticed by his many wives to worship false gods. The peace and wisdom that Solomon seemed to promise would be realized by another king. The Lord judged Solomon for his defection, and after his death the kingdom was split into two: Israel in the north, Judah in the south.

Every king from the northern kingdom, Israel, was ungodly, worshipping at altars forbidden by the Torah. The nation experienced some political highs and lows, but the Lord's word of judgment was inevitable. In 722 BC the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom and exiled the people. The southern kingdom, which preserved the line of David, was not nearly as bleak. Several of its kings were truly devoted to the Lord. And yet the overall trajectory was still downward, and Judah traced Israel's steps and rebelled against the Lord's commands. God's word of judgment was unleashed on Judah as well, and Babylon sent Judah into exile, capturing Jerusalem and burning the temple in 586 BC.

Most of the prophetic books were written during the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. Any brief summary of the prophets surely would be inadequate, but we can say that the prophets proclaim both judgment and salvation—what is often identified as the day of the Lord.⁵ Those who turned away from God and refused to obey his word were judged. These words of judgment were fulfilled when the exile became a reality in 722 BC and 586 BC. Nevertheless, judgment was not the final word for Israel. The prophets looked forward to a day when God's saving promises would be fulfilled, his kingdom would come, the new covenant would be inaugurated, a new exodus from Babylon would be realized, the Spirit would be poured out on Israel, and Israel would keep God's law. The prophets promised a new creation, a new temple, a new covenant, and a new king. The exile would be over, and the wilderness would bloom.

The great promises in the prophets, however, were not fulfilled when the exile ended in 536 BC.⁶ Israel did return from Babylon and a temple was built, yet the temple was insignificant in comparison to the Solomonic temple. Nor was the nation enjoying glorious prosperity, the kind of glory envisioned in Isa. 40–66. Israel was small, struggling, and under the oppression of former powers. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah,

5. For a helpful survey on the day of the Lord, see Beasley-Murray 1986: 11–16; see also Hiers, *ABD* 2:82–83; House 2007: 179–224.

6. For a summary of what Israel anticipated and longed for, see Bauckham 2001: 435–37. What Bauckham describes as restoration here can also be described as the fulfillment of kingdom promises. The terminology used is not decisive, since different expressions are used to denote the same reality.

and Malachi document the low spiritual state of the nation. Nor did matters improve in the four hundred years before the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. Israel was a pawn in the struggle between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. A brief period of freedom dawned with the Has-moneans in the second and first centuries BC, but the interlude was brief, and soon the Romans swept in and subjugated Israel, appointing the Herodians and procurators to rule the land.⁷

This all-too-brief sketch of Israel's history helps us understand the significance of Jesus' claim that the kingdom of God had drawn near (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15).⁸ Those hearing Jesus did not ask for a definition of the kingdom. They understood him to be proclaiming the dawn of a glorious new era in which Israel would be exalted and the nations made subservient to Israel's God.⁹ The Lord would reign over the whole earth, the son of David would serve as king, and the exile would be over. The new covenant would be fulfilled, God's people would keep his law, and the promised new creation would become a reality. The Lord would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed, to the ends of the earth, would become a reality.

Centrality of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' Teaching

The Synoptic Gospels make it immediately apparent that the kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching. In this regard he is not to be differentiated from John the Baptist, who likewise proclaimed the coming kingdom (Matt. 3:2). John's preaching in the desert and his baptism in the Jordan signal the promise of a new exodus for those who repent and confess their sins (Matt. 3:3–6),¹⁰ but judgment will come for those who fail to repent (Matt. 3:7–10). The expression "kingdom of God" occurs

7. On the kingdom of God in Second Temple Judaism, see Beasley-Murray 1986: 46–51.

8. The verb *engizō* in Mark 1:15 has precipitated much discussion. Dodd (1936: 44) argues that the kingdom has come in its fullness. Others argue that the verb signifies nearness rather than arrival (e.g., Marcus 2000: 172–73). It is more likely, however, that the verb form cannot be confined to the present or the future and includes both. For this latter view, see France 2002: 92–93; Beasley-Murray 1986: 73. Meier (1994: 430–34) argues that the evidence is too ambiguous to derive a certain conclusion.

9. For the kingdom of God in the OT, see Beasley-Murray 1986: 17–25. For an apt description of what Israel expected, see *Pss. Sol.* 17–18.

10. Meier (1994: 46) says, "The desert naturally conjured up for Jews of any stripe the founding events of the exodus from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai, and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness." He goes on to say, "Likewise, the waters of the Jordan were an apt symbol not only for the washing away of sin but also for the entrance of Israel into a new and better life after its wandering in the desert of rebellion against its God."

four times in Matthew, fourteen in Mark, thirty-two in Luke, and four in John. At first glance, it might appear that Matthew does not use the phrase often, but then we notice that Matthew uses the expression “kingdom of heaven” thirty-two times.¹¹ Older dispensational thought distinguished between the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven,” but today very few argue for such a distinction. The usual scholarly explanation today is that the Gospel of Matthew was addressed to Jews, and the Jews often reverentially avoided using God’s name.¹² The term “heaven,” it is argued, was a reverential substitute for “God.” It follows, on this view, that the expressions “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” refer to the same reality and should not be distinguished.

Recent work by Pennington on the term “heaven” in Matthew, however, has demonstrated the inadequacy of the scholarly consensus in Matthew.¹³ It is quite unlikely that Matthew used the term “heaven” to avoid referring to God out of reverence, for he refers to God over fifty times elsewhere in the Gospel and actually uses “kingdom of God” on four occasions.¹⁴ Moreover, Jewish evidence that the term “heaven” was used to avoid the name of God out of reverence is lacking. Hence, it is more persuasive to argue that Matthew uses the term “heaven” for a particular purpose in the narrative.

The substance of Pennington’s case is as follows. When “heaven” (*ouranos*) is used in the singular without the term “earth” or its equivalent nearby, it usually refers to the sky (Matt. 16:1–3; cf. 6:26; 8:20; 13:32; 14:19; 26:64).¹⁵ The plural “heavens” (*ouranoi*), on the other hand, typically refers to the invisible divine realm (e.g., Matt. 3:16–17; 5:12, 16; 18:10; 19:21). When the pair “heaven and earth” is used, it may denote the entirety of the universe created by God (Matt. 5:18; 11:25; 24:35; cf. Gen. 1:1). But even more common in Matthew is the use of heaven and earth to contrast life according to God’s will and ways with life lived

11. Pennington (2007: 2–3) remarks, “‘Kingdom of heaven’ is found nowhere else in the OT, NT, or any preceding Second Temple literature. Similar phrases appear occasionally in the Apocrypha, but kingdom of heaven is found only in literature which postdates Matthew. Even these occurrences are quite infrequent (e.g., twice in the Mishnah and three times in the Gospel of Thomas).”

12. See Dodd 1936: 34; Meier 1994: 239.

13. Pennington (2007: 67–76) summarizes his thesis on heaven in Matthew with four points: (1) we see a preference for the plural form *ouranoi*; (2) we find an emphasis on the word pair “heaven and earth”; (3) Matthew regularly refers to the Father in heaven; (4) the phrase “the kingdom of heaven” is prominent in Matthew.

14. Pamment (1981) suggests a less convincing distinction. She claims that “kingdom of heaven” refers to an imminent but future coming of the kingdom, whereas “kingdom of God” refers to the kingdom already actualized in the present.

15. Matt. 23:22 seems to be an exception where the singular “heaven” appears to refer to God’s realm; “the powers of the heavens” in Matt. 24:29 also seems to be an exception (see also Matt. 24:31).

according to human standards. In Matt. 6:1–21 Jesus’ instructions on righteousness point to a heaven-versus-earth contrast, whether the issue is almsgiving, prayer, or fasting. The contrast between heaven and earth is illustrated by Matt. 6:19–20: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (cf. Matt. 5:34–35; 6:10; 11:23;¹⁶ 21:25;¹⁷ 28:18).

Matthew uses the plural “heavens” to speak of the Father in heaven on thirteen occasions, and “kingdom of heaven” thirty-two times to contrast the heavenly and earthly realm. The usage here confirms that the plural “heavens” refers to God, while the singular “heaven” refers to the sky.¹⁸ In other words, Matthew intentionally uses heaven and earth to contrast God’s ways with those of human beings. The disjunction between God’s ways and ours is also evident in (1) the “heaven and earth” pairs; (2) the emphasis that the Father is in heaven (separated and exalted above human beings); and (3) the contrast between the heavenly kingdom and the kingdoms that are earthly and wicked. Hence, the expression “kingdom of heaven” focuses on the truth that God’s kingdom is from above. His kingdom is not an earthly one but rather represents his sovereignty and rule over all other kingdoms and all other so-called gods. In particular, Matthew emphasizes the inbreaking of God’s heavenly kingdom in Jesus.¹⁹ The earthly and inhumane kingdoms described in Dan. 7 are giving way to the kingdom from above with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Matthew and the other Gospels do not speak only of the “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God,” for the word “kingdom” occurs alone eighteen times in Matthew, four times in Mark, twelve times in Luke, and twice in John. Most of these examples refer to God’s kingdom. It is very clear, then, that the kingdom of God is a central theme in the first three Gospels. John clearly moves in another direction, and we will explore John’s terminology in the next chapter.

The importance of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ teaching is also apparent by the location of the sayings about the kingdom. For example, both Matthew and Mark introduce Jesus’ teaching ministry with pregnant sayings about the kingdom of God. “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17). “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming

16. The contrast here is between heaven and Hades.

17. Here Matthew contrasts what is from heaven with what is from human beings.

18. The singular is also used in “heaven and earth” pairs, following the pattern of the LXX, regardless of the referent.

19. For a survey on the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, see Kingsbury 1975: 128–60.

the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14–15). Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom, the fulfillment of the good news that God would redeem his people. This promise of good news (*euangelion*) reaches back to Isaiah, where the good news is the new exodus from Babylon, the return from exile (Isa. 40:9; 52:7). The return from exile promised by Isaiah, however, cannot be limited merely to return from exile, since Isaiah promises that God will fulfill all of his saving promises to Israel culminating in a new creation (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).²⁰ Even though Israel returned from exile in 536 BC, the fullness of what was promised in Isa. 40–66 did not become a reality. The new creation did not commence, nor was the rule of evil shattered. Interestingly, the Jews did not conclude from this that Isaiah's prophecies were mistaken, but both the Qumran community (1QM IX, 19–21) and early Christians believed that Isaiah's prophecies were being fulfilled in their day. Jesus proclaimed that Israel was about to receive what God had promised. God would rule and reign over his people in a saving way. At the outset of his ministry Jesus heralds this work, calling upon Israel to repent and trust in God.

The importance of the kingdom is also attested by the summary statements that epitomize Jesus' ministry.²¹ "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Matt. 4:23; cf. 9:35; 24:14; Luke 4:43). Jesus' ministry in Galilee consisted of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Again the conjunction of new creation and kingdom appears, for the healing of every disease means that the old order is passing away. Similar summary statements that focus on the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus appear in Matt. 9:35; Luke 4:43–44; 8:1; 9:11. The kingdom does not belong to the periphery of Jesus' ministry, for, as Luke informs us, after his resurrection, in the few days that he had to instruct his disciples, Jesus over the course of forty days spoke to them "about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Indeed, when Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach during his ministry, they proclaimed the kingdom

20. We see from this that the Gospel writers did not typically refer to the fulfillment of God's promises in terms of return from exile or as a new exodus. Instead, they spoke of the coming of God's kingdom. It is important to see, however, that the coming of the kingdom means the fulfillment of God's promises regarding a new exodus and return from exile. Hence, there is no need to drive a wedge between the notion of God's kingdom and new exodus and return from exile, though it is important for the sake of precision to note that the terminology typically used in the Gospels is not that of a new exodus or a return from exile but of the coming of the kingdom of God (but see Matt. 2:15, 18).

21. It should also be noted that John the Baptist anticipated the arrival of the kingdom and the coming of another (see R. Webb 1991: 55, 196–97, 261–88).

of God (Matt. 10:7; Luke 9:2). If the kingdom of God was the theme of Jesus' instruction in the days subsequent to his resurrection, it must have been a central feature of Jesus' ministry.

Understanding the Kingdom

How should we understand what Jesus meant by the "kingdom of God"? Our OT survey provides some assistance in forming a definition, for we see the emphasis on the fulfillment of God's saving promises. It is also helpful to consider some specific OT and Jewish antecedents that refer to God's kingdom. The ruling power of the Lord is demonstrated at the exodus when he destroyed the Egyptians and saved Israel (Exod. 15:18). Israel also looked forward to the day when God's rule would be established and their enemies thwarted. "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people. It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44). This future kingdom would be realized under the Son of Man (Dan. 7:14, 18, 23, 27), and a descendant of David would rule in this kingdom (Isa. 9:2–7; 11). Ultimately, Israel longed for and expected the future reign of the Lord over all the earth (Isa. 24:23).²² Zephaniah directed his eye toward the future and promised a future reign of God as king in the midst of Israel (Zeph. 3:15). Indeed, the Lord "will become king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9 NRSV). The emphasis is on the future reign of the Lord, his triumph over Israel's enemies in coming days. Hence, when Edom is subjugated—and "Edom" probably includes a reference to all God's enemies—the Lord will reign (Obad. 21). The booth of David will be established again and the Lord will rule over the world, and the fruitfulness of this world demonstrates that it will be a new creation (Amos 9:11–15).

The expectation of a future rule of God in which he fulfills his promises to Israel and subjugates his enemies continues in Second Temple literature. For example, in the *War Scroll* from Qumran a great battle is envisioned in which the people of God will triumph. A similar expectation of a glorious future is envisioned in the *Testament of Moses*: "Then his kingdom will appear throughout the whole creation. Then the devil will have an end. Yea, sorrow will be led away with him" (*T. Mos.* 10:1;

22. Isa. 24:23 speaks of the Lord reigning over Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, but in the context of Isa. 24–27 this refers to the Lord's reign over the whole world, for Isa. 24–27 emphasizes the Lord's eschatological judgment and rule over the whole earth (see esp. 24:20–22; 25:6–9; 26:11–19; 27:1).

cf. *2 Bar.* 73:1–7).²³ In *Pss. Sol.* 17–18 the psalmist prays that the Lord will raise up a Davidic king, the Messiah, to cast sinners out of Jerusalem and to rule over his holy people. Gentile nations will be subservient to him, and all the earth will live in fear of the Lord. Or, we can think of what Josephus (*Ant.* 18.23–25) calls the “fourth philosophy,” the sect with Judas the Galilean as their leader. They refused to capitulate to any other governing authority, convinced that only the Lord should rule over them. Scholars dispute whether this party should be called “the Zealots” at this early stage.²⁴ In any case, we see the roots of a way of thinking that culminated in the Jewish rebellion against Rome in AD 66–70. The Jewish longing for God’s future kingdom is also expressed in the Kaddish: “May he let his kingdom rule in your lives . . . and in your days and in the lives of the whole house of Israel, very soon and in a near time.”²⁵ Interestingly, the desire for Israel to triumph and to see surrounding nations defeated is expressed in a thoroughly Jewish way in Luke 1, indicating Luke’s faithful rendering of early Jewish piety before the coming of the Messiah. If we interpret the relevant verbs as futures, Mary anticipates the judgment of evil rulers and the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham (Luke 1:52–55).²⁶ With the birth of Jesus, God has begun to fulfill his promises, though the complete fulfillment, as the reader of all of Luke-Acts knows, lies in the future.²⁷ Similarly, Zechariah rejoiced that God had visited his people and brought in his promised redemption (Luke 1:68–75).²⁸ In the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham, Zechariah saw the realization of the promise that Israel would be liberated from its enemies.

Eschatological Kingdom in Jesus’ Teaching

The brief survey of OT and Jewish teaching on the kingdom reveals that the kingdom was anticipated in the future; the focus was on the eschatological kingdom. When we turn to the teaching of Jesus, we see that he too expected a future kingdom, an end-time kingdom wherein God

23. All Pseudepigrapha citations are from Charlesworth 1983–1985.

24. For discussion of this matter, see Hengel (1989b), who answers in the affirmative, and Horsley and Hanson (1985), who answer in the negative.

25. Taken from Meier 1994: 297. See also Meier’s (1994: 361–62n36) sound and careful discussion regarding the date of the tradition.

26. Marshall (2005: 157–62) argues that the verbs that express God’s saving action on behalf of his people in Luke 1–2 point to the spiritual dimensions of Jesus’ mission.

27. See Juel 1983: 21; Seccombe 1982: 76–77.

28. Indeed, Maddox (1982: 137–42, 183, 186) argues that one of the central themes in Luke-Acts is the fulfillment of God’s eschatological promises. See also Bock 1987: 70–74; Kee 1990: 6–27.

would fulfill his saving promises. This is evident from the Lord's Prayer, in which believers are to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).²⁹ Jesus also speaks to the disciples of the day when he will come "in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28; cf. Luke 23:51), which clearly refers to the future fulfillment of the kingdom promise. When the kingdom comes, the judgment will commence, and all will be appraised for the way they have lived (Matt. 25:31–46). The coming kingdom can be described as a great end-time feast in which the righteous will rejoice but others will be cast out into the darkness (Matt. 8:11–12; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:15; 22:16, 18, 29–30; cf. Isa. 25:6–8).³⁰ The futurity of the kingdom is evident in the call to "inherit the kingdom" that has been prepared by God from the beginning (Matt. 25:34). Jesus did not believe that the kingdom had come in its fullness in his day, for he envisioned a future day when he would enjoy the messianic banquet in God's kingdom (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).³¹ Some of the Beatitudes also promise a future reward when the kingdom arrives (see Matt. 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23).³² Clearly, Jesus did not teach a completely realized eschatology. He anticipated a period of time in which believers awaited the fulfillment of God's saving promises and the unleashing of his terrible judgments.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom is the role that he envisions for himself. He is the king and judge, deciding both who enters the kingdom and who is excluded from it (Matt. 25:31–46). The Father will deny access to the kingdom to those who deny Jesus before others, whereas those who confess Jesus will be inducted into God's presence (Matt. 10:32–33 par.). The Son of Man saying in Matt. 26:64 indicates that Jesus saw his return as the event that commences the eschatological kingdom. When we speak of the kingdom, inevitably we are introduced to Christology, for Jesus does not merely speak abstractly about the coming kingdom. He invariably considers his own role as paramount in the eschatological kingdom. The most remarkable feature of the kingdom is the role of Jesus Christ himself.

It is when we think of Christology that the uniqueness of Jesus' view of the kingdom is clarified. The Qumran community and the Pharisees believed that if the Torah were kept more faithfully, God would fulfill his promises. Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord because it repeatedly

29. See Meier 1994: 291–301. Many commentators argue that the petition that God's name be hallowed (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2) is also eschatological (e.g., Fitzmyer 1985: 898; Davies and Allison 1988: 603).

30. Meier (1994: 309–17) argues that Matt. 8:11–12 and the parallel in Luke 13:28–29 are authentic and demonstrate Jesus' belief in the futurity of the kingdom.

31. See Meier 1994: 302–9.

32. For detailed discussion, see Meier 1994: 317–36.

sinned and violated his law.³³ Hence, they urged rigorous and meticulous observation of the ways of the Lord. By way of contrast, Jesus called on the people to repent and to recognize that God had sent him. The focus is not on the Torah but on Jesus himself and a right relation with him.³⁴ What Jesus called for was, in one sense, stunningly simple, but it was also remarkably different from the views of his contemporaries, and so opposition developed.

Nor did Jesus advocate cooperation with the Roman authorities, which seems to have been the pathway of the Sadducees and the political elite in Israel. Jesus believed that those who desired the approval of Rome had compromised with the world. The fulfillment of God's promises would not come through worldly wisdom and political machinations. He called upon people to turn to the Lord in a fresh and vital way, and to show their allegiance to the God of Israel by becoming one of his disciples.

Others in Israel opted for a political solution of a different character. Many believed that the power of Rome should be removed through guerilla warfare and violence. We think of Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.118), Theudas (Acts 5:36), and the Egyptian who tried to lead a revolt in Israel (Acts 21:38; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.261–263; *Ant.* 20.169–172). Still others could be mentioned. The end result was the Jewish war of AD 66–70 and the Bar Kokhba rebellion of AD 132–135. Both were severely crushed by the Romans. Jesus had a completely different vision of the coming of the kingdom. He repudiated any notion that the kingdom could be inaugurated through a violent program of resistance.³⁵ In some ways, those who opted for violence fell into the same trap that captured the Sadducees, except that they chose another form of political action. Jesus did not call for a political revolution; he trusted in the power of the word of God (Mark 4:28) and focused on the need of the nation to repent and turn to God. Jesus summoned the people not to revolt but to pay taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:15–22 par.). Thus he deliberately downplayed what was considered to be a matter of great political importance in his day. Jesus did not focus on the structures of evil that need to be dismantled, though certainly he recognized that evil permeated society. What will change society is individuals turning from

33. Scholars have debated intensely the role of the Pharisees in Second Temple Judaism. Deines (2001) rightly argues that the Pharisees had the most influence among all the religious movements during Jesus' ministry. See also Deines 1997, a definitive work on the Pharisees.

34. For the christological focus in Jesus' view of the kingdom, see Beasley-Murray 1986: 74.

35. Some have maintained that Jesus in actuality was a supporter of violent revolution (e.g., Brandon 1967). Few, however, are convinced of this thesis, and it has been decisively refuted by the small but decisive work of Hengel 1971.

their sin and committing themselves wholly to God. Even more striking, Jesus was convinced that he would transform the world by suffering and dying instead of leading a revolt and triumphing over political enemies. Matthew indicates that Jesus did not come to lead armies into the streets and thereby quash his enemies. On the contrary, he came to heal bruised reeds and to sustain flickering wicks. The kingdom, therefore, would be attained not by militaristic machinations but by Jesus submitting to the will of God and giving his life for the sake of his people (Matt. 12:18–21). Even though the Synoptics do not often cite Isa. 53, it seems that the vision that Jesus had for his own ministry comports with the substance of that chapter, where suffering is the pathway to victory.

The Presence of the Kingdom

The kingdom of God cannot be restricted to the future in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. It is also a present reality.³⁶ There is a sense, of course, in which God always and invariably rules as king over all. This is illustrated by Ps. 103:19: “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” God reigns at all times and in all places over all that occurs in history. The psalmist therefore declares, “The LORD reigns” (Ps. 93:1; 97:1; 99:1). The universal lordship of God is a staple of OT piety: “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Ps. 47:8). Israel longed for the coming of God’s kingdom in the future but also believed that God was in control of all of history. This is expressed well in the words of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:34–35: “At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” Jesus too held the notion that God rules over all, that his sovereignty extends over the whole earth. He did not depart from the OT on this matter.

It is clear, then, that when Jesus spoke of the future coming of the kingdom, he was not referring to God’s sovereign reign over all of history, for God has always ruled over all that occurs. The coming of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed designated something new, a time when God’s enemies would be demonstrably defeated and the righteous would

36. Meier (1994: 242) rightly argues that the kingdom is present according to Jesus, and thus his teaching about the kingdom cannot be confined to existentialism.

be visibly blessed. The future coming of the kingdom relates to the realization of God's promises of salvation. God has always ruled over the whole world, but when Jesus arrived on the scene of history, he had not yet fulfilled the saving promises found in the OT, nor were the enemies of God now vanquished.³⁷ When Jesus announced the presence of the kingdom, he declared that God was about to bring about the salvation that he had always promised.

One of the unique elements of Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom is that it is both present and future.³⁸ When we speak of God's kingdom as present in the ministry of Jesus, we are not referring to the notion that God is sovereign over all of history. Rather, the kingdom is present in Jesus' ministry in that the saving promises of the kingdom (i.e., the saving rule of God) had dawned with his coming. In other words, the OT promises of a new covenant and a new creation and a new exodus were beginning to be fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. How does the presence of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry fit together with the prayer for the kingdom to come? Why pray for the kingdom to come if it has already arrived in the person of Jesus? Many scholars now agree that the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching is both present and future.³⁹ In other words, the kingdom is already inaugurated but not yet consummated.⁴⁰ We will now explore in more detail in what sense the kingdom is already present in the ministry of Jesus.

One of the most remarkable statements in the Gospels is found in Matt. 12:28, where Jesus says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." In the parallel saying, instead of "Spirit of God," Jesus uses the expression "finger of God" (Luke 11:20).⁴¹ Our interest at this point is not on the difference between "Spirit" and "finger," for in either instance the emphasis is on God's power. What is remarkable is that Jesus saw in his exorcisms a sign that the kingdom of God had broken into history.⁴² Some interpreters

37. See Dunn 1975b: 47.

38. This emphasis on the presence of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry with a simultaneous expectation of a future consummation is supported also by an examination of Luke-Acts alone (see Maddox 1982: 132-45; also Green 1995: 94-101).

39. Jeremias 1971: 96-108; Kümmel 1957; 1973: 33-39; Ladd 1993: 54-102. There are different nuances in the views of these scholars, but there is general agreement regarding the already-not yet character of the kingdom. For this view in Luke, see Nolland 1998; Marshall 1970: 128-36.

40. Dunn (1975b: 308-18) especially emphasizes the role of the Spirit in the already-not yet character of Jesus' ministry.

41. See the full discussion in Meier 1994: 407-23. Cf. Luke 19:11-44, which Guy (1997) argues supports both the present and the future dimensions of the kingdom.

42. The objection that the kingdom would have also arrived, given Jesus' argument, through the exorcisms of others is unsustainable. As Davies and Allison (1991: 341) note,

have maintained that the saying means only that the kingdom has drawn near; however, the natural meaning of the verb *phthanō* in this context is “arrived” or “has come.”⁴³ Indeed, some promote such an interpretation because they assume that the kingdom is *only* future and eschatological—the same view the Pharisees likely held. Jesus proclaimed that Israel should have perceived in his victory over Satan that the salvation promised in the OT had arrived. The new creation was, in some sense, a reality, for Adam failed to cast the snake out of the garden, but Jesus succeeded in casting out Satan (Matt. 12:28).⁴⁴

According to the Matthean version (Matt. 12:28), the eschatological Spirit promised in the OT was active in Jesus’ ministry. Here we have the early evidence for the already–not yet tension that informs the NT.⁴⁵ The kingdom had already arrived in the person and ministry of Jesus, but God’s enemies had not yet been entirely removed, and the people of God did not yet possess all the blessings pledged to them in the OT.

The kingdom of God was present also in Jesus’ miraculous signs and preaching. A programmatic text for this point is Luke 4:16–30, for here Luke portrays the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry and almost certainly relates Jesus’ customary message.⁴⁶ Jesus began by citing the OT Scriptures and claiming that they reach fulfillment in his person and ministry (cf. Isa. 61:1–2; 58:6; 29:18).⁴⁷ The claim is a stunning one, for the OT text refers to the fulfillment of God’s end-time promises. Jesus claimed that he is anointed with the eschatological Spirit (cf. Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 11:18–19; 36:26–27; Joel 2:28).⁴⁸ The good news of release from exile had now been realized through him. The year of the Lord’s favor

“Jesus accepts the miracles of others but holds his own to be of different import because of his identity. What is decisive is not the exorcisms but the exorcist.” It is probably also the case that Jesus’ authority over demons was qualitatively different from the authority of other exorcists.

43. See Dodd 1936: 43–45. For further discussion of this verb along with the various options, see Marshall 1978b: 476; Hagner 1993b: 343; Nolland 2005: 500–501; Fitzmyer 1985: 922. Luz (2001: 204) argues that in Matt. 12:28 the kingdom is present in miracles and exorcisms but has not come in transcendent power in its fullness.

44. So Beale 2004: 173.

45. For a convincing analysis of this verse, see Beasley-Murray 1986: 75–80.

46. See Beasley-Murray 1986: 85–91. Fitzmyer (1981a: 526) comments, “It is an important episode in the Lucan Gospel . . . foreshadowing in a way the account of the entire ministry that is to follow.” See also Marshall 1978b: 176; Green 1995: 76.

47. It is likely we have a reference to the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25) here (Marshall 1978b: 184; Bock 1994: 410), but this view is contested (Tannehill 1986: 67–68).

48. Contra Conzelmann (1960: 95), who thinks that the Spirit is not the end-time gift in Luke’s theology. This is linked with Conzelmann’s view that Jesus’ ministry is the middle of time separated from the time of the church, in which the delay of the parousia plays a significant role. For criticisms of Conzelmann’s view, see Marshall 1970: 85–88, 107–11, 129–34, 144–50.

and the liberty of God's people had arrived. It does not appear here that Jesus merely states that these promises will be fulfilled at the consummation of all things. Even now, through his healing ministry, the blind were receiving sight. The gospel that he proclaimed means that the poor were hearing the glad tidings in the present. Indeed, Jesus skipped over the line in Isa. 61 that speaks of the Lord's vengeance and referred only to the time of his favor. This suggests that the present time is not a time of vengeance but the day of salvation. The day of vengeance was delayed, and yet, surprisingly enough, the day of favor and salvation had dawned in the person and ministry of Jesus.

A text that points in the same direction is Matt. 11:2–6 (par.).⁴⁹ John the Baptist voiced doubts about Jesus, presumably because he languished in prison, and his expectations regarding the kingdom were not realized.⁵⁰ We can think back to the words of his father, Zechariah, anticipating salvation “from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (Luke 1:71).⁵¹ Surely, John perceived that the political impact of Jesus' ministry was small and so began to question whether he was truly “the coming one.” Jesus did not reply to John's messengers directly but pointed them to what was accomplished in his ministry: the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead raised. Indeed, the good news was being preached to the poor. Once again Jesus cited texts in Isaiah that related what the Lord would do when he freed his people from exile (Isa. 35:1–10; cf. 40:9; 42:6–7; 52:7). The remarkable thing about Isa. 35 is that it clearly speaks of a new creative work of God. The wilderness will become as beautiful and lush as a garden. The desert will flow with streams of water. No rapacious beast will destroy anyone, and when Israel returns to Zion with inexpressible joy, they will be blessed forever. Here we have the language of new creation and a new exodus. At the same time, God will inflict vengeance upon Israel's enemies (Isa. 35:4). What stands out is that many of the prophecies found here remained unfulfilled in Jesus' ministry. Israel did not reside in Jerusalem with everlasting joy and with freedom from fear of enemies. The Romans were still menacingly present in Jesus' day. No vengeance was meted out to Israel's enemies. The world was not transformed into

49. See Beasley-Murray 1986: 80–84; Davies and Allison 1991: 242–43; Hagner 1993b: 300–301. For the Lukan parallel, see Fitzmyer 1981a: 664–65. Fitzmyer maintains that the Baptist has to reinterpret his view of the Messiah because Jesus is not a “fiery reformer.” Hagner (1993b: 301) is more precise in saying that Jesus is not fulfilling the role of the judge in the present time (so also Bock 1994: 669–70).

50. For a helpful discussion on the typological and prophetic role of the Baptist, see Evans 2002.

51. Scholars have long recognized the importance of salvation in Luke's theology. See Marshall 1970 on Lukan theology; Green 1998.

a new creation. All of these facts must have contributed to John's doubts about whether Jesus was truly the coming one.

Jesus responds by instructing John about the nature of his ministry. His work among the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the poor reveal that God is fulfilling his promises in Jesus. The new exodus and return from exile promised by Isaiah are a reality for those who respond to Jesus' message—the good news of the gospel is being proclaimed. And yet Jesus himself recognizes that the fulfillment astonishes. He says, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Matt. 11:6). The prophecies of Isaiah are beginning to be fulfilled, but they are not yet fulfilled in their totality. The kingdom really is present in Jesus' ministry, and yet all that God has promised to do has not become a reality. If John has eyes to see, he must perceive the eschatological tension. Something unexpected has arisen. The promises are not coming to pass in the way John or anyone else expected. God is working remarkably in Jesus' ministry, and yet only some of what is predicted has been realized. The kingdom has arrived, and yet Israel must await the day of vengeance and the completion of all that God promised.⁵² It is telling that Jesus, when citing Isaiah, omits the day of vengeance when he proclaims the kingdom (cf. Isa. 19:20; 35:4; 61:2).⁵³ We should not conclude from this that Jesus rejects any notion of future punishment; rather, the day of judgment is not now—today is the day of salvation.

Jesus also taught that the kingdom had come in his person. The text in Luke 17:20–21 is particularly important. The Pharisees wanted to discuss the coming of the eschatological kingdom. How could they know when it would arrive? What signs will precede its coming? Jesus flatly rejected such speculation. The kingdom cannot be forecasted by observing and interpreting signs. The kingdom of God, Jesus declared, "is among you" (NRSV). The term used here is *entos*, and hence it is possible, as some translations render it, that Jesus says that "the kingdom of God is within you" (KJV, NIV). This interpretation is unlikely, however, for Jesus addressed the Pharisees, and it is quite implausible that he claimed that the kingdom of God was within them! Moreover, Jesus did not say elsewhere that the kingdom is within people. The Pharisees were caught up with excitement over their ability to detect the arrival of the kingdom, but Jesus announced that they were blind to its presence right in front of them.⁵⁴ The kingdom had arrived in the

52. Meier (1994: 439–50) also rightly argues that Mark 2:18–20 points to the presence of the kingdom.

53. See Meier 1994: 134.

54. Hence, Jesus speaks here of the presence of the kingdom, not its future coming (rightly Bock 1996: 1417–18).

person of Jesus.⁵⁵ The Pharisees did not possess any categories, however, to comprehend what Jesus was saying. If the kingdom had arrived, then how could one explain the continuing presence of the Romans and the downtrodden state of Israel? They failed to grasp that Jesus was teaching an already-not yet kingdom. The kingdom was present in the person of Jesus, but it would not be consummated until after his death and resurrection when he will return in glory. Indeed, Jesus specifically distinguished between his first and second advents in this very context (see Luke 17:20–37). Such a concept was completely mystifying to the Pharisees. We know from the Gospels that supporters, such as Jesus' disciples and John the Baptist, had difficulty understanding Jesus' conception of the kingdom. How much more was this true of those who questioned and opposed him?

Those who belong to God will inherit the kingdom in the future, and yet it is also the case that Jesus' disciples were members of God's kingdom during the present age. Those who are poor in spirit share now in the power of the kingdom (Matt. 5:3; cf. Luke 6:20). Those persecuted for Jesus' sake participate in the blessings of the kingdom even while being mistreated (Matt. 5:10). Among the most difficult statements in the Gospels are Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16. The meaning of these verses is intensely debated, and it is wise not to base any significant thesis about Jesus' ministry on a disputed text.⁵⁶ I understand Matt. 11:12 to say that the kingdom of God has been advancing forcefully in the world from the time that the Baptist began to preach. Jesus did not proclaim a different message from that of the Baptist.⁵⁷ He too heralded the message of the kingdom. What this verse teaches is that the kingdom is now active in a powerful way in the world. It is not merely a future power. The kingdom had arrived, particularly in the preaching and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Demons were being cast out, the sick healed, and the needy transformed by the good news of salvation. The last part of Matt. 11:12 probably means that only those who make a decisive commitment to be part of the kingdom

55. See the clear defense of this view in Bock 1996: 1415–17; see also Kümmel 1957: 34. Beasley-Murray (1986: 97–103) claims that the verse means that the kingdom of God is within reach of those who hear the good news being proclaimed by and in the person of Jesus. Fitzmyer (1985: 1159, 1161–62) maintains that “among you” and “in your reach” are equally possible, and the meaning is not greatly affected either way. But for a convincing argument favoring authenticity and the meaning “in your midst,” see Meier 1994: 423–30.

56. See Beasley-Murray 1986: 91–96.

57. For a survey of the options for this verse, see Davies and Allison 1991: 254–55; Hagner 1993b: 306–7. Hagner understands the verse negatively, so that it speaks of the kingdom suffering violence and of violent people plundering it (see also Davies and Allison 1991: 255–56; Meier 1994: 160).

receive its blessings. The kingdom has come, but one must grasp the kingdom and give it priority to receive its blessings. Luke 16:16, then, has a similar meaning.⁵⁸ The good news of the kingdom, the gospel of the kingdom, had been proclaimed from the time of John the Baptist onward, though it obtains its supreme expression in the ministry and proclamation of Jesus. The emphasis on good news suggests that the kingdom preached fulfills the promises of return from exile prophesied in Isaiah (Isa. 40:9; 52:7).⁵⁹ Luke adds, “and everyone forces his way into it” (Luke 16:16). This saying should be interpreted similarly to what we found in Matthew. One must act decisively and give up all to enter the kingdom. The blessings of the kingdom will pass by those who put something else above the kingdom, for Jesus demanded that the kingdom be preeminent in the lives of those who claim to be people of the Lord (Matt. 6:33).

The Parables and the Kingdom

In Matt. 13:11 Jesus says that the parables reveal the “secrets” or “mysteries” of the kingdom.⁶⁰ Jesus’ parables can be studied from a number of different angles. Here we want to explore what the parables tell us about the kingdom of God.⁶¹ We saw above that the difficult sayings in Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 focus on the power of the kingdom. The kingdom’s power is communicated also in parables, and we begin with one that is unique to Mark (Mark 4:26–29). The kingdom is compared to seed sown on the ground. The sower sleeps, and yet the seed sprouts and grows in a way that is incomprehensible to the sower. The seed then begins to bear fruit, and finally when the fruit is ripened, the crop is harvested. Jesus emphasized that the power of the kingdom stems from the word of God. The word itself creates life and fruitfulness, and the speaker of the word is amazed at how it continues to bear fruit even when he is absent. As Beasley-Murray notes, the account “sets forth the coming reign of God as a process attributable solely to the miraculous working of God.”⁶² This parable also reveals

58. So Marshall 1978b: 629–30; Fitzmyer 1985: 1117. Bock (1996: 1352–54) understands the verse as imploring all to enter the kingdom. It should be noted as well that most commentators claim that the saying has a different meaning in Matthew than in Luke.

59. See Watts 2000: 96–102.

60. On the theme of parables and the kingdom, see Jeremias 1972: 115–24.

61. In a more thorough examination of the parables, Blomberg (1990a: 297–302) demonstrates that they support the notion that the kingdom is both present and future.

62. Beasley-Murray 1986: 126. See also Hooker 1991: 136; Hultgren 2000: 388; Marcus 2000: 326–28; France 2002: 214–15.

the already–not yet character of the kingdom. The kingdom even now bears fruit and accomplishes its purpose in the world. By the word of God it advances. Still, the kingdom is not consummated until the end of the age, when the judgment comes.

The parable of the four soils (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23 par.) teaches a number of different truths. Jülicher rightly reacted against an indiscriminate allegorizing of parables, but he overcompensated by insisting that parables only have one point.⁶³ To say in advance that parables cannot have any allegorical features determines in advance their interpretation. Whether parables have one point or whether they contain some allegorical elements must be resolved by investigating each parable separately instead of trying to formulate a principle that embraces every parable.⁶⁴ What we are seeking here is what the parable of the four soils teaches about the kingdom of God. A striking feature of the parable is that when the kingdom is proclaimed, not all accept its message. There are four different kinds of soil, and only the last bears genuine fruit. All the other soils fail to persevere in bearing fruit, and they represent people who are unsaved on the day of judgment.⁶⁵ One of the mysteries of the kingdom communicated here is that the word of the kingdom will not immediately have overwhelming success in this world.⁶⁶ Many will reject the good news about the kingdom, but they will not be judged instantly. The Jews expected the kingdom to arrive in apocalyptic power, sweeping away all opponents. But this parable reveals that the message of the kingdom does not operate initially in this manner. In and through the preaching of Jesus the kingdom is successful only in some hearts. The whole world is not changed dramatically, and yet the kingdom is at work; it is operating in the world, transforming hearts through the message of the kingdom. Still, some people resist the message of the kingdom and refuse to believe. This parable communicates the secret of the kingdom: it is already here through the preached word, but the day of judgment is reserved for the future.⁶⁷

63. Jülicher argued that in Jesus' teaching, parables only had one point, but the Gospel writers turned the parables into allegories (see Baird 2003: 158–59).

64. Blomberg (1990a) effectively criticizes the notion that parables must be restricted to one truth and provides his own constructive understanding of Jesus' parables. For classic works on the parables, see Dodd 1936; Jeremias 1972. For more recent work, see Hultgren 2000.

65. See Hagner 1993b: 381.

66. The surprising nature of the kingdom is captured well by Marcus 2000: 295–96.

67. The observations of Vickers (2004: 17) on this parable are helpful: "The Kingdom is not initially coming on the scene with fanfare or in a cataclysmic battle." He points out that the adverse response to Jesus' ministry in the Gospels does not contradict the promise that the kingdom has arrived, for it has not come in such a way that it overwhelms its enemies immediately.

The parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43) communicates a message that is rather similar to the parable of the four soils. The Jews expected that when the kingdom arrived, their enemies would be removed and paradise would commence. Jesus revealed one of the mysteries of the kingdom in the parable of the weeds. The word of the kingdom is spread throughout the world by the Son of Man. As expected, God's word is effective and powerful, producing "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). Still, all is not well in the world, for the devil also sows "children of the evil one" (Matt. 13:38). The arrival of the kingdom does not transform the world into a place of peace and prosperity. The world is a battleground between children of God and children of the devil. The kingdom is truly present, as is evidenced by the children of the kingdom. The kingdom of God has come in transforming power. But astonishingly, the enemies of the kingdom persist and are not removed from the scene. The world is filled with ambiguity and tension between those transformed by the kingdom and those hating the kingdom.⁶⁸ Indeed, in some instances it is difficult to discern who genuinely belongs to the kingdom and who does not. Only on the final day will we be able to discern clearly all those who genuinely were believers and those who only appeared to belong to God. Hence, the mystery of the kingdom is that an interval exists between the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom. The day of judgment lies in the future, and when that day arrives, the Son of Man will punish those who practice evil and will reward the righteous. On the last day the prophecy of Daniel, that the righteous will shine like stars, will reach its fulfillment (Dan. 12:1–3; cf. Phil. 2:15). In the meantime, even though the kingdom is present and active in the world, the struggle with evil continues, and we are unable to discern infallibly those who are genuine believers.

The parable of the net (Matt. 13:47–50) is similar in some ways to the parable of the weeds. During the present age the kingdom is like a fishing net that gathers a variety of fish, both good and bad. So too in the present age the kingdom embraces both good and evil but without judging the evil definitively. The evil as well as the good are caught up in the power of the kingdom that sweeps through the world. Only at the end of the age will those who are evil be separated from those who are good. The punishment is not immediate but future. The kingdom is now sweeping through the world, gathering up into its net both good and evil, but the day of judgment is coming, the day when the kingdom will be consummated and evil will be judged.

68. Rightly Hagner 1993b: 395. Hultgren (2000: 299) concludes from this that the church is a mixed entity, consisting of both good and evil. But Luz (2001: 268–70) contends that the church is specifically excluded from purview here. Hultgren (2000: 300–301) individualizes the parable unduly in saying that good and evil also reside in each believer.

The nature of the kingdom is captured well by the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven.⁶⁹ These parables likewise present the mystery of the kingdom. Again we must remind ourselves that the Jews thought that the kingdom would demolish their enemies, arrive with overwhelming force, and be evident to all. Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom does not arrive as a massive tree that holds sway over the earth like the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4). The kingdom's coming is as inconspicuous and small as a mustard seed—the smallest seed of Jesus' day (Matt. 13:31–32 par.). It is like a small seed in a vegetable garden.⁷⁰ The coming of the kingdom is not trumpeted to the entire world for all to know that it has appeared.⁷¹ Eventually the kingdom of God becomes a tree that dominates the entire earth. The image of the mustard seed becoming a tree probably indicates that the kingdom of God grows throughout history.⁷² What started out small becomes larger.⁷³ Nevertheless, this should not be interpreted to mean that the kingdom will eventually rule over this world before the return of Christ and become evident to all. The kingdom grows, but even its increase does not represent an apocalyptic forcefulness that steamrolls opposition. Many observe the world and see no indication of its presence at all. Ultimately, however, the kingdom of God will rule and reign over the whole world. On the day of judgment and salvation the kingdom will be consummated. What began as a small mustard seed will end up as a towering tree ruling over all.

The parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33 par.) should be interpreted like the parable of the mustard seed, and its placement immediately after the latter suggests that the two make basically the same point. The kingdom does not arrive manifestly and clearly but rather is nearly invisible, like leaven in flour.⁷⁴ In other words, the watching world does not perceive the presence of the kingdom. Still, Jesus maintained that the kingdom had arrived in his ministry even though it is hidden and obscured. Once again the permeation of the flour with leaven signifies a gradual growth of the kingdom, but that growth is perceptible only to the eye of faith,

69. See the classic exposition in Jeremias 1972: 146–53.

70. See Luz 2001: 261.

71. Stein (1981: 95) comments that what is distinctive here is not “the greatness of the kingdom of God in its final manifestation, for every Jew who heard Jesus would agree with this. . . . What was not recognized nor understood was the smallness and insignificance of its beginning.”

72. So Davies and Allison 1991: 419, though they caution rightly against equating the kingdom of God with the church.

73. It may be the case, on the other hand, that this feature of the parable should not be pressed (so Jeremias 1972: 148; Hultgren 2000: 401).

74. Luz (2001: 262–63) argues that the parable emphasizes not the small amount of leaven but rather its hiddenness.

for the kingdom does not advance by crushing God's enemies. Jesus contrasted what the kingdom is like in this present age with its consummation in the age to come. Only at the end will the kingdom rule over all, and then it will be as comprehensive and complete as leaven in dough. The kingdom is already here, even if obscure and hidden as leaven, and eventually it will triumph completely.

In the midst of the parables in Matt. 13, Ps. 78 is cited to explain why Jesus spoke in parables (Matt. 13:34–35).⁷⁵ Psalm 78 reviews the history of Israel until the time of David, emphasizing Israel's hard heart and rebellion against God. Matthew interprets the psalm prophetically (cf. the use of the word "prophet" in Matt. 13:35) to demonstrate that the psalm anticipated Jesus' generation, for the Israel of Jesus' day was still rebellious. They resisted the word of the Lord proclaimed through Jesus. This fits with Matt. 13:13–15 (cf. Mark 4:11–12; Luke 8:9–10), where the prophecy of Isa. 6 is seen to be fulfilled through Jesus' teaching of parables. The parables function to harden stiff-necked and rebellious Israel.⁷⁶ The mysteries of the kingdom are closed to them, but the disciples, by God's grace, have been given insight to know the secrets of the kingdom (Matt. 13:11). They are incomparably blessed because God has revealed the nature of the kingdom to them (Matt. 13:16–17). Psalm 78, then, reveals something about the kingdom. Even Israel is not genuinely open to the message of the kingdom. The Israel of Jesus' day is like Israel throughout history, the Israel that went into exile because of its rebellion. Psalm 78 concludes, however, with God's faithfulness to his promise. He raised up David to shepherd his people. So too God had now raised up Jesus as Israel's Messiah. Those who had eyes to see perceive that in Jesus the kingdom has begun, but many in Israel failed to perceive the mystery of the kingdom.

Even though the kingdom is nearly invisible, it is incomparably precious. The value of the kingdom is communicated in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value (Matt. 13:44–46). Both parables emphasize the hiddenness of the kingdom. The treasure and the pearl are discovered by assiduously searching for them. The kingdom is not apparent on first glance, nor is its value grasped by all. The end of the age has not yet come, when the kingdom of God will rule over all, where the righteous are blessed and the wicked punished. Currently the

75. On the reference to Ps. 78 here, see Carson 1984: 321–23.

76. The view proposed here fits with the claim by Watts (2000: 184–209) that Mark 4:11–12 represents Yahweh's judicial hardening of those who have consistently turned against the Lord's will. See also the perceptive exegesis in Marcus 2000: 299–301, 305–7; Evans 1988: 92–99. Matt. 13:13 emphasizes human responsibility (rightly Davies and Allison 1991: 392), but if Watts is correct, we have a different emphasis, not a different theology.

kingdom is like a hidden treasure or an obscure pearl. So the kingdom really is present in the world in the ministry of Jesus. And those who perceive the value of the kingdom joyfully give up all to enter into it. Its value is not conspicuous, however; on the day when the kingdom is consummated, all will perceive that the kingdom is exceedingly precious.⁷⁷ But in the interval between the “already” and the “not yet,” only some discern the worth of the kingdom.

Jesus concluded the parables in Matt. 13 by comparing the kingdom of heaven to a scribe “who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matt. 13:52). Jesus considered here the OT, the many prophecies about the kingdom of God. The disciple of Jesus, however, must interpret the prophecies in light of what is new, the dawning of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. The wise disciple, then, both grasps the meaning of the OT prophecy and discerns its fulfillment in Jesus. The new and the old are rightly related and correlated to one another.⁷⁸ The old is not imposed upon the new, nor does the new squelch the old. Both the new and the old have their proper place, but the old, ultimately and finally, can be grasped only by those who understand the newness present in Jesus.

Miracles and the Kingdom

The inauguration of the kingdom is manifested by signs, wonders, and healings.⁷⁹ Jesus' miracles are not just the promise of the kingdom; they are themselves the actualization, at least in part, of the kingdom.⁸⁰ We noted earlier that Jesus pointed to Isa. 35 to demonstrate to the Baptist and his disciples that he truly is the coming one. In Isa. 35 the arrival of God's kingdom is evidenced by a new work of creation in which the wilderness will bloom, streams will flow in the desert, and voracious beasts will become tame.⁸¹ Israel will return from exile and will experience everlasting joy. Israel did return from exile, but they hardly experienced everlasting joy. Nor did the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear.

77. Beasley-Murray (1986: 111) remarks, “The point is that the worth of what has come to the finders is so great that they are happy to pay whatever price is necessary to get it.”

78. See Davies and Allison 1991: 446–48; Hagner 1993b: 402; Luz 2001: 287–88. The “priority” is “given to the new” because it is mentioned first (Nolland 2005: 571).

79. See the vigorous study by Kallas (1961), who overstates his point here and there. See also Tannehill (1986: 89), who focuses on the message in Luke.

80. So Twelftree 1999: 263, 268–72, 276.

81. Many scholars, of course, have doubted the reality of the miracles. But Schlatter (1997: 174–91) showed that they cannot be stripped from Jesus' message of the kingdom.

In many texts in the Synoptic Gospels the proclamation of the gospel is accompanied by physical healing and the exorcism of demons (e.g., Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:7–8; Luke 9:11; 10:9, 17; 11:20). Jesus' exorcisms instantiate his victory over Satan and demons, indicating that the kingdom is now present and that Jesus has triumphed over the reign of evil.⁸² Furthermore, if we look at the Synoptic Gospels as a whole, we see that much attention is devoted to Jesus' healings and exorcisms. We have warrant from the summary statements themselves (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 9:2, 11) to see these as manifestations of the kingdom of God. Indeed, we have seen from Isa. 35 that such healings are indications of the presence of the kingdom, of the kingdom already exerting its power in this present evil age. Adherents of rationalistic liberalism denied the reality of the miraculous because of their Enlightenment worldview, which denied the intervention of God in the cosmos. Their problem with the miracles arose from their philosophical standpoint and cannot be derived from a study of the text. It is clear that the Gospel writers believed that the miracles truly occurred. The miracles are not merely spiritual realities that can be reduced to spiritual lessons or moral truths.⁸³ Indeed, there are sound reasons for believing that the miracles actually occurred in Jesus' ministry, that the stories go back to the historical Jesus.⁸⁴ Meier says about the miracles "that total fabrication by the early church is, practically speaking, impossible"; and, "the tradition of Jesus' miracles is more firmly supported by the criteria of historicity than are a number of other well-known and often readily accepted traditions about his life and ministry. . . . Put dramatically but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus' public ministry were rejected *in toto* as unhistorical, so should every other Gospel tradition about him."⁸⁵ Indeed, Meier does not shrink back from saying that, as far as one can determine matters historically, there are solid grounds for believing that

82. See Twelftree 1993; 1999.

83. Indeed, the credibility of miracles increases when we consider the matter philosophically. I contend that we must presuppose the truth of the Scriptures and the biblical worldview, for no worldview can be proved ultimately, definitively, and without lingering questions. That does not mean, however, that we do not consider evidence. All other worldviews ultimately succumb to rationalism or irrationalism, or the evidence adduced for their truth fails to persuade. When we consider the biblical worldview, we also find that historical evidence confirms the worldview adopted. See Frame 1987.

84. Twelftree 1999: 281–330; Meier 1994: 509–1038. Meier does not claim that the miracles actually happened, for he maintains that the actuality of miracles lies outside the realm of historical study. Instead, Meier, with painstaking care and remarkable thoroughness, evaluates whether the claim that miracles occurred goes back to the historical Jesus. His judgments vary somewhat from miracle to miracle, but in the main he argues that the reports are credibly attributed to the historical Jesus.

85. Meier 1994: 630.

Jesus raised people from the dead.⁸⁶ Nor can the miracles be explained away with rationalistic explanations, such as the idea that Jesus was walking on the shore rather than the water, or that at the feeding of the five thousand the young boy shared his lunch, which inspired others to do the same, or that those apparently raised from the dead were not really dead. Kallas rightly says, “The kingdom meant the defeat of Satan, and the re-creation, the restoration, of the world that Satan had stolen and subjugated.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the miracles also point to God’s future kingdom, the new creation devoid of sickness, disease, and demons (see Rev. 21:1–8). The miracles, then, testify to the already–not yet character of the kingdom. They demonstrate that the kingdom has entered into this world, and yet not everyone is healed, which shows that the kingdom is not yet consummated. Death and evil still cast their long shadow over the world.

Jesus’ miracles, then, are signs of the kingdom, manifestations of the new creation.⁸⁸ Restoring health to the sick or freeing the demonized from oppression signals the onset of the new age, and this is a harbinger of the new creation where sickness is absent and the impact of demons only a memory. Jesus’ power over sickness and demons demonstrates that he rules over disease and the demonic. The forces of evil cannot triumph over him; he reigns over all that deforms and destroys. In the same way, the nature miracles (e.g., Matt. 14:13–33) reveal Jesus’ mastery over the created world, demonstrating that he is the sovereign ruler over all creation. “Each miracle is—at least in part—the actual arrival of salvation.”⁸⁹ These miracles also anticipate the new creation where the entirety of the created order reflects the order and justice intended for the world from the beginning.

If miracles point to something beyond themselves, then those observing them should perceive God’s mighty work through Jesus in the wonders performed. The miracles performed by Jesus fit with two major themes of this work. First, as we have already seen, they signify the inbreaking of God’s kingdom—the arrival of the age to come in the midst of this present evil age. But second, they also testify to Jesus’ identity.⁹⁰ They

86. Meier 1994: 773–873. Meier (1994: 968) is not claiming that these accounts are actually miracles but only that what occurred was thought to be miraculous by some of Jesus’ contemporaries. It is not my purpose here to examine Meier’s philosophical approach, which is, I think, too limiting. My point is simply that even within the bounds of his criteria solid reasons exist to believe that Jesus performed many miracles. Incidentally, Meier (1994: 874–1038) is more skeptical about the historical reliability of the nature miracles, except for the miraculous feedings.

87. Kallas 1961: 81.

88. Beale 2004: 174.

89. Crump 2006: 43.

90. Rightly Twelftree 1999: 93–96, 181–82, 223, 225, 234–35, 275–76.

demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, and the Lord of all. This is scarcely surprising, for the coming of the kingdom also signals the arrival of the king. It would be a strange state of affairs if the kingdom arrived without its king and lord!

We think here of John's distinctive vocabulary whereby he identifies Jesus' miracles as "signs" (*sēmeia*).⁹¹ As signs, they point to something, to someone, beyond themselves. For example, the miracle at Cana anticipates the day when God will fulfill all his promises, when wine will flow down the hills (John 2:1–11; cf. Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). The healing on the Sabbath points forward to the Sabbath rest of the eschatological day (John 5:1–18). The feeding of the five thousand signifies that Jesus is the bread of life and that he gives true life to the world, a life that transcends the eating of manna (John 6:1–59). The healing of the blind man indicates that Jesus is the true light of the world and that he removes spiritual blindness (John 8:12–9:41). The raising of Lazarus anticipates the final resurrection, which will be enjoyed by all of God's people (John 11). John does not criticize signs as inadequate or superficial, as a first glance at some texts might suggest (John 2:23–25; 4:48).⁹² The stated purpose of his Gospel makes it clear that the signs *should* lead human beings to put their faith in Jesus (John 20:30–31; cf. 12:37). If the signs do not lead to faith, the fault lies not in the signs but in human beings who refuse to believe and who fail to see in the signs who Jesus is.

Even though Acts extends beyond the ministry of Jesus, we see that miracles have a similar function in Acts. The apostles proclaimed that Jesus' miracles demonstrate that he was accredited by God as the Messiah (Acts 2:22; 10:38). When Peter and John healed a lame man (Acts 3:1–10), the astonishing character of the healing provided an opportunity for Peter to preach the message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ and to explain that any healing comes exclusively through the name of Jesus (Acts 3:11–26). The signs, wonders, and miracles performed by the apostles played a vital role in the spread of the gospel (Acts 5:12–16; 9:32–43). Similarly, the signs and wonders of Stephen and Philip attested that they were speaking God's message and gave them an opportunity to proclaim the word of God both to opponents and to those interested in hearing the message (Acts 6:8–7:53; 8:5–24). Similarly, God granted Paul and Barnabas the ability to do miracles on their first missionary journey (Acts 15:12). The miracles not only opened the door for the word of the gospel but also were manifestations of the kingdom themselves. Juell observes that the miracles "offer evidence that the 'last days' have

91. Due to the subject matter addressed here, I am including Johannine material at this point.

92. For the view of the Johannine signs defended here, see M. M. Thompson 1988: 53–86.

indeed arrived and that the Spirit, poured out by the risen Jesus from his place at God's right hand, is at work."⁹³ They anticipate the new creation where sickness, deformity, and disease will be left behind. The signs and wonders of the apostles are manifestations of the kingdom and represent the continuation of Jesus' teaching and ministry (Acts 1:1, 3).

Other Views of the Kingdom

At this juncture we will explore all too briefly some of the views of the kingdom in the history of the church. The early church tended to equate the kingdom with the church.⁹⁴ It is more satisfying, however, to say that the kingdom works in and through the church but is not coequal with the church. The church per se cannot be identified with the ruling power of God, even though God's transforming power is manifested in the church. The church has been tempted throughout history to construct an overrealized view of the kingdom and to view itself as the full manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Liberalism collapsed the kingdom into the notion of the fatherhood of God and the fraternity of humankind.⁹⁵ In this view, the kingdom of God is basically equated with ethics. The liberal conception of the kingdom is a classic example of imposing a preferred notion of the kingdom, a culturally acceptable view of the kingdom, upon the Gospels. More than a hundred years ago Weiss demonstrated that the apocalyptic nature of the kingdom was completely ignored by liberalism.⁹⁶ Liberalism's view of the kingdom domesticated the kingdom in the teaching of Jesus and thus failed to do true biblical theology.

The apocalyptic view of the kingdom that has influenced NT study to this day was articulated, as we noted above, by Weiss. Schweitzer embraced Weiss's conclusions, using them to argue against liberalism's understanding of the kingdom. This view has sometimes been called "consistent eschatology" or "thoroughgoing eschatology."⁹⁷ In Schweitzer's view, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to compel God to bring in the kingdom, but his noble attempt failed. In other words, Jesus' idea of the kingdom was mistaken. He incorrectly believed the kingdom was imminent, and we realize from our standpoint in history that Jesus was misguided. If Schweitzer was correct, it is difficult to know how Jesus' message of the kingdom relates to us today. It would seem that Jesus' view stands as a

93. Juel 1983: 62.

94. See the helpful discussion of this matter in Ladd 1993: 103–17.

95. For example, Harnack 1957.

96. Weiss 1971 (the first edition was published in 1892).

97. Schweitzer 1968: 238–69, 330–97.

monument to the delusion that God was about to bring in his kingdom and fulfill his promises. Since it did not happen, should we venerate Jesus for his aspirations while realizing that he was profoundly mistaken? On Schweitzer's terms, it seems that Jesus could only be hailed as a failed revolutionary. I will argue in due course that we do not need to embrace Schweitzer's conclusion that Jesus was mistaken, and so Jesus' conception of the kingdom still speaks to us today. Furthermore, the already-not yet character of the kingdom is not explained adequately by Schweitzer, and inaugurated eschatology solves some of the problems raised by Schweitzer.

The Bultmannian school understood the kingdom existentially. This is captured well in this statement by Bultmann: "The essential thing about the eschatological message is the idea of God that operates in it and the idea of human existence that it contains—not the belief that the end of the world is just ahead."⁹⁸ According to Bultmann, Jesus was mistaken about when the world would end, but if we demythologize his message and apply it to ourselves, it still speaks to us today. Bultmann commented similarly: "The coming of the Kingdom of God is therefore not really an event in the course of time, which is due to occur sometime and toward which man can either take a definite attitude or hold himself neutral."⁹⁹ Bultmann removed the kingdom from space-time reality and focused on the existence of human beings. We find the same theme in his disciple Conzelmann. The nearness of the kingdom "does not represent a primarily neutral statement about the length or brevity of an interval of time, but a fact which determines human existence; man has no more time left to himself. He must respond to the kingdom in the present moment."¹⁰⁰ But why should human beings respond if the kingdom is not a historical reality, if Jesus was mistaken about the time of the end? It seems arbitrary to claim that what Jesus taught about the kingdom is flawed and then to apply it to our lives, even if in a demythologized form. Furthermore, the existential worldview of Bultmann and his disciples is imposed upon the NT instead of being a faithful rendition of the NT kerygma.

More recently scholars have emphasized the already-not yet character of the kingdom. Dodd put his emphasis initially on realized eschatology and seemed to allow little room for future eschatology.¹⁰¹ Scholars such as Jeremias, Kümmel, Goppelt, Cullmann, Ladd, and Beasley-Murray

98. Bultmann 1951: 23. See also Bultmann 1962: 27–56.

99. Bultmann 1962: 51–52.

100. Conzelmann 1969: 111.

101. Dodd 1936: 50–51. In the remainder of the book Dodd argues that parables and statements regarding the Son of Man that seem to refer to a future kingdom in their original historical context emphasized realized eschatology. Hence, according to Dodd,

have emphasized inaugurated eschatology in the teaching of Jesus.¹⁰² They differ on details and in emphasis, but they seem to have rightly captured a main theme in the teaching of Jesus. Ladd's definition helpfully captures Jesus' notion of the kingdom: "The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among human beings, and . . . this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver people from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign."¹⁰³ We can say, then, that the kingdom was inaugurated in the ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus, but the kingdom will not be consummated until he returns. The emphasis on the kingdom fits with one of the major themes of this book. As Beasley-Murray says, "Yet the sovereign action of God must by its very nature finally disclose itself in the consummate glory of the Creator-Redeemer."¹⁰⁴

Fulfillment Formulae in Matthew

The coming of the kingdom means that God's promises of old are being fulfilled. This theme is evident in all four Gospels and indeed in all of the NT. The purpose here is not to trace the theme broadly but rather to investigate the particular emphasis on fulfillment in Matthew.¹⁰⁵ Nor will we examine the fulfillment of the law in Matthew here, for that theme is significant enough to warrant separate treatment elsewhere.

In some instances prophecy and fulfillment appear to be rather direct. For instance, Mic. 5:2 predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and Matthew narrates how this prophecy was fulfilled (Matt. 2:1–12). Interestingly, a fulfillment formula is not used in this text, but Matthew clearly perceives that Jesus' birth fulfilled Micah's prophecy. Perhaps some might find a problem in Micah's claim that Bethlehem is too small to be considered among the clans of Judah, whereas Matthew emphasizes that Bethlehem should not be considered as despised or too small.¹⁰⁶ The difference between the texts is one of perspective.

the theme of future eschatology was a later addition. Dodd (1953: 447n1) later signaled his agreement with Jeremias (see the next note).

102. Jeremias (1972: 230) describes his view as eschatology that is in the process of being realized. See also Kümmel 1957; Cullmann 1964; Beasley-Murray 1986; Goppelt 1981: 43–76; Ladd 1993.

103. Ladd 1993: 89–90.

104. Beasley-Murray 1986: 74.

105. For useful surveys of the theme, see France 1989: 166–205; Stanton 1988: 205–10.

106. See Davies and Allison 1988: 242–43. But see Hagner (1993b: 29), who mentions a possible reading of the Hebrew that would fit with what we find in Matthew.

Micah stresses that even though Bethlehem is insignificant, God will surprisingly raise up a ruler from it. Matthew does not contradict this truth; he simply affirms that Bethlehem, despite its size, should not be considered insignificant, since the ruler hails from it.¹⁰⁷

Other texts in Matthew conceive of the fulfillment of prophecy rather differently. The OT event functions as a model or type of that which is fulfilled in Jesus. Hence, the OT text is fulfilled in a typological fashion.¹⁰⁸ We think of the famous fulfillment formula relative to the virgin birth in Matt. 1:22–23.¹⁰⁹ The virgin birth of Jesus, in which he saves his people from their sins, fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Isaiah. When we examine Isa. 7 in context, however, we see that matters become more complicated. The text addresses the period when Ahaz was king of Judah, suffering a severe threat from Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel. These two kings had formed an alliance and intended to install upon Judah's throne another leader, Tabeel. Judah and Ahaz are terrified by the prospect, but the Lord promises that the conspiracy against Judah will not succeed. No rival will supplant the son of David as the king of Judah.

The Lord invited Ahaz to ask him for a sign to confirm the Lord's faithfulness to his promise, but Ahaz refused to ask him for a sign. His refusal was a sign not of faith but of rebellion. Nevertheless, the Lord granted him a sign anyway. The sign is that a virgin or young woman will bear a child and name him "Immanuel." He is called "Immanuel" because his birth testifies to God's presence with his people, confirming the promise that Syria and Israel would not install another king in Judah. Commentators have long debated how to interpret this sign, and space is lacking here to give a full accounting of the various proposals.¹¹⁰ Here I will attempt to defend the view that seems most plausible to me. First, the notion that the prophecy is a straightforward prediction of the birth of Jesus does not explain well the features found in Isa. 7–8 itself. Immediately after the prophecy is uttered in Isa. 7:14, we are told that the boy who will be born will eat curds and honey at an age at which he grasps the difference between good and evil (Isa. 7:15). Isaiah 7:16 is even more specific. Before the child can distinguish between good and evil, both kingdoms that threaten Judah (i.e., Israel and Syria) will

107. Rightly Carson 1984: 87–88.

108. See Hagner 1993b: 20–21.

109. For a brief analysis of possible antecedents, see Davies and Allison 1988: 214–16. They conclude that there are no clear parallels or precursors to the story in either Hellenistic or Jewish literature. For a vibrant defense of the historical and theological veracity of the virgin birth, see Machen 1965.

110. Childs (2001: 60–81) ultimately understands the text messianically and relates the prophecy to Isa. 9:6–7. See also Motyer 1993: 86.

be judged. We learn from the subsequent verses that Assyria will function as the agent of judgment upon Israel and Syria. As a result of the Assyrian invasion, the land will be devastated. All that remains will be curds and honey (Isa. 7:22). Before the promised child is old enough to distinguish between right and wrong, the Lord will remove Syria and Israel by the hand of Assyria.

Who is the son spoken of in this text? A good case can be made for Hezekiah, and that would fit nicely with the Matthean emphasis on the birth of Jesus.¹¹¹ Hezekiah would function as the prototype of a later king, Jesus of Nazareth. The case seems still stronger when we include the prophecies of a coming king in Isa. 9:1–7; 11:1–10. Nevertheless, it seems that Isa. 8 suggests that the son in view is Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isa. 8:1).¹¹² Isaiah specifically notes that he had sexual relations with the prophetess and that she conceived (Isa. 8:3). This fits the notion that a young woman would conceive and have a child. Furthermore, Isa. 8:4 indicates that before the boy could articulate the words "mother" or "father," Assyria would despoil Israel and Syria. The parallel with Isa. 7 is unmistakable, where we are informed that judgment will come upon Israel and Syria before the child can distinguish between good and evil.

Isaiah proceeds to explain in chapter 8 that Assyria will sweep into the land and judge Israel and Syria (Isa. 8:5–8). Assyria will sweep in like a flood and even come up to the neck of Judah, so that it almost takes the whole country. But as we read later in Isa. 36–37, Assyria was unable to conquer Jerusalem itself. The repetition of "Immanuel" in Isa. 8:8 also links chapter 8 with chapter 7. God was with his people, preserving them from complete annihilation by Assyria (see also Isa. 8:10). The people, therefore, were not to fear the conspiracy hatched by Syria and Israel but only to fear the Lord (Isa. 8:11–13). The significance of Isaiah's child is that he is a sign and portent (Isa. 8:18), strengthening the case that he is the child spoken of in this instance. It is true that another child is coming (Isa. 9:6–7) to whom ultimate rule will belong, but Isaiah likely refers to his own child in chapters 7–8.¹¹³ The fact that two names are used for Isaiah's child, "Immanuel" and "Maher-shalal-hash-baz," is not a problem, for the son functioned symbolically on more than one level. The names signify two realities. The judgment from Assyria would come quickly, and yet God would be present with his people. He will

111. R. Brown (1977: 147–49) thinks that the child is Davidic and notes that some see it as Hezekiah (e.g., Schibler 1995: 99). Carson (1984: 79–80) emphasizes that Isa. 7:1–9:7 is a unit, culminating with the son promised in Isa. 9:6–7.

112. R. Brown (1977: 148) dismisses this view because the prophetess already had a son. See also Motyer 1993: 86–87.

113. So Oswalt 1986: 212–13, 220, 227.

not allow the southern kingdom of Judah to fall when the devastation from Assyria comes.

This brief explication of Isa. 7–8 helps us grasp Matthew’s citation of the fulfillment formula. How can Matthew use this text with reference to the virgin birth if it relates to a child begotten by a young woman? The most satisfactory answer is that Matthew reads the text typologically. What God did for his people in the past anticipates and foreshadows his work in the future. Even in the context of Isaiah the future dimension of the promise is adumbrated, for in chapter 9 Isaiah proceeds to speak of a child, a son of David, who will rule the nations (Isa. 9:2–7). The term used for “young woman” (NRSV) in Hebrew (*‘almâ*) could refer to a virgin, and the LXX uses the word *parthenos*, which is defined as “virgin.” That the woman in Matthew is a virgin is not surprising, for there is escalation between the type and the fulfillment. If the sign in the days of Ahaz was surprising, how much greater is the sign of salvation in the days of final fulfillment? If God was present with his people in saving them from Assyria, how much more is Immanuel now present in Jesus the Christ? We also see a theme that frames the entire book of Matthew. Jesus is Immanuel—God with us (Matt. 1:23)—and the book concludes with Jesus’ words, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” All that the OT teaches about God being with his people is fulfilled in Jesus as Immanuel.

The fulfillment text from Hosea 11:1 is puzzling. Matthew maintains that Hosea 11:1 (“Out of Egypt I called my son”) was fulfilled when Jesus returned from his sojourn in Egypt (Matt. 2:13–15). Modern readers are perplexed as to why this text was selected, for it appears not to be a prophecy but a historical reflection on Israel’s exodus from Egypt, for the full verse of Hosea 11:1 reads, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” The “son” in the second half of the verse, in accord with Hebrew parallelism, clearly is “Israel.” If this is the case, on what basis did Matthew see a fulfillment in Jesus leaving Egypt? Some scholars have suggested that the connection is altogether arbitrary. When we grasp, however, that Matthew thinks typologically in terms of the unfolding narrative of redemptive history, his appeal to Hosea 11:1 fits with his redemptive-historical understanding of the OT. God’s son in the OT is identified as Israel (Exod. 4:22–23), and as the story line unfolds, we see that Israel as God’s son was represented by the son of David (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14). And, as will be explained later, Matthew identified Jesus as the true Israel and as the fulfillment of the promises made to David. Hence, a text that refers to Israel may legitimately be applied to Jesus because he is the true Israel.¹¹⁴

114. See Davies and Allison 1988: 263.

We still wonder, though, how Matthew seizes upon Hosea 11:1 as prophetic, since the text refers to a historical event. Upon a closer reading, however, we discern that chapter 11 of Hosea itself engages in a typological reading of Israel's history.¹¹⁵ The chapter begins with the verse that we have been considering, where Hosea called to mind Israel's exodus from Egypt. Nevertheless, Israel did not respond to God's tender love by cleaving to him (Hosea 11:2–4). Instead, they turned to idols and sacrificed to the Baals despite being liberated by Yahweh and nurtured by his love. Therefore, the Lord pledged that he would send them as captives to Assyria. Their place of exile on this occasion will be not Egypt but Assyria (Hosea 11:5–7). This threat, of course, became a reality when the northern kingdom was exiled in 722 BC. Hosea 11:8–9 turns the spotlight on God's anguish. He wonders how he can give up his people, how he can hand them over to their adversaries. He pledges that he will not destroy them in the same way that he obliterated Admah and Zeboiim when Sodom and Gomorrah were pulverized. These verses do not rescind the promise that Israel will be exiled. The reference to the cities destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were annihilated provides the clue to the meaning of the text. Even though Israel deserved to be wiped out entirely, the Lord will have mercy on them. Assyria will capture them and deport them, but the nation will not be utterly extinguished as Admah and Zeboiim were. The Lord will preserve a remnant.

Hosea 11:10–11 promises, then, that the Lord will restore his people from exile. The Lord as a lion-king will roar, and his people will come trembling back to him. Like frail birds, they will return to their homes from Assyria and Egypt. Hosea's reference to Egypt here is fascinating and instructive, for he has already said in Hosea 11:5 that Israel will not return to Egypt but will be exiled to Assyria. Why, then, does he speak of a return from Assyria *and* Egypt if the people will not go to Egypt? We know from Hosea 11:5 that the reference to Egypt was not literal. Thus Hosea refers to a return from Egypt for typological reasons. We think back to the first verse of the chapter, which begins with the reflection that God called his son, Israel, out of Egypt. The exodus from Egypt functions as a type for what God will now do in Hosea's day.¹¹⁶ Just as he freed Israel from Egyptian bondage, so he will liberate them in a new exodus from Assyria. Hosea 11:1, therefore, is not merely a historical remembrance of God's work in the past; it points forward to God's promise for Hosea's day, to a new liberating work of God. Hosea himself, then, views Israel's

115. For this view, I am dependent upon the unpublished work of my OT colleague Duane Garrett. On the typological connection, see also Hagner 1993b: 36–37; Carson 1984: 91–93; France 1989: 207–8; Luz 1989: 146.

116. Isaiah also used exodus traditions in this typological way, predicting a new exodus from Babylon (esp. in Isa. 40–66).

history typologically. If what I have suggested is correct, then Matthew used typology just as Hosea did.¹¹⁷ Matthew believed that the return from exile promised in Hosea ultimately became a reality with the true son of Israel, Jesus Christ. In calling Jesus out of Egypt—in replicating the history of Israel—we see that Jesus is the true Israel, the true son of the promise, the fulfillment of God’s saving purposes.

Matthew recounted Herod’s slaying of children aged two years and under (Matt. 2:16–18), seeing it as a fulfillment of Jer. 31:15. Again the use of the OT seems to be eccentric, for in the OT context Jeremiah referred to Israel’s exile to Babylon. Rachel wept because her children were removed from the land. Matthew, on the other hand, referred to the literal slaying of children by Herod. It is likely again that Matthew drew a typological connection between an event in Israelite history and his own day.¹¹⁸ The words about Rachel weeping for her children are drawn from a context in Jeremiah that promises that God will bring back his people from exile. He will make a new covenant with his people and give them a new heart so that they will keep his law (Jer. 31:31–34). Indeed, the words that immediately follow the reference to Rachel weeping for her children pledge that God will bring her children back to the land (Jer. 31:17–26). The promise of a return from exile was fulfilled in part in Jeremiah’s day, but the fullness of what was promised in Jer. 30–33 had not become a reality. The slaying of children by Herod revealed that Israel was, so to speak, still under the dominion of evil nations. The only explanation for such, according to the OT, was that Israel was still not freed from its sin. God had not yet placed the law on his people’s hearts. Matthew saw Israel’s freedom from sin and liberation as now occurring through Jesus Christ. The time for weeping has now ended, and the day of redemption and the fulfillment of the new covenant was at hand.

Perhaps the most puzzling fulfillment formula occurs in Matt. 2:23, where Jesus’ origin from Nazareth is said to fulfill the words “He shall be called a Nazarene.”¹¹⁹ Nothing in the OT clearly indicates that the Messiah would be a Nazarene.¹²⁰ Most likely, Matthew engages in a play on words here, and the reference is to Isa. 11:1 where a “branch” (*nēšer*)

117. The word “typology” is subject to a number of different interpretations, and some worry that it could be construed as an open door to unrestrained allegorizing. But as long as typology is rooted in the OT, it is difficult to deny that Matthew saw patterns in the OT (see France 1989: 185–86). For an insightful study of typology, see Davidson 1981.

118. Davies and Allison (1988: 267) note a number of connections between the story in Matthew and Jer. 31. For the typological use of the OT here, see Hagner 1993b: 38; Carson 1984: 95. See also Nolland 2005: 125.

119. See discussion of this issue in Luz 1989: 149–50.

120. Carson (1984: 97) thinks that the point is that Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies that the Messiah would be despised, since Nazareth was considered a lowly place.

from Jesse will bear fruit.¹²¹ Isaiah 11:1–10 clearly referred to a son of David who would rule as Messiah by the anointing of the Spirit and introduce a new age of peace and righteousness, an age in which the wolf and the lamb will dwell peacefully together. Alternatively, perhaps a connection is made between “Nazarene” and “Nazirite.” In Judg. 13:5 Samson was to be dedicated to God as a Nazirite (*nāzîr*) from his birth (see also Num. 6; Judg. 16:17; Amos 2:11–12).¹²² Matthew possibly intended for readers to exploit both texts, seeing Jesus like Samson as one dedicated to God from his birth and as the one who will save his people (cf. Matt. 1:21).¹²³ Just as David, as the son of Jesse, was an unlikely candidate for king over Israel (see 1 Sam. 16:6–13), so also Jesus hails from an unexpected place as the Messiah of his people.

Matthew 3:15 does not, strictly speaking, have a fulfillment formula, but the verb “fulfill” (*plēroō*) is used, and so it will be discussed here. The Baptist proclaims that people should be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins (Matt. 3:6). When Jesus came to John for baptism, John protested that their roles should be reversed, presumably because Jesus did not need to be baptized for the sake of his sins but John did (Matt. 3:13–14).¹²⁴ Jesus quieted John’s objections by saying that his baptism was necessary “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). The word “fulfill” suggests that Jesus fulfills what is prophesied in the OT.¹²⁵ Again the Matthean account is cryptic and not replicated in the other Synoptic Gospels. We have already considered, however, that Matthew depicts Jesus as the true Israel. It is likely, then, that Jesus identified himself with Israel in this text. Furthermore, the story line of Matthew as a whole must be included to grasp the significance of the phrase—a story that culminates with Jesus’ death.¹²⁶ Therefore, as the representative of his people, Jesus

121. Hagner 1993b: 40–41. Nolland (2005: 130) thinks both Isa. 11:1 and Isa. 42:6 are alluded to.

122. Davies and Allison (1988: 276) point out “in the LXX an interchange between *nazaraios theou* and *hagios theou* (see A and B for Judg 13.7; 16.17).” Such a connection may suggest an allusion to Isa. 4:3 in this instance.

123. In support of this view, see the detailed discussion in Davies and Allison 1988: 275–81, though they see a secondary reference to Isa. 11:1. See also R. Brown 1977: 223. But Hagner (1993b: 41) probably is right in saying that Jesus does not fit as a Nazirite, because he was accused of being a drunkard, and he touched corpses when raising them.

124. Campbell (1996: 194) argues that baptism is used with the meaning of “overwhelm,” designating both the outpouring of the Spirit and the fiery wrath of God’s judgment. This interpretation, Campbell argues, is borne out by Luke 12:49–50.

125. So Davies and Allison 1988: 325–27, but they are less convincing in defining this as obedience to God’s will. Hagner (1993b: 56) convincingly argues that “righteousness” (*dikaïosynē*) does not invariably refer to fulfilling God’s ethical demands in Matthew (contra Przybylski 1980). In this context righteousness refers not to “moral goodness but . . . the will of God in the sense of God’s saving activity.”

126. Contra Luz 1989: 179.

undergoes baptism, and hence his baptism forecasts his death for the sake of his people.¹²⁷

The beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee is identified in Matt. 4:14–16 as a fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew hearkens back to Isaiah's words that the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, Galilee of the Gentiles, which has been shrouded in darkness, has seen a great light (Isa. 8:22–9:2). In the context of Isaiah this is followed immediately by an oracle promising victory through one who sits on the throne of David. He will rule as the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Since the location is Galilee, it seems that the darkness predicted is the capture of the northern kingdom by Assyria (see Isa. 7–10). But the time of judgment is followed by the dawn of salvation, the coming of a great light. Matthew finds the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth. He is the one who sits on David's throne (see Matt. 1:1–17). In Matthew's day Israel was under the shadow of Rome, but Jesus is the great light who spells the end of exile and the fulfillment of God's saving promises.

All three Synoptic Gospels relate Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law and his healing of the sick and expelling of demons (Matt. 8:14–16; Mark 1:29–34; Luke 4:38–41), but only Matthew adds this comment: "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases'" (Matt. 8:17). The citation comes from Isa. 53:4, where the Servant of the Lord suffers for the sins of Israel. We shall examine the title "Servant of the Lord" in due course, but we should note here that the Servant of the Lord is also identified as Jacob or Israel (Isa. 41:8; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3). Hagner rightly comments that "Isa. 53:4 guarantees no one healing in the present age. What is guaranteed is that Christ's atoning death will in the eschaton provide healing for all. The healings through the ministry of Jesus and those experienced in our day are the first-fruits, the down payment, of the final experience of deliverance."¹²⁸

We have another indication, then, that Jesus functions as the true Israel suffering for the sake of his people. Matthew quotes rather extensively from a Servant of the Lord text in Matt. 12:18–21. The text in this instance is from Isa. 42:1–4, and again a fulfillment of this text is assigned to Jesus' ministry.¹²⁹ The Servant is anointed with God's Spirit, but he is not a warrior who creates tumult by waging war in the streets of the cities. He does not crush the bruised reed and does not snuff out

127. Rightly Hagner 1993b: 57. Other scholars maintain that Jesus' baptism simply represents his obedience here and functions as an example for believers (e.g., Hartman 1997: 24–25).

128. Hagner 1993b: 211. See also Carson 1984: 205–7.

129. For these themes, see Hagner 1993b: 338–39.

the wick that barely burns. The context in which Matthew cited these words is illuminating. The Pharisees, having seen Jesus' Sabbath healings, have decided to destroy him (Matt. 12:1–14). Presumably, Jesus could have responded with force, crushing his opposition with God's help. Instead, he humbly withdrew from those who opposed him (Matt. 12:15) and refused to take the stance of a warrior. He healed the weak and refused notoriety (Matt. 12:15–16). He delivered a demonized man who was blind and mute (Matt. 12:22). Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is a servant king rather than a warrior king.

Jesus' speaking in parables (Matt. 13:35) is said to fulfill the words of the psalmist (Ps. 78:2).¹³⁰ Psalm 78 recounts the history of God's saving acts on behalf of his people and their continual failure to believe and obey. It culminates with his raising up David to shepherd his people (Ps. 78:70–72). As we noted previously, the parables disclose that God fulfills his saving promises in unexpected ways. Perhaps Matthew hints that Jesus' contemporaries were like Israel of old. They failed to see the fulfillment in Jesus, despite the truth that God was fulfilling his kingdom promises through him. Still, Jesus is the new David whom God has raised up to shepherd his people. Those who have eyes to see the meaning of the parables discern that God has not abandoned his people but has faithfully fulfilled his promises in him.

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt. 21:5–6) fulfilled Zech. 9:9, which prophesied that Jerusalem's humble king would arrive on a donkey. We see again the theme that Jesus is a king whose nature is contrary to the popular expectations of his day. He did not establish his kingship by winning wars. His entrance on the donkey indicated that he triumphs through suffering, as the rest of the passion narrative in Matthew clarifies. The same theme is prosecuted with fulfillment formulae when Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:50–56). One of Jesus' disciples wielded his sword, ready for battle, and sliced off the ear of the high priest's slave. Jesus rebuked him, teaching that all who conquer by violence will meet the same fate eventually. Indeed, if this were the time for battle, Jesus could summon the assistance of twelve legions of angels. Jesus submitted to the cross in order to fulfill what the Scriptures teach (Matt. 26:54). In this way "the Scriptures of the prophets" are fulfilled (Matt. 26:56). In this instance no particular text from the OT is adduced. The testimony of the Scriptures as a whole points toward the cross.

The last text with a fulfillment formula appears in Matt. 27:9–10, where the money that Judas received for his treachery was used to buy a potter's field for a cemetery. Curiously, Matthew says that the text

130. For discussion on whether the reference to Ps. 78:2 is apt, see Davies and Allison 1991: 426.

fulfills Jeremiah, although the fulfillment text contains words from Zech. 11:12–13.¹³¹ Whatever we make of Matthew's use of the OT here, it is clear that he saw the passion of Jesus, down to its very details, as fulfilling prophecy.

The fulfillment formulae in Matthew indicate that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The saving promises given to Israel, found in texts that pledge return from exile, find their terminus in him. Hence, they confirm the truth that the kingdom has dawned in Jesus. If the fulfillment formulae begin by emphasizing that Jesus is the promised one and the one through whom God's salvation for Israel will be realized—and this is the case especially in Matt. 1–4—then as the Gospel continues, the focus shifts to what kind of Messiah he is. Jesus is a servant Messiah. He has come not to win a military victory but rather to suffer for his people. His death was not an accident or a tragedy but represents the fulfillment of prophecy. Jewish readers in particular would need assurance that Jesus' suffering was God's intention, and that this intention squared with the OT. In the fulfillment formulae Matthew establishes that Jesus is the Messiah, and that he is a suffering Messiah. But the focus on Jesus' suffering and death indicates that God's saving promises have not yet been consummated, that the new creation and new exodus have not yet reached their denouement.

Conclusion

The kingdom of God is a central theme in Jesus' ministry, and the meaning of the concept must be discerned from the OT because Jesus nowhere defines it. When Jesus referred to God's kingdom, he had in mind God's saving power, the fulfillment of his saving promises. When God's saving promises become a reality, then those who are God's enemies will be judged. Still, Jesus called attention to God's saving work on behalf of his people. The surprising element in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom is its ambiguous character. The kingdom can be explained in terms of the already–not yet. The kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus' ministry but not yet consummated. It had arrived, but the full salvation and judgment promised had not yet come to pass. Finally, Matthew emphasized Jesus' role in the kingdom. The kingdom promises are fulfilled in Jesus and through his ministry and death and resurrection. As the Son of Man, he will determine who enters God's kingdom on the final day.

131. See discussion in Hagner 1993b: 813–15; Carson 1984: 562–66; Luz 2005: 467–68, 474–75; Nolland 2005: 1156–58. Davies and Allison (1997: 568–69) probably are right in seeing a mixed citation here.