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Jesus' Teaching on "Entering the Kingdom Of Heaven" in the Gospel According to Matthew (Interpretation of Selected Matthean Texts and Parables)

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JESUS' TEACHING ON "ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" IN THE
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW (INTERPRETATION OF
SELECTED MATTHEAN TEXTS AND PARABLES)

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus speaks frequently on the topic of "the Kingdom of Heaven" both in His speeches and in His parables. His purpose is not only to reveal this important truth to mankind, but also to urge people to enter this Kingdom of Heaven. This idea can be seen explicitly in His "entrance message" such as in 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23,24, along with some other related passages,¹ and is also implied in many of His parables.² The purpose of this study is to explain through the exegesis of selected Matthean texts and the interpretation of some Matthean parables the meaning of Jesus' teaching on "entering the Kingdom of Heaven."

It is obvious that the central theme of Jesus' message in the Synoptic Gospels is the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God).³ In the first three Gospels the term "Kingdom" is used 123 times.⁴ This is Jesus' favorite

¹See Matt. 4:17; 5:3,10; 8:10,11; 11:12; 21:31.

²For instances, the Parables of the Hidden Treasure (13:44), of the Pearl (13:45,46), of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16), and of the Two Sons (21:28-32), etc.

³Both expressions mean the same thing. See the discussion below, pp. 15-16.

⁴The "Kingdom of Heaven" 32 times; the "Kingdom of God" 53 times; the "Kingdom" 38 times. Cf. G.V. Wigram and

expression to designate His work and the significance of His mission. Following John the Baptist, Jesus began His Galilean ministry by preaching the good news of the Kingdom, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."⁵ Then, He called people to follow Him, to become His disciples and taught them the ways of the Kingdom of Heaven in the Sermon on the Mount.⁶ And then, He sent His twelve disciples out to preach this same gospel of the Kingdom with Him.⁷ Later on, He explained the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven through parables and in many other teachings.⁸ Moreover, not long before His death, He even emphasized that the end would not come until this gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in the whole world.⁹ Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus kept on stressing this topic and urging people to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus speaks frequently about "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" in the passages like 5:20; 7:21; 11:12; 18:3; 19:23,24, and illustrates its meaning by some parables such as: the Hidden

R. D. Winter, The Word Study Concordance (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1978), pp. 103-4.

⁵ See Matt. 4:17,23.

⁶ See Matt. 5-7.

⁷ See Matt. 9:35; 10:1-7.

⁸ See Matt. 11:11-12; 13:1-52; 16:13-28; 18:1-6; 19:12-30; 20:1-16; 21:28-46; 22:1-14; 25:1-46; etc.

⁹ See Matt. 24:15.

Treasure and the Pearl (13:44-46), and the Workers in the Vineyard (10:1-16). Unfortunately, however, Bible scholars cannot agree with each other on the interpretation of this important subject. Is the "Kingdom of Heaven" synonymous with the "Kingdom of God"? Is the "Kingdom" something only in connection with the future world, or something that has already been realized in this present age, or something that contains both the aspects of the present and the future? Does it involve all mankind, that is, both the Jews and the Gentiles, or only one of them? Does it concern the redemptive salvation of Jesus or only His other religious and ethical teachings? Is the "Kingdom of Heaven" a reward to the faithful Christians only, or a general gift to all who are called by God's grace and thus sincerely repent and believe in Christ? Does "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" have the same meaning as "being saved," or "having eternal life"? Is there any difference between the usages such as: a believer, a disciple, a follower of Christ, a Christian, one who gets eternal life, and one who enters the Kingdom of Heaven? Are they synonymous or do they refer to different levels of Christian life?

In a more specific way: what is the relationship between "repentance and belief in Jesus Christ" and "total commitment to Jesus Christ"? When Jesus called people to follow Him, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, did He also require people to commit themselves totally to Him? These

questions, which have divided scholars,¹⁰ will be discussed in the following pages.

The purpose of this study is to show through the exegesis and interpretation of selected Matthean texts and parables that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with the "Kingdom of God." It is the dynamic rule of God through the Person and the Mission of Jesus; and "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" has the same meaning as "being saved," or "having eternal life." Again, the phrases such as "being called by Jesus to follow Him," "repenting and believing in Jesus," "becoming a disciple of Jesus," "committing oneself totally to Jesus" are expressing the same fact from different angles. Jesus taught that a believer is also a disciple. Anyone who

¹⁰This has been a serious problem among some Chinese churches since the beginning of this century. First, many Chinese churches accepted the teaching of Dispensationalism and distinguished the "Kingdom of Heaven" from the "Kingdom of God" by referring the latter to God's eternal rule but the former only to God's promise to Israel (see chapter two). Second, one of the most famous and influential Christian leaders in China, Watchman Nee (1903-1972), also differentiated the "Kingdom of Heaven" from the "Kingdom of God" and refers the latter to the rule of God over all believers but the former to God's reward only for the faithful Christians in the future millennium (see chapter two). Third, although Nee himself did not make a distinction between the terms "believer" and "disciple," in recent years many Chinese preachers assert that believers of Jesus are different from disciples of Jesus: the former only accept Jesus as their Savior, while the latter go one step further--after a period of discipleship training, then commit themselves totally to Jesus as their Lord and only they will be rewarded in the future world. According to this teaching, accepting Jesus as the Savior and committing oneself to Jesus as his Lord are separated; one can believe without commitment; one can first accept Jesus as Savior to become a believer, then later commit himself to Jesus as the Lord to become a disciple, and thus a disciple is a higher level believer among other believers.

through the Spirit's work confesses Jesus as his Savior simultaneously commits himself to Jesus as his Lord and keeps on following Him. In other words, genuine belief and total commitment are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, Jesus' teaching on "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" signifies that by God's grace, through the Spirit's work, sinners are called to enter the reign of God, to follow Jesus, to repent and believe in Him, to commit themselves totally to Him, to become His disciples, and to enjoy the blessings of His reign--salvation and eternal life.

Chapter one of this study is the Introduction. Chapter two investigates the biblical meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven. After presenting the biblical concept of this usage and evaluating different interpretations of different scholars, chapter two concludes that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with the "Kingdom of God," the dynamic reign of God to establish His rule among men, and that this glorious eschatological Kingdom has already begun in human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, to attract men to commit themselves totally to Jesus, and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign.

Chapter three examines Jesus' use of the parables in explaining the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is obvious that one of Jesus' favorite teaching methods was the use of the parables which make up more than one-third of His

recorded teachings.¹¹ The main purpose of Jesus' parables is to explain or illustrate His central message--the Kingdom of God.¹²

The Jews held a different view of the Kingdom of God from that of Jesus. Hence Jesus' teaching on the quiet and secret coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its glorious and apocalyptic manifestation became a mystery to most of them. They would not identify God's Kingdom with the person and mission of a humble Nazarene carpenter nor would they treasure Jesus, believe in Him, and commit themselves totally to Him. Thus, Jesus' parables remained enigmatic to them. Had they known the precious value of Jesus, they would have accepted Him wholeheartedly as their Savior and Lord. Jesus' parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl in Matthew 13 illustrate this truth clearly.

In order to interpret Jesus' parables correctly, two principles are important: first, parables must not be interpreted as though they were allegories; second, parables must be understood in the historical life setting of Jesus' ministry which was always in connection with the divine purpose of redemption. On the basis of these principles, an interpreter must first find the point of comparison in the earthly story of the parable and only then arrive at the central truth, the spiritual meaning of the parable.

¹¹ See A. M. Hunter, Interpreting the Parables. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 7.

¹² See C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 20.

Chapter four first introduces the purpose of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and analyzes the different approaches to its interpretation. Then, the concept of "righteousness" in Matthew's Gospel and the purpose and functions of the Beatitudes are explained. Finally, the meaning of Matt. 5:3,10,20, and 7:21-23 which speak of "entering into the Kingdom of Heaven" are interpreted. The best way to understand Jesus' ethics is through the concept of God's dynamic rule, which has already manifested itself in the person and mission of Jesus and will find consummation only in the Age to Come. The presence of God's rule within one's heart gives him through the Spirit's work the transforming power of God to practice Jesus' ethical commands. The ethics of the Kingdom emphasize the righteousness of the heart and demand a perfect righteous inner attitude, character, as well as outward acts. Obviously, this is beyond the ability of any human being. However, through God's redemptive reign in the heart of the believer, this righteousness, which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, can actually be experienced even in this present age, qualitatively if not quantitatively. The perfect righteousness still awaits the eschatological consummation.

There are many different approaches to the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. The important principle is that the Sermon is not only Law but also Gospel. It presupposes the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' ethical demands are preceded by His gracious gift of

salvation. Only those who have responded to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus have repented and believed in Jesus with total commitment to Him, that is, who have submitted to the reign of God, can experience the righteousness of the Kingdom. Keeping this crucial fact in mind, Matt. 5:3,10,20; 7:21 are to be interpreted in relation to true repentance, the genuine trust in Jesus with total commitment to Him. By God's grace, all those who repent and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him as their Savior and Lord will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Chapter five interprets Jesus' difficult saying in Matt. 11:12 and its parallel saying in Luke 16:16 to discover Jesus' teaching on entering the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matt. 11:12, it reads "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven *βιάζεται* and *βίασται ἄρπάξουσιν αὐτήν*" (the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it),¹³ and in Luke 16:16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and *πᾶς εἰς αὐτήν βιάζεται*" (everyone is forcing his way into it).¹⁴ Many questions may be raised. What is the relationship between these two passages? Are they both genuine

¹³New International Version.

¹⁴Ibid.

sayings of Jesus, or different modifications of the same source Q? Are they creations of the early church, or critical objections of the Pharisees picked up by Jesus? Again, what is the most proper meaning here for the Greek words of βιάζεται, βιασταί, and ἀρπάζουσιν? Is the first verb passive or middle? Are they used in the good sense or the bad sense? What does Jesus emphasize here in relation to the topic of entering the Kingdom of Heaven?

A detailed exegesis demonstrates that both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 express the idea of the forceful or powerful coming of the Kingdom of God (that is, the dynamic and redemptive rule of God in Jesus and the powerful ministry He manifests--the grace of God), and the forceful or vigorous response of men in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (that is, the sincere repentance and faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him--the result of God's grace through the Spirit's work). However, those who enter the Kingdom of God are not "forceful" by nature, and thus better than others, but the Kingdom itself, with all its gifts and blessings, puts power and courage into those who are willing to obey Jesus to seize it all.

Chapter six interprets the Twin Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl in Matt. 13:44-46. These two parables illustrate Jesus' saying of Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16. The point of comparison of these twin parables is that: Even as the laborer who found a treasure in a field responded by selling all he possessed to buy the field in order to obtain

the treasure and as the merchant who found an especially valuable pearl also responded by selling all he possessed in order to buy the pearl, so the disciples through the Spirit's work, knowing the value of the Kingdom of Heaven, respond to God's kingly rule by committing themselves totally to Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Again, the central truth is that those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven are those who realize the value of the Kingdom of Heaven and respond to Jesus' kingly rule, through the Spirit's work, in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him. Thus, Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 can be reinforced by the Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl and vice versa.

Chapter seven interprets Jesus' saying of Matt. 18:3 and Mark 10:15, where Jesus speaks of the relationship between being like a child and entering the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matt. 18:3-4, Jesus says, ". . . unless you turn (**στραφήτε**) and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child. . ." What does Jesus mean by the phrase "turn and become like little children"? Does **στραφήτε** here refer to repentance and conversion? Does the phrase "humbles himself like this child" in verse 4 explain the meaning of **στραφήτε** in verse 3? After investigation of the meaning of **στραφήτε** and the Biblical conceptions of repentance and humility, it becomes clear that Matt. 18:3-4 does emphasize the necessity of man's genuine repentance to

God and total dependence on Him in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁵

In Mark 10:14-15, Jesus says, ". . . for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child (ὡς παιδίον) will never enter it." Why does God's Kingdom belong to little children? Is this because little children's objective qualities such as: littleness and helplessness, which signify God's grace in giving the Kingdom to those who have no claim upon it, or their subjective qualities such as: humility, meekness, receptiveness, dependence, trust, and commitment? Or does Jesus here simply emphasize the Biblical conception of father-child relationship? -- A relationship involves both a father's free loving gift and a child's total dependence on and complete trust in his father?

After examining different interpretations, the present writer asserts that to distinguish subjective qualities inherent in the nature of little children from their objective humblesness is not necessary. The important point Jesus made is the blending together both the objective and subjective qualities in the themes of helplessness, humility, receptiveness, trust, total dependence, and commitment of the Biblical father-child relationship--a relationship of a child-like trust in God as his gracious loving Father. In

¹⁵This is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, man by himself cannot repent and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

this way, Jesus connects the entering of the Kingdom of Heaven with both God's gracious gift of His Kingdom and men's sincere repentance and genuine faith in Him with total commitment.¹⁶

Chapter eight investigates the meaning of Matt. 19:16 to Matt. 20:16 which includes the conversation between Jesus and the rich young man; Jesus' comment on the impossibility of a rich man who depended on his own merits to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; the conversation between Jesus and Peter about the future reward; the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. Here the phrases "to have eternal life," "to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," "to be saved," and "to inherit eternal life" should be understood synonymously.

The most important point of the story of the rich young man is that no one can merit eternal life by doing good; the only valid way to salvation is by God's grace and through the Spirit's work to commit oneself totally to Jesus and follow Him. The twelve disciples who have in fact left all and followed Jesus will share in Jesus' glory in the new age. And all those who have sacrificed for Jesus' name's sake will receive "many times" a "reward" as they inherit eternal life in the age to come.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is designed to show that the divine standard of reward is totally different from human standards of payment. God has the right to do things according to His own generosity. Based on His

¹⁶Again, this is through the Spirit's work.

grace, God can distribute a full day's wages to those who worked only for one hour or few hours. Christians should avoid the work-for-wages spirit and the envious attitude toward their fellows in the serving of the Lord. God's amazing grace and good-will welcome equally all who accept His gracious offer, even those "late-comers" into the Kingdom of Heaven. The main point of this parable is the contrast between the grace and generosity of the employer and the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers. When God is active redemptively in order to re-establish His rule over and among men, He is like this gracious employer whose amazing grace and surprising generosity in treating his employees will irritate those who have a self-merit and envious mind. In this way, all who depend on their own merit before God will become last, and all who depend totally on God's grace will become first.

CHAPTER II

INTERPRETATIONS ON THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The concept of the Kingdom of Heaven (or the Kingdom of God) is not only the theme of Jesus' preaching, but also involves the total message of the whole Bible.¹ In both the Old and the New Testaments the term covenant is used. A synonym for covenant in the Old Testament is "Kingdom of YHWH."² In the New Testament one of the synonyms for covenant is "Kingdom of God." The covenant concept has been regarded as the unifying theme which connects the Old and the New Testaments.³ It is the theme of salvation, of redemption, in which God redeems sinners to become His people and to live under His gracious rule. Covenant includes both Law and Gospel.

¹Cf. John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), p. 7. These two usages are synonymous, see below, pp. 15-16.

²See 1 Chron. 28:5; 17:14; 29:1; Ps. 145:11,12,13; 103:19; 22:28; Obadiah 21. See also below, pp. 21-23.

³Cf. W. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1961) 1:26. In recent years there have been many different suggestions for the unifying theme of the two testaments, e.g., covenant (W. Eichrodt), promise (W. C. Kaiser), God's lordship (L. Kohler), God's glory (H. D. Hummel), none (G. von Rad), etc. It is agreed by most scholars that the best way to relate the two testaments is in multiplex relationship. See Gerhard F. Hasel, Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 49-80.

The concept of the dynamic rule of God can first be seen in His Creation. Then it is manifested in judgment and in mercy in His covenant relationship with His people throughout the history of Israel. As Israel failed God's covenant, the future messianic and theocratic state with a New Covenant was prophesized by the prophets, and thus all Israel were waiting for the coming of the glorious Kingdom of God.⁴ Under this expectation, Jesus came into the world and preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Jesus not only proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God but also realized God's Kingdom in His person and mission, and the final consummation waits until the Age to Come arrives.

Since this concept has been interpreted so variously, this chapter will first investigate the proper Biblical meaning of the Kingdom of God and then introduce and evaluate briefly the other inappropriate alternatives.

The "Kingdom of Heaven" is Synonymous
With The "Kingdom of God"

There is much Biblical evidence to prove that the Kingdom of Heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. First, in recording the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, Matthew refers to His opening message in terms of "the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 4:17), while Mark uses "the Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14, 15). Could it have been possible that Jesus had preached two different Kingdoms at the same time?

⁴ Cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 1:25, 30; 23:51; Acts 1:6.

Of course not! Second, in Matt. 10:7 and Luke 9:2, when Jesus sent out the twelve and commissioned them to preach His message, Matthew used the term "the Kingdom of Heaven," while Luke used "the Kingdom of God." Obviously, they are synonymous terms. Third, in Matt. 11:12,13 and Luke 16:16, Christ states that John the Baptist preached a Kingdom message following the time of the Law and the Prophets. In Matthew, Christ refers to that kingdom as "the Kingdom of Heaven," while in Luke, He refers to that same kingdom as "the Kingdom of God." How could these two usages have meant different things? Fourth, in Matt. 19:23, 24, there is a case of Hebrew parallelism in which Christ says the same thing twice for effect. Without changing subjects, He refers to the same Kingdom in two different terms, that is, "the Kingdom of Heaven" and "the Kingdom of God." It is indisputable that in Christ's mind they are one and the same. In the same way, all other usages of "the Kingdom of Heaven" in Matthew are substituted by the term "the Kingdom of God" in their parallel Markan or Lukan passages. This difference in wording is due to the fact that the Gospels were addressed to different groups. The Jews hesitated to use the name of God. For that reason Matthew who addressed them respected this custom and used the name "heaven" while Mark or Luke who addressed the Gentiles used the name "God." Jesus used both terms in the same meaning.⁵

⁵ Cf. G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 64.

The Linguistic Studies

The expression "Kingdom of Heaven" (מְלִכּוּת שָׁמַיִם ; βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) was originally used, not long before Jesus' time, by Rabbinic Judaism to serve as an alternative for the divine name in the phrase "Kingdom of Yahweh" (יְהוָה מְלִכּוּת).⁶ The word מְלִכּוּת is an early Hebrew abstract noun. Since Semitic nouns are usually derived from verbs, the essential meaning of nouns can be found in their verbal root.⁷ The meaning of the Qal (מָלַךְ) is always "to reign," and thus מְלִכּוּת as well as two other related nouns מְלִיכָה and מְלִיכָה have the meaning of "reign," "kingly rule," "kingship," and "kingdom."⁸

Although the term מְלִכּוּת is mostly used in the Old Testament in the secular sense of a political kingdom,⁹ it is also occasionally used to refer to "God's rule" or "Yahweh's Kingship."¹⁰ The Kingship of Yahweh in judgment and mercy

⁶ Cf. B. Klappert, "King, Kingdom," in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, 3 vols., ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 2:376-77 (Hereafter NIDNTT); Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth, His Life, Time, and Teaching, trans. from the Hebrew by Herbert Danby (New York: Macmillan, 1945), pp. 245-46.

⁷ Cf. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, B. K. Waltke, ed. Theological Word Book of the Old Testament, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 1:507-9.

⁸ See G. von Rad, " βασιλεύς B: מָלַךְ and מְלִכּוּת in the OT," in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols., trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 1:570 (Hereafter TDNT); Klappert, "King, Kingdom" NIDNTT 2:376-77.

⁹ Cf. 1 Sam. 20:31; 1 Kings 2:12, etc.

¹⁰ מְלִכּוּת in Ps. 103:19; 145:11, 13; Dan. 4:3; מְלִיכָה

has been the most important factor in Israel's faith. It did not begin with the explicit application of the title King (מֶלֶךְ) to Yahweh in the vision of Isaiah,¹¹ nor with the so-called "Enthronement Psalms,"¹² nor with the beginning of the monarchy of Israel in the eleventh century B.C., but may well go back to the days long before the formation of a political state.¹³ Furthermore, the concept of the kingly rule of God can be found in God's covenant relationship with the Israel at Mount Sinai, with Abraham, and even as early as in God's Creation.

Therefore, in the Old Testament, the kingship of Yahweh is not limited only to the nation of Israel, but also has a cosmic dimension: He is the creator of the world;¹⁴ His Kingdom rules over all the earth;¹⁵ He is the King of the nations.¹⁶ It is evident that all these usages emphasize the

in Ps. 22:29; Obadiah 21; מֶלֶךְ in 1 Chron. 29:11. Except for these seven texts the Old Testament does not apply the abstract "kingship" to Yahweh. Cf. H. Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), p. 16, fn. 1.

¹¹ Isa. 6:5, "My eyes have seen the King the Lord of Hosts."

¹² Psalms 47; 93; 96; 97; 99, etc. Cf. R. H. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 993-96.

¹³ For two centuries after the conquest of Canaan, Israel functioned as a sacred confederation of tribes with a faith that Yahweh Himself is the Commander-in-Chief of the army of Israel. Cf. Josh. 5:14; Judg. 7:22, etc.

¹⁴ Ps. 24:1; 93:1; 95:3-7.

¹⁵ Ps. 47:2.

¹⁶ Cf. Ps. 47:3; 99:2; Jer. 10:7.

reign of God rather than the realm over which He rules. Thus, the expression היהי תיכף should be understood as the universal Kingship of God, or God's character as universal King, since He is the Creator of the earth.¹⁷ This meaning became even more prominent in later Judaism, where the term $\text{מַלְכוּת הַשָּׁמַיִם}$ (the Kingdom of Heaven) never referred to the territory ruled by God but denoted that "God rules as King."¹⁸

The Greek term βασιλεία signifies the "being," "nature," "state," "dignity" and "power" of a king.¹⁹ Thus, βασιλεία primarily means "reign," "rule," "dominion." Since the dignity of a king is expressed in the territory ruled by him, linguistically, βασιλεία also has a secondary meaning as "Kingdom."²⁰

In the New Testament, βασιλεία is sometimes used in the abstract sense of God reigning as King,²¹ but sometimes in the concrete sense of the situation which is being ruled by God.²² In either case, however, the primary meaning is God's reign and, the secondary, His realm. Again, "this

¹⁷G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of the Tannaim, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 2:371-72.

¹⁸Kuhn, " βασιλεύς c: $\text{מַלְכוּת הַשָּׁמַיִם}$ in Rabbinic Literature" TDNT 1:571-72.

¹⁹K. D. Schmidt, " βασιλεία " TDNT 1:579.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Matt. 6:10.

²²Matt. 5:20; 7:21; John 3:5.

reign cannot be a realm which arises by a natural development of earthly relationships or by human efforts, but is one which comes down only by divine intervention."²³ Thus, the basic meaning of " βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν " (the Kingdom of Heaven) or " βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ " (the Kingdom of God) is God's reign, but it also signifies the realm in which the blessings of His reign are experienced. In short, the Kingdom of God means that God's dynamic reign has as its purpose to reestablish His Kingdom over and among men through His redemptive work.²⁴

The Kingdom of God Before Abraham

The first manifestation of the kingly rule of God over and among men is the Creation. In Eden, Adam and Eve lived under God's rule, and they also reflected His rule by their own dominion over the rest of the created world.²⁵ The rule of God was summarized in the probationary commandment which tested the obedience of men.²⁶ As long as men maintained the right relationship with God, they kept on enjoying God's blessings in this "prototype kingdom."

Adam's fall disrupted the harmonious situation and brought disaster to the whole world. Since men rejected the

²³K. D. Schmidt, " βασιλεία " TDNT 1:582.

²⁴Cf. Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 45.

²⁵Gen. 1:26-28.

²⁶Gen. 2:15-17.

rule of God, they were inevitably subjected to the control of Satan and lived under the power of sin. Along with God's judgment, His grace was also revealed. God promised to carry out His redemptive plan to reverse the fall through the work of the woman's seed.²⁷ Since then, the reality of the rule of God could still be seen in the lives of a few godly individuals, such as Enoch, and Noah,²⁸ but the majority of people kept on excluding God's rule in their lives. It was then that God chose Abraham to be the father of a new kind of people, His special covenant people.

The Kingdom of God in Israel's History

God's dynamic reign in activity to re-establish His Kingdom over and among men has its clear manifestation in the covenant promises He made to Abraham:

. . . I have made you a father of many nations. . . I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.²⁹

God's promises stress that He will make the descendants of Abraham a great nation; they will be given a land to possess; they will have a special relationship with God. This is to say that Abraham's descendants are to be God's

²⁷ Gen. 3:15.

²⁸ Gen. 5:22-24; 6:8, 9.

²⁹ Gen. 17:5-8. See also Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 22:15-16.

people, to dwell in God's place, and to live under God's rule. Thus, what God promised to Abraham is, in a sense, a recovery of what Adam lost in the fall. In other words, God's covenant promise to Abraham is substantially identical with God's promise of His Kingdom, even though the latter term is not used.³⁰

There is a definite relationship between God's covenant with Abraham and the salvation of Israel from Egypt as recorded in Ex. 2:23, 24: ". . . their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob." This means that God's salvation is based on His grace alone. It is because of God's gracious promise to Abraham, but not because of any merit in Israel, that God works salvation. In short, it is based strictly on God's grace that He re-establishes His Kingdom over and among men through His redemptive work. This crucial principle is the foundation for the understanding of the covenant of Sinai, and the concept of God's redemptive rule.

At Mount Sinai, God formally received Israel as His covenant people and thus gave them the covenant guidelines.³¹ Israel was constituted God's people because of God's free gift, God's gracious redemption.³² The giving of the

³⁰G. Goldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament" Present Truth 5 (Feb. 1976):18-19.

³¹Ex. 19:3-6; 20:19-24:8.

³²Deut. 26:5; Ezek. 16:44-45. Cf. Eichrodt,

covenant guidelines provided Israel with a standard for faithful obedience by which the covenant relationship may be preserved through the Spirit's work in the hearts of God's people. Thus, God's salvation is strictly of grace.

In the covenant of Sinai, Israel is specifically referred to as a "kingdom":

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.³³

This "kingdom of priests" (מְמַלְכֹת פִּיִּהֲנִים) is a result of God's redemptive work. In the Old Testament this usage is very close to the later rabbinical expression "kingdom of God."³⁴ God set Israel apart as a holy nation, a people of His treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, so that they not only experienced His redemptive rule at the Exodus but might also daily live under His gracious rule and obey His will.

Six important characteristics of this "God's redemptive rule among His people" can be distinguished.³⁵ The

Theology 1: Ch. 2; G. A. F. Knight, Law and Grace (London: SCM, 1962) pp. 25-27.

³³Ex. 19:5, 6.

³⁴However, Israel as a "kingdom of priests" is not synonymous with the "Kingdom of God." Israel is the people who live under the gracious rule of God. In the later chapters of Isaiah and in some psalms, the verbal combination "God rules" is used. The noun form of this, however, does not occur until the intertestamental period. Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, p. 32.

³⁵Dr. Kiehl listed six distinguishing marks of this "kingdom" relationship. See Erich H. Kiehl, "The Parable of

first characteristic is that God saved Israel by grace alone. It is based on God's covenant promise to Abraham that He brought Israel out of Egypt. The Exodus account demonstrated that Israel is an unworthy people. The only reason for Israel's being chosen as God's people is because of God's grace.

The second characteristic is that God chose to dwell with His people. During Israel's journey in the wilderness, God's dwelling with His people can be seen in the pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.³⁶ Again, God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle as the place of His gracious presence.³⁷ Israel, therefore, became the people of God's presence.

The third characteristic is that God set Israel apart to do His will. Through Moses, God conveyed His will in great detail, covering every aspect of Israel's daily life.³⁸ Those rules and regulations of the covenant guidelines always reminded the Israelites that they were God's people and their task was to do God's will. In His grace, God also provided a system of sacrifices as an "atonement" for the transgressors

the Unjust Manager in the Light of Contemporary Economic Life," (An unpublished Doctor of Theology Dissertation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1959), pp. 29-31. See also Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 34-37.

³⁶Ex. 13:21,22; 14:19,20.

³⁷Ex. 25:8; 40:34-38.

³⁸See especially the many rules and regulations in the Book of Leviticus.

of these guidelines, so that the people of Israel could continue in this special relationship with God.

God made a covenant with His people in the manner that He was their sovereign King. God's covenant with Israel was a unilateral one. It was in no way like a common contract over which Israel might bargain with God, but similar to the ancient Middle Eastern suzerainty covenants.³⁹ God spoke to His people as a king to his subjects. After reminding them what He had done for them, God declared in detail what He expected of them.⁴⁰ The people of Israel agreed with these terms, accepted this covenant and trusted that God would keep His promises. Thus Moses sprinkled the blood of a sacrifice on the people to seal the covenant. This was the situation described in Exodus 20-24. In other words, as God's covenant people, through the Spirit's work, all Israelites should live a life completely loyal to God and keep obeying His will. They were to treat God as their gracious King and Lord in every aspect of their life.

The fourth characteristic is that God designed Israel

³⁹This was the pattern used by kings of old in spelling out the terms of service for their subjects. It was customary for the monarch, first of all, to set forth what he had done for his people. Then he would outline in detail what he expected of his people. At this juncture his subjects were given the opportunity of accepting or rejecting the king's offer. After the subjects had agreed to accept the king's terms, the covenant was sealed by the sprinkling of blood from a sacrifice. See Scharlemann, Parables, p. 36; Cf. George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," The Biblical Archaeologist, 17 (1954):50-76.

⁴⁰Ex. 19:3-6.

as a community to stand in a special relationship to Himself, as a nation to live in His covenant. Israel was chosen to be "a kingdom of priests"--a community of serving the Lord; "a holy nation"--a community of separating from all others; "a people of God's treasured possession"--a community of belonging to God Himself.⁴¹

The fifth characteristic is that of witness. God made Israel to become an example of His rule among the nations with the hope that this model would attract other nations to enter into the same relationship with Himself. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, God also intended to manifest His name and His power to the Egyptians⁴² and even to all the people on the earth.⁴³ One positive result could be seen from the conversion of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God and said, "Now I know that the Lord (Yahweh) is greater than all other gods."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, only in the later stages of Israel's history did this characteristic become more clear and more explicit to the people of Israel.⁴⁵

The sixth characteristic is that of judgment. God would judge the rebellious people. This feature is evident

⁴¹Ex. 19:5,6.

⁴²Ex. 7:5; 14:4,18.

⁴³Ex. 9:16.

⁴⁴Ex. 18:11,12.

⁴⁵Isa. 43:10,12; 44:8.

from two aspects. First, God announced His judgment against the nations which rejected His Kingly rule:

I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.⁴⁶

Second, God also revealed His judgment to the people of Israel who would rebel against Him. After giving the first two commandments, God warned:

for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.⁴⁷

In the wilderness journey, Israel's rebellions almost caused her destruction under God's wrath. It was God's mercy that He pardoned their sins through Mosés' intercession.⁴⁸ Again, through the system of sacrifices, God mercifully provided a typological atonement for the sins of His people. Nevertheless, behind these sacrificial offerings, God's judgment could easily be sensed. To the rebellious, God announced His judgment, but to those who loved Him and kept His commandments, that is, who lived in genuine faith in Him, He promised His love, His salvation in grace.

⁴⁶ Ex. 23:31-33.

⁴⁷ Ex. 20:5.

⁴⁸ E.g., their worshipping of the golden calf (Ex. 32:10-14); their rebelling against God after the report of the spies (Num. 14:12-20).

These six characteristics of God's redemptive rule clearly indicate that God's covenant of grace is lived in obedience to His will. Israel could never take her status as God's chosen people for granted. Through the Spirit's work she was to live obediently under the rule of God in accordance with the requirements of the covenant. Unfortunately, throughout her history, Israel kept on breaking her covenant with God by worshipping idols and ignoring God's will and thus repeatedly experienced God's wrath in judgment.

Despite the ongoing failure on the part of Israel, God's redemptive rule was still explicitly demonstrated in the historical events such as: the conquest and possession of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua while the real leader was God Himself;⁴⁹ the rule and the deliverance from oppression by the judges, whose authority represented the primitive theocracy of Israel;⁵⁰ the establishment of the united monarchy, the theocracy, with the temple worship in Jerusalem.⁵¹

During the reign of David and Solomon, the external expansion of God's rule became an especially prominent feature in Israel's history. It seemed that the promises to

⁴⁹Cf. Josh. 5:14.

⁵⁰Cf. Judg. 8:23. For some two hundred years Israel remained a tribal league, a racial and religious unit, a loose confederation of clans united one to another about the worship of the common God. See W. A. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), pp. 95-110.

⁵¹2 Sam. 7:8-17, 24-26; 1 Kings 8:54-61.

Abraham were fulfilled at least in their physical characteristics:

So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, . . . not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.⁵² And David became greater and greater, for the Lord God of hosts was with him. . . say to My servant David. . . your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.⁵³ . . . So Judah and Israel lived in safety,⁵⁴ . . . from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.⁵⁴

The people of Israel related the promises given to David to the coming Messiah to a David redivivus, a new David, a son of David.⁵⁵ The inevitable result was that the aims of the state and the aims of religion became one: the state supports the religion, and the religion in turn exists for the state. The monarchy became the Kingdom of God, composed of God's chosen people, and ruled by His anointed "son." This, eventually, led to a false conclusion: God will eternally defend the state.⁵⁶

However, the idolatry of Solomon in his later days changed the whole scene. It gradually became obvious that God's rule and Solomon's kingdom were not at all coextensive. Furthermore, the split, the decline, the corruption, and

⁵² Josh. 21:43,45. Cf. Gen. 15:18-21.

⁵³ 2 Sam. 5:10; 7:8,16.

⁵⁴ 1 Kings 4:25.

⁵⁵ Bright, Kingdom, p. 41. For Messiah reference see also 2 Sam. 7:12-16.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 43, 44.

finally the fall of Israel between 922 B.C. and 586 B.C., raised the crucial question about the nature of the fulfillment that existed under David and Solomon. Is it possible for a kingdom of fallen people in a fallen world to fulfill God's glorious promises to Abraham? Should the concept of the true Kingdom of God be taken in more spiritual dimensions? When will God's promises be actually fulfilled? The answer was given by the prophets of Israel from the eighth century B.C. to the fifth century B.C.⁵⁷ Those prophets, on the one hand, interpreted the decline of the monarchy as God's judgment on unfaithfulness to the covenant; on the other hand, they prophesied the real fulfillment of the promise in terms of a restored, perfect, permanent and glorious situation coming through the work and the New Covenant of God's Messiah in the last days.

The Kingdom of God in Israel's Prophecy

As the monarchy declined, the majority of Israelites began to doubt that their state was the fulfillment of their destiny. In the eighth century B.C., Amos proclaimed a shocking message of God that "I [God] will destroy it [Israel] from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob. . . In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches."⁵⁸ He emphasized that the kingdom of Israel was not the Kingdom of

⁵⁷ From Amos, Hosea, Isaiah in the eighth century B.C. to Malachi in the fifth century B.C.

⁵⁸ Amos 9:8,11.

God! Israel was now under God's judgment!⁵⁹ Hosea also announced that the bond between Israel and God had been broken: "Call his name (Loammi) **לֹאֲמִי** (not My people), for you are not my people and I will not be your God."⁶⁰ Henceforth, the prophets began to speak of a Remnant in Israel. They transferred the hope to the future, that whatever form the Kingdom of God might take, it would not come without judgment upon Israel.

Isaiah connected the ideal state of the Messiah with the Israel of the Remnant. He stressed the notion of a pure Remnant of God's people, cleansed in fiery trial and made amenable to God's purpose.⁶¹ Thus, the concept of the Suffering Servant occupied his thought.⁶² Israel must suffer the consequences of disobedience. Nevertheless, the real healing and salvation would be brought to them, as well as to all the nations of the earth, only by the obedience of the coming Suffering Servant of God, when "he makes himself an offering for sin. . . he shall bear their iniquities."⁶³

⁵⁹ Bright, Kingdom, pp. 45-70; especially p. 67.

⁶⁰ Hos. 1:9.

⁶¹ Isa. 1:21-27; 4:2-4; 10:20-22; 37:30-32.

⁶² The arguments for the assertion that Isaiah was the author of Isaiah 40-66 see Edward J. Young, The Unity of Isaiah (London: Tyndale Press, 1950). Also see Horace D. Hummel, The Word Becoming Flesh (St. Louis: Concordina Publishing House, 1979), pp. 184-91; 214-28; Roland K. Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 764-80.

⁶³ Isa. 53:10,1. The concept of the Suffering Servant see Isa. 52:13-53:12.

While maintaining the hope of a Remnant over which the Messiah King would rule in the future,⁶⁴ Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that God would make with His people:

Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord, I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.⁶⁵

This new covenant expresses God's new and utterly gracious rule among His new Israel. Its main characteristics include: God's grace in forgiving sins; God's presence with His people; God's people in fellowship with Him and with each other as a new community; God's law in the obedient hearts of His people; God's absolute Lordship or Kingship over and among His people. These features parallel those of the covenant at Sinai⁶⁶ and express the real fulfillment of the latter.

⁶⁴ Jer. 23:5-6.

⁶⁵ Jer. 31:31-34.

⁶⁶ See above, pp. 23-27. Only the characteristics of witnessing and of judgment are not mentioned here. However, the idea that other nations would be drawn to God can be found in Jer. 48:47; 49:39, and the idea of God's judgment upon the rebellious Israel and the nations is evident throughout the book of Jeremiah. But he also speaks the promises: "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at

Ezekiel emphasized this same theme in his own distinctive way. The vision of the revival of the dry bones signifies that Israel, dead in her sin, would be alive again through the grace of God.⁶⁷ God purged her sins, gave her a new heart, a new spirit, a new and eternal covenant, and even His own Spirit so that this new Israel might keep God's law and be ruled by God's "new David King" forever.⁶⁸ In so speaking of the future fulfillment of God's eternal Kingdom, Ezekiel deliberately mixed the restored Israel theme with the restored Eden theme and depicted the New Jerusalem as having the tree of life along the river of life which flows from the new temple.⁶⁹

Obviously, this eternal Kingdom of God will outlast and prevail over the empires of this world. Through God's revelation in a vision, Daniel identified the stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream as the eternal Kingdom, sent by God, which would destroy the heathen nations represented by the different parts of the statue.⁷⁰ Again, in the visions of

that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she shall be called, the Lord is our righteousness." Jer. 33:14-16.

⁶⁷ Ezek. 37:14.

⁶⁸ Ezek. 36:22-28; 37:24-28.

⁶⁹ Ezek. 36:35; cf. Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 47:3-12; cf. Rev. 22:1,2.

⁷⁰ Dan. 2:36-45.

the four beasts and the thrones, he saw One "like the Son of man," to whom was given dominion, glory, and a Kingdom. This Kingdom is eternal, one which will not be destroyed, and which was to supersede the earthly empires represented by the various beasts of the vision.⁷¹ There is the promise "to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). There is the promise of resurrection (Dan. 12:2).

Since the historical restoration, beginning with the return from the exile, was only a very pale reflection of the anticipated fulfillment in few physical features, the post-exilic prophets, that is, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, emphasized more the coming of the future great day of the Lord.⁷² Daniel's prophecies of the coming Kingdom remained alive throughout the intertestamental period although much misunderstood as speaking of a political kingdom. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people expected that God would soon establish His Kingdom of Heaven on earth even though its concept had been interpreted differently by different groups.

The Kingdom of God in Jewish Expectations at Jesus' Time

At Jesus' time, two main factors affected the Jewish expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom. They are Apocalypse and Law.⁷³ Apocalypse means "revelation." It

⁷¹Dan. 7:1-28.

⁷²Cf. Hag. 2:23; Zech. 13:1; 14:1-21; Mal. 3:2,17; 4:1,5.

⁷³Bright, Kingdom, pp. 162-177.

describes how God will intervene to wind up the affairs of this earth, to judge His enemies and to set up His Kingdom. Although this type of literature is found in the Old Testament,⁷⁴ it became very popular between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D.⁷⁵ The apocalyptic view emphasized eschatological aspects, and thought that the history was given over to evil powers. God's people could only expect suffering and affliction in this age until God would act supernaturally through a catastrophic intervention to establish His Kingdom at the last day.⁷⁶

The scribes and the Pharisees emphasized keeping the Law. To them the center of Jewish religion was the observance of the Law. A religious Jew was one who studied the Law, knew it, taught it, and kept it. In order to avoid breaking the Law, the rabbis made new rules as building fences one after another around the Law. The letter of these strict regulations eventually took the place of the spirit of the Law, and made the observance of the Law more difficult.

⁷⁴See Ezek. 38-39; the Book of Daniel. Cf. H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (London: Lutterworth, 1944), pp. 31-32.

⁷⁵E.g., The Similitudes of Enoch (the crucial section is post-70 A.D.); Assumption of Moses; The Psalms of Solomon; 2 Esdras (after A.D. 70); 2 Baruch, and some other books of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphy. See James H. Charlesworth, ed. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).

⁷⁶Cf. G. E. Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 72-97.

Before A.D. 70, 341 additional rules were added to the Oral Law.⁷⁷

The rabbis asserted that the Kingdom of God was the reign of God. Although this was experienced in the present age through the obedience of the Law, it mainly awaited a future consummation.⁷⁸ Therefore it was necessary for men to decide for or against it by a decision of will. The rabbinic expression "to take upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" meant "to acknowledge God as one's King and Lord."⁷⁹ In this age, God's rule was limited to those who accepted the Law of Moses and obeyed it. At the end of this age, God will manifest His sovereignty in all the world to punish the wicked and gather righteous Israel into a redeemed order of blessing.⁸⁰ Thus, when Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God is at hand and did not observe and also rejected the Pharisaic understanding of the letter of the Law and the traditions as they did, they rejected Him as an impostor and blasphemer.

⁷⁷Bright, Kingdom, p. 175; Jacob Neusner, "Pharisaic Law in New Testament Times" Union Seminary Quarterly Review 26 (1970-1971):331-40.

⁷⁸See D. Flusser, Jesus (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 85; C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (New York: Ktav, 1970, 1930), p. 131.

⁷⁹See H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1926-61) 1:173 (Hereafter SB); cf. Kuhn, " βασιλεύς C: מלכות שמיים in Rabbinic Literature" TDNT 1:571.

⁸⁰J. Jeremias, New Testament Theology I (London: SCM, 1971), p. 99.

The relationship between the apocalypticism and Pharisaism cannot be separated. Pharisaism, based on the Old Testament, inevitably stressed its eschatological expectations; on the other hand, apocalypticism also held the Torah in the same eminent position that Pharisaism did. The Pharisees used the apocalyptic Psalms of Solomon to teach the common people what the coming Messianic age would be like.⁸¹ Thus, dichotomy between Pharisaism and apocalypticism is incorrect. Both schools shared the same conviction that the Kingdom of God is primarily eschatological and transcendent.⁸² When God's Kingdom comes, there will be dramatic changes in social, ethical, and political situations. Thus, to them, God's Kingdom had not yet come in the real sense. This also forced them to reject Jesus and His preaching of the coming of God's Kingdom.⁸³

The Qumran community emphasized both their understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures and of the apocalyptic thought. They withdrew themselves from the society in order to practice the Law interpreted in their own way and to wait

⁸¹T. W. Manson, The Servant-Messiah (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), pp. 21-35.

⁸²Cf. W. D. Davies, "Apocalyptic and Pharisaism," in Christian Origins and Judaism (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 19-30; G. E. Ladd, "Why Not Prophetic-apocalyptic?" Journal of Biblical Literature 76 (1957):192-200; Kuhn, "βασιλεύς C: מֶלֶךְ תְּלִיטָה in Rabbinic Literature" TDNT 1:571.

⁸³Donald A. Hagner, The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 135.

for the coming of God's eschatological Kingdom.⁸⁴ They called themselves "the sons of light": those who kept the Law, and their enemies "the sons of darkness." The warfare between them would continue until the eschatological consummation when the angels would help them to defeat all their enemies.⁸⁵

A political movement in Judaism, with the fervent hope of political restoration, tried to gain independence from Rome through military action led by the messiah. These Jewish radicals, known as the Zealots, were not content to wait quietly for God to bring His Kingdom but wished to establish the Messianic Kingdom by force.⁸⁶ They revolted against Rome again and again with the hope of being able to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom, but they never succeeded. On the contrary, their insurrections brought about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus in A.D. 70, and finally the total destruction of Jerusalem by Hadrian's legions in A.D. 132-135.

⁸⁴ F. M. Cross, Jr., The Ancient Library of Qumran & Modern Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 197-238.

⁸⁵ See the War Scroll in A. Dupont-Sommer, The Essence Writings from Qumran, trans. G. Vermes (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), pp. 164-97; H. Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, trans. Emilie T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) pp. 152-98.

⁸⁶ Cf. Eduard Lohse, The New Testament Environment, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Parthenon, 1981), pp. 83-84; E. Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, 2 vols., a new English version revised and edited by Geza Vermes & Fergus Millar (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1973) 1:382-87; 459-70; 496-513; S. Mowinckel, He That Cometh (New York: Abingdom, 1956), pp. 284-86.

The Kingdom of God in Jesus' Preaching

In the force of various incorrect Jewish expectations of God's Kingdom mentioned above, such as the apocalyptic view, the Pharisaic view, the Qumran view, the political view, John the Baptist and Jesus came and proclaimed, "the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"⁸⁷

Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God involved both present and future aspects. On the one hand, following biblical prophecies, Jesus asserted the coming of an eschatological Kingdom in the future. The coming of God's Kingdom will mean the final judgment of the world, the decisive separation of believers and unbelievers, the total destruction of the devil and his angels, and the glorious bliss of the believers.⁸⁸ Thus, the disciples were taught to pray for its realization.⁸⁹ Again, to teach a proper understanding, Jesus mentioned the sudden and unexpected future irruption of the Kingdom of God in some parables: the sudden coming drawing on the imagery of the flood,⁹⁰ the unexpected entrance of the burglar,⁹¹ the surprise of the servant at the return of his master,⁹² the sudden arrival of the bridegroom.⁹³ Thus,

⁸⁷Mark 1:14; Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Luke 3:3-18.

⁸⁸Matt. 25:31-46; 13:36-43.

⁸⁹Matt. 6:10.

⁹⁰Matt. 24:37-42; Luke 17:26-27.

⁹¹Matt. 24:43-44; Luke 12:39-40.

⁹²Matt. 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-46.

⁹³Matt. 25:1-13.

the disciples were reminded to keep watch and always be prepared for it. These teachings regarded the coming of God's Kingdom as a future event.

On the other hand, Jesus also emphasized the present aspect of God's Kingdom. After casting out demons, Jesus asserted: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you."⁹⁴ To the Jews this disarming of Satan would be an eschatological event,⁹⁵ Jesus told them that in this act it was happening before their eyes.⁹⁶ In Jesus' ministry the Kingdom of God was already a present reality. Again, in answering the Pharisees' question, "When is the Kingdom of God coming?" Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is in your midst."⁹⁷ The Pharisees looked for the apocalyptic signs, but overlooked what God had done through Jesus in their midst in keeping with the Old Testament prophecies. To those who are "poor in spirit" and "persecuted for righteousness' sake," Jesus said, "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."⁹⁸ In Luke 12:32, Jesus even used an aorist verb "εὐδόκησεν" (was well pleased) to comfort His

⁹⁴Matt. 12:28.

⁹⁵SB. 1:167; cf. B. Klappert, "King, Kingdom" NIDNTT 2:382.

⁹⁶Matt. 12:29; 10:8; Luke 10-17-20.

⁹⁷Luke 17:20,21. Here, "ἐντὸς ὑμῶν" is better translated as "in your midst" than as "within you." Cf. Ladd, Kingdom, p. 224. See Isa. 28:16; 35:2-4; 42:1-9; 61:1-3.

⁹⁸Matt. 5:3,10. Here, "ἔστιν" (is) is in the present tense. The meaning of these verses see below, pp. 127-36.

disciples: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father was well pleased (or has been pleased) to give you the Kingdom." All these teachings stressed the present realization of the future Kingdom in Jesus.

Furthermore, Jesus connected the Kingdom of God with His own Person. Those who through the Spirit's work confess Him before men in the present age, He will also confess them before His Father who is in heaven.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the unrepentant will be condemned, because they rejected Jesus and His ministry.¹⁰⁰ Again, Jesus described Himself as the final Judge at His second coming.¹⁰¹ A man's final destiny is decided by his attitude toward Jesus Himself in this world as Jesus stressed in John 3:16-19. This is reflected also in Jesus' comments recorded in Matt. 19:29, Mark 10:29-30 and Luke 18:29. This also indicates that the Kingdom was already present in the person and ministry of Jesus.

A very important point is that Jesus saw His own person and ministry as the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic promises. In the beginning of His ministry, Jesus plainly proclaimed that His coming and His person had fulfilled the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2.¹⁰² In

⁹⁹Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8.

¹⁰⁰Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-16.

¹⁰¹Matt. 25:31.

¹⁰²Luke 4:16-21; cf. Matt. 5:3-10, see below, pp. 126-27.

answering the question of John the Baptist's disciples, Jesus pointed out that His ministry had fulfilled the messianic prophecy of Isaiah.¹⁰³ Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' person and ministry were repeatedly understood as the fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic promises. He is the Son of Man, the Son of God, the "son" of David, the Suffering Servant, the King of Israel . . . In Him and through Him, the promised Kingdom of God was realized, the Jewish people's hope was fulfilled. Unfortunately, since Jesus and His followers were only a tiny minority, and most of them belonged to the lower class or even to the outcasts of the Jewish society,¹⁰⁴ this humble group and its activities were not welcome by their Jewish contemporaries who expected a glorious kingdom. Thus, the present realization of God's Kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus became a "mystery" to them.¹⁰⁵

In summary, Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God emphasized both the present and the future aspects, and this Kingdom could not be separated from His person and ministry. Jesus' true role was to first be the obedient Suffering Servant before becoming the victorious servant. The Kingdom

¹⁰³Matt. 11:2-6. See Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:6-7; 61:1-3.

¹⁰⁴Some of them were fishermen, some were people with various diseases, some were demon-possessors, some were tax-collectors, and some were "sinners" like the prostitutes. See Matt. 4:18-25; 9:11; Luke 7:37.

¹⁰⁵Matt. 13:10; Luke 8:10; Mark 4:11.

of God is God's kingly rule which has two moments: a fulfillment of the Old Testament promises in the person and ministry of Jesus, accomplishing the salvation, and a consummation at the second coming of Jesus, inaugurating the Age to Come.

The Characteristics of the Kingdom of
God in Jesus' Teaching

In preaching the Gospel of God's Kingdom, Jesus emphasized the same characteristics as those of the Sinaitic covenant.¹⁰⁶ First, the coming of God's Kingdom was an act of God's grace. God gave His Kingdom as a gift to His own, His "little flock."¹⁰⁷ The only way into God's Kingdom is by being born of water and the Spirit. It is only of God's love and gift.¹⁰⁸ As the father's love receives back again the prodigal son,¹⁰⁹ as the shepherd goes out after the lost sheep,¹¹⁰ as the woman searches for the lost coin,¹¹¹ as the king invites the beggars and homeless to his feast,¹¹² as the master willingly pays the full day's pay to the labourers hired at the last hour.¹¹³ So, based on God's pure grace,

¹⁰⁶ See above, pp. 23-27.

¹⁰⁷ Luke 12:32; Matt. 6:33.

¹⁰⁸ John 3:3-16.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 15:11-32

¹¹⁰ Luke 15:4-7.

¹¹¹ Luke 15:8-10.

¹¹² Matt. 22:1-10.

¹¹³ Matt. 20:1-15.

Jesus gives to penitent sinners the promise of forgiveness and brings them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Second, God's Kingdom was already present in Jesus' person and ministry; thus, God Himself dwelt among those who believed in Jesus. Jesus was the eternal Word who had become flesh and tented among men.¹¹⁴ Those who believe in Jesus become the people of God's presence, the Temple of God.

Third, the people of God's Kingdom were those who prayed that God's will be done everywhere.¹¹⁵ They not only had the strong desire to obey God's will but were also empowered by God's redemptive rule through the Spirit's work in doing it.¹¹⁶ Jesus emphasized that "only he who does the will of My Father in heaven will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."¹¹⁷ Again He proclaimed that "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."¹¹⁸ All those who responded to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven through the Holy Spirit's work would be empowered by God's redemptive rule to live a life in keeping with the will of God.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴John 1:14.

¹¹⁵Matt. 6:10.

¹¹⁶See below, pp. 116-18.

¹¹⁷Matt. 7:21, see below, pp. 144-52.

¹¹⁸Matt. 12:50.

¹¹⁹Cf. Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 19-20. See also below, pp. 116-18.

Fourth, God's Kingdom created a new community, that is, the Church. Jesus granted God's Kingdom to the believers through a New Covenant He made with them.¹²⁰ Instead of the ongoing sacrifice of animals and their blood, Jesus shed His own blood to seal the covenant.¹²¹ Through God's redemptive rule, the believers had a new relationship and fellowship with God and with each other. In Jesus, they became a family,¹²² a flock of sheep,¹²³ and the true people of the Kingdom of Heaven.¹²⁴

Fifth, Jesus emphasized the universality of the Gospel of God's Kingdom. After healing the Gentile centurion's servant, Jesus said to those following Him, ". . . many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven."¹²⁵ In His Mount of Olives discourse, Jesus again asserted, "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."¹²⁶ This same idea was reemphasized in His great commission and His final instruction right before His

¹²⁰ Luke 22:14-29.

¹²¹ Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 7:26-28; 8:6-13; 10:17-20.

¹²² Matt. 12:48-50.

¹²³ Matt. 18:12-14; John 10:7-16.

¹²⁴ Matt. 8:10-13.

¹²⁵ Matt. 8:11.

¹²⁶ Matt. 24:14.

Ascension. Carrying it out was begun in the outreach as recorded in the Book of Acts.¹²⁷

Sixth, Jesus also mentioned that God's judgment would fall upon those who rejected the Gospel of God's Kingdom. In prophesizing the destiny of the unbelieving Jews, Jesus said, "the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹²⁸ To Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of this judgment to all unbelievers by saying, "whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son."¹²⁹ But those who die in faith and those who are living in faith when Christ comes again will in grace be welcomed into the eternal Kingdom.¹³⁰

A Brief Introduction to Various Interpretation
Of the Kingdom of God In the Church's History

In the second and third centuries the Kingdom of God was interpreted quite differently. Some, such as, Clement of Rome and Hermas, strongly emphasized the ethical demand, and made either the coming of God's Kingdom or the entering into it dependent on the conduct of men.¹³¹ In this way, faith and the moral life were separated; merit and asceticism were

¹²⁷Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.

¹²⁸Matt. 8:12.

¹²⁹John 3:18, 19-21.

¹³⁰Matt. 7:21; cf. Matt. 25:31-46.

¹³¹The former see 2 Clement 12, 2; the latter see Hermas 9,15,2. Cf. K. L. Schmidt, "βασιλεία F" TDNT 1:592.

prevailed, and the Kingdom of God became an individual's inner spirituality and enjoyment of God's blessings. Others, such as, Barnabas and the Didache, stressed the eschatological fulfillment, and plainly distinguished the Kingdom and the Church.¹³² The Church was the present reality while the Kingdom was viewed as a hope belonging almost exclusively to the eschatological future. Justin Martyr asserted a future millennial Kingdom which is God's promise of an eternal reward for the righteous.¹³³ As the Church was still a minority suffering persecution at the hands of imperial powers, it was easy for the believers to withdraw from the world and await the future Kingdom. Still others, such as, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, explained the concept of God's Kingdom in terms of Greek philosophies, and thus almost ignored its biblical message entirely.¹³⁴

The Constantinian reversal closely connected the Church and God's Kingdom. Both the Eastern imperial theology and the Western episcopal theocracy reduced the Kingdom of God to the earthly realities of caesaro-papal rule and power.¹³⁵ Augustine, the most influential Western theologian, identified the Kingdom of God not only with the Church Triumphant but

¹³²As in Barnabas and the Didache. Cf. TDNT, 1:593.

¹³³Justin's Dialogue 117, 3. Cf. TDNT, 1:593.

¹³⁴Cf. TDNT, 1:593.

¹³⁵Cf. J. G. Davies, The Early Christian Church (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), pp. 187-90; 228-33; 246-50; 257-58; Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (New York: Penguin, 1967), pp. 160-73.

also with the Church militant by saying that "the Church even now is the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven."¹³⁶ The Medieval Church indiscriminately followed Augustine in identifying the visible ecclesiastical system with the Kingdom of God. This resulted in the subsequent alliance of Church and state, which led to a series of tragic consequences, such as, the enthusiasm for the "Holy Crusades" replaced that of the mission of the Church; the persecution of the Christian "heretics," and so forth.¹³⁷

The Reformers interpreted the Kingdom of God in a more complicated way. Martin Luther spoke of two kingdoms. One is the Kingdom of the Gospel, that is the church when the Means of Grace are extended. This is the Kingdom of grace. The other is the civil kingdom of justice and the sword. Luther says:

There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. I have written this so often that I am surprised that there is anyone who does not know it or remember it. . . . God's Kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy, not of wrath and punishment. In it there is only forgiveness, consideration for one another, love, service, the doing of good, peace, joy, etc. But the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity. In it there is only punishment, repression, judgment, and condemnation to restrain the wicked and protect the good. For this reason it has the sword, and Scripture calls a prince or lord "God's wrath," or "God's rod" (Isaiah 14:5-6).

We must divide the children of Adam and all mankind into two classes, the first belonging to the Kingdom of God,

¹³⁶S. Augustine, The City of God (De Civitate Dei), 2 vols., trans. J. H. (London: Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, 1610) 2:258 (Book 20, Chapter 9).

¹³⁷W. R. Cannon, History of Christianity in the Middle Ages (Nashville, Abingdon, 1960), pp. 130-218.

the second to the kingdom of the world. Those who belong to the Kingdom of God are all the true believers who are in Christ and under Christ, for Christ is King and Lord in the Kingdom of God, as Psalm 2:6 and all of Scripture says. For this reason he came into the world, that he might begin God's Kingdom and established it in the world. . . He also calls the gospel a gospel of the Kingdom of God; because it teaches, governs, and upholds God's Kingdom. . . All who are not Christians belong to the kingdom of the world and are under the law. . . one must carefully distinguish between these two governments. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other.¹³⁸

At first, John Calvin also held a "two kingdom" view similar to Luther. But later he linked the Kingdom of God with the covenant, and asserted that there was only one covenant and one universal Kingdom of Christ from the beginning of creation which lasts to the end of the world. To him, the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Christ has been operating in history and on earth. Thus, the spiritual kingdom and the political kingdom overlap, not only in their common aim, the glory of God, but also in their effect, the conditions of humanity on earth. Under this conception, Calvin developed a Christocracy as the Geneva system of Church controlling the State.¹³⁹ Here the Gospel subserves the Law.

¹³⁸ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 55 vols., gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Gortress Press/St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-), 46:69-70; 45:89-92. See also Thomas F. Torrance, Kingdom and the Church: A Study in the Theology of the Reformation (Edinburgh and London: Olive and Boyd, 1956), pp. 16-29.

¹³⁹ Heinrich Quistorp, Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things, trans. H. Knight (London: Lutterworth, 1955), pp. 158-171. Cf. Torrance, Kingdom, pp. 155-60.

During the last one and a half centuries, some different schools of interpreting the meaning of God's Kingdom arose. The first is the old liberal view. This view understands the Kingdom of God primarily in terms of personal religious experience in the present age--the reign of God in the individual soul and has no importance in connection with the future.¹⁴⁰ Adolf von Harnack, a representative of this view, interprets the Kingdom of God as the pure prophetic religion taught by Jesus: the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the infinite value of the individual soul, and the ethic of love. The obvious apocalyptic or eschatological element in Jesus' teaching was only the time-conditioned husk that contained the kernel of His real religious message--the non-eschatological aspect of the Kingdom of God.¹⁴¹ This interpretation is deficient because of its neglect of the important truth of Christ's second coming and with Him the appearance of the Kingdom of God. The second is the consistent eschatology view. This view holds the opposite idea of the above one. It argues that Jesus' view of the Kingdom was like that of the Jewish apocalypses: altogether future and eschatological. The victory of the Kingdom of God over Satan had already been won in heaven; therefore Jesus proclaims its coming on earth. The Kingdom will be altogether God's

¹⁴⁰ See T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 135.

¹⁴¹ A. von Harnack, What is Christianity? trans. T. B. Sanders (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 52-56.

supernatural act, and when it comes, Jesus will be the heavenly King and Judge.¹⁴²

Albert Schweitzer, an advocate of this view, interprets the entire ministry of Jesus from the viewpoint of the eschatological understanding of the Kingdom, which Jesus expected to come in the immediate future. Jesus' ethical teaching was designed only for the brief interval before the end comes, not for the ordinary life of men in society. But the Kingdom did not come, and Jesus died in despair and disillusionment.¹⁴³ Obviously, this interpretation is incorrect, because the present aspect of the Kingdom of God is as important as the future aspect of it, and the ethics of Jesus is really aimed for the on-going life of those who believe in Him. Furthermore, the Kingdom of God did already come in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ Who did not die in despair nor in vain, but as the obedient suffering Servant Who also rose again and ascended to be with the Father.

The third is the realized eschatology view. C. H. Dodd, who originated this theory, understood the apocalyptic language of Jesus as a series of symbols standing for realities that the human mind cannot directly apprehend. The Kingdom of God, which is described in apocalyptic language, is in reality the transcendent order beyond time and space that has broken into history in the mission of Jesus. In

¹⁴² Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 67-79.

¹⁴³ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: A. and C. Black, 1911), pp. 223-49.

Him, the "wholly other" has entered into history. In this event, all that the prophets had hoped for has been realized in history.¹⁴⁴ Dodd's theory can be criticized for at best minimizing the future aspect of the Kingdom, since many of Jesus' teachings and parables of the Kingdom do speak of His future coming and the blessings of the future Kingdom. In Dodd's latest publication, he admits that the Kingdom yet awaits consummation "beyond history."¹⁴⁵ However, his earlier view of realized eschatology is still very influential.

The fourth is the dispensational view which will be taken up below.

The fifth is the socio-political view. This is an abuse of the teaching of God's Kingdom by the social gospel movement.¹⁴⁶ In recent years, one significant ecumenical discussion of this topic was the World Council of Churches sponsored conference "Your Kingdom Come," held in May 1980 in Melbourne. The theme of this conference had three dimensions: first, the indicative: we confess that the Kingdom has already come; second, the subjunctive: we pray for its coming

¹⁴⁴C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1961), pp. 21-59.

¹⁴⁵C. H. Dodd, The Founder of Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 115.

¹⁴⁶Cf. George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); S. R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

in fullness; third, the imperative: we are called to make it come.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the Melbourne Conference did not keep a balance between these three "moods." It tended to ignore the first two and only emphasized the third. Thus it has been criticized for its lack of biblical foundation, for its unbalanced socio-political emphasis, and for its insufficient concern for preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the lost.¹⁴⁸

The sixth is the already-not yet view. This view is a revival of the biblical teaching that the Kingdom of God is the dynamic and redemptive reign of God which is manifested both as a present realization in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and as a future consummation at His glorious second coming.¹⁴⁹ This is the most appropriate interpretation of the Kingdom of God and is also adopted by the present writer.

¹⁴⁷ David J. Bosch, "Melbourne and Pattaya: The Left Foot and the Right Foot of the Church?" (A paper available to this present writer only in its unpublished form), p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Kuzmic, "The Church and the Kingdom of God" Wheaton '83 (A paper available to this present writer only in its unpublished form), p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ See the writings of the scholars such as: H. N. Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); G. E. Ladd, Jesus and the Kingdom (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); R. Schnackenburg, God's Rule and Kingdom (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963). See also above, pp. 39-46.

Varying Interpretations of the "Kingdom of Heaven" as
Being Different from the "Kingdom of God"

The Dispensational View

A Brief Introduction of
Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism had its beginning with the Brethren Movement, which became prominent around 1830 especially in Plymouth, England. J. N. Darby (1800-1882), an early Plymouth Brethren leader, articulated the dispensationalist understanding of "the Kingdom of Heaven" or "premillennialism." He wrote forty volumes and founded some fifteen hundred assemblies around the world.¹⁵⁰ Through his books, the dispensational system was carried throughout the English-speaking world. From Darby to the present, there have been many famous preachers and scholars who followed his teaching, such as, C. H. Mackintosh, Willaim Kelly, F. W. Grant, W. E. Blackstone, James Hall Brooks, G. Campbell Morgan, D. L. Moody, C. I. Scofield, H. A. Ironside, A. C. Gaebelain, L. S. Chafer, C. C. Ryrie, and John F. Walvoord.¹⁵¹ Also there are many theological schools with a specific dispensational emphasis, such as, Dallas Theological Seminary, Talbot Theological Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary, Moody Bible Institute, Philadelphia Bible College, and so forth as is

¹⁵⁰ Cf. F. R. Coad, A History of the Brethren Movement (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1968); A. C. Piepkorn, "Plymouth Brethren (Christian Brethren)," Concordia Theological Monthly 41 (March 1970):165-71.

¹⁵¹ For a positive view by a modern scholar, see C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody, 1965). For a critique by a former dispensationalist, see C. B. Base, Backgrounds to Dispensationalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960).

attested in their catalogs. Darby's impact on C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) was probably most important since Scofield made dispensationalism an integral part of his Bible notes, and within sixty years more than three million copies of the Scofield Reference Bible were printed in the United States.¹⁵² In recent days the popularity of Hal Lindsey's books again demonstrates the vitality of the dispensational view among evangelical Christians.¹⁵³

Dispensationalists distinguish human history into seven dispensations, that is, innocency, conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, millenium, and assert that God has dealt with men at different periods on different terms.¹⁵⁴ The seventh dispensation is the millennial kingdom, that is, the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven, in which God's promise to Israel will be literally fulfilled as the faithful Jews are restored to their land under the Davidic monarch, with Christ as King. The Christians will all be raptured and transformed into spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal bodies before the millennial Kingdom, and even before the so-called seven year Great Tribulation.¹⁵⁵ The relation of the Church to the millennium is not always

¹⁵²The Scofield Reference Bible was first published in 1909.

¹⁵³E.g., Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

¹⁵⁴See C. I. Scofield, ed., The Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), pp. 5,10,16,20,94,1115,1250,1341.

¹⁵⁵J. F. Walvoord, The Rapture Question (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 269-70.

clear in dispensationalism. Some say that the Church will return at the beginning of the millennium and pass through it to eternal life.¹⁵⁶ Others assert that the Church will not return to earth at all but will be a part of the holy city hovering above the earth, and from there she will reign with Christ.¹⁵⁷

The Difference Between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven

Dispensationalists differentiate the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Heaven, and understand the latter as only a part of the former. According to their view, the Kingdom of God is eternal. It includes all intelligences in heaven or on earth who are willingly subject to God. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Messianic, mediatorial and Davidic kingdom, in which the Messiah, Jesus Christ as the Son of David, will rule on earth.¹⁵⁸ When Christ proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, He legitimately offered to Israel the promised earthly Davidic kingdom, designed particularly for Israel. However, the Jewish nation rejected their King and with Him the Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom was postponed until the second advent of Christ, and the Kingdom entered a

¹⁵⁶ A. G. Gaebelien, The Gospel of Matthew, 2 vols. (New York: Our Hope Press, 1910) 2:248.

¹⁵⁷ J. D. Pentecost, Things to Come (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 577-78.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. L. S. Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 3:215; 4:315-18; 7:224; C. I. Scofield, Bible, pp. 996, 1003.

mystery form, that is, the Church, during this present age. But when Christ returns in power and glory at the conclusion of the tribulation, the postponed Kingdom of Heaven, the millennial kingdom, will be realized. Then Israel, which has been gathered to the Messiah from its dispersion throughout the earth, will accept Him as such and will enter the millennial kingdom as the covenanted people.¹⁵⁹

A Brief Valuation

Dispensationalism bases its whole system of doctrine on the literal principle of hermeneutics without regard for literary form and the principle of the analogy of Scripture. It develops such theories as the strict literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, the distinction between Israel and the Church, the pretribulational rapture, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state. Although this may seem to be a consistent system of theology, it can not be the correct biblical view on account of its incorrect presupposition of the strict literal interpretation and disregard for literary form and its inappropriate theories developed thereupon.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, there are many biblical reasons, as pointed out above, which demonstrate that the Kingdom of

¹⁵⁹Chafer, Theology, 1:44-45; 7:223-25.

¹⁶⁰Cf. R. G. Clouse, ed., The Meaning of Millennium: Four Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), pp. 20-27; W. E. Cox, An Examination of Dispensationalism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1963), pp. 34-36; O. T. Allis, Prophecy and the Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945).

Heaven and the Kingdom of God are one and the same.¹⁶¹ To make a differentiation between them is to make a most serious mistake.

The Reward View

This view asserts that the Kingdom of Heaven is the reward of the faithful Christians--the millennial reign with Christ. Watchman Nee, a very famous church leader, preacher, and Bible expositor in China,¹⁶² who was deeply influenced by the Brethren Movement in England,¹⁶³ while criticising the dispensational interpretation, proposes another meaning for the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁶⁴ He also differentiates the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Heaven, and refers the latter as the reward part of the millennium--in other words, it is the reward for the faithful Christians who will reign with

¹⁶¹ See above, pp. 15-16.

¹⁶² Watchman Nee (1903-1972) is the founder of the local church movement in China, which is usually called by the name of the "Little Flock." He wrote many books in Chinese concerning Christians' spiritual life, ministry, and Church's administration, organization, etc. His influence in the Chinese Church in general is very great. Recently, more than forty of his books have been translated into English and published in the United States by Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc. (11515 Allecingie Parkway, Richmond, Virginia 23235). For more information on Nee's thoughts see Ch. 4, fn. 140, pp. 153-54.

¹⁶³ Cf. Watchman Nee, The King and the Kingdom of Heaven (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1978), pp. 271-72. His biography in English is more complete than any of his biographies in Chinese. See Angus I. Kinnear, Against the Tide: The Story of Watchman Nee (Fort Washington, PA: The Christian Literature Crusade, 1973). J. N. Darby's great influence on Watchman Nee see p. 110 of Kinnear's book.

¹⁶⁴ Nee, Kingdom, pp. 18-20.

the Lord for a thousand years. To him, the distinction is not between the Jews and the Gentiles, but between the faithful Christians and the unfaithful Christians. He comments on Matt. 11:12, saying:

The scope of the church today is as big as the scope of the Kingdom of God today. The scope of the Kingdom of Heaven is smaller than the scope of the Kingdom of God and the scope of the church. The province in which God dispenses grace is the church. It is a matter of position. The Kingdom of God is the sovereignty of God. All who believe in the Lord are under God's sovereign authority. This is true both now and in the future. Hence the church (all who believe in the Lord) and the Kingdom of God are like the two sides of a coin. The Kingdom of Heaven refers to those who will reign during the millennium. Not all who are today in the church and in the Kingdom of God can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only the faithful in the church may enter . . . Since the Pharisees use force to prevent men from entering the Kingdom of Heaven, those who would enter need to seize it by force.¹⁶⁵

This interpretation prompts man to look to something they must do in order to receive the reward of the millennial Kingdom, that is, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the way of the Law and not of the Gospel. As is true also of the Dispensational view, it is impossible to establish this thesis on the basis of Scripture that the Kingdom of Heaven is different from the Kingdom of God.¹⁶⁶ If anyone wants to encourage other Christians to be faithful to the Lord, he should choose other Bible passages and do so in keeping with proper Biblical hermeneutics. Such passages should stress that Christ's crucifixion is the key. Nee directs attention to something man must also do, and not only

¹⁶⁵Nee, Kingdom, pp. 113-15.

¹⁶⁶See above, pp. 15-16.

to what Christ, and only He alone, has done for the sinners.

Summary

"The Kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with "the Kingdom of God" which is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish His gracious rule among men, and that 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 men from its power, to bring men through the Spirit's work to commit themselves totally to Jesus, and also to experience the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history--the Kingdom of grace and the Kingdom of glory.

CHAPTER III

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

A favorite teaching method of Jesus is the use of the parables. It is estimated that about sixty parables of Christ are recorded in the first three Gospels.¹ These parables make up more than one-third of Jesus' recorded teachings.² Many of the parables are used to explain or illustrate Jesus' central message--the Kingdom of Heaven.³ Thus, it is necessary to study the principles of the interpretation of Jesus' parables in order to understand His teaching on entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

This chapter will first examine the meaning of the word "parable," then explain what the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven is, and then investigate the purpose of Jesus'

¹ A. M. Hunter, Interpreting the Parables (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 11. However, different scholars have different ways of counting the number of parables, such as Trench lists 30; Juelicher, 53; B. T. D. Smith, 62; A. B. Bruce, 33; Moulton, between 30 to 40; C. H. Dodd, 44, this indicates that the meaning of the word is not fully agreed upon. Cf. Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 18-19; Hunter, Parables, p. 11.

² Hunter, Parables, p. 7; Scharlemann, Parables, p. 13.

³ C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 20.

parables, and finally discuss the interpretation of the parables.

The Meaning of the Word "Parable"

The most familiar definition of the word "parable" is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."⁴ However, this is misleading and owes much to Augustine's signum theory. This definition may suit the mind of twentieth-century English-speaking people. Yet the New Testament was written in first-century Greek. Thus, the Greek word παραβολή (parable) in the meaning of its first-century Greek-speaking people should be studied. Again, since Jesus' native tongue was Aramaic,⁵ the meaning of the Hebrew/Aramaic term לִפְתּוּלָה (parable) should be examined first.

לִפְתּוּלָה

In the Old Testament, the word לִפְתּוּלָה was used in a variety of ways;⁶ namely, proverbial utterance, a dark saying, by-word, prophetic or figurative discourse, similitude, parable, poem, and sentences of ethical wisdom.⁷ Four main usages can be distinguished as follows.

⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, Meet Yourself in the Parables (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), pp. 9-10.

⁵This is demonstrated by the Aramaic terms present in the Gospels which come from Jesus' lips. Cf. Matt. 5:22; 6:24; 10:25; 12:27; 13:33; 16:17; Mark 3:17; 5:41; 9:47; 14:36; 15:34; John 1:42; etc.

⁶Friedrich Hauck, "παραβολή," TDNT 5:747-51.

⁷Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, "לִפְתּוּלָה," A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the O. T. with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic Based on the Lexicon of

Proverb

A clear illustration of this usage is 1 Sam. 10:12, "Therefore it became a proverb (לִּשְׂמֵרָה), 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" Again, the Book of Proverbs carries the title " לִּשְׂמֵרָה ." In passages such as Ezek. 18:2-3 and 1 Sam. 24:13, לִּשְׂמֵרָה is used to refer to a simple proverb.

What do you people mean by quoting this proverb (לִּשְׂמֵרָה) about the land of Israel: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"?

As the old saying (לִּשְׂמֵרָה) goes, "From evildoers come evil deeds. . .⁸

Other similar examples can be found in Ezek. 12:22-23; 16:44.

Byword, Satire, Taunt
or Word of Derision

לִּשְׂמֵרָה in passages like Deut. 28:37 and Isa. 14:3-4 is used in this category.

You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule (לִּשְׂמֵרָה) to all the nations where the Lord will drive you.

On the day the Lord gives you relief. . ., you will take up this taunt (לִּשְׂמֵרָה) against the king of Babylon: "How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended!"

Other examples of this use can be found in Num. 21:27-30; 1 Kings 9:7; 2 Chron. 7:20; Ps. 44:14;⁹ 69:11;¹⁰ Jer. 24:9 and Hab. 2:6.

William Gesenius as Translated by Edward Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 605. (Hereafter BDB).

⁸ 1 Sam. 24:14 in the Hebrew text and in the LXX.

⁹ Ps. 44:15 in the Hebrew text and 43:15 in the LXX.

¹⁰ Ps. 69:12 in the Hebrew text and 68:12 in the LXX.

Story, Allegory or
A Figurative Discourse

In Ezek. 24:2-14, the term **מִשְׁלַּל** is used to describe a story or an allegory.

Tell this rebellious house a parable (**מִשְׁלַּל**) and say to them, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "Put on the cooking pot; put it on and pour water into it. Put into it the pieces of meat, all the choice pieces--the leg and the shoulder. Fill it with the best of these bones; take the pick of the flock. Pile wood beneath it for the bones; bring it to a boil and cook the bones in it."¹¹

Two other examples of this use are Ezek. 17:2-10 and 20:49-21:5.¹² In the passages like 2 Sam. 12:1-4, 14:1-11 and Isa. 5:1-7, the similar literal device can be found, although the term **מִשְׁלַּל** is absent.

Riddle

In some passages, **מִשְׁלַּל** is used with reference to **הִיָּדָה** (riddle). For instances, in Ps. 49:4, 78:2 and Prov. 1:6, **מִשְׁלַּל** and **הִיָּדָה** are here almost synonymous:

I will turn my ear to a proverb (**לְמִשְׁלַּל**); with the harp I will expound my riddle (**הִיָּדָתִי**).¹³

I will open my mouth in a parable (**בְּמִשְׁלַּל**); I will utter things hidden from of old.

To understand a proverb (**מִשְׁלַּל**) and a figure. The words of the wise and their riddle (**יְהִירֵתָם**).

This enigmatic quality of **מִשְׁלַּל** can also be seen in Ezek. 17:2, 20:49 and 24:2, although **מִשְׁלַּל** describes a story, an allegory or a figurative discourse in those places.

¹¹ Ezek. 24:3-5. See fn. 29 on p. 67 and fn. 74 on p. 79.

¹² Ezek. 21:5-10 in the Hebrew text and in the LXX.

¹³ Ps. 49:5 in the Hebrew text and 48:5 in the LXX.

Another example of riddle-like usage is found in Num. 23;7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20-23, where the obscure oracles which God sets on the lips of Balaam are also called לִשְׁמֵרָה.

Summary

In the Old Testament, לִשְׁמֵרָה is mainly used as proverb, byword, taunt, allegory, figurative discourse and riddle. Besides these usages, לִשְׁמֵרָה is also used for the riddle-like and dark pronouncements of Balaam. It seems evident that the enigmatic quality and the prophetic aspect of לִשְׁמֵרָה are eminent in the Old Testament. Friedrich Hauck emphasizes that לִשְׁמֵרָה is a manner of speech with a hidden meaning.¹⁴ Otto Piper asserts that לִשְׁמֵרָה designates a brief saying of wisdom, especially those with a hidden or enigmatic meaning.¹⁵ Again, Piper stresses that the function of לִשְׁמֵרָה may conceal and reveal at the same time.¹⁶

Therefore, in the Old Testament, the primary meaning of לִשְׁמֵרָה is to express the idea of utterances with an enigmatic quality which challenges the hearer to probe and ponder its meaning. Its secondary meaning may be rendered as implying a comparison or similarity, although this is always subordinated to the former meaning.¹⁷ In short, לִשְׁמֵרָה is

¹⁴Hauck, " παραβολή," TDNT 5:749.

¹⁵Otto A. Piper, "The Mystery of the Kingdom of God," Interpretation, A Journal of Bible and Theology 1 (1947):192.

¹⁶Ibid., 1:195.

¹⁷Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, p. 16.

part of the terminology of those words which give God's revelation of Himself and of His ways.¹⁸

παραβολή

In the Septuagint the Greek word παραβολή is usually used to translate the Hebrew term לִּפְתּוּחַ.¹⁹ The word παραβολή itself means a comparison or analogy.²⁰ Aristotle used it in this sense in his "Rhetoric."²¹ However, the translators of the Septuagint did not strictly follow the Greek meaning of this term, but used παραβολή to render the various meanings of the Hebrew לִּפְתּוּחַ. Thus, the enigmatic and prophetic usages of לִּפְתּוּחַ were carried over into the Greek word παραβολή.²²

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus used the term παραβολή in a way similar to that of the Septuagint. Sometimes

¹⁸Cf. Ibid.; Erich H. Kiehl, "The Parable of the Unjust Manager In the Light of Contemporary Economic Life" (An unpublished Doctor of Theology Dissertation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1959), pp. 6-7.

¹⁹The word "παραβολή" only appears in the Synoptic Gospel and in Heb. 9:9; 11:19. Another Greek word used in the LXX for לִּפְתּוּחַ is παροιμία. However, this word does not occur in the Synoptic Gospels, but only in John 10:6; 16:25, 29, and 2 Peter 2:22. Cf. James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, "παραβολή," and "παροιμία," The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 480, 496.

²⁰Cf. Hunter, Parables, p. 8; Hauck, "παραβολή" TDNT 5:745; W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 617.

²¹See W. Rhys Roberts, "Rhetorica," The Works of Aristotle Translated into English, edited by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), XI, II, 20.

²²Cf. Kiehl, "Parable", p. 7.

παραβολή is used as a proverb,²³ or a short saying.²⁴ In most cases, it refers to a figurative saying of simile²⁵ or metaphor,²⁶ a similitude,²⁷ a story parable or an example parable.²⁸ Only in a few special instances does it carry the allegorical meaning.²⁹ Although the function of comparison does exist in the use of παραβολή, its central significance is still that of ἕψῃ as the enigmatic and prophetic utterance for the revelation of God.

²³Luke 4:23; 6:39.

²⁴Matt. 15:11,15.

²⁵A simile makes an explicit comparison by means of such terms as "like," "as," "as if," "seems." Again, a simile has only one verb. Cf. Matt. 10:16, "Be wise as serpents." etc.

²⁶A metaphor makes an implicit comparison between two unlike things. Again, a metaphor has only one verb. Cf. Matt. 16:5, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees'." Other examples may see Mark 7:14-17; Luke 5:36-38; etc.

²⁷When a simile is expanded from a simple explicit comparison into a picture it becomes a similitude. A similitude has more than one verb in the present tense. Cf. Matt. 13:31-35, 44-50; 7:9-11; Mark 4:26-29; 13:28-29; Luke 15:4-7; 15:8-10; 17:7-10.

²⁸When a similitude is expanded from a picture into a story, it becomes either a story parable, an example parable, or an allegory. A story parable see Matt. 21:28-31; 25:1-13, 14-30; Luke 14:16-24; 15:11-32; 16:1-8; 18:2-8. An example parable see Matt. 18:23-25; Luke 10:29-37; 12:16-21; 14:7-14; 16:19-31; 18:9-14.

²⁹An allegory is a story that contains a string of metaphors. While a story or an example parable usually has one main point of comparison, an allegory has several. Some examples of allegory in the Gospels are Matt. 13:3-9 and 18-23; 13:24-29 and 36-43; 21:33-45; 22:1-14. However, except these parables which have explicit allegorical character explained by Jesus Himself, the other parables of Jesus should not be interpreted as allegories. See the discussion below, pp. 80-81.

It was when Jesus' message and ministry were openly rejected by the scribes and Pharisees and many of the Jews,³⁰ that Jesus began to proclaim the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven in parables.³¹ Therefore, in the New Testament, παραβολή is part of the terminology applied to the instructional and revelatory activity of Jesus.³² As לִשְׂרָאֵל in the Old Testament, παραβολή also has the dual functions of revealing and concealing at the same time.

The Mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven

In answering His disciples question: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus replied, "The knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you, but not to them."³³ It is evident that Jesus' use of the parables has something to do with the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The noun μυστήριον (mystery) is derived from the verb μύω which originally meant "to shut the mouth" and thus designated a thing not spoken of to others.³⁴ Although some ancient Hellenistic religions called their secret teachings

³⁰See Matt. 12:24-29.

³¹See Matt. 13:3,13.

³²Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, p. 17.

³³Matt. 13:10-11. Matt. 13:11 and Luke 8:10 use the "mysteries" of the Kingdom, while Mark 4:11 uses the "mystery" of the Kingdom. Mark's wording suggests a single truth, the others a truth with its various implications. Cf. Piper, "Mystery," pp. 196-97.

³⁴J. H. Thayer, "μύω" A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti Translated, Revised and Enlarged (Corrected edition; Chicago: American Book Company, 1889), p. 419.

and rites "mysteries," Jesus' use of "mystery" is definitely not the esoteric religious truth shared only by the initiated and strictly withheld from all outsiders.³⁵ It has its roots in the Old Testament and in contemporary Judaism.³⁶

In the Old Testament, the idea of God disclosing His mysteries to men is a familiar concept.³⁷ An explicit background of the New Testament use of *μυστήριον* is found in Dan. 2:27 where it is used in parallel with *δηλοῦν* to make clear. Daniel, instructed through a vision, interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream and thus revealed the mystery of God's eschatological purpose.³⁸

In the Qumran literature, the concept of "mysteries" plays a very important role.³⁹ Mysteries can be categorized in four aspects, that is, the mysteries of divine providence,

³⁵Those who support the influence of the Hellenistic mystery religion are: B. H. Branscomb, The Gospel of Mark (New York: Harper, 1937), pp. 78-79; A. E. J. Rawlinson, St. Mark: With Introduction, Commentary and Additional Notes (London: Methuen 1947, 1925), p. 48; C. A. H. Guignebert, Jesus, translated from the French by S. H. Hooke (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1935), p. 256; S. E. Johnson, The Interpreter's Bible, 12 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951) 7:410 (Hereafter IB); and F. C. Grant, IB 7:699 .

³⁶Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 4:1-34," Scottish Journal of Theology, 5 (1952):53; Piper, "Mystery," pp. 186-87.

³⁷See Job 15:8; Amos 3:7; Jer. 23:18,22; etc. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), pp. 1-11; C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 152.

³⁸Cf. G. Bornkamm, "*μυστήριον, μύεω*," TDNT 4:814.

³⁹For a list of passages, see E. Vogt, "Mysteria' in textibus Qumran," Biblica 37 (1956): 247-57.

of their interpretation of the Law, of cosmos, and of evil.⁴⁰ To the Teacher of Righteousness, "God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants the prophets."⁴¹ This means that God revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness the hidden meaning of the prophetic Scripture including the knowledge of Israel's future⁴² and God's unfathomable unalterable decisions.⁴³

In the New Testament, Paul uses "mystery" to refer to the secret purpose of God hidden from men for long ages but finally disclosed by revelation to all men through the preaching of the Gospel concerning the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ Thus, in contrast with the practice of the mystery religions, God's mystery is proclaimed to all men even though it is understood only by the believers. Again, in Col. 1:27, Paul speaks of "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Then he defines "mystery" in Col. 2:2-3, ". . . they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In Paul's mind, Christ is the center of God's mystery revealed. To accept Christ is to be led to understand that He is the fulfillment of God's promises.

⁴⁰ Cf. Brown, Mystery, pp. 22-30.

⁴¹ Commentary on Hab. 7:1-5. Cf. Brown, Mystery, p.24.

⁴² Cf. Ibid.; F. F. Bruce, Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 16, 66-68.

⁴³ See J. Licht, "The Doctrine of the Thanksgiving Scroll," Israel Exploration Journal 6 (1956): 7-8.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rom. 16:25-26.

The reason why the Kingdom of God becomes a "mystery" is the fact that God's Kingdom has come into history, realized in the person and ministry of Jesus, in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation. In other words, "realization without consummation."⁴⁵ It is no secret to assert that God proposes to bring His Kingdom nor to proclaim that God's Kingdom will come in apocalyptic power; because both apocalyptic and rabbinic literature reflect these expectations.⁴⁶ But it is a mystery to say that God's Kingdom which is to come finally in apocalyptic power, as predicted in Daniel, has in fact entered into the world in advance, through the person and ministry of Jesus, in a hidden form to work secretly within and among men.⁴⁷ It is hidden to unbelief. To faith it is clear and simple, Christ the Savior. He is the Savior of both the Jews and the Gentiles who believe in Him. Through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel. This has been a great mystery to the Jews. It was made known to Paul only by divine revelation as he stated in Eph. 3:2-11, Col. 1:25-27, and 1 Tim. 3:16.

In Jesus' time, the Kingdom that the Jews expected

⁴⁵ Cf, the discussion in Chapter II, see above, pp. 39-43.

⁴⁶ See above, pp. 34-37. Also see G. E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 224-25.

⁴⁷ This view is held by scholars such as C. E. B. Cranfield, Mark, pp. 152-53; G. Bornkamm, "μυστήριον," TDNT 4:814-15; G. E. Ladd, Presence, p. 225; R. N. Flew, Jesus and His Church (London: Epworth, 1951), pp. 45-46; W. Manson, Jesus, the Messiah (London: Hodder and Stoughton), pp. 49-50; Piper, "Mystery," pp. 187-88; etc.

was what Daniel prophesied:⁴⁸ a display of divine power that would overthrow Rome, sweeping away the ungodly Gentiles, purging the earth of unrighteousness and evil, and exalting God's people, Israel, in their own land over all the nations of the earth.⁴⁹ It is unthinkable for the Jews to relate the humble Jesus and His tiny group to the coming of the Kingdom of God. Thus, the present realization of God's Kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus became a "mystery." In this Sitz im Leben (setting in life), Jesus revealed Himself as the mystery of the Kingdom of God to those who believed in Him, but chose to speak only in parables to "those outside."

The Purpose of the Parables

In Mark 4:10-11, Jesus indicates the purpose of His parables.

When He was alone, the Twelve and the others around Him asked Him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside (ἐκείνοις τοῖς ἔξω) everything is said in parable so that (ἵνα), "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise (μήποτε) they might turn and be forgiven!"

If ἵνα means "in order that" and μήποτε means "lest," then the purpose of the parables is to conceal the truth from "those outside" in order to prevent them from understanding, repenting, and being forgiven. This explanation regarding the use of the parables as God's intention to let "those

⁴⁸Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45; 7:13-14, 26-27.

⁴⁹See above, pp. 34-39.

outside" perish is doubtful.⁵⁰ Many interpretations have been proposed to solve this difficulty.

One interpretation asserts that Mark mistranslated the Aramaic term used by Jesus which should be translated into "ܘܗܘ" (who), but it was mistranslated into "ܘܘܩܘܢ" (in order that).⁵¹ According to this rendering, Jesus originally said something like: "To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside who see but do not perceive and hear but do not understand, everything appears as parables (riddles)." This explanation lies the problem of these verse with Mark's mistranslation of Jesus' words. It tries to keep Jesus' words meaningful by accusing Mark of making mistake. If this solution is insisted, then the authority of the Scripture is at stake. This, however, cannot be true. Another attempt claims that Mark 4:10-12 is not the real sayings of Jesus at all, instead it is a piece of apostolic teaching.⁵² This solution which tries to "save" Jesus at the expense of the authenticity of Mark 4:10-12 is even more unlikely.

Still another explanation, while accepting "in order that" as the correct translation, suggests that Jesus was following the Eastern or Semitic thought pattern, that is,

⁵⁰Cf. Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), p. 257; T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 76; F. C. Grant, "The Gospel According to St. Mark," IB, 7:700; etc.

⁵¹Manson, Teaching, pp. 78-80.

⁵²Dodd, Parables, p. 3.

from effect to cause, when he said the phrase "in order that . . ." ⁵³ Thus, in Jesus' mind He did not mean that "since God purposed 'those outside' would not repent and thus resulted in their condemnation"; but meant that "since His listeners did not repent, this must ultimately lie in the divine purpose." ⁵⁴ However, this explanation does not really solve the difficulty but only modifies it.

A more acceptable interpretation is proposed by J. Jeremias. ⁵⁵ He translated ἵνα as an abbreviation for ἵνα πληρωθῆ , that is, "in order that as it is written" or "in order that it might be fulfilled" or "in order that the prophecy of Isa. 6:9-10 should be fulfilled." ⁵⁶ Again, He renders μήποτε as "unless" on account of the following two reasons. First, the Markan form of the Isa. 6:9-10 quotation differs from both the Masoretic and Septuagintal texts and agrees with the Peshitta, and even more closely with the Targum. ⁵⁷

⁵³ Cf. Edmund F. Sutcliffe, "Effect as Purpose: A Study in Hebrew Thought Patterns," Biblica 35 (1954):320-27.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid.; see also C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 143, states that both ἵνα and μήποτε are instances of the Semitic blurring of purpose and result.

⁵⁵ J. Jeremias, The Parable of Jesus, trans. S. H. Hooke, second revised edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 13-18.

⁵⁶ Piper, "Mystery," p. 193.

⁵⁷ He points out three agreements between Mark and the Targum: (1) instead of the verb "heal" (Isa. 6:10, MT and LXX) Mark and Targum have "forgive"; (2) instead of the singular יִלֵּךְ (Isa. 6:10, MT) both have the plural; (3) both avoid the use of the divine name by means of the passive. See Jeremias, Parables, p. 15.

Second, the Aramaic word for $\mu\eta\acute{\nu}\sigma\tau\epsilon$ is ܡܗܢܝܢ which may have three meanings: "in order that not, i.e., lest," or "lest perhaps," or "unless." Regardless, however, of how the Targumist understood it, rabbinical exegesis definitely took it to mean "unless" and regarded the conclusion of Isa. 6:10 as a promise that God would forgive His people if they repented.⁵⁸ It seems likely that Jesus had this same idea in His mind.

Therefore, according to this interpretation, the reason of Jesus' message remaining obscure to "those outside" is that they intended to stand and live outside of God's will and thus in their live the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled. However, in His grace, God still promised that they would be forgiven if they repented.

Understanding Mark 4:10-12 in this manner, it is appropriate to say that there are three purposes in Jesus' use of the parables. The first one is to illustrate and reveal His truth to both His followers and "those outside" so that they might understand His message.⁵⁹ The second one is to disarm His listeners through the Spirit's work to penetrate their heart's hardness and hostility so that they might

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 17; Manson, Teaching, pp. 78-80; see also H. L. Strack & P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, 4 vols. (Munich: C. H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956) 1:662-63, for four examples of the rabbinical exegesis of Isa. 6:10 in which this passage is understood as being a promise of forgiveness rather than a threat for final hardening.

⁵⁹ To His disciples see Mark 4:2,9,23,33-35, etc.; to "those outside" see Mark 12:12; Luke 10:30-37; 15:1-32; etc.

accept Jesus' truth.⁶⁰ The last one, contrary to the first two, is to conceal Jesus' truth to His opponents who sought to find fault with Him and accuse Him.⁶¹ This concealment made Jesus' teaching an enigma to them, and thus helped to seal their lips of accusation, but it also served to stimulate their curiosity to pursue seeking through the Spirit's work to find the truth so that they also might repent.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, many of His listeners were hostile toward Him. Most of the Pharisees hated Jesus, because He rebuked their hypocrisy⁶² and their outward obedience to the oral traditions.⁶³ After all, they considered themselves as the inspired interpreters of Scripture. The Sadducees also disliked Jesus, because He disagreed with their doctrine⁶⁴ and revealed their greed and reproved the abuse of their role in administering God's Temple.⁶⁵ Jesus' teaching also threatened their private benefits and sacerdotal system. Again Pilate as well as the Herodians⁶⁶ might

⁶⁰ Luke 7:36-50 is a good example, where Jesus used a parable to penetrate Simon's heart and sought to reach him.

⁶¹ Cf. Matt. 22:15; Mark 12:13; Luke 20:20. Also see the following discussion.

⁶² Cf. Matt. 6:1-5, 16-18, 23:13-36.

⁶³ Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13.

⁶⁴ Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40.

⁶⁵ Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48.

⁶⁶ Besides Matt. 22:16; Mark 3:6; 12:13; and two references in Josephus, the Herodians are not mentioned in any other ancient source. This indicates that they were not a sect or an organized party. They were those people who supported Herod and his son Antipas as their kings and thus

also be suspicious about Jesus' preaching on the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. How would such a Kingdom relate to the kingdom of Rome? Is Jesus the "Messiah," the king of Israel, that is, a political-military figure who would lead Israel fighting against Rome?

Such hostile opponents of Jesus were among His audience. On the one hand, they tried hard to discredit His teaching and to link His miracles to satanic power;⁶⁷ on the other hand, they sought from His teaching to find fault to accuse Him of blasphemy and sedition.⁶⁸ In order to prevent misunderstanding, Jesus used politically harmless parables such as grain of mustard seed, leaven, hidden treasure, or precious pearl. . . to speak of the Kingdom of God.⁶⁹ These riddle-like parables could not easily be found fault with but confused Jesus' opponents. In this manner, the parables concealed Jesus' truth to those outside, but to His disciples, after Jesus' private explanation, the same parables revealed His truth even more clearly.

generally were also loyal to the Roman control of Palestine upon which the Herodian dynasty depended. Cf. H. H. Rowley, "The Herodians of the Gospels," Journal of Theological Studies 41 (1940):14-27; B. W. Bacon, "Pharisees and Herodians in mark," Journal of Biblical Literature 39 (1920): 102-12; Bo Reicke, The New Testament Era, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), pp. 104, 124, 162; William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 124-25.

⁶⁷ Matt. 12:1-24.

⁶⁸ Matt. 12:14; 32:15.

⁶⁹ Matt. 13:31-46.

In fact, not only to Jesus' opponents but to all who would not accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord, the parables of Jesus remained enigmatic to them. Mark described them as "those outside" (ἐκείνοις τοῖς ἔξω).⁷⁰ The term τοῖς ἔξω was a technical term for those "outside of the Kingdom," which signified "heretics" or "unbelievers" in the rabbinical literature.⁷¹ Mark referred to those who would not accept Jesus, that is, the mystery of God's Kingdom, and thus remained outside of the Kingdom of God.

"Those outside" at Jesus' time were in a similar situation with that of Israelites at Isaiah's time. The more Isaiah preached, the more the people hardened their hearts and refused to listen. Thus, God pronounced His judgment upon Israel. This situation was repeated and fulfilled in the time of Jesus. Their unwillingness to listen to the truth caused their spiritual blindness and deafness and prevented them from repenting and being forgiven. However, if through the Spirit's work, the riddle-like parables would stimulate them to search Jesus' truth, to repent and believe in Jesus, they might still receive God's forgiveness. Otherwise they would experience God's judgment as what Jesus had said, "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."⁷²

⁷⁰ Matthew uses ἐκείνοις and Luke τοῖς λοιποῖς. These three usages are synonymous. Cf. Kiehl, "Parables," p. 15.

⁷¹ Johannes Behm, "ἔξω" TDNT 2:575-76.

⁷² Matt. 13:12; Mark 4:25. This has been the tragic spiritual situation in Israel's history. Cf. Matt. 8:10-12; 23:39; Acts 28:23-29; Rom. 9:1-5; 11:7-11; etc.

The Interpretation of the Parables

Throughout the Church's history, the interpretation of Jesus' parables has received considerable attention by the scholars. Different methods with various results have been advocated. Generally speaking, five approaches can be classified as follows: analogy, generalization, setting in life, prophecy, and God's redemptive purpose.⁷³

The analogy or two level approach resulted in the allegorical method.⁷⁴ It asserts that the earthly story reflects a higher counterpart, and thus every detail of a parable may represent independent spiritual meaning. This method of parabolic interpretation used by Philo was followed by Early Church Fathers like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen, and flourished through the school of Alexandria. Ignoring the protest of the school of Antioch, later on Ambrose and Augustine also followed them and thus this approach became the dominant method throughout the Medieval Church's history.⁷⁵

Although this method of interpretation had been

⁷³Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 21-30.

⁷⁴The allegorical method was first generally used by the Greek philosophers who tried to explain the heroes of Homer in a more sensible way to their audience. Later it was used by Jewish scholar Philo for interpreting the Old Testament teaching. Then there were Church Fathers who followed this method in interpreting the parables. Cf. R. H. Stein, Parables, pp. 42-43. Very few Biblical instances of this usage can be found; see pp. 64, 81 and fn. 29 on p. 67.

⁷⁵Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca. 200), Marcion (d. 160), Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-ca. 215), Origen (ca. 184-ca. 254), Ambrose (339-390), Augustine (354-430) and many others all used the allegorical method. For examples see *ibid.*, pp. 43-48.

seriously criticized by both Martin Luther⁷⁶ and John Calvin,⁷⁷ its explicit influence could still be seen in R. C. Trench's work⁷⁸ in the nineteenth and also in the twentieth century and in the books of many Chinese church leaders, such as Watchman Nee,⁷⁹ even in the present century.

This allegorical method, based on the incorrect assumption of the Greek dichotomy of material and spiritual, and that a similarity exists, or more found, between the earthly and heavenly realms, is inappropriate. It ignores the fact that God is not arrived at by a process of analogy. He is there for the believers in the incarnate, crucified and risen Savior. This wrong approach resulted in theological abuse of the parables.

In 1888, Adolf Jülicher's great work, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, attacked allegorical interpretation. He protested vigorously against this traditional method but unfortunately fell into the pitfall of generalization. He treated the earthly and heavenly levels of the parable as two

⁷⁶Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 55 vols., gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Gortress Press/St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-), 1:122, 185, 231, 233; 3:27; 5:345, 347. See also Frederic W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (London: Macmillan & Co., 1886), p. 328.

⁷⁷John (Jean) Calvin, A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke, trans. A. W. Morrison, 3 vols, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 3:38-39.

⁷⁸R. C. Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Appleton, 1866), pp. 258-64.

⁷⁹See Watchman Nee, The King and the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study of Matthew (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1978), pp. 161-66.

modes of experience, and thus extracted only general truisms, such as general moral and religious truth, from the parables.⁸⁰

Although Jülicher's generalization method is improper, he was the first eminent scholar to insist on the sound principle that a parable has only one single point of comparison (tertium comparationis). This means that each parable has only a single point, and the details of the parable simply provide background or give coloring for that single point but have no separate functions.⁸¹ In this way, Jülicher fought against the allegorical school successfully. Unfortunately, however, he overreacted. He held not only that a parable had only a very general moral but also denied the presence of what may seem to be an allegorical element in Jesus' parables. Thus whenever such allegorical details were seen to be present in the Gospel, their authenticity was denied, and their origin was attributed to the early Church.⁸² Nevertheless, despite these weaknesses, Jülicher's "one main point" principle has been observed among many recent scholars.⁸³

The third approach is that of the "setting in life" (Sitz im Leben). This principle was promoted by Martin Dibelius' form criticism which held it is necessary to strip

⁸⁰Adolf Juelicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, 2 vols. (Zweite, Neubearbeitete Auflage-Zweiter Abdruck; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910); Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 22-23.

⁸¹See the discussion in Stein, Parables, p. 53.

⁸²Ibid., p. 54-56.

⁸³Such as Scharlemann, Parables, p. 28; G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 91-92; Stein, Parables, p. 56; etc.

away what is said to be an addition from the period of oral tradition and gospel composition, and to determine what part of the parable Jesus Himself actually spoke.⁸⁴ C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias, following Dibelius, asserted that a parable should be interpreted in its original Sitz im Leben, that is, in its original setting in the life and ministry of Jesus.⁸⁵

This principle actually is another breakthrough in the history of parabolic interpretation and has also been accepted by many recent interpreters.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, again, in practical exegesis, Dodd emphasizes the Sitz im Leben in the life of the early Church,⁸⁷ while Jeremias stresses the Sitz im Leben in the life of Jesus' Jewish hearers, that is, Judaism, as well as in the life of the church.⁸⁸ Both men come short of the real original Sitz im Leben, that is the life and teaching of Jesus Himself. Each insisted on the need to identify and strip away the additions of the early church and thereby be certain of what Jesus Himself spoke.

⁸⁴Martin Dibelius, From Tradition to Gospel, translated from the revised second edition of Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums by Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935); Cf. Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 24-26.

⁸⁵See Dodd, Parables, p. 32; Jeremias, Parable, p. 21.

⁸⁶Such as Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 26-29; Ladd, Theology, p. 92; Stein, Parables, pp. 61-62; etc.

⁸⁷This is Scharlemann's criticism. See Scharlemann, Parables, p. 24.

⁸⁸This is Ladd's criticism. See Ladd, Theology, pp. 92-93. See Jeremias on ipsissima verba Jesu and the ten laws of transformation he insists make it possible to do so. Parable, pp. 23-114.

The fourth approach is called that of prophecy. In fact this is only a variety of the allegorical method. It connects the details of the parable with persons and events in the Church's history, and treats the latter as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the former. Thus, the parable of the Leaven is a prophecy of the rise of the "vast hierarchical system of the papacy,"⁸⁹ or of the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church;⁹⁰ the parable of the Mustard Seed prophesies that the small, meek church will develop into the complicated Roman Catholic Church which is a headquarters of Satan (signified by the birds of the air).⁹¹

Another interesting example of this method identifies the servant owing the ten thousand talents in Matt. 18:23 as being the pope, who misused his position of trust in the church and was warned by the invasion of Goths and other barbarians. But he was mercifully delivered by the Carolingian kings. However, far from repenting and amending his ways, the papacy oppressed the true servants of God more than ever at the time of the Reformation. Nothing but irreversible doom awaited him now.⁹² This semi-allegorical approach fired by the interpreter's imagination is hardly to be commended.

⁸⁹See G. H. Lang, The Parabolic Teaching of Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 103.

⁹⁰See Nee, Kingdom, pp. 159-60.

⁹¹See *ibid.*, pp. 156-57.

⁹²See Vitringa's book Erklärung der Parabolen as quoted and summarized by Scharlemann, Parables, p. 26.

The fifth approach is that the parables must be interpreted in the light of God's redemptive purpose.⁹³ Since the Kingdom of God has already come into the present age in the person and ministry of Jesus, and since the mystery of God's Kingdom is Jesus Himself, the parables must be understood in the purpose of His coming, His message, and His ministry, that is, the purpose of God's redemption. This is the real original "Sitz im Leben" of Jesus' parables. In His preaching of the Gospel of God's Kingdom, Jesus' parables call for repentance and faith. Only through the Spirit's work can the message of Jesus' parables be understood and be received in faith.

In the light of God's redemptive purpose in Jesus, interpreters should find out the point of comparison and the central truth of a parable. The latter is derived from the former.⁹⁴ Normally a parable only has one main point. The details of the parable have no independent meanings of their own. Thus, only those details affected by the point of similarity can be interpreted.

In order to ascertain the point of comparison, the interpreter should be familiar with the social and cultural conditions of Jesus' time. He should also pay very careful attention to the context of the parable. At times the hint

⁹³Cf. Piper, "Mystery," pp. 183-200; and "The Understanding of the Synoptic Parables," Evangelical Quarterly 14 (January, 1942):42-53; Scharlemann, Parables, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁴See the example below, pp. 191-200.

of the main point is given just before or after the parable. Again, it will be very helpful for the interpreter if he is fully aware of the various categories of Jesus' parables, that is, the coming of the Kingdom, the grace of the Kingdom, the men of the Kingdom, and the crisis of the Kingdom, which were preached in different periods during Jesus' earthly ministry.⁹⁵

Finally, it is important to mention two restrictions to remember in interpreting parables. First, parables should never be used to develop theological arguments. They were not intended to become the key passages for doctrines. Second, the interpretation of the parables should not become complicated, because most of Jesus' listeners were ordinary simple people. The parables often reflect common, everyday life experience of the people of Jesus' day or an important event in their history. Through the Spirit's work in their heart, Jesus' hearers could be led to understand the spiritual message of the parable and its significance for their need in the person and role of Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Summary

The dominant meaning of the Hebrew word **לְפֶתַח** in the Old Testament is that of enigma. This basic note has been carried over into the Greek term **παραβολή** in the New Testament. Both terms mainly signify the enigmatic and prophetic utterance for the revelation of God's mystery. The

⁹⁵See Hunter, Parables, pp. 42-91.

mystery of the Kingdom of God is Jesus Himself. To those who believe in Jesus, His parables being an important truth about Him and His Kingdom. But to those who rejected Him, His parables remain enigmatic and may become a means for obscuring the truth in order to prompt them to ponder, and hopefully through the Spirit's work to repent and believe. Thus, Jesus' parables have the dual functions of revealing and concealing the truth at the same time.

Two main principles are essential in the interpreting of Jesus' parables. First, normally a parable has only one point of comparison. Unless it is necessary and related to the main point, the details of the parable should not be pressed. Second, a parable should be seen in its original setting in the life and ministry of Jesus, and thus in the light of the divine purpose of redemption. In this manner, and only in this manner, can Jesus' parables be properly interpreted.

CHAPTER IV

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND JESUS' TEACHING ON ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Two passages in the Sermon on the Mount recorded Jesus' explicit teaching on entering the Kingdom of Heaven. First, the most familiar one, is Matt. 5:20, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The second one is Matt. 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."

These two verses have caused some difficulties for some interpreters. What is the nature of this righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees? How can one achieve this greater righteousness? Does Jesus mean that this greater righteousness is attainable by men themselves and thus their good conduct may merit their entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven? Or that this greater righteousness is the good fruit coming out of the good life which is a result of God's redemptive reign through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men? Again, what is the meaning of calling someone "Lord, Lord" in the first century? Is there a contradiction between Matthew's Gospel and Paul's epistles in

the use of the title *κύριος* (Lord)? What kind of people are those who call Jesus "Lord, Lord" but do not do the will of His Father? Or what does Jesus mean by "doing the will of His Father? Does it refer to the Mosaic Law, to Jesus' interpretation of the Mosaic Law or to something else?

Since these two passages are a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon's nature and correct approach to its interpretation must be discussed first. Next, the concept of "righteousness" in Matthew's Gospel and the purpose and function of the Beatitudes will be investigated. Then two correlated passages concerning entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5:3 and Matt. 5:10, will be examined to determine the meaning of and the relationship between "the poor in spirit," "righteousness," and "the Kingdom of Heaven." Finally, Matt. 5:20 and 7:21 will be interpreted in the light of the above.

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of at least six discourses in Matthew's Gospel.¹ They are different sermons spoken by Jesus at various times.² The ending formula of

¹The six sections are 5:1-7;28; 10:1-11:1; 13:1-53; 18:1-19:1; 23:1-39; 24:1-26:1.

²The "new Pentateuch" hypothesis, i.e., Matthew arranged five discourses in his Gospel to provide a new Pentateuch for the community of the church, was asserted by Bacon and Kilpatrick, but was questioned by W. D. Davies and David Hill. Cf. B. W. Bacon, Studies in Matthew (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), p. 181; g. D. Kilpatrick, The Origin of the Gospel According to St Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 135-37; W. D. Davies, The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Cambridge: the University Press, 1964),

7:28, which is similar to that of four other discourses (11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), suggests that Matthew regarded the Sermon on the Mount as unity. Although the Sermon on the Mount was recorded by Matthew, the contents were definitely spoken by Jesus and were part of His teaching.³

In the initial period of His Galilean ministry, Jesus often spoke about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven to large crowds which followed Him, Jesus spoke this sermon primarily to His disciples in the presence of the people who listened in. They were interested in Jesus' teaching and were also an important objective of Jesus' ministry.⁴ From

pp. 25-93, 107; David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 38, 39; "The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel" Irish Biblical Studies 6 (1984):126. See also Jack Dean Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 1-7.

³It is likely that the Sermon was spoken by Jesus at one time, on one place, and as one single sermon. Cf. W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 259-60. However, some scholars consider it as a collection of various sayings of Jesus delivered on different occasions. See R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 59.

⁴The Sermon on the Mount recorded by Matthew and the so-called Sermon on the "Plain" recorded by Luke are one and the same. Their historical setting and train of thought are the same. Their difference in contents can be explained by each selecting different portions of Jesus' teaching for his own purpose to meet the needs of specific readers. Their difference in location is due to the sequence of events recorded by Matthew and Luke. Jesus had spent the night in prayer higher up on the ridge and then selected twelve from the members of His disciples to be His apostles. He walked down the ridge to a more level area to teach His disciples. Other people from the surrounding area come to listen in. Seemingly He first healed their sick before He spoke to His disciples, with people listening in. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus:

the context of Matt. 5:1-16 and Luke 6:17-26, it is obvious that the primary hearers were Jesus' disciples, and those also listening were the crowds. The latter were also to hear and know what it meant to take Christ's true disciples and what their lives in the Kingdom of Heaven were to be like. Thus, the Sermon also opened the door of the Kingdom to the crowds and stimulated them to ponder what Jesus was saying.⁵

In the Sermon, Jesus' purpose was not to set forth new principles, opposed to or higher than the principles of the Old Testament Covenant guidelines, but to correct the twisted externalism of Jewish traditions and misinterpretation of these covenant guidelines by pointing out the correct meaning, the inner moral demand and the promise and the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant guidelines. On the one hand, Jesus stated that His coming and ministry were the fulfillment of the promise of the Torah and the Prophets. God's eschatological salvation was freely given to all those who through the Spirit's work received the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, He regarded the

Wartburg, 1943), p. 179; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 259-60, 449. Some wish to hold that Jesus delivered the same sermon twice: once on the mountain and again while on a plain. See John F. Walvoord, Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 43. This is especially true of some of the views of some critical scholars. They assert that Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:20-49 are drawn from different sources which contain two different sermons. Cf. W. C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), pp. xlv-lxii.

⁵ Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 179-80.

real meaning of the moral Law⁶ as the divinely given rule of life, which was eternally valid.⁷ He reinterpreted the role of the Law in the new era of the messianic salvation and viewed His messianic mission and the presence of the Kingdom as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. All who repent and believe in Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit will be granted this messianic salvation and be empowered by Him to live in the ways of the Kingdom.

Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount contains not only conduct but also promise; not only demand but also gift; not only the required "greater righteousness" but also the means to achieve that righteousness; not only Law but also Gospel,

⁶As the obedient Servant Jesus would fulfill the typological meaning of the Old Testament ceremonial Law. Therefore, in some places, He claims for himself an authority equal to that of the Old Testament and annuls the ceremonial Law regarding purity and washings (Matt. 15:1-30; Mark 7:1-23; Luke 11:37-54); fasting (Matt. 9:14-17); the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-21; 14:1-24). However, some scholars do not agree to the distinguishing between the moral Law and the ceremonial Law, and assert that all the Law, including both of them, was abrogated in the death of Christ. Cf. Robert A. Hawkins, "Covenant Relations of the Sermon on the Mount" Restoration Quarterly 12 (1969):8.

⁷The eternal validity of the Law in Matt. 5:17-19 should be understood as referring to the moral Law but not the ceremonial Law. Cf. Carl F. H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), p. 316; G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1974), p. 125. Henry also differentiates Christian personal ethics from Christian social ethics which includes the civil governmental affairs such as war, public oaths, business principles, etc. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount should be supplemented by biblical ethics in the larger sense when it is applied to social and official relationships. This view has been the predominant Protestant position. Cf. Henry, Ethics, pp. 322-325. The Sermon on the Mount has sometimes been termed the austere demands of true discipleship.

and the Gospel is the foundation for one to express faith in total life through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Different Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount

Some have described the Sermon on the Mount as a jewel of Matthew's Gospel, one which records Jesus' fullest treatment of Christian morality. Throughout the history of the church, it has been one of the favorite Scripture passages of all Christians. Yet with its greatness and importance, scholars have puzzled over many problems in the interpretation of the Sermon. Is it Law or Gospel? Should it be understood literally and absolutely? hyperbolically? or in some other modified way? Is Jesus' ethical demand preceded by His gift of salvation which provides the power through the Spirit's work to practice His demand? What is the real meaning of the Sermon on the Mount? How can one interpret the Sermon appropriately? To answer these questions, at least eight different typical approaches should be examined as follows.⁸

The Traditional Roman Catholic Approach

This approach tries to preserve the literal applicability of the Sermon by adopting a double standard code of ethics, which distinguishes the "precepts" from the "counsels" of Jesus' teaching. The precepts are for all Christians

⁸Carl Henry classifies seven appraisals of the Sermon, while H. K. McArthur lists twelve approaches to it. See Henry, Ethics, pp. 278-326; Harvey K. McArthur, Understanding the Sermon on the Mount (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 105-27.

to keep in order to secure salvation, while the counsels are only for the committed Christians to obey in order to attain perfection. The injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount in their entirety are expected to be obeyed not by the laymen but only by the clergymen who made a total commitment by separating themselves from the common life of the laity through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This view reached its full development in Thomas Aquinas' writing:

The difference between a counsel and a commandment is that a commandment implies obligation, whereas a counsel is left to the option of the one to whom it is given. So in the New Law, which is the law of liberty, counsels are fittingly added to the commandments, but not in the Old Law, which is the law of bondage. We must therefore understand the commandments of the New Law to have been given about matters that are necessary to gain the end of eternal beatitude, to which end the New Law brings us forthwith; but that the counsels are about matters that render the gaining of this end more assured and expeditious. . . . Nevertheless, for man to gain the aforesaid end, he does not need to renounce the things of the world altogether, since he can, while using the things of this world, attain to eternal happiness, provided he does not place his end in them. But he will attain more speedily thereto by giving up the goods of this world entirely; and that is why the evangelical counsels are given.⁹

In spite of the immense role this theory has played in the Church's history, it must be rejected for at least two reasons. First, in the Sermon as well as in the whole New Testament, there is no general presentation of a double standard code of ethics.¹⁰ It is arbitrary to regard one

⁹Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica. See Q. 108, Art. 4 in "The First Part of the Second Part" as cited by Henry K. McArthur in Sermon, p. 117.

¹⁰The passages such as Matt. 19:10-12; 16-22; 1 Cor. 7:38 cannot be used as bases to establish this theory. Cf. McArthur, Sermon, pp. 115, 132.

verse as a precept and another as a counsel. Second, as far as the ethical teaching is concerned, Jesus did not make any distinction between demands on the laity and on the clergy. The Sermon on the Mount was spoken to His disciples and to the people listening and thus apply to both clergy and laity alike.

The Liberal Approach

This approach, like the previous one, claims that salvation can be attained by doing Jesus' commands. The Sermon on the Mount, without dividing it into precepts and counsels, sets forth the ethical requirements upon whose fulfillment salvation depends.

Two main scholars, Adolf von Harnack and Hans Windisch, represent such an interpretation. They hold that it is possible for human beings in their present condition to fulfill literally the ethical demands of the Sermon. According to Harnack, the Sermon is Jesus' ethical message about a higher righteousness and the commandment of love which were aimed at the individual's disposition and intentions. He asserts:

A large portion of the so-called Sermon on the Mount is occupied with what he says when he goes in detail through the several departments of human relationship and human failings as to bring the disposition and intention to light in each case, to judge a man's works by them, and on them to hang heaven and hell.¹¹

Hence, the "doing" of the ethical requirements will reveal

¹¹Adolf von Harnack, What is Christianity? trans. T. B. Saunders (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 72.

one's intention and disposition. Thus it is "doing" which leads to salvation.

Hans Windisch holds a very similar view that by observance of the ethical principles of the Sermon, one may now obtain personal righteousness, and hence eschatological salvation. He explains:

The Sermon on the Mount as we have it presents a doctrine of the righteousness whose fulfillment guarantees acquittal at the Day of Judgment and admittance to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 5:3). This righteousness in the first place is the righteousness laid down in the Law. . . . The religion of the Sermon on the Mount, like that of Judaism, is predominantly a religion of "works" and of eschatological salvation. . . . Christ is therefore the teacher, the prophet, the judge. . . . Nowhere, however, does the Sermon on the Mount represent him as mediator or as redeemer. . . . The way to be saved is to imitate God, to hear and to do the words of Christ. . . . And to be obedient to His commands. . . . The Sermon intends to proclaim commands. It presents demands that are to be literally understood and literally fulfilled.¹²

For Windisch, the doctrine of salvation in the Sermon stands in sharpest contradiction to that of Paul, and there is a great gulf between Jesus and Paul that no art of theological exegesis can bridge.¹³ He recognizes Jesus as an expositor of the Law, a legislator who demands good conduct to earn salvation but, on the other hand, Paul as a preacher of the Gospel who stresses God's gracious redemption through the cross of Christ.

This interpretation, however, is fair neither to

¹²Hans Windisch, The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, trans. S. M. Gilmour (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), pp. 168-72.

¹³Ibid., p. 107

Jesus nor to Paul. In Matt. 5:17, Jesus clearly regards His coming and mission as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Again in Matt. 5:3-10, Jesus definitely uses the prophecy of Isaiah 61 as the background of the Beatitudes.¹⁴ Both passages emphasize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Fulfiller of the redemption, and that through Him the eschatological salvation is available to those who are "poor in spirit."¹⁵ Furthermore, Jesus reveals His teaching concerning salvation gradually. The Sermon on the Mount should not be isolated from other parts of Jesus' message. As a matter of fact, Jesus was the One Who first taught the gracious vicarious redemption through His death in Matt. 20:28. It was followed and explained later by Paul as well as others. Thus, there is no contradiction between Jesus and Paul, nor gulf separating them. If the Sermon is treated as Law as Harnack and Windisch assert, then no one can really literally fulfill its requirements, and it can only cause despair.¹⁶ However, the Sermon is to be seen in the framework of Gospel and its implications for life. It presupposes the powerful redemptive reign of God which, through the Spirit's work, enables Jesus' disciples to seek to live out its demands. This important concept will be elaborated later.

¹⁴See below, pp. 126-27.

¹⁵See below, pp. 127-35.

¹⁶Cf. James 2:10-11; Rom. 3:9-23; 7:7-24; Gal. 3:10-12.

The Dispensational Approach

This system of interpretation asserts that the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount was intended for the people of the Kingdom of Heaven in the future millennial dispensation and has only secondary application to Christians since they live in the dispensation of grace.¹⁷ Like the previous two interpretations, this approach also insists on a literal fulfillment of all the ethical demands of Jesus but escapes the difficulty of the impossibility of their fulfillment by postponing their full application until the future Kingdom Age, when life will be totally different.

C. I. Scofield, the most influential scholar of this school, points out that the Sermon on the Mount contains the Law of the millennial Kingdom. Though there is a moral application to the Christians, it is not the duty of the church:

The Sermon on the Mount has a twofold application:
 (1) Literally to the Kingdom. In this sense it gives the divine constitution for the righteous government of the earth. Whenever the Kingdom of Heaven is established on earth it will be according to the constitution. . . . In this sense the Sermon on the Mount is pure law. . . . For these reasons the Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the church. These are found in the Epistles. . . .
 (2) But there is a beautiful moral application to the Christian.¹⁸

Again, he states that the Sermon on the Mount lacks the

¹⁷Concerning the history and the teachings of Dispensationalism, see above, pp. 54-58.

¹⁸C. I. Scofield, ed., The Scofield Reference Bible: The Holy Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), pp. 999-100.

teaching on grace. It does not apply adequately to the Christian now who is under grace:

Under the law of the Kingdom, for example, no one may hope for forgiveness who has not first forgiven (Matt. 6:12,14,15). Under grace the Christian is exhorted to forgive because he is already forgiven (Eph. 4:30-32). . . Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace we are forgiven for Christ's sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven.¹⁹

Recently, C. C. Ryrie tried to defend the dispensational approach by elevating the significance of the Sermon's ethical principles to the Christian. He asserts:

Thus the dispensational interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount simply tries to follow consistently the principle of literal, normal, or plain interpretation. It results in not trying to relegate primarily and fully the teachings of the Sermon to the believer in this age. But it does not in the least disregard the ethical principles of the Sermon as being not only applicable but also binding on believers today.²⁰

However, this explanation still ranks Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in a secondary position. But how can this theory be justified? How can Jesus' important message as recorded in the Synoptics be intended primarily for the future Kingdom Age and only be secondarily relevant to the present church? This problem, as well as many other difficulties in this dispensational system of Bible interpretation,²¹ makes this approach unacceptable.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 1000, 1002.

²⁰C. C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 109.

²¹See above, pp. 57-58.

The Interim Ethics Approach

This interpretation was first developed at the end of the last century by Johannes Weiss and was then supported by Albert Schweitzer. They advocated the consistent eschatological view of the Kingdom of God,²² and considered the Sermon on the Mount as setting forth exceptional regulations only for the very brief period immediately before the coming of the Kingdom of God, that is, the Eschaton. Since the Kingdom, to be established by God, was imminent, it was necessary and possible for men to keep its radical demands and to abandon even the proper concerns of routine life in order to prepare for the hour of judgment. Thus the Sermon is not a long term culture-ethic, but rather a short term interim-ethic.

In his writings, Schweitzer says, "As repentance unto the Kingdom of God the ethics also of the Sermon on the Mount is interim-ethics. . ." ²³ And again, "What this repentance, supplementary to the law, the special ethics of the interval before the coming of the Kingdom is, in its positive acceptance, He explains in the Sermon on the Mount." ²⁴ Schweitzer thinks that the practice of the ethical requirements would prepare the disciples for the Kingdom's coming because they

²²See above, pp. 50-51.

²³Albert Schweitzer, The Mystery of the Kingdom of God, trans. W. Lowrie (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1914), p. 97.

²⁴Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 352.

taught an ethics of repentance and a new morality to equip one to enter the Kingdom of God.

Since the end did not come immediately, both Weiss and Schweitzer concluded that the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount have no validity today. Carl F. Henry correctly comments on this:

Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer repudiated the general validity of the ethics of the Sermon. . . . The interim-ethic interpretation contends that literal fulfillment of the Sermon was intended, that it is possible but absurd if the world will continue more than a few weeks, and that its ethics is therefore irrelevant to the contemporary moral situation.²⁵

For them, the only elements of the Sermon on the Mount which are applicable today are those that can be separated from dependence on eschatology, such as, the claim of the law, love of God and neighbor. This is to say that the nature of eschatology in the Sermon destroys the ethics of the Sermon. However, this position is not biblical, since it is based on the debatable premise that both Jesus and Paul thought that history would end in their lifetime. How can the nature of eschatology in the Sermon on the Mount destroy the ethics of the Sermon? The whole of Christ's ethics is eschatological because there will be a final judgment and also the whole of Christ's ethics is non-eschatological in the sense that it is valid throughout history.

The Existential Approach

This approach asserts that the Sermon on the Mount is

²⁵Henry, Ethics, p. 292.

dealing with righteousness as an event of existential experience which strikes the inner attitude or the intention of heart and is not necessarily a righteousness of the external acts. It denies that the teachings of the Sermon are concrete ethical demands. Rather they reveal the absolute claim of God on the individual, and point out what a proper attitude toward God and what a relationship with God should be.

Several scholars can be mentioned as belonging to this school of thought. First, Wilhelm Herrmann who insists that the Sermon does not intend to set forth commandments that are to be fulfilled literally. Rather, these impossible demands drive us to an experience of divine mercy and to the spirit of absolute dedication involved in the approved moral life. He writes,

The most wide-spread and worst mistake in interpreting these words consists in taking them all as laws, to be fulfilled in every case. This is impossible; for they can in no way be deduced from the mind of Jesus as universal expressions of His unchanging will. His own demeanour in His intercourse with men shows that it was not His purpose to present in Himself such an abnormal type of humanity, nor yet, for the sake of heaven, to make of His surroundings a barren wilderness. Had He meant these words to be universal rules, He would have been worse than the rabbis whose teaching He opposed.²⁶

Second, Gerhard Kittel, along this same line, asserts that the Sermon on the Mount requires absolute demands which men do not fulfill and cannot fulfill as long as they live as sinful men in a sinful world. Its only purpose is to lay bare men's ethical need, to show them the futility of all

²⁶A Harnack & W. Herrmann, Essays on the Social Gospel, trans. G. M. Craik (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), pp. 203-4.

their moral striving, to show them their need for repentance, and to point out the reality of forgiveness and grace.²⁷

Third, Martin Dibelius shares the position that the Sermon on the Mount was not given as a rule of life. It is Jesus' proclamation of the pure will of God with an eschatological orientation and without regard to circumstances in this world. The demands are therefore impossible to follow because the conditions of the world are different from that of the Kingdom of God. Although the demands retain their full weight, each disciple accepts responsibility for compromises in his own circumstance. He says:

We are not able to perform it in its full scope, but we are able to be transformed by it. . . We should not take it as a law in the Jewish sense, i.e., we must not interpret it in a nomistic way, and thus perform literally what is written, and that alone, omitting what is not written. The Christian law does not demand of us that we do something but that we be something. In this way it creates the new type of man who knows the will of God and its ultimate eschatological aim, and who wants to live here and now in accordance with this will. But he accepts the conditions of this world as the inescapable basis of all his actions, and realizes that these conditions have been completely changed since the days of our Lord. . . This then is what the Sermon on the Mount demands--that Christians should live on their own responsibility before God.²⁸

Fourth, the dialectical theologians, such as Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner, hold that there is no revealed

²⁷Gerhard Kittel, "Die Bergpredigt und die Ethik des Judenums" Zeitschrift fur Systematische Theologie 2 (1924-25):583-84; 590-91. The English translation see Warren S. Kissinger, The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography, ATLA Bibliography Series, No. 3 (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, and the American Theological Library Association, 1975), pp. 69-70.

²⁸Martin Dibelius, The Sermon on the Mount (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), pp. 136-37.

moral and theological doctrine, since revelation cannot be expressed in propositions. The Bible teaching is regarded as a witness to a present encounter with God in which God reveals His will with a claim to total submission.

Bultmann viewed Jesus' ethics as setting forth the conditions for entering the coming Kingdom. However, these conditions are not concrete regulations to be obeyed in order to merit this entrance. The content of Jesus' ethics is one simple demand. Because the Kingdom is at hand, because God is near, one thing is demanded: decision to do God's will.²⁹ Similarly, Brunner writes:

None of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount are to be understood as laws, so that those who hear them can go away feeling, "Now I know what I have to do. . ." It is not intended merely to intensify or to spiritualize the divine law, in order that now we may better know--beforehand--what God wills from us. . . The commandments of the Sermon on the Mount hold good today just as at all other periods in history: not as a law but as a guide to the Divine Command.³⁰

All the scholars mentioned in these four branches of this school above share the common error that they only emphasize an ethics of attitude but avoid concrete ethical instructions on how to act. To stress the inner attitude is correct but it is incorrect to suggest unnecessary antitheses between inner attitudes and outward acts, between submission to God and obedience to God's commands, between existential

²⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, trans. by L. P. Smith and E. Huntress (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 72-98.

³⁰ Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (A Study in Christian Ethics), trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), pp. 136, 137, 434.

righteousness and doing righteousness. Thus, this approach is not in keeping with Scripture.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite Approach

This approach claims that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the Christians to be obeyed in this age both in personal and in social relations. Even though its ethical demands appear impossible at times, the Anabaptist-Mennonite still holds that the demands should be and can be obeyed literally and absolutely by Christians.

For them, the central value of the Sermon on the Mount is love--for both neighbor and enemy. This love ethics expresses itself in no use of force, no retaliation--no police force, no use of punishment as vengeance--no capital punishment, no war--no participation in warfare, and so forth. One Mennonite scholar says:

Peter was commanded to sheathe his sword. All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend Scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities and conquering?³¹

According to this view, the ethics of the Old Testament is inferior to and overruled by that of the New Testament. Guy Hershberger asserts that "in Matthew 5 Jesus definitely rejects the civil code of Moses because it did not measure up

³¹J. C. Wenger, ed. "Reply to False Accusation" in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), p. 555. Another example see Guy F. Hershberger, "Mennonites and the Modern Peace Movement," Mennonite Quarterly Review 2 (1928):163.

to the standards of the Kingdom and the higher moral law."³² Again he tries to explain away the accusation that he implies moral development in God by saying, "God in the Old Testament commanded to do what was against his will."³³ Obviously, both his assertion and explanation are wrong. Because Jesus clearly declared in Matt. 5:17,18, that He did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it. He did not set forth a higher moral law of His own to discredit the Old Testament law, but to unveil its inner requirements which were blurred especially by the current rabbinic interpretations. There is definitely an essential continuity between the ethics of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Even though sometimes amendments are permitted by God,³⁴ His commandments still express His eternal will.

Another problem of this approach is that it mixes up the personal ethics with the social ethics. It insists that the Sermon is a New Testament code for all the relations of life in the regenerated Christian society. Therefore Mennonites refuse to take oaths, object to capital punishment and war, and hold a policy of pacifism and non-resistance. However, the Sermon on the Mount is not a self-sufficient, comprehensive ethical code for all the circumstances of

³² Guy F. Hershberger, "Peace and War in the New Testament," Mennonite Quarterly Review 17 (1943):59.

³³ Guy F. Hershberger, "Peace and War in the Old Testament" Mennonite Quarterly Review 17 (1943):5.

³⁴ For example, in the case of divorce. See Matt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9. Cf. John Murray, Divorce (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978), pp. 19-20.

Christian living. Its purpose is to serve as a guide in the immediate "one-and-one" neighbor relationship in all of life, rather than aimed merely for one's behavior in the official or social relationship.³⁵

On the one hand, this approach correctly asserts the validity of the Sermon as a rule of practice for Christ's true disciples who share the gracious rule of God, but on the other hand, it incorrectly insists on its literal application to all aspects of Christian life while ignoring the balanced teachings of other Biblical passages.

The Reformed Approach

This approach, like the previous one, asserts the validity of the Sermon on the Mount as ethical regulations for Christians who share in God's redemptive grace. But it is different from the previous one in two ways: first, it emphasizes the essential continuity between the Old Testament ethics and the New Testament ethics; second, it distinguishes Christian social ethics from Christian personal ethics, and only relates the latter to the Sermon on the Mount.

Thus, the Sermon is viewed as an exposition of the deeper meanings of the Old Testament moral Law essentially for the Christian's immediately-adjacent circle of daily relations. And when dealing with the large elements of social relations such as the public oath, business principles, war, capital punishment and other civil governmental

³⁵See Henry, Ethics, pp. 321-26.

affairs, the Sermon should be supplemented by biblical ethics in the larger sense.³⁶

For this interpretation, the Sermon presents Christ not only in the role of moral legislator but also of redemptive Mediator, although the latter function is implicit. Jesus sets forth the greater righteousness by which man may gain access to the Kingdom of Heaven. However, it is impossible for man as sinner to satisfy such ethical demand, so that one can meet the divine requirement of righteousness only through the Mediator--Jesus Himself. J. Gresham Machen remarks:

The Mosaic law requires already more than man as sinner can fulfill; the deeper law of Jesus asks even more, and before it all are obviously condemned. Like the rest of the New Testament, the Sermon leads straight to the Cross, to a divine means of salvation.³⁷

It is admitted by this approach that the doctrine of the cross and of Christ's substitutionary atonement can hardly be found in the Sermon. Nevertheless, it asserts that some passages presuppose the facts of the messianic redemption. For instance, the doctrine of sinful human nature is implied in Matt. 7:11, "if you then, being evil"; the forgiveness of sins is indicated in the disciples' prayer in Matt. 6:12; and the coming of the new age of God's salvation in Matt. 5:17. But before Christ's death and resurrection, the doctrine of vicarious atonement had been unclear to the

³⁶See Henry, Ethics, pp. 321-26.

³⁷J. G. Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), P. 38.

disciples and only after these events, the imputed righteousness became a central theme in the teaching of the disciples as evidenced also in the New Testament documents.³⁸

According to this approach, the moral law has three main purposes. First, it serves as a curb to control the flesh of man outwardly. Second, it stands as a mirror to show man his sins both before or at his conversion and after that in his daily life. Third, it functions as a guide or rule to point out good works to Christians in living the faith. However, it is not the Law but the Gospel through the work of the Spirit that supplies the power to cleanse the sins, to destroy the flesh inwardly, to empower Christians to practice good works.³⁹ The Sermon on the Mount speaks of the works the disciples are to do in the power of the Gospel and of faith. Jesus properly combined the Gospel and the Law in the Sermon, and made the Gospel as the foundation for the practicing of the Law.⁴⁰ This approach was also used in many of the Pauline epistles. Paul always first dealt with men's tragic situation in which they lived without Christ, then he proclaimed the Gospel of Christ, and then he urged Christians to live the faith through the Spirit's work.⁴¹

³⁸Cf. Henry, Ethics, pp. 319-20.

³⁹J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), pp. 477-80; L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), pp. 614-16.

⁴⁰Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 179-80.

⁴¹See Romans 1-8; Ephesians 1-3; Colossians 1-2 (the Gospel doctrine) and Romans 12-16; Ephesians 4-6; Colossians 3-4 (the Christian live).

This is to say that the Sermon implies no diversity with the developed Pauline perspective, and there is no disagreement among the disciples and apostles over the significance of Jesus. The coming of Jesus brings in a New Age of messianic salvation which summons people to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and delivers them from the power of Satan and sin to the gracious reign of God.

Therefore, this interpretation asserts that what the Sermon says is to be fulfilled, at least approximately, by Christians who have been saved by grace and live under the saving rule of God. What Carl Henry says may conclude this discussion:

The Sermon remains an "ethical directory for Christians. It contains the character and conduct which Jesus commends to His followers, the demand which the nature and will of God make upon men, the fundamental law of the Kingdom, and the ideal and perfect standard. It is the ultimate formula of ethics for which ideal human nature was fashioned by creation and is destined in eternity. Fallen nature is justified in Christ in conformity to it, and redeemed nature approximates it by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.⁴²

The Lutheran Understanding

The Lutheran understanding of the Sermon on the Mount has had different emphases throughout the years. First, Martin Luther, while opposing both the double standard theory of the Roman Catholics and the ethical absolutism of the Anabaptists, saw human activity as divided into two spheres, the spiritual Kingdom of God and the temporal kingdom of the

⁴² Henry, Ethics, pp. 325-26.

world.⁴³ God rules both, but each in a different way. Christians are Christians by God's gracious gift of unmerited free forgiveness for Christ's sake, and are thus enlivened by the Holy Spirit who bestows the gifts which God's words say and convey. What God says and gives are alone operative in the church. Outside the church in the secular realm God rules with justice and sword, and in His calling in the world a Christian serves with these as he is called to do for the good of his neighbour.

In his Preface to the exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Luther writes:

Dear brother, let this preaching of mine be of service to you, in the first place, against our squires, the jurists and sophists. I am referring especially to the canonists, whom they themselves call "asses"; and that is what they are. Thus you may preserve in its purity the teaching of Christ in this chapter of Matthew, instead of their asinine cunning and devilish dung. In the second place, there are the new jurists and sophists, the schismatic spirits and Anabaptists. From their crazy heads they are making new trouble out of this fifth chapter. The others go too far to the left when they keep nothing at all of this teaching of Christ, but condemn and obliterate it. In the same way these men lean too far to the right when they teach miserable stuff like this: that it is wrong to own private property, to swear, to hold office as a ruler or judge, to protect or defend oneself, to stay with wife and children. Thus the devil blows and brews on both sides so that they do not recognize any difference between the secular and the divine realm, much less what should be the distinctive doctrine and action in each realm. Thank God, we can boast that in these sermons we have clearly and diligently shown and emphasized this. Whoever errs or will err from now on, we are excused from all responsibility for him; for we have faithfully set forth our views for everyone's benefit. Let their blood be on their own head! We shall await our reward for this--

⁴³See the discussion in chapter II, pp. 48-49.

ingratitude, hate, and all sorts of hostility. And we shall say, "Thank God!"⁴⁴

Luther discusses this question more clearly in his exposition of Matt. 5:38-42. He says:

This text has also given rise to many questions and errors among nearly all theologians who have failed to distinguish properly between the secular and the spiritual, between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world. Once these two have been confused instead of being clearly and accurately separated, there can never be any correct understanding in Christendom. . . . He (Christ) is not tampering with the responsibility and authority of the government, but He is teaching His individual Christians how to live personally, apart from their official position and authority. They should not desire revenge at all. They should have the attitude that if someone hits them on one cheek, they are ready, if need be, to turn the other cheek to him as well. . . . It is the duty and obligation of those who participate in this earthly regime to administer law and punishment, to maintain the distinctions that exist among ranks and persons, to manage and distribute property. . . . But the Gospel does not trouble itself with these matters. . . . May a Christian be a secular official and administer the office and work of a ruler or a judge? This would mean that the two persons or the two types of office are combined in one man. In addition to being a Christian, he would be a prince or a judge or a servant or a maid--all of which are termed "secular" persons because they are part of the secular realm. To this we say: Yes, God Himself has ordained and established this secular realm and its distinctions, and by His Word He has confirmed and commended them. . . . There is no getting around it, a Christian has to be a secular person of some sort. . . . If he has a house or a wife and children or servants and refuses to support them or, if need be, to protect them, he does wrong. It will not do for him to declare that he is a Christian and therefore has to forsake or relinquish everything. But he must be told: "Now you are under the emperor's control. Here your name is not 'Christian,' but 'father' or 'lord' or 'prince.'" According to your own person you are a Christian; but in relation to your servant you are a different person, and you are obliged to protect him." You see now we are talking about a Christian-in-relation: not about his being a Christian, but about his life and his obligation in it to some other

⁴⁴Martin Luther, Luther's Works, 55 vols., gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia: Gortress Press/St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-), 21:4-5.

person, whether under him or over him or even alongside him, like a lord or a lady, a wife or children or neighbors, whom he is obliged, if possible, to defend, guard, and protect. Here it would be a mistake to teach: "Turn the other cheek, and throw you cloak away with your coat . . ." Do you want to know what your duty is as a prince or a judge or a lord or a lady, with people under you? You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law. It will soon tell you your duty toward your inferiors as their protector. . . . A Christian should not resist any evil; but within the limits of his office, a secular person should oppose every evil. . . . In short, the rule in the kingdom of Christ is the toleration of everything, forgiveness, and the recompense of evil with good. On the other hand, in the realm of the emperor, there should be no tolerance shown toward any injustice, but rather a defense against wrong and a punishment of it, and an effort to defend and maintain the right, according to what each one's office or station may require.⁴⁵

In dealing with the matter of how to practice the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount, Luther wants to distinguish between Coram Deo (before God) and Coram hominibus (before men). Before men there are the distinctions of one's calling given one by God. For instance, he asserts that Matt. 5:28, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart," cannot apply to the desire a husband rightly feels for his wife;⁴⁶ therefore this saying is meant to apply in the proper contexts. This principle is expanded by Luther to the other commands of the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore swearing should be thought of as forbidden in exactly the same sense as killing or looking at a woman and desiring her was forbidden earlier. Killing is right, yet it is also wrong. Desiring a man or a woman is sinful, and it is not sinful. That is to say, we must make the proper distinction here. To you and to me it is

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-13.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 84-89.

said: "If you kill, you do wrong; if you look at a woman with desire, you do wrong." But to a judge He says: "If you do not punish and kill, you shall be punished yourself." And to a husband or wife He says: "If you do not cling to your spouse, you do wrong." So both regulations stand: "You should kill" and "You should not kill"; "You should have a woman" and "You should not have a woman." For you must not get angry or kill or look at a woman with desire unless you have a word or command from God to do so.⁴⁷

Luther's position has had a profound influence on the Lutheran tradition in general. Lutheran orthodoxy, however, emphasizes another aspect of the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁸ Since no one can really fulfill Jesus' absolute demands, Lutheran orthodoxy asserts the theory of the impossible ideal for the principle of interpreting the Sermon on the Mount.

The main contents of this impossible ideal theory are: first, anyone who reads the Sermon on the Mount earnestly is of necessity moved to despair, because it is impossible for him to fulfill such demands; second, Jesus' intention in teaching these things is to multiply the Mosaic law to the highest degree, to shatter His hearers' self-reliance, to make the Sermon a pedagogical law, to prepare men for salvation.⁴⁹ In this way, the Sermon's injunctions are not

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁸Properly speaking, the era of Lutheran orthodoxy ranged over the entire 17th century. Cf. Bengt Hägglund, History of Theology, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 304.

⁴⁹The summary of the interpretation of the Lutheran orthodoxy see Joachim Jeremias, The Sermon on the Mount, trans. Norman Perrin (London: Athlone, 1961), pp. 11-12. However, Jeremias himself does not agree with this theory.

purposed to be observed literally but serve as the guiding function of the existential approach.⁵⁰

In recent years, some prominent Lutheran commentators, such as R. C. H. Lenski and Martin H. Franzmann, emphasize the Gospel aspect of the Sermon on the Mount. They advocate the possibility of practicing the Sermon's commands by Jesus' disciples through Spirit's work in the power of the Gospel. Lenski says:

The Sermon on the Mount has often been regarded as law and not as gospel. Jesus is thought of as expounding the true sense of the law over against the shallow and perverted expositon of the Jewish scribes and rabbis, doing again the work of Moses because the Jews had lost the true understanding of Moses. But it would be an astounding thing for Christ to do this, and it would be equally astounding for Matthew to place three chapters of law in the forefront of his Gospel. This conception is due to the fact that the theme of the sermon and the hearers to whom it is addressed are not properly understood. . . the body of the sermon deals with the life of these true disciples and employs the law only as the Regel or rule by which they live and prove themselves to be true disciples. . . The sermon speaks of the works the disciples are to do in the power of the gospel and of faith. . . In the sermon gospel and law are properly combined, and the gospel is the fundamental content.⁵¹

Similarly, Franzmann does not only interpret the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' call to repentance, but also understands the Sermon as including the free grace of the Kingdom and the higher righteousness which that grace makes possible.⁵² He says:

⁵⁰ See above, pp. 100-104.

⁵¹ Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel p. 180.

⁵² Martin H. Franzmann, The Word of the Lord Grows (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 175.

It (the Sermon on the Mount) builds upon the narrative of the beginnings (1:1-4:16), the genealogy, and the seven fulfillments. It is, furthermore, prepared for by the narrative of 4:7-25 and is organically connected with it. The Sermon on the Mount in this framework is to be understood and appreciated as the record of how the call of Jesus, issued by Him with Messianic authority, summoning men into the eschatological reality of the kingdom of heaven, is made to determine the whole existence of the disciple. Jesus is, in the Sermon on the Mount, Messianically molding the will of His disciple, so that the disciple is led to will a life wholly drawn from God the King, as He is revealed in these last days by His Son and Anointed One, and a life wholly lived for God the King in virtue of the disciple's communion with Jesus, God's Son and Anointed One. . . . When Jesus proclaimed the advent of the Kingdom, the light of God's new creation was dawning. Jesus Himself was that new Light, the Dawn of that new creation. The Kingdom was at hand, in Jesus' words and works, in His Messianic presence. We have already seen how the calling of the four disciples was a Messianic act, conferring the gift and imposing the claim of God's gracious royal reign (4:18-22).⁵³

Only in the new situation created by the coming of the Messiah, . . . is a man enabled to confront the Law as the bare will of God for him, for now the Messiah is speaking. He is not merely uttering the inscribed will of God; he is writing the Law in man's heart. That writing is made possible by His whole course of complete self-devotion which leads Him to stand where the sinner must stand in order to fulfill all righteousness for a mankind under the wrath of God (3:15; cf. 3:7-12). The impotence of the Law is now being done away with by the Messiah; now man, in this new situation, is being called upon to face the bare but no longer terrible imperative of the will of God and to obey it.⁵⁴

This Lutheran understanding of the Sermon on the Mount as asserted by Lenski, Franzmann and others has some parallels to the interpretation of the Sermon of the Reformed Approach.

⁵³Martin H. Franzmann, "Studies in Discipleship II" Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (1960):670-71.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 677.

The Dynamic Reign of God Approach

This approach is essentially the same as the previous two, but it approaches the question from the angle of the dynamic reign of God. The word "dynamic" stands for "powerful," "forceful," "active," "saving," "gracious," and "energetic." The powerful and gracious reign of God was manifested in Jesus' healing of the sick, cleansing of the lepers, raising of the dead, converting of the sinners, forgiving of men's sins, and preaching of the Gospel, and so forth. The crucial point is that Jesus' ethical teaching and His view of the Kingdom of God must be linked together. The Kingdom of God is the dynamic and redemptive reign of God in men's hearts in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus' announcement in Matt. 4:17, "Repent, the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near," the saving reign of God began to work among men, and attracted some people to follow Jesus and become His disciples. It was primarily to these disciples that Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount.

The ethics of the Sermon emphasizes the righteousness of the heart and demands a perfect righteous inner attitude and character as well as outward acts. It is obvious that the fulfillment of this demand is definitely beyond the unaided strength of any individual. The only way to practice Jesus' demand is also provided by Jesus Himself. This is to say that men must first accept the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Then they will be empowered by the power of His gracious rule

through the Spirit's work to seek to practice His ethical demand.

On the one hand, God's dynamic and redemptive reign has already manifested itself in the person and mission of Jesus; on the other hand, it will not come to consummation until the eschatological hour. Therefore, in the Age to Come, when all the power of sin is destroyed, Jesus' ethics will be observed as God's eternal will in the eternal perfection of heaven, but during this present age, it is both attainable and unattainable. It is attainable because God's power through His dynamic reign enables a believer through the Spirit's work to practice Jesus' demand, qualitatively if not quantitatively; it is unattainable because in his sinful weakness a believer will still yield at times to his fleshly desires and be ruled by his sinful human nature.

For this approach, it is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the power of God's dynamic reign through the Spirit's work, in one's heart which brings him God's transforming power to overcome the power of sin, to practice Jesus' ethical demands, to achieve the righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, and to live a life in keeping with the will of the Father. One scholar of this school, A. M. Hunter, remarks:

Biblical ethics always presuppose Biblical religion. . .
 Biblical ethics grow out of Biblical religion. . . So it
 is with the ethics of Jesus. Its postulate is faith in
 God. . . His ethics presupposes not only belief in the
 one true and living God but the whole Gospel of the Reign
 of God which was the central theme of his preaching. . .
 The Reign of God had begun--had begun with himself and
 his ministry. . . So we have to do with both a divine

indicative and a divine imperative. But the imperative is founded on the indicative. The divine indicative may be expressed like this: "God has manifested his Kingdom--his saving Rule--in Christ." The imperative will then run something like this: Therefore let all who accept the Rule of God live in a new way--the Kingdom way. What that new way should be, the Sermon on the Mount makes plain. It is a design for life in the Kingdom of God.⁵⁵

Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount is not only Law but also Gospel. It presents the eternal will of God for human ethics; however, it also presupposes the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' ethical demands are preceded by His gracious gift of His salvation. Only those who are moved by the Holy Spirit and thus repent and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him, that is, who submit to the reign of God, can experience the righteousness of the Kingdom partially in this present age, and fully in the Age to Come.⁵⁶ This is also the view of the present writer.

The Concept of Righteousness in Matthew's Gospel

"Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) is one of the key concepts in the Sermon on the Mount. Except for Luke 1:75 in the four Gospels, this word occurs only in Matthew's Gospel, and five of its seven usages are in the Sermon.⁵⁷ In order to understand this important concept correctly, one should interpret it in the light of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven,

⁵⁵A. M. Hunter, A Pattern For Life (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 106-7.

⁵⁶Cf. G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 125-32.

⁵⁷The other two have to do with John the Baptist (Matt. 3:15; 21:32).

that is, the dynamic reign of God. However, three main unsatisfactory alternatives need to be briefly introduced first:

1. The most common view is the one that emphasizes Jesus' ethical demand and human responsibility. Some commentators refer "righteousness" to one's life and conduct lived in keeping with the will of God as taught by Jesus.⁵⁸

2. Some scholars emphasize the human incapability of ever achieving this righteousness, and refer it to an eschatological gift based purely on divine grace.⁵⁹

3. Others interpret "righteousness" as being God's vindication of the righteous anticipated in Psalms such as Ps. 1:5-6, and in the eschatological promises of Isaiah such as Isa. 51:1-8.⁶⁰

As a matter of fact, the above three elements should be combined together. This means that "righteousness" in Matthew has its background in the Old Testament and involves both a gift and a demand.⁶¹ From Matt. 5:10,20; 6:1; 7:21; 13:41,43; 25:34-46, it is clearly seen that righteousness

⁵⁸Cf. Hill, Matthew, p. 112; G. Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew" in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 31.

⁵⁹Cf. Schlenk, "δικαιοσύνη," TDNT 2:198-99; G. Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law" in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 123-24.

⁶⁰See Hunter, Pattern, p. 34.

⁶¹Cf. G. E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 211.

involves Jesus' demand of a conduct in keeping with the will of God in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But from Matt. 5:6; 6:33, and the Beatitudes' Old Testament background in Isaiah 61,⁶² it is also obvious that righteousness comes as a gracious gift from God. In Matt. 6:33, Jesus taught His followers to "seek" the Kingdom and God's righteousness rather than the food, drink, and clothing of 6:32. By seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, the items of food, drink, and clothing will be added to the disciples by God. This divine passive (*προστεθήσεται*) implies that "the Kingdom and his righteousness" come from God as well as the "all these things" added to them. Therefore, the Kingdom and God's righteousness must be seen along with "all these things" as "gifts" which are given by God's grace to those who through the Spirit's work respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The same emphasis can also be found in Matt. 5:6, "Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Here "hungry" and "thirsty" are metaphors describing those who feel their desperate need of righteousness and this need can only be satisfied by God. The metaphors in the subject and the divine passive of the verb doubly attest that this righteousness is a gracious gift of God. Through the Spirit's work, all

⁶²In the Beatitudes, the words and promises of Isa. 61:1-3 are used, such as, poor in spirit, mourning, comforting, and righteousness. Many Gospel passages clearly identified Jesus' ministry with the fulfillment of Isa. 61:1-2. Cf. Matt. 11:5, Luke 4:16-21; 7:22.

those who are brought to the awareness of their desperate need and turn to God for forgiveness and faith in God's certain promises will be granted God's gift of righteousness.

Again, this gift-character of righteousness was clearly prophesized in the Old Testament.⁶³ In Isa. 61:10, God initiates the action by "covering" one with the "robe of righteousness"; in Isa. 61:11, He causes "righteousness" to "spring forth before the nations"; and in Isa. 61:3 those whom God comforts will be called "oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord." Therefore, it is correct to assert that "righteousness" in Matthew is a fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament and is a gift.

Then, what is the relationship between these two seemingly contrary elements of gift and demand in righteousness? This question should be understood in the light of the coming of God's Kingdom. The Kingdom is a present reality in Jesus' ministry as God's redemptive activity and rule in history bringing the promised righteousness to those who believe in Jesus through the Spirit's work. But, at the same time it also demands their obedience to this heavenly rule. Thus after receiving righteousness as a gift, believers are ruled and empowered by God to seek to meet Jesus' demand of living a righteous life in keeping with God's will. This righteous life will guarantee them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as described in Matt. 5:20 and 7:21.

⁶³See Ps. 32:107; 51:1-17; Lev. 4:1-35; Isa. 53:4-12; 61:3,10; Jer. 23:6; etc.

Therefore, in light of the gracious rule of God, all those who repent and believe in Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit, receive God's Kingdom and righteousness as His gifts in the present. And they will seek definitely to live their faith in this life in keeping with the will of the Father, qualitatively if not quantitatively. God in grace will receive them into the heavenly eschatological Kingdom in the future. In other words, through the Spirit's work, repentance and faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him are the qualifications for the entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Purpose and Function of the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are for many the most familiar portions of the entire Bible. They stand at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount and pave the way for the whole Sermon. However, their purpose and function are much debated among scholars. Whether they are "entrance requirements" for the Kingdom or "eschatological blessings" inherent to the coming of the Kingdom into history.⁶⁴ In other words, whether they are Jesus' ethical demands, such as "meek," "merciful," "pure in heart," "peacemaking," that people should fulfill them by their own strength in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or they are Jesus' announcing of spiritual blessings and ethical exhortations to those who have

⁶⁴Those who assert the former meaning are scholars such as H. Windisch, M. Dibelius, G. Strecker, etc.; on the other hand, E. Schweizer, R. A. Guelich, and others assert the latter. See Robert A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" Journal of Biblical Literature 95 (1976):415-34.

responded to His Gospel through the Spirit's work. Considering the following three aspects, the latter option is proved to be the biblical one:

The Literary Style of the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are presented in an inclusive stylistic device, in which the first and the last beatitudes express the same blessing of inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven.⁶⁵ This means that everything bracketed in between can be included under the one theme, that is, the Kingdom of Heaven. Again, it should be noted that only the first and the last beatitudes use verbs in the present tense (ἐστίν), while the rest of them all use verbs in the future tense. This may express the already and not-yet character of the Kingdom of Heaven and may also indicate that the disciples are the first to take part in the Kingdom of Heaven on account of "poor in spirit," and then they will experience the blessings of the God's redemptive rule in their lives such as meek, mercy, integrity, and peace making.⁶⁶

In Jesus' ministry, God's redemptive rule confronts people, and calls them to repent, to believe, to commit themselves totally to God. Those who, through the Spirit's work, respond with such attitudes are those who are "poor in

⁶⁵The same blessing of "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" in Matt. 5:3 and 5:10. Cf. D. A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 16.

⁶⁶Cf. R. A. Guelick, The Sermon on the Mount (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), pp. 76-83, 88-107; D. A. Carson, Sermon, pp. 17-27.

spirit" and are blessed with participating in the Kingdom of Heaven. They will be persecuted for righteousness' sake and will experience God's redemptive rule in their life to become meek, to show mercy to others, to be pure in heart, and to become a peacemakers. Because of all this conducts they will also be granted in grace more blessings in the future. Therefore, the blessings of the Beatitudes are both present and future, and the Beatitudes are both eschatological promises and ethical exhortations to Jesus' disciples.

The Literary Form of the Beatitude

In Hebrew, the beatitude form is introduced by the plural construct בְּרֵכִים ($\mu\alpha\kappa\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\omicron\iota$, blessed) generally followed by a participle or a noun/pronoun with a participle that identifies the subject.⁶⁷ Almost all the beatitudes are in the third person.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, there are two main different categories of the beatitude form in the Jewish literature of the Old Testament and intertestamental period. First, in the Wisdom-cultic setting, the beatitude is mainly an ethical exhortation. The statement of blessing becomes a goal to be attained. The recipients of the blessing are usually identified by an attitude or conduct befitting the blessing.⁶⁹ Second, in the prophetic-apocalyptic setting,

⁶⁷ Cf. R. A. Guelich, Sermon, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Cf. Gen. 30:13.

⁶⁹ See Prov. 8:34; Ps. 40:4; Ps. 1:2; Deut. 33:29. Cf. K. Koch, The Growth of Biblical Tradition (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 7; Bertram, " $\mu\alpha\kappa\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\omicron\iota$ C" TDNT 4:365.

the beatitude is mainly an eschatological promise.⁷⁰ The statement of blessing becomes an assurance and encouragement of future vindication and promises. The recipients of the blessing are people with the eschatological hope.

The Beatitudes in Matt. 5:3-12 involve not only both eschatological blessings and ethical exhortations but also add the aspect of the present realization of the future eschatological promises. Jesus addressed these Beatitudes to those who through the Spirit's work have responded to the Gospel of God's Kingdom with repenting and believing heart. Thus, on the one hand, He pronounced the realization of the eschatological blessings upon them, and on the other hand, He instructed them with ethical exhortations for the future blessings. The blessings of His Beatitudes, similar to His Kingdom of Heaven, are both present and future. The future consummation of God's reign is still to come but it has already begun here and now. Not only the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, God's redemptive rule, is declared to be the present reality of the "poor in spirit" and of those who have been "persecuted for righteousness' sake," but the conduct of the subjects, such as being meek, showing mercy, being pure in heart, and making peace, also reflects the result of God's rule in their life in the present. In other words, the eschatological blessings of the promises are both present and future, and the Beatitudes are both eschatological blessings

⁷⁰ Cf. Isa. 30:18; 32:15-20; Dan. 12:12; 1 Enoch 103:5; 2 Bar. 10:6-7.

and ethical exhortations to Jesus' disciples.

Isaiah 61 and the Beatitudes

It is evident that the words and promises of Isa. 61:1-3 are used in the Beatitudes. The most explicit ones are: the poor (in spirit); mourning, comforting, and righteousness. In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus clearly identified His own ministry with the fulfillment of Isa. 61:1-2. Again, in answering the question of the disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus asserted that He was the One who would preach the good news to the poor⁷¹ as what was prophesized by Isaiah.

Therefore, the Beatitudes are indeed an expression of the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of Isaiah 61 in the person and mission of Jesus. They are the eschatological pronouncement of the presence of the New Age. They are also the ethical exhortations to those who have already responded to the Gospel through the Spirit's work. They are not something "ethicized" or "spiritualized" by Matthew's redaction to become entrance requirements for the Kingdom as some suggest.⁷² Rather they are Jesus' announcement of blessing for attitudes and conduct of those who have experienced God's redemptive work in His ministry. It is on the basis of one's present experience of mercy, integrity, and peace through God's work in Jesus that the future promise of the Beatitudes are announced.

⁷¹See Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22.

⁷²So H. Windisch, M. Dibelius, G. Strecker, cf. R. A. Guelich, "Beatitudes" Journal of Biblical Literature 95 (1976):419.

Therefore, all those who respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, who repent and believe in Jesus with total commitment to him through the work of the Holy Spirit will experience and enjoy the blessings of the Beatitudes both in the present and in the future.

The Interpretation of Matthew 5:3

"Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν." (Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.)

"Μακάριοι" (Blessed are)

The word μακάριοι in the Septuagint represents וְאַחַד in the Hebrew Old Testament, such as Ps. 1:2, which is interjectional, "Oh, the blessedness of . . .!"⁷³ The connecting verb may, therefore, be omitted. This word is neither a wish regarding a future situation, nor a description of a present condition, but a judgment pronounced upon the persons indicated, stating that they must be considered fortunate.⁷⁴ Thus, to be blessed by God means, basically, to be approved by God.⁷⁵ As a matter of fact, God's approval is the highest blessing man can enjoy in the universe. All who, through the Spirit's work, receive the Gospel of God's Kingdom in

⁷³ Cf. A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, p. 50; Hill, Matthew, p. 110. This form occurs forty-five times in the Hebrew Old Testament. See Guelich, Sermon, p. 63.

⁷⁴ Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 183.

⁷⁵ Carson, Sermon, p. 16.

repentance and faith will be rendered this judgment by Jesus as "blessed." They will be full of joy for the spiritual blessings.

"Οἱ πτωχοί" (the Poor)

This simple form of the Beatitudes "οἱ πτωχοί" was recorded in Luke 6:20, which conforms more to the Old Testament usage, although Matthew's record seized more clearly the thought which underlies it. The synonymity of "οἱ πτωχοί" and "οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι" will be explained later. In order to understand the meaning of "οἱ πτωχοί" in Jesus' ministry, the Greek and the Jewish background need to be examined.

1. In Greek literature πτωχοί and its cognates mean "destitute," "to lead the life of a beggar," "begging," and denote the complete destitution which forces the poor to seek the help of others by begging. These cognates of πτωχοί have an exclusively socioeconomic meaning.⁷⁶ The poor were always referred to as those who were economically deprived. Consequently, there was a neat pattern of περιπέτεια --the great reversal of conditions, such as, poor and rich--in the Greek usage.⁷⁷ Since Matt. 5:3 has no sign of such pattern and since it speaks of the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven instead of the woes on the rich, the poor here should not be understood in light of the Greke background.

⁷⁶Cf. Hauck, "πτωχός A," TDNT 6:886-87.

⁷⁷C. H. Dodd, "The Beatitudes: A Form Cirtical Study" in More New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 5-6.

2. In the Old Testament **πτωχός** is used about one hundred times to translate six Hebrew words.⁷⁸ The most common one of them, **עָנִי**, has both a socioeconomic as well as a religious connotation. Basically it refers to one so powerless and dependent that he is usually oppressed in socioeconomic relationship. Yet this powerless and dependent relationship caused a poor man to rely upon God for his needs and vindication. This religious dimension of the humble posture of the poor without any pretention before God can be seen in the Psalms.⁷⁹ Besides, many Old Testament passages portray God as being the protector and vindicator of the poor. He will judge the rich and powerful who abuse and oppress the poor.⁸⁰ Again, the prophets also rebuke the rich and powerful who oppress the poor and helpless and announce God's coming judgement.⁸¹ Furthermore, Isaiah identifies the poor with the exiled people of God,⁸² and prophesizes an eschatological hope to them.⁸³

Later on the term **עֲנָוִים**, plural form of **עָנִי** which is a relative of **עָנִי**, begins to be used and has more

⁷⁸Bammel, "πτωχός B" *TDNT* 6:888-89. They are **עָנִי**, **לַבַּיִת**, **אֲנִיִּי**, **עָנִי**, **עָנִי**, **עָנִי**.

⁷⁹E.g., Ps. 14:6; 22:24; 25:16; 34:6; 40:17; 69:29; 82:3; 86:1; 88:15.

⁸⁰E.g., 2 Sam 22:28; Psalm 10; 35:10; 37:14-15; 72:2,4,12; Isa. 26:6; 49:13; 66:2; Zeph. 3:12.

⁸¹E.g., Amos 8:4; Isa. 3:14,15; 10:2; 32:7; Ezek. 16:49; 18:12; 22:29.

⁸²See Isa. 26:6; 49:13; 51:21; 54:11.

⁸³See Isaiah 49; 51; 54; 61.

accent on the religious significance than on the socio-economic one.⁸⁴ The poor becomes synonymous with "the humble" which emphasizes their dependent relationship upon God.⁸⁵ These dual socioeconomical and religious connotations continue in usage into Qumran.⁸⁶

To sum up. "The poor" in the Old Testament referred to those in desperate need of socioeconomical deliverance but this need led them to the awareness of their spiritual poverty and need, and also to a dependent relationship with God for supply and vindication. This understanding of the meaning of "the poor" provides the background for its usage in Jesus' ministry.

3. In Jesus' ministry, *πτωχός* is used mainly in the religious significance of its Old Testament meaning. Jesus clearly identified His ministry with the fulfillment of Isa. 61:1-2,⁸⁷ such as preaching good news to the poor (*בְּשִׁבְעָה*), comforting all who mourn, wrapping one with a robe of righteousness, clothing one with garments of salvation. . . However, Jesus' disciples in general were not particularly poor nor were they oppressed in the sense of the poor of Old

⁸⁴Bammel, "*πτωχός* B" TDNT 6:900-2; Guelich, Sermon, p. 68-69.

⁸⁵Cf. Ps. 25(24):9; 34(33):2; 37(36):11; 76(75):9; 147(146):6; 149:4.

⁸⁶See 1QM 14:7; 1QH 5:21; 14:3; 18:14; 1QSb 5:22; 4QpIs . Cf. Kurt Schubert, "The Sermon on the Mount and the Qumran Texts" in The Scrolls and the New Testament, ed. Krister Stendahl (London: SCM Press, 1957), pp. 118-28.

⁸⁷See Luke 4:16-21; Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22.

Testament Judaism. The crowds who were listening in the Sermon on the Mount were also of the common people of Galileans. They were not all necessarily socioeconomically poor. Again, the term "the rich" was not used in the sense of their abusing or exploiting the poor. Rather, the terms rich and poor demonstrate primarily differing attitudes both towards their spiritual situation and towards God which manifest themselves secondarily in treating others. The rich depend on their own self-righteousness and take God for granted;⁸⁸ the poor depend totally on God's mercy and have hope only in Him.⁸⁹

During Jesus' earthly ministry, all who responded to Jesus' message through the work of the Holy Spirit were "the poor" in the sense of their attitude in turning to Him out of their spiritual desperation with true repentance and genuine trust with total commitment. They stood empty-handed without any pretense before God, and accepted freely His gracious gift in Jesus Christ. In this understanding, "the poor" and "the poor in spirit" are actually synonymous. Both signify man's spiritual bankruptcy, deepest form of repentance, and total dependence on God.⁹⁰

In summary, the meaning of the Beatitude "Blessed are the poor. . ." should be interpreted as follows: while seeing

⁸⁸Cf. Luke 1:51-53; 12:15-21; 14:15-24; 16:14-15, 19-31.

⁸⁹Cf. Luke 1:48,53; 14:21-23; 16:25.

⁹⁰Cf. Carson, Sermon, pp. 17-18.

so many desperate spiritually poor followers who responded to His message of the Kingdom in repentance and faith with commitment through the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, using the language of Isa. 61:1, declared such "poor" as blessed, for theirs was the Kingdom of Heaven. In so doing, Jesus was blessing His followers and announcing the fulfillment of the age of salvation in and through His ministry and teaching.

"Οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι "

"Τῷ πνεύματι" is a dative of respect which points to the sphere in which "poor" is to be found, and means "with respect to the spirit."⁹¹ Many biblical parallel expressions indicate that the focus of this usage is on the noun (τῷ πνεύματι) rather than on the adjective (οἱ πτωχοί).⁹² Thus, in the phrase "poor in spirit," the "spirit" is qualified as being "poor." And this phrase literally means a "poverty of spirit" or an attitude of "humility."

In Qumran literature, the exact Hebrew equivalent קַוַּר קוֹרְבָנִים, of "οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι" was found.⁹³

⁹¹See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. A translation and revision of the ninth-tenth German edition incorporating supplementary notes of A. Debrunner by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), § 197, p. 105; McNeile, Matthew, p. 50.

⁹²E.g., Ps. 34:18 "crushed in spirit"; Eccl. 7:8 "proud in spirit"; Ps. 11:2; 32:11, "upright in heart"; Ps. 24:4; Matt. 5:8, "pure in heart"; Matt. 11:29, "meek and lowly in heart." Each phrase refers to "heart" and "spirit" as the seat of one's feelings, volition, and spiritual or rational functions. Cf. Baumgartel, "πνεῦμα" TDNT 6:361-362.

⁹³1QM 14:7 (The War Scroll of Qumran).

In its light, Schubert renders "voluntarily poor,"⁹⁴ while E. Best suggests "fainthearted,"⁹⁵ for the meaning of "the poor in spirit." However, these interpretations are doubtful, since any direct connection between the Qumran literature and the Gospel of Matthew has not been established, even though a definite Semitic parallel was found.⁹⁶

The important and clear clue of understanding of this phrase is its relationship with the Old Testament prophecy of Isa. 61:1-3 and Isa. 57:15; 66:2. It is evident that Jesus, using the language of Isa. 61:1, pronounced the blessing to "the poor in spirit" to demonstrate that the age of fulfillment, the day of promised salvation, had come in His ministry. Again, Jesus' Gospel fulfilled God's promise in Isa. 57:15 and 66:2 that He would dwell with those who were contrite and humble of spirit. Therefore, those who received Jesus' message through the work of the Holy Spirit in repentance and faith with commitment were identified as "the poor in spirit." And they were congratulated by Jesus, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Therefore, "the poor in spirit" in Matt. 5:3 is not "the poor in courage," nor "the poor in spiritual awareness," nor "the poor in the Holy Spirit," but is synonymous with "the poor" in Luke 6:20. Both refer to those who are aware of their spiritual poverty and need, and turn to God in

⁹⁴Cf. K. Schubert, "The Sermon on the Mount," p. 122.

⁹⁵E. Best, "Matthew V. 3." New Testament Studies 7 (1960-61):255-58.

⁹⁶Cf. Davies, Setting, p. 251.

repentance and faith with commitment through the work of the Holy Spirit and depend totally upon God's mercy and grace without any pretense before Him.

"Ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν" (for Theirs Is)

Different from the Old Testament Beatitudes, the New Testament Beatitudes use the causal ὅτι to connect the clause.⁹⁷ This ὅτι -clause signifies that the content of the promise is inherent in the beatitude's declaration itself.

The third person "αὐτῶν" is the same format with the majority of beatitudes in the Jewish, Greek, and New Testament literature. This is a kind of aphoristic form. The use of the second person in Matt. 5:11-12 can be explained in terms of the specific application of the Beatitudes to a special situation.

The present tense verb "ἐστὶν" stands in contrast to the future tenses of verses four through nine. Actually in Hebrew or Aramaic the connecting verb would not be used.⁹⁸ Although in Greek, the present usually here is read as a future in agreement with the other promises,⁹⁹ the choice of ἐστὶν (present) rather than ἔσται (future) may signify the special nature of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the Kingdom in Jesus' ministry involved both the present (already) and the future (not yet). The Kingdom has come now in God's

⁹⁷Cf. above, p. 124.

⁹⁸Cf. McNeile, Matthew, p. 50.

⁹⁹Cf. W. C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, ICC (Edinburgh: Clark & Clark, 1912), p. 40.

redemptive reign through Jesus' teaching and ministry, and will be consummated at Jesus' second coming in the future.

" Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν "

The meaning of "the Kingdom of Heaven" has been examined in detail in chapter two.

The Interpretation of Matthew 5:10

" Μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν." (Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.)

" Δεδιωγμένοι "

This is a perfect participle passive. The perfect tense denotes the integral relationship between the past and the present and makes the subject quite concrete, emphasizing an actual experience rather than a more general, indefinite possibility.¹⁰⁰ This is to say that the persecution had already been and was still being experienced by those of whom Jesus spoke of.

" Οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης "

" ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης " (for the sake of righteousness)

explains the cause of the persecution. Here, righteousness denotes the conduct which is in keeping with the will of God.

¹⁰⁰Cf. 1 Peter 3:14, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed." In this verse, the verb **πάσχοιτε** is in the optative mood. Cf. Guelich, Sermon, pp. 93, 108; Hill, Matthew, p. 113.

However, such conduct must be seen as that growing out of the new relationship given by God to the believers through the Gospel of Jesus' ministry.¹⁰¹ All the believers who accepted righteousness as God's gift would definitely live out righteousness in their conduct. And such conduct stood inevitably in conflict with the worldly standards and brought about the persecution.

Therefore, "those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" are the same people as "those who are poor in spirit." Both signify those who respond with commitment to Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in repentance and faith. Not only do they receive righteousness as God's gift, but they also live out a righteousness life which causes the persecution. They are really blessed because God's redemptive rule has been already at work in their lives, and this is the meaning of the phrase, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Ὅτι αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν"

This phrase also appears in Matt. 5:3.¹⁰²

The Interpretation of Matthew 5:20

"Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν." (For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes

¹⁰¹See above, p. 121.

¹⁰²See above, p. 134.

and Pharisees, you will surely never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.)

"Γάρ" (for)

The conjunction γάρ denotes a connecting link between what precedes and what follows.¹⁰³ Thus, the question of entrance into the Kingdom in Matt. 5:20 must be understood as relating to the question of rank in the Kingdom in Matt. 5:19 and thus also to Matt. 5:17-19.¹⁰⁴ This connecting relationship can also be seen from Jesus' use of these same motifs elsewhere in Matt. 18:3,4, although there the order is reversed. In Matt. 18:3, Jesus first points out the way of entrance into the Kingdom, that is, turning and becoming like little children, and then in 18:4, He uses the conjunction (therefore), which expresses its inferential relationship to 18:3, to mention the basis of greatness in the Kingdom, that is, having childlike humility.¹⁰⁵

Here in Matt. 5:19, Jesus first talks about least and great in the Kingdom, then in 5:20, He uses the conjunction γάρ (for), which serves here as a combining clip, to emphasize 5:20 and shifts the attention to the question of entrance

¹⁰³Cf. H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953,) p. 338; W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), p. 151.

¹⁰⁴McNeile's assertion that the γάρ forms a logical sequence with πληρῶσαι (5:17), not with 5:18, 19 is not satisfactory. Cf. McNeile, Matthew, p. 60.

¹⁰⁵See below, pp. 207-16.

into rather than to rank within the Kingdom. One's rank (5:19) presupposes one's entrance into the Kingdom (5:20). Yet, by using γάρ, Jesus emphasizes the prerequisite of "an exceeding righteousness" in order to enter the Kingdom which is quite different from the keeping of the least of these commandments in 5:19. The nature of this "exceeding righteousness" is expounded by the demands of the antitheses in 5:21-48. Therefore, 5:20, on the one hand, connects the teaching of 5:17-19, and on the other hand, introduces the theme of 5:21-48.

" Ἡ δικαιοσύνη . . . τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων "
(The Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees)

Jesus groups together the scribes and Pharisees as practicing a righteousness which falls short of what is required of those who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Some of the scribes were Sadducees but many of them were Pharisees. Despite that only one article was used for them, they may also describe two types of the Jewish religious leaders for the law.¹⁰⁶ The scribes were the professional preservers, interpreters and instructors of the Law;¹⁰⁷ the

¹⁰⁶The different usages in the Synoptic Gospel: e.g., Matt. 2:4; 3:7; Mark 7:1; Luke 5:21, etc.

¹⁰⁷The scribes were Jewish scholars, men of learning, their primary concern was the study of the Law, written and oral. The written Law was contained in the five books of Moses; the oral Law was also regarded as given to Moses, though it was transmitted orally from scribe to disciple. This oral Law was called "the tradition of the elders" in Matt. 15:2. The scribes, the experts of the Law, were religious leaders, even though the functions of priesthood were no part of their office. At Jesus' time, they were professional scholars. Some of them were Sadducees but many of them were Pharisees. After the destruction of the Temple at

Pharisees were the great Jewish party which professed to live a separated life, that is, a life in strict accordance with the Law.¹⁰⁸ All of them were striving very hard to maintain and to practice all the regulations of the Law.¹⁰⁹

In their own estimation the scribes and the Pharisees did have a righteousness under the Law. Generally speaking, they were esteemed very highly by the common Jewish people.¹¹⁰

A.D. 70, they came to be ordained as "rabbis." The collection of the oral Law preserved by the Rabbi Judah the Prince near the end of the second century was the so-called authoritative "Mishnah." Cf. Eduard Lohse, The New Testament Environment, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, Tennessee: the Parthenon Press, 1981,) pp. 115-20. F. F. Bruce, New Testament History (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1972), pp. 70, 78-81, 172, 374; F. W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 143; J. Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, trans. F. H. and C. H. Cave (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 233-45.

¹⁰⁸The Pharisees were a Jewish party of laymen. Probably, they might be the heir of the Hasidim (the pious) of the Maccabees' time. Those pious fought against the Seleucid rulers who imposed Greek customs and religious rites upon the Jewish people. The name Pharisee itself is generally agreed to be derived from the Hebrew פְּרִישׁ, separate. They separated themselves from all that might cause them to incur moral or ceremonial defilements, in order to live up to the legal regulations of the Torah in the most scrupulous manner. For instance, for them it would be an offense to eat with Gentiles, or with "tax collectors and sinners" (e.g., Matt. 9:11; Luke 15:2; Acts 11:3, etc.). They studied the Law and sought to practice the teaching of the scribes or to adjust the application of the Law in the changing condition of the national life. Cf. Lohse, Environment, pp. 77-83; Bruce, History, pp. 69-81; Beare, Matthew, p. 144; Jeremias, Jerusalem, pp. 246-67.

¹⁰⁹Before A. D. 70, 341 additional rules were added to the Oral Law. Cf. Jacob Neusner, "Pharisaic Law in New Testament Times" Union Seminary Quarterly Review 26 (1970-1971):331-40.

¹¹⁰T. W. Manson asserted, "We do the scribes and Pharisees a monstrous injustice if we imagine that they did not conscientiously strive to carry out what was for them a divinely appointed way of life. Indeed if any criticism is

On some occasions, Jesus also appreciated their outward accomplishments in the keeping of the Law.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, Jesus emphasizes that even their seeming high standards of conduct was still not high enough to qualify them to meet the requirement of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The inadequacy of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees can be analyzed from three angles. First, from Jesus' teaching on one's relationship to others in the antitheses in 5:21-48,¹¹² their righteousness only stresses on the outward conduct of the fulfillment of the Law, while Jesus' demand emphasizes the inner motive and attitude of integrity. Second, from Jesus' teaching on one's relationship to God in terms of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting in 6:1-18, their righteousness is doing the good work under their own power for the wrong motives, for show or personal reward and thus becomes hypocrisy, while Jesus' demand is doing through the Spirit's work everything only for God's sake. Third, the most important one, from Jesus' teaching on the nature of righteousness in 5:6,10; 6:33, their righteousness is dependent on their own virtue, while Jesus is

to be made, it is that they were too conscientious; that in their zeal for the minutest details of Law and tradition they were apt to lose sight of the larger moral purposes which the Law as a whole was meant to serve." See T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus (London: SCM, 1957), p. 162.

¹¹¹E.g., Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-21; Luke 18:18-22.

¹¹²These six antitheses are all prefaced by the similar formula: "You have heard that it was said. . . but I say to you." In this section, six times Jesus' demands stand in a higher level than the scribes' and Pharisees' understanding of the requirement of the Old Testament Law.

preaching a righteousness of God's gracious gift through God's redemptive activity and rule in Jesus' ministry, and only this righteousness of gift will enable one to practice the righteous conduct spoken of by Jesus.

This last factor is the fatal failure of the scribes and Pharisees. Their predicament can be illustrated by the situation of the rich young ruler.¹¹³ Having kept the Law from his youth, at least outwardly, he was still far from the Kingdom of Heaven, from eternal life, since he lacked the "wholeness" that comes with following and total commitment to Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus' ministry, can one have this exceeding righteousness, that is, a new relationship with God (the righteousness of faith) as well as the concomitant conduct in keeping with God's will (the righteousness of life).¹¹⁴

“Περὶσσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον”

(Your Righteousness Surpasses That)

The righteousness of Jesus' Kingdom far exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. This "greater righteousness" includes three elements: soteriological, ethical, and eschatological or Christological aspects.¹¹⁵ The soteriological element is seen from righteousness as the gift from God of a

¹¹³ Matt. 19:16-22. In Jewish mind, rich is God's reward for man's special holiness. Cf. William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 362-70. The detailed discussion on this passage see Chapter VIII.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 215-16.

¹¹⁵ See above, pp. 118-22.

new relationship between God and the individual (5:6; 6:33); the ethical element is implied by the demand of a better conduct than that of the scribes and Pharisees, of a conduct made possible only through the work of the Spirit and in keeping with the will of God in relationship to others (5:21-48) and to God (6:1-18); the eschatological element, the most important aspect, is indicated by the fact that Jesus' coming and ministry have fulfilled the Old Testament promises of God's eschatological redemptive activity for His people (5:17,18; cf. Isaiah 61). Without Christ's redemptive fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, no one will ever be able to achieve the greater righteousness that Jesus demanded. It is God's redemptive rule through Jesus' eschatological ministry that brings the soteriological element of new relationships both now and in the future (5:3-12), as well as the demands for a concomitant ethical response (5:21-48).

Therefore, the greater righteousness, on the one hand, is the gracious gift of God based on Jesus' fulfillment of the prophets and the Law; on the other hand, it is the "good fruit" produced by the "good tree" (7:16-20), that is, the doing of the will of the Father out of the new life in Christ (7:21-24).¹¹⁶ In other words, the greater righteousness is the gift of God's redemptive activity through His Spirit in establishing new relationships with His people in Jesus Christ and also granting the power for the righteous conduct in commensurate with this new relationship.

¹¹⁶ See above, pp. 116-18.

" Οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν "
 (You Will Surely Never Enter the Kingdom of Heaven)¹¹⁷

Jesus connects together "righteousness" and "the Kingdom of Heaven" many times.¹¹⁸ Here He uses the double negation οὐ μὴ with the subjunctive εἰσέλθητε to exclude decisively from the Kingdom all whose self-righteousness is similar to that of the scribes and Pharisees. However, it is important to notice that the righteousness necessary to enter the Kingdom is not simply conduct in keeping with the Father's will as set forth by Jesus, but the righteousness given by God as gift on account of one's repentance and faith in Jesus through the Spirit's work. Otherwise, there would be no substantial difference between that and the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Since the future Kingdom is only the consummation of the present Kingdom, all those who are accepted into the present Kingdom will also be received into the future Kingdom. In other words, all those who receive the Gospel of the Kingdom in repentance and faith in Jesus with commitment to Him by the work of the Holy Spirit, will receive God's righteousness as a gift and live under God's redemptive rule, that is, the present Kingdom. This redemptive and dynamic rule of God will provide the power for the believers to try to practice the greater righteousness, to qualify them for the demand of the entrance into the future Kingdom. When

¹¹⁷ Concerning the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven see above, pp. 39-46.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 5:10,20; 6:33, 7:21.

Matt. 5:20 is understood in this manner, the "greater righteousness" can be regarded as the entrance requirement for the Kingdom. Therefore, the greater righteousness necessary for the entrance into the Kingdom is both the righteousness of faith (gift) and the righteousness of life (demand)--all worked by God through His Spirit. It is not the righteousness of life over against the righteousness of faith but the righteousness of life as manifesting the righteousness of faith.¹¹⁹ All those who receive by faith the gracious gift of God's redemptive rule through Jesus will not only be given a new relationship with God but also be endowed with the transforming power to live out the righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. The gift-character and the demand-character of this greater righteousness have an inseparable link in God's redemptive rule through Jesus' ministry.

The Interpretation of Matthew 7:21

"Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι , Κύριε κύριε , εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν , ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς." (Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.)

The Structure of Matthew 7:13-27

This section consists of three units of admonitions and concludes the Sermon on the Mount with the emphasis on

¹¹⁹Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 216.

doing, not only hearing or preaching, the will of the Father. First, 7:13-14, Jesus exhorts the hearers to enter the narrow gate; second, 7:15-23, Jesus first warns about the false prophets in 15-20 and then elaborates this topic in 21-23;¹²⁰ third, 7:24-27, Jesus closes His teaching with the parable of two houses.

Some scholars interpret 7:21-23 as a separate warning referring to charismatic prophets, which is different from the false prophets in 7:15-20, and construct four units in this section.¹²¹ This assertion, however, is not convincing. Because Matt. 7:15-20 serves as a bridge between 7:13-14 and 7:21-23. Matt. 7:13-14 deals with the two gates and the two ways; 7:21-23 describes those who look like Jesus' disciples but they do not obey Him. The bridge (7:15-20) presents false prophets who do not teach the narrow way, nor practice it. Their false teachings come out of their disobedient lives.¹²² Thus, 7:21-23 is an elaboration of the warning on the false prophets in 7:15-20, and they form a single unit.

¹²⁰Those scholars who understand it in this way are: Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 296-313; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 366-82, especially pp. 366, 375; McNeile, Matthew, pp. 94-99; Guelich, Sermon, pp. 383-85; E. Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), pp. 186-89; R. Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 117; Carson, Sermon, p. 128; Hill, Matthew, p. 151, etc.

¹²¹Cf. Manson, Sayings, p. 176; Watchman Nee, Kingdom, pp. 72-77; D. Hill, "False Prophets and Charismatics: Structure and Interpretation in Matthew 7:15-23" Biblica 57 (1976):327-48. Earlier, Hill held the other alternative as cited in the previous footnote.

¹²²Cf. Carson, Sermon, p. 128.

The parable of the two houses of the third unit both explains the teaching of the first unit (7:13-14) in terms of hearing and doing Jesus' words and indicates the basic characteristic of the false prophets of the second unit (7:15-23).

Furthermore, each of these three units offers a promise as well as requests a demand. The first unit urges to enter the narrow gate and offers life; the second urges to do the Father's will to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; the third urges to learn Jesus' words and follow them and to be vindicated at the final Judgment, that is, eternal salvation. Here, the promises: "leading into life," "entering into the Kingdom of Heaven," and "safety at the final Judgment" are parallel in structure and synonymous in meaning. So also is the case in the three demands: "entering the narrow gate," "doing the Father's will," and "doing Jesus' words."

Therefore, the thought of Matt. 7:13-27, consisting of three units, is a related section dealing with the relationship between the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and the doing of the will of the Father, and serves as the conclusion to the whole Sermon on the Mount.

"Κύριε κύριε" (Lord, Lord)

During Jesus' earthly ministry the vocative **Κύριε** was not necessarily a worshipful acclamation, but often only a respectful title.¹²³ Those who called Jesus "Lord, Lord"

¹²³Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson 1970), p. 130.

would not necessarily mean to worship Him as the Lord God and commit themselves to Him. Here Jesus means that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, one should not only call Him "Lord, Lord," but also do the Father's will by committing oneself totally to Him.

In the Septuagint, the usages of *κύριος* can be divided roughly into four categories.¹²⁴ First, the possessive usage: it describes a man who possesses something, such as, a master of a servant (Ex. 21:5). Second, the polite usage: it expresses respect, without special reverence, such as, Abraham, Laban, Moses, Elijah were called *κύριε* (lord) by Sarah, Rachel, Joshua, and Obadiah respectively.¹²⁵ Third, the courtly usage: it is a title of kings, princes, and governors, such as, Saul was called *κύριε* in 1 Sam. 22:12. Fourth, the religious usage: it is a title for the true God. The Greek term *κύριε* has replaced the Hebrew title "Adonai" in Judaism, and the latter was the substitute for the divine name "יהוה" in the reading of the Scriptures.¹²⁶

In the Gospels, the term *κύριος* is used in all of these four usages of the Septuagint.¹²⁷ One important point

¹²⁴Cf. Quell, "*κύριος*," TDNT 3:1058-59.

¹²⁵See Gen. 18:12; 31:35; Num. 11:28; 1 Kings 18:7.

¹²⁶Cf. I. H. Marshall, The Origins of New Testament Christology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 98; Quell, "*κύριος*," TDNT, 3:1059.

¹²⁷E.g., the possessive usage (Matt. 15:27; 18:25; Mark 12:9; Luke 16:3); the polite usage (Matt. 21:29); the courtly usage (Matt. 27:63); the religious usage (Matt. 1:20,24; 2:13,19; 4:7,10; 11:25).

to note is that before Jesus' resurrection, the religious title **κύριος** was seldom applied to Jesus by His disciples or followers. Sometimes, different words which lack any sense of reverential worship but are terms of respect are found in parallel Synoptic passages:

1. **κύριε** in Matt. 8:25, but **διδάσκαλε** in Mark 4:38 and **ἐπιστάτα** in Luke 8:24;

2. **κύριε** in Matt. 17:4, but **ῥαββί** in Mark 9:5 and **ἐπιστάτα** in Luke 9:33;

3. **κύριε** in Matt. 17:15, but **διδάσκαλε** in Mark 9:17 and Luke 9:38;

4. and **κύριε** in Matt. 20:31,33 and Luke 18:41; but **ῥαββουνί** in Mark 10:51.

It seems that **κύριε**, **διδάσκαλε**, **ἐπιστάτα**, **ραββί**, and **ραββουνί** are interchangeable in such passages, and thus the vocative **κύριε** was commonly not used in the religious sense of Jesus before His resurrection.

Even the double form "Lord, Lord" in Matt. 7:21 and Luke 6:46 does not provide evidence that Jesus Himself attached any importance to the title. O. Cullmann points out that the double form "Lord, Lord" like the double "Rabbi, Rabbi" indicates only special respect, but is still far removed in usage from the religious sense.¹²⁸

Therefore, in Matt. 7:21, those false prophets could publically call Jesus "Lord, Lord" but definitely without

¹²⁸Cf. O. Cullmann, The Christology of the New Testament, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), p. 202.

committing themselves to Him, let alone being obedient to Him by doing the will of the Father. There was no way for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

On the contrary, when the true disciples applied this polite title to Jesus, they also treated Him as the object of their faith, love, and devotion,¹²⁹ even though only after Jesus' resurrection did they more fully understand the true significance of Jesus and of His teaching and ministry. Then they applied the religious sense of the title ὁ κύριος to the risen Jesus without hesitation. Then they worshipped Him wholeheartedly, and Thomas even calls Him, "My Lord and my God."¹³⁰ Thereafter, those who truly confess Jesus as Lord also simultaneously commit themselves to Him. This is why Paul claims in Rom. 10:9 that "if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." In this case, salvation or justification by faith, is concomitant with the confession of Jesus as the Lord. Being as a believer's Lord, Jesus will supply the power through His Spirit for him to live a life in keeping with the Father's will.

But in Matt. 7:21-23, the use of Lord presents a different situation. Those who politely call Jesus "Lord, Lord" are false prophets who give only outward lip-service but without true commitment to Jesus in doing God's will.

¹²⁹See J. G. Machen, The Origin of Paul's Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1923), pp. 293-317.

¹³⁰John 20-28; 30-31; Matt. 28:9,17; Luke 24:52.

They are ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing; they bear bad fruit out of their bad lives (bad tree). They have never truly spiritually received Jesus as their "Lord." They have never responded to Jesus' preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom; they have never genuinely repented, nor believed in Jesus with total commitment to Him. They are definitely different from those who confess Jesus as Lord described in Rom. 10:9,13. Therefore, there is no contradiction between Matthew and Paul on this point.¹³¹

"Τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου" (The Will of My Father)

Jesus emphasizes the relationship between the Kingdom and the will of His Father.¹³² Without doing the will of the Father (7:21), as without the "greater righteousness" (5:20), one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But what does "doing the Father's will" mean?

In view of Matt. 7:24,26 "these words of mine," it is evident that the content of the Father's will here includes Jesus' teaching as illustrated by the whole Sermon on the Mount. Thus, it consists neither of the legal demands of the Mosaic Law, nor only of Jesus' interpretation of the Mosaic Law (5:17-48), nor only of the summary ethical teaching of the Golden Rule (7:12). The Golden Rule does express the proper conduct growing out of the new relationship between

¹³¹T. W. Manson suggests that Matthew consciously shaped the saying to make it a rebuttal of the Pauline doctrine in Rom. 10:13. See Manson, Sayings, p. 176.

¹³²See Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 21:31; 26:42.

God and others, however; it is only representative of, rather than the total expression of the Father's will.

Similar to the interpretation of the term "righteousness," "the Father's will" should also be interpreted in all the soteriological, eschatological, and ethical aspects. It is the Father's will that Jesus came into this world to fulfill the promises and the prophecies of the Law and prophets concerning the eschatological salvation.¹³³ Again, it is the Father's will to which one should respond in the Gospel of Kingdom and be granted the righteousness as a gift from God, resulting in a new relationship between him and God.¹³⁴ Furthermore, it is the Father's will that one who receives the gift of righteousness in grace is simultaneously receiving God's redemptive rule in his life, which will empower him to live out the ethical demand of the Golden Rule, that is, the righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.¹³⁵

Therefore, the basic emphasis of "doing the Father's will" is one's relationship with Jesus Christ. Those who do the will of the Father are the disciples who respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven in true repentance, genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit. They will freely receive God's gift of

¹³³ Cf. Matt. 5:17-18; Isaiah 61; John 6:29,39,40; 1 John 3:23.

¹³⁴ Cf. Matt. 5:3-12; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 305.

¹³⁵ Cf. Matt. 5:20-48; 7:12.

righteousness and thus live under God's redemptive rule which will provide the power for them to live a life in keeping with the will of God. And they are the ones who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Interpretation of Matthew 7:21-23 and
The Misinterpretation of Watchman Nee

It has been shown above that Matt. 7:21-23 is a further elaboration of Matt. 7:15-20 on the topic of the false prophets.¹³⁶ Therefore, at the final judgment, Jesus condemns this group of people but not because they are "enthusiasts" or "charismatics."¹³⁷ Because Jesus Himself clearly entrusts His disciples with such ministries and also supports them in preaching and teaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles.¹³⁸

Unfortunately, however, these activities can also be done by the false prophets to deceive God's people, by men who disguise themselves (wolves) among the believers in sheep's clothing.¹³⁹ Here, the false prophets, like their use of "Lord, Lord" to imply their validity, appeal to such charismatic deeds to defend their legitimacy and genuineness

¹³⁶See above, p. 144-46.

¹³⁷Käsemann, Hill, and others identify this group as "enthusiasts" or "charismatics," which is different from the false prophets described in Matt. 7:15-20. Cf. E. Käsemann, "The Beginnings of Christian Theology," in New Testament Questions of Today (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 83-84; Hill, "Prophets" pp. 336, 337, 340, 341.

¹³⁸See Matt. 10:7-8; Luke 10:9,17; Mark 16:17,18. (Although the originality of Mark 16:9-20 is debated.)

¹³⁹See Matt. 24:24.

before the Judge. But Jesus cannot be deceived, and He will tell them plainly, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness."

Watchman Nee misinterpreted almost all the main points of this paragraph.¹⁴⁰ His view

¹⁴⁰Nee's interpretation on Matthew's Gospel and the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven are not his main theological concerns. Thus, comparatively, fewer articles on these areas have been written either by Nee himself or by those who evaluate his thoughts. Nee studied a lot of the writings of Madame Guyon, Jessie Penn-Lewis, J. N. Darby, Andrew Murray, D. M. Panton, G. H. Pember, Robert Govett, F. B. Meyer, T. Austin-Sparks, and other Plymouth Brethren and Keswick-type authors. These writers influenced Nee's thought greatly. Nee's main theological doctrines are Anthropology (the trichotomy, see his writing The Spiritual Man, 3 volumes. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968), Soteriology (especially on the doctrine of Sanctification, see The Normal Christian Life, Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1961) and Ecclesiology (the Local Church Movement, see 工作的再思.台北台灣福音書房, 1979). In recent years, some theses of different theological schools were written in evaluating his main thoughts, such as, Paul Y. C. Siu, "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Watchman Nee" (an unpublished Master of Theology Thesis at Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 1979); Dennis Paul Schiefelbein, "A Lutheran Confessional Critique of the Understanding and Function of the Believer's Union with Christ in the Theology of Watchman Nee" (an unpublished Master of Sacred Theology Thesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1980); Robert Kingston Wetmore, "An Analysis of Watchman Nee's Doctrine of Dying and Rising with Christ as It Relates to Sanctification" (an unpublished Master of Theology Thesis at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, 1983); Andrew Wa Mon Ng, "Watchman Nee and the Priesthood of All Believers" (an unpublished Doctor of Theology Dissertation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1985). In last year, a comprehensive evaluation of Nee's thought (The Spiritual Theology of Watchman Nee) was written in Chinese by Lam Wing-hung and published by China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong (林榮洪:「屬靈神學——倪柝聲思想的研究」.香港中國神學研究院, 1985). In this present study, only several Nee's misinterpretations on Matthew's Gospel and on the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven are evaluated. See chapter two on the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven (pp. 58-59); chapter three on the methodology of interpreting the parables (pp. 79-83); chapter four on Matt. 7:21-33 (pp. 152-58); chapter six on the twin parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

can be summarized as follows:¹⁴¹

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is smaller in scope than the Kingdom of God, and thus the two are different. The latter denotes the sovereignty of God and includes all believers, but the former is reserved as the reward only for the faithful Christians who will reign with the Lord for a thousand years.

2. Since the people in question here confess Jesus as Lord, according to Rom. 10:9, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'. . . you will be saved," they are definitely Christians. The problem is that they do not do the will of God and are thus disqualified from receiving the reward of the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

3. Since those people perform great gifts of the church, that is, prophecy, casting out demons, and doing mighty works by the name of the Lord, they must be Christians.

4. The word "knew" in 7:23 should be understood as "recognized" or "approved of." Therefore, here, Jesus is saying to Christians that, "I never recognized what you did as right," or "I never approved of you."

5. The phrase "you who practice lawlessness" should

(pp. 204-5); chapter eight on Matt. 19:16-26 (232-41) and the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (pp. 259-60). Nee's purpose of distinguishing the Kingdom of Heaven, which to him is the reward for the faithful Christians, from the Kingdom of God, which belongs to all Christians, is to stimulate Christians to live a spiritual life in this present world so that they may receive the reward in the future millennium. Although Nee's purpose is good, his interpretations of these Bible passages are wrong.

¹⁴¹See Nee, Kingdom, pp. 74-77; 114-15.

be interpreted as "you Christians who do not work according to the rules of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount."

6. The phrase "depart from me" simply denotes that those Christians have no part in the glory, the Kingdom of Heaven, but they are still in the Kingdom of God.

In short, Watchman Nee separates 7:21-23 from 7:15-20, and refers the people in 7:21-23 definitely to Christians who have already had God's salvation but do not do the will of God and thus can not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. For him, the Kingdom of Heaven is the reward only for the faithful Christians to reign with Jesus for a thousand years.

Besides his wrong definition for the Kingdom of Heaven, the main error of his interpretation here is to identify the people in question with Christians. Thus, he must adjust the meanings of all other words to fit his premise. His errors are evaluated point by point below:

1. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are definitely synonymous, which signifies the dynamic and redemptive reign of God through Jesus' person and ministry.¹⁴² All those who repent and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit are saved by His gracious redemption and enters the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁴³

2. Those who called Jesus "Lord" during His earthly ministry were not necessarily true Christians. Many used the

¹⁴²See above, pp. 15-16; 39-43.

¹⁴³See above, pp. 116-18.

title "Lord" in the polite sense as "Sir," as did Jesus use the double title "Lord, Lord" here. Thus the Pauline formula of Rom. 10:9,13 cannot be applied to this situation.¹⁴⁴

3. Those who perform great gifts of the church are not necessarily true Christians. Jesus plainly warns His disciples that many false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect.¹⁴⁵

4. The verb "knew" ($\gamma\iota\nu\omega\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$) is used here in an intensive sense, which means "to know as one's own" or "to acknowledge."¹⁴⁶ It is not only a knowledge of the mind, such as can ascertain what kind of prophets they are, but also a knowledge of the heart, that is, of friendship, fellowship, and acknowledgement.¹⁴⁷ The false prophets have taken for granted that they are Jesus' true disciples, but Jesus rejects: "Not for a single moment do I acknowledge you as my own, or have known you to be my true disciples."

Furthermore, this rejection "I never knew you" is a ban formula found in the rabbinic usage, which means "I have nothing to do with you," or "you mean nothing to me."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴See above, pp. 146-50.

¹⁴⁵See Matt. 24:24; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9.

¹⁴⁶Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 307.

¹⁴⁷See Amos 3:2; Nah. 1:7; John 10:14; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19. Cf. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 377.

¹⁴⁸H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1926-61) 1:429; 4:293; cf. Hill, Matthew, p. 152.

Therefore, Nee's translation, "I never approved of you," is definitely wrong, and so is his assertion that the people in question are Christians.

5. The word "lawlessness" (*ἀνομία*) has been interpreted in three main ways. First, it is understood as "disputing the validity of the Mosaic Law," and thus those "prophets" are identified as "antinomians."¹⁴⁹ However, in Jesus' three other uses of the word "*ἀνομία*" in Matt. 13:41, 23:28; and 24:12, the legal character is not prominent at all. As a matter of fact, this term also lacks a strictly legal character anywhere else in the entire New Testament.¹⁵⁰ Thus, this interpretation is inappropriate.

Second, some exchange the Mosaic Law by Jesus' interpretation of the Law, and define the term "lawlessness" (*ἀνομία*) as the disobedience to the will of God as disclosed and delivered by Jesus as in Matt. 7:12, and in other ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁵¹ It is correct to put "working lawlessness" antithetically to "doing the will of the Father." However, in Matthew's Gospel, the will of the Father contains not only an ethical element, but more importantly the soteriological and eschatological elements.¹⁵² Therefore, it is incorrect for this view to neglect the

¹⁴⁹Cf. Barth, "Understanding," pp. 73-75, 159-64.

¹⁵⁰Cf. Davies, Setting, p. 203.

¹⁵¹Cf. Hill, "Prophets," p. 341, 348; Schweizer, Matthew, p. 189; Nee, Kingdom, p. 76.

¹⁵²See above, pp. 118-22; 141-42.

latter aspects in understanding the meaning of "doing the will of the Father" and its antithesis "working lawlessness."

Thirdly, the best way to understand the term "ἀνομία" (lawlessness) is to interpret it in the light of all the three elements of the Father's will. Those who practice lawlessness are the false prophets who, on the one hand, fail to recognize the coming of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the eschatological salvation (Matt. 5:3-18), which will inevitably change the attitude and conduct of the believers in keeping with the Father's will (Matt. 5:20-48). On the other hand, they insist on the practice of the Mosaic Law, which they themselves can only achieve in an hypocritical way, as the foundation of one's relationship to God.

Therefore, those who practice lawlessness are definitely not Christians and Nee's interpretation is incorrect.

6. The phrase "depart from me" (ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ) signifies that those false prophets will be expelled from the presence of the Lord Jesus forever and doomed to eternal destruction. The contexts of a parallel usage in Luke 13:27 and a similar usage in Matt. 25:46, explicitly mention that those who are expelled from the presence of the Lord are also doomed to eternal destruction.¹⁵³ Therefore those who depart from Jesus are not Christians without glory as in Nee's interpretation, but false prophets without eternal life.

¹⁵³Cf. Luke 13:27, "ἀπόστρητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ" (depart from me); Matt. 25:41, "πορεύεσθε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ" (depart from me). Although different words are used, their meanings are same. A similar phrase is found in Ps. 6:9.

Summary

In the Sermon on the Mount, on the one hand, Jesus teaches the eternal will of God for Christian ethics, which emphasizes the integrity of the heart and demands a perfectly righteous inner attitude, character as well as outward acts. This high ethical standard is definitely impossible for any human being to achieve by his own power. Fortunately, on the other hand, Jesus also teaches that His coming and ministry is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of God's eschatological salvation. God's redemptive rule has been and is being manifested through His mission and preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. All those who are "poor in spirit," who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that is, those who turn to God out of desperation in true repentance, genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit, will receive God's righteousness as a gift; will enter the present Kingdom of Heaven; will live under the redemptive reign of God, who will through His Spirit empower them to live righteous life in keeping with the Father's will, qualitatively if not quantitatively, and which in turn will qualify them to enter the future Kingdom of Heaven, that is, the consummation of the present Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount is both Law and Gospel; both a demand and a gift. It presents God's eternal ethical demands; however, it also presupposes the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, that is, the redemptive rule of God

in Jesus' ministry. On the one hand, Jesus demands of His disciples a greater righteousness which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees; on the other hand, He first grants them God's righteousness as a gift, and then empowers them to live out this greater righteousness in keeping with God's will.

In other words, a man can be saved only by God's grace through faith in Christ; but God's grace in a believer's life will simultaneously and inevitably result in obedience. No one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven only on the basis of his obedience; but neither can anyone enter the Kingdom without his true obedience to God's will. Jesus' disciples who can enter the Kingdom of Heaven are those who receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit in true repentance, genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him. These believers live daily under the dynamic and redemptive reign of God, and it will definitely produce their righteous conducts. In this manner, and only in this manner, one can understand correctly the meaning of Matt. 5:20, Matt. 7:21, and the message of the Sermon on the Mount.

CHAPTER V

THE INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 11:12 AND LUKE 16:16

(ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND THE VIGOROUS RESPONSE OF MEN)

Matt. 11:12 is one of the most difficult sayings of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel which concerns the Kingdom of Heaven and the entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. After mentioning His ministry as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies,¹ Jesus asserted that "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven *βιάζεται* and *βιασταὶ ἄρπάζουσιν αὐτήν.*" The meaning of this verse as well as that of its parallel saying in Luke 16:16 have been interpreted variously. In Luke 16:16 it reads, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and *πᾶς εἰς αὐτήν βιάζεται.*" Many questions have been raised. What is the relationship between these two passages spoken at two different times? What did Jesus have in mind in each context? Are they different modifications of the same source Q as some suggest? Or are they creations of the early church? Or are they the critical objections of the Pharisees in the Lukan text picked up by Jesus? Again, what is the

¹See Matt. 11:4-5; cf. Isa. 35:5, 6.

most appropriate meaning here for the Greek words of βιάζεται, βιασταί, and ἀρπάζουσιν? Is the verb passive or middle? Are these three words used in the good sense or the bad sense? Does Matt. 11:12 mean that "the Kingdom of Heaven is suffering violence, and violent men take it by force";² or that "the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it";³ or one of the many other possibilities suggested by different scholars?⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to show, through exegetical studies, that the second interpretation is the most appropriate one. This is to say that both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 express the idea of the forceful coming of the Kingdom of God (that is, the dynamic rule of God in Jesus and the powerful ministries He manifests: healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, curing the blind and deaf, raising the dead, casting out the demons, preaching the Gospel, and so forth), and the vigorous or forceful response of men in order to enter that Kingdom (that is, the sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit). In other words, Jesus

²See A.V.; R.V.; A.R.V.; R.S.V.; N.E.B.; N.A.S.B.; Beck; Weymouth, and the scholars listed on p. 172, fn. 33.

³See N.I.V., R.S.V. mg, Lenski, Hendrikson, and the scholars listed on p. 180, fn. 53.

⁴See below, pp. 171-83; Cf. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in New Testament, 6 vols. (New York: Harper, 1930) 1:88-89; J. H. Moulton & G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), pp. 109-10; G. Schrenk, "βιάζεται," TDNT 1:609-14.

emphasizes that the Kingdom of Heaven has been vigorously advancing, and only those who respond vigorously to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, through the work of the Holy Spirit, may enter into that Kingdom.

The Relationship Between Matthew 11:12
And Luke 16:16

The Similarities

1. Both mention that the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John, although they are in the reverse order.⁵
2. Both mention that from the days of John the Baptist, there have been activities of the Kingdom of God.⁶
3. Both use the verb "βιάζεται."⁷
4. Both mention the "violent" or vigorous response of men to the Kingdom of God.
5. Both indicate the contrast between the action of the Kingdom and the reaction of men.

The Differences

1. The timing--In Matthew, this event happened in Jesus' early Galilean ministry, right after the sending out of the twelve and before the martyrdom of John the Baptist.⁸

⁵In Matt. 11:13, it reads, "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John."

⁶Although Matthew uses the synonymous term "the Kingdom of Heaven," see above, pp. 15-16.

⁷See below for the discussion of its meaning.

⁸Cf. Matt. 11:2-15.

But in Luke, it took place in Jesus' Later Perean ministry, probably on His way to Jerusalem,⁹ and sometime after the martyrdom of John the Baptist.¹⁰

2. The context--Matt. 11:12 (paralleled in Luke 7:18-35) belongs to a series of verses which deal with John the Baptist: the question asked by John's disciples about Jesus (Matt. 11:2-3), Jesus' answer (verses 4-6), Jesus' commending of John (verses 7-9), John's place in the divine history of revelation (verses 10-15), his reception by the people (verses 16-19). The context of Luke 16:16 does not deal directly with John the Baptist but with the assumed righteousness of the Pharisees and the validity of the Law as they understood it (Luke 16:14-18)--with stress on the continuing significance of the Law in the time of Christ and underline the fact that the disciples as well as the Pharisees still stand under the moral guidelines of the Law.

The Relationship

Since Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are variant forms of the same saying, some "literary critics" treat them as different modifications of the same source, Q, and suggest that the Matthean recension of this Q saying is clearly more difficult than the Lukan, and thus the latter must be secondary.¹¹

⁹Cf. Luke 13:23; 17:11.

¹⁰Cf. Luke 9:9.

¹¹So does Richard H. Hiers, The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1970), p. 36.

They explain further that Luke seems to have reworked it with a view to make it intelligible and less offensive: the Kingdom of God is subject to preaching, but not violence. Men do not "seize it by force" (ἀρπάξουσιν αὐτήν) as in Matthew, but "press into it" (εἰς αὐτήν βιάζεται). Nevertheless, they think that the meaning of the saying may have been no longer understood by whoever collected the sayings in Q.¹² Form critics usually hold that this saying is completely a creation of the early church, caused by its environment and added for an edifying purpose.¹³ E. Bammel argues that Luke probably draws here on a tradition from a Baptist community.¹⁴ He asserts that Luke may have found in Q or Matthew a similar saying attributed to Christ, and therefore assumed the same source for the logion now preserved in 16:16-18.¹⁵ Again, F. W. Danker claims that both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are originally the Pharisees' objection to the moral chaos and lawlessness because of the fact that everyone, including tax-collectors and sinners, forces his way into the Kingdom of God and this criticism of the Pharisees is picked up by Jesus to evaluate the Pharisees themselves.¹⁶ Because

¹²Ibid.

¹³Cf. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (NIGTC) (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), p. 627.

¹⁴E. Bammel, "Is Luke 16:16-18 of Baptist's Provenience?" Harvard Theological Review 51 (1958):104.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶F. W. Danker, "Luke 16:16--An Opposition Logion" Journal of Biblical Literature 77 (1958):236-40.

of their basic presuppositions, all the above explanations, however, are not satisfactory. The witness of the text is that both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are the similar sayings, each spoken by Jesus. On these two different occasions, He has made statements about John the Baptist as a transitional person and about the "violent" pressing into the Kingdom of God.¹⁷ This repetitive teaching methodology is very often adopted by Jesus throughout His ministry.¹⁸

The Meaning of βιάζεται

The Related Noun βία, ας, η.

βία is found from Homer onwards and is used in rabbinic literature as a borrowed word; it means force and the use of force.¹⁹ The Septuagint uses it about thirty times to translate six different Hebrew words.²⁰ It is worth noting that in Isa. 28:2 and 30:30 βία is used in the good sense to describe God's power in action. In the New Testament, βία occurs only in Acts and denotes forces or violence (such as 5:26; 21:35; 27:41).²¹ Again the adjective βίαιος, violent, in Acts 2:2, is used in the good sense to modify

¹⁷ Cf. N. Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 422.

¹⁸ Cf. Matt. 10:38, 16:24; Matt. 16:21, 20:17-19; Matt. 10:22, 24:13; etc.

¹⁹ G. Braumann, "βία" in NIDNTT 3:711; also Arndt-Gingrich, p. 140.

²⁰ Cf. G. Braumann, "βία" in NIDNTT 3:711.

²¹ In every case the violence is a potential threat to men's lives. Cf. Ibid.

the power of the coming of the Holy Spirit, as being like a mighty, rushing wind.

The Verb *βιάζεται*

The verb form is quite rare in the active but nearly always in the middle, which easily passes over into the passive, as a deponent verb expressing the idea of forcible action both in deed and word.²² Transitivity, it means to violate, rape; intransitively, to use force. It occurs 18 times in the Septuagint to translate seven Hebrew words which all contain the idea of forcible action: to urge (using friendly constraint, Gen. 33:11; Judg. 19:7); to break through (Ex. 19:34); to rape (Deut. 22:25); to molest (Esther 7:8); and so forth. In the New Testament this verb "*βιάζεται*" is found only in Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16. When this verb is rendered as passive, it has the meaning of "to be forced" or "to suffer violence." Although illustrations of the passive usages can be found in the classical Greek and in the papyri, in Greek sources relevant to the New Testament, *βιάζεται* is considerably more common in the deponent middle than in the passive voice.²³

The Meaning of *βίασται*

The noun *βίασται* in Matt. 11:12 is a "hapax" in the

²²See Arndt-Gingrich, p. 140; G. Braumann, "*βία*" in NIDNTT 3:711; G. Schrenk, "*βιάζεται*," TDNT 1:609-14.

²³See D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary 10 vols (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 6:266. Cf. Moulton & Milligan, Vocabulary, pp. 109-10.

New Testament and does not occur in the Septuagint at all. It is an extremely rare word. The classical writers, Josephus, the main Hellenistic authors and the papyri cannot offer further help on the meaning of this word.²⁴ In Philo, is probably used once in describing "the stormy waves of the passions beating against the ship of the soul."²⁵ Then, in patristic expositions of Matt. 11:12, it is often understood as the forceful men in the good sense. Clement of Alexandria refers *βιασταί* to the good men who seize the Kingdom: "Nor does the Kingdom of God belong to sleepers and sluggards, but 'the men of force seize it.' This is the only good force, to force God, and seize life from God . . . for God welcomes being worsted in such contests."²⁶ This interpretation is followed by Basil, Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium, Erasmus, Luther and many modern scholars.²⁷ On the other hand, many other modern scholars, guided by the analogy of some similar *βία* derivatives, assert that *βιασταί* cannot easily bear a good meaning but designates violent, evil

²⁴G. Schrenk, "*βιαστής*" TDNT 1:613-14. No illustrations for this word in the papyri can be found in Moulton & Milligan, Vocabulary, pp. 109-10.

²⁵Agric, 89. v.1. Cf. G. Schrenk, "*βιαστής*" TDNT 1:614; Arndt-Gingrich, p. 140.

²⁶The Rich Man's Salvation, XXI (Butterworth's translation: Loeb Classical Library: Clement of Alexandria, p. 315). Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215).

²⁷See G. Schrenk, "*βιάζομαι, βιαστής*" TDNT 1: 610, f.n. 4; 614, f.n. 3. Also Origen in his Commentary on St. John's Gospel, restrained by the obvious meaning of *βιαστής*, gives an ambiguous interpretation of the second clause in Matt. 11:12: among the raptors are both the good who desire and therefore take the kingdom and the bad who usurp it.

action.²⁸ They all insist that Matt. 11:12 must refer to the violence of the foes of Jesus in the persecution and hampering of the rule of God. Nevertheless it is difficult to settle this problem only on linguistical grounds; other factors, such as the context, must be taken into consideration too.

The Meaning of ἀρπάζουσιν

This is the third person plural present indicative active of ἀρπάζω. It is found 14 times in the New Testament with the basic meaning of "taking something forcefully."²⁹ In Matt. 12:29, John 10:12, it means to steal, carry off, drag away; in Matt. 13:19, to take away; in John 6:15, 10:28, 10:29, Acts 23:10, Jude 23, to lead away forcibly; in Acts 8:39, 2 Cor. 12:2, 12:4, 1 Thess. 4:17, Rev. 12:5, to carry someone away; and in Matt. 11:12, to take it by force. But whether it is understood in the bad sense, that is, to rob it, or in the good sense, that is, to lay hold of it, should be determined by the context, by the understanding of the meanings of the words "βιάζεται" and "βιασταί." in the specific setting of Matt. 11:12. Foerster asserts that since in Matt. 11:12, ἀρπάζω does not mean either "to bring in by

²⁸For instance, G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι, βιαστής" TDNT 1:610-14; E. Moore, "βιάζω, ἀρπάζω and cognates Hiers, Kingdom, pp. 36-42; J. D. Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 142. Also see the Commentaries on Matthew by the scholars like David Hill, H. B. Green, W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, E. Schweizer, M. H. Franzmann, R. H. Gundry, F. W. Beare, etc.

²⁹Cf. W. Foerster, "ἀρπάζω" TDNT 1:472; E. Tiedtke and C. Brown, "Snatch, Take Away, Rapture" NIDNTT 3:602-3.

force" or "to plunder," only three alternatives are open:³⁰

1. It may mean that the Kingdom of God is stolen, that is, taken away from men and closed to them.
2. It may mean that violent men culpably try to snatch the Kingdom of God for themselves.
3. It may mean that men forcefully take it in the good sense, that is, men with resolute earnestness are taking possession of the Kingdom of God through the Spirit's work.

All three are linguistically possible. The best interpretation in the setting of Matt. 11:12 can be obtained by understanding the context.

The Meaning of Matthew 11:12

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven *βιάζεται* and *βιασταὶ ἄρπάζουσιν αὐτήν*."

Four central questions are involved in this verse:

1. Whether *βιάζεται* is middle or passive?
2. If *βιάζεται* is passive, whether it is in a good sense ("is being seized eagerly," or "is being brought with force") or in a bad sense ("is suffering violence")?
3. Who are the *βιασταί*? Are they disciples of Jesus who are eagerly taking possession of (*ἄρπάζουσιν*) the Kingdom of God and are commended by Jesus, or are they Zealots or Pharisees or violent and impetuous throngs who culpably

³⁰See "*ἄρπάζω*" TDNT 1:472-73.

try to snatch (ἀρπάζουσιν) the Kingdom of God for themselves and are condemned by Jesus, or are they the demons or forces of evil (the foes of Christ, including Herod Antipas and the Jewish antagonists or even Satan himself), who are violently taking away (ἀρπάζουσιν) the Kingdom of God from men and closing it to them?

4. Whether the verb βιάζεται and the cognate noun βιασταί should be understood in a similar sense or in a form of antanclasis (a figure of speech in which the same word is repeated in a different or even contradictory sense)?

The combinations of these alternatives are very complicated. Therefore, E. Trocme lists it among those "dominical sayings which are often obscure and sometimes totally incomprehensible,"³¹ while D. Daube regards it as a "Trümmerfeld, a heap of ruins."³² Nevertheless, through careful close examination, this saying of Jesus can still be understood clearly and meaningfully.

Βιάζεται as Passive

If βιάζεται is treated as passive, this verse can be interpreted in the following ways.

In the Sense of "Suffering Violence" or "Being Attacked"

1. The most widely accepted interpretation is that

³¹E. Trocme, Jesus And His Contemporaries (London: E. T. R. A. Wilson, 1973), p. 35.

³²D. Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (London: Athlone, 1956), p. 300.

the Kingdom suffers violence in the persons of its servants when they are maltreated by the enemies of God's Kingdom.³³ The Kingdom of God suffers violence in that violent men seek to rob other men of the Kingdom of God, such as Herod's imprisonment of John the Baptist or Jewish antagonists' attitude toward Jesus and His disciples (Matt. 9:34; 12:22-24). Two sayings of Jesus are usually picked to support this interpretation: "The evil one comes and snatches away (*ἀρπάζει*) what is sown in his heart" (Matt. 13:19); "You shut the Kingdom of heaven against men" (Matt. 23:13). However, Matt. 11:12 differs from these. It says nothing about doing violence against men but against the Kingdom of God.³⁴ But in Matt. 13:19, the evil one snatches away the seed and not the Kingdom; and in Matt. 23:13, closing the Kingdom to

³³ So, more or less, KJV, NEB, NASB, RSV, etc. See G. Dalman, The Words of Jesus (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1909), pp. 141-42; G. Schrenk, "*βιάζομαι*" TDNT 1:609-14; W. G. Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment (London: SCM, 1957), p. 123; R. H. Fuller, The Mission and Achievement of Jesus (Naperville,: Allenson, 1954), p. 32; F. V. Filson, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Black, 1960), pp. 138-39; Martin H. Frangmann, Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), p. 120; David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 200; Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), p. 262; H. B. Green, The Gospel According to Matthew (Oxford: Oxford University, 1975), p. 116; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, Matthew (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 137-38; F. W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 260; Robert H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 209-10; C. Brown, NIDNTT 3:603; W. C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 116; Others cf. footnote 24.

³⁴ If *βιάζεται* is treated as passive.

men is not quite the same as taking it away from men. It is improper to add something to what Jesus did not say for the purpose of explanation while, without it, a natural interpretation is possible.³⁵ Therefore, βιάζεται is not likely to be understood in this sense.

2. Some scholars refer this verse to a spiritual battle, that is, the coming of the eschatological kingdom is being resisted or attacked by evil spiritual powers, "the rulers of this age," "the hosts of darkness," "Satan and his demons."³⁶ They understand "βιάζεται" as "is being resisted" or "is being attacked." Although Satan is the enemy of God's Kingdom and does all he can to hinder its work among men (Matt. 13:19, 39), the idea of Satan attacking God's Kingdom itself is not found in the Bible. Satan can only wage his war against the sons of the Kingdom but not the Kingdom itself. In the conflict motif, it is always the Kingdom of God which attacks the kingdom of Satan. God is always the aggressor; Satan is on the defensive and is always defeated by God. The stronger invades the house of the strong man (Matt. 12:28). Satan is toppled from heaven (Luke 10:18). Demons quail before Jesus' presence (Mark 1:24). Michael

³⁵Cf. G. E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 161-62; W. Foerster, "ἀρπάζω" TDNT 1: 472-73.

³⁶See A. Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (London: S.C.M., 1958), p. 210; A. N. Wilder, Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, 1950, 1939), pp. 58, 149-50; Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment, p. 123, considers this one of the two possible meanings.

and his angels wage war against Satan (Rev. 12:7-9). It is contrary to this basic motif to think of God's Kingdom itself as actually experiencing violence at the hands of evil spirits. Therefore, this interpretation is not appropriate either.

In the Sense of "Is Being Compelled to Come"

1. Some commentators refer this verse to the misguided efforts of the Zealots to establish a national-political earthly kingdom by force. The revolutionary Zealots (violent men) are trying to seize the kingdom and to compel its coming by illegitimate means.³⁷ The words of Jesus contain an implied condemnation of their erroneous views. J. Weiss even proposed that Jesus also means to rebuke the Baptist for having aroused such a movement.³⁸ The difficulties here are that first, Matthew's context deals with the Prophets, the Law, John the Baptist, Jesus and the Kingdom. Thus there is no reason for Jesus to talk about the Zealot movement in His reply to the messengers from John.³⁹ Second, the Zealot movement had already begun before the

³⁷See A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Macmillan, 1915), pp. 155-56; cf. C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels, Edited with An Introduction and A Commentary, 2 vols. Second Edition revised and partly rewritten (London: Macmillan, 1927) 2:163-64; see also J. Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 206; O. Cullmann, The State in the New Testament (New York: Scribners, 1956), pp. 20-22; G. Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 66.

³⁸Weiss, Kingdom, pp. 15-16.

³⁹Cf. G. Schrenk, "βιάζονται" TDNT 1:611.

appearance of John, whereas Jesus refers to something taking place only since the days of John. There is no specific incident in history of this happening at this particular time. Therefore, this interpretation is not correct.

2. A. Schweitzer, followed by M. Werner,⁴⁰ asserts that the Kingdom of God is compelled to come by the preaching of Jesus and His disciples. He refers this verse to the movement of repentance which Jesus expected His preaching to arouse among the people, and proposes that Jesus and His disciples are the "men of violence" who would compel the Kingdom to come through the repentance awakened by their preaching. This interpretation, however, is built on the misunderstanding of the role of Jesus. They treat Jesus only as the apocalyptic prophet and not as the Son of God. In fact, Jesus and His ministry is the realization of God's Kingdom itself. There is no need for Jesus to compel the coming of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, although some later rabbis taught that the coming of the Kingdom could be hastened by the repentance and faithfulness of Israel,⁴¹ Jesus' teaching of the coming of the Kingdom of God is entirely in God's hands. What man can do is to pray that the Kingdom might come, and to lay hold of it when it comes. But

⁴⁰A. Schweitzer, Quest, pp. 355 ; The Mystery of the Kingdom of God (London: Black, 1913), pp. 64 , 110-12; M. Werner, The Formation of Christian Dogma (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 70 .

⁴¹Cf. G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1927), 2:350-52.

no man nor his efforts can compel or prevent its coming.

In the Sense of "Is Being Seized Forcibly" or "Is Being Taken by Storm"

Those Who Are Condemned by Jesus

A. Plummer, following F. J. A. Hort,⁴² refers to this verse to express that a new period of the Kingdom of Heaven has set in after what are called the days of John the Baptist, and that his preaching had led to a violent and impetuous thronging to gather round Jesus and His disciples, and this unhealthy excited throng is pressing violently into the Kingdom of God. In the context, however, Jesus is not condemning but commending John the Baptist and the influence of his ministry. Again, Matt. 11:18 indicates that the influence of John's ministry is not as great as what Plummer thinks. John, as well as Jesus, had often been rejected by the people who heard him. Another problem of this interpretation is the same as that of the next one and this will be dealt with later.

Those Who Are Commended by Jesus

Many scholars understand this verse as "the Kingdom of Heaven is forcibly seized by its friends, and these eager men are enthusiastically seizing it (or are forcing their way into it)." This rendering was adopted as early as Clement of Alexandria in the second century, and then followed by

⁴²A Plummer, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 162; F. J. A. Hort, Judaistic Christianity (London: Macmillan, 1894), p. 26.

Erasmus, Luther (who popularized this view), Holtzmann, Dibelius, Schniewind and some other modern scholars.⁴³ It seems that this is a much better solution. Nevertheless, it is not entirely satisfactory, since in this interpretation the second line virtually repeats what has already been said in the first. This tautology is better to be avoided unless no other suitable meaning is possible.

In the Sense of "Is Brought Forward Forcefully"

Some commentators render this verse as "the Kingdom of God is brought forward forcefully either by John and Jesus,⁴⁴ or by God,⁴⁵ and forceful people, those who are commended by Jesus, seize it." This is a likely rendering. In this case, the passive has no difference from the deponent middle. Since it is quite the same in substance whether one says "the Kingdom is brought forward forcefully" or "the Kingdom presses forward forcefully."⁴⁶ On account of the fact that in Greek sources relevant to the New Testament, is considerably more common in the deponent middle than in

⁴³Cf. J. H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Co., 1880), p. 101; G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:610; Arndt-Gingrich, p. 141; The most popular Chinese Version of the Bible (Kuoyu Bible) follows this interpretation.

⁴⁴R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), pp. 437-38.

⁴⁵See G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:611.

⁴⁶Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 437.

in passive voices,⁴⁷ it is better to adopt the deponent middle here for the same meaning.

In the Sense of "Is Suffering
Violence of Interpretation"

Recently, James Swetnam proposed a novel alternative in taking βιάζεται as passive.⁴⁸ He renders this verse to mean that from the time of John the Kingdom has been suffering violence of interpretation (βιάζεται); and those who are of like-minded violence (βιασταί)--that is, who understand the Kingdom in the same way--are the ones who snatch it away (ἄρπάξουσιν). This suggestion, however, adds an unparalleled meaning ("to suffer violence of interpretation") to the verb, and hence is unsuitable.

Βιάζεται as Middle

If βιάζεται is treated as middle, this verse can be interpreted in two ways in its association with βιασταί

Βιασταί in the Bad Sense

D. A. Carson and some other commentators consider this verse as a form of antanclasis (βιασταί is different from or contradictory to βιάζεται),⁴⁹ and render it as "the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing; and violent

⁴⁷See above, p. 167.

⁴⁸J. Swetnam, "A Review of Spicq" Biblica 61 (1980): 440-42.

⁴⁹See above, pp. 167-69; 171.

or rapacious men have been trying to plunder it."⁵⁰ Carson is right concerning the first part of the verse in treating the verb *βιάζεται* as a deponent middle. He is wrong, however, in two ways concerning the latter half of the verse. First, he follows many others in insisting that the noun *βιασταί* must be seen in the negative connotations of violence and rapacity, and the verb *ἀρπάζουσιν* also has the evil connotation of plundering. But this point cannot be established linguistically.⁵¹ Second, Carson's interpretation is not in accordance with Jesus' parallel saying in Luke 16:16, where Jesus uses the same word *βιάζεται* and says that "the gospel of the Kingdom is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it."⁵² Carson is inconsistent either in bringing out the thought of these two sayings or in his interpretation of the same word *βιάζεται*. Such an interpretation is difficult to defend.

Βιασταί in the Good Sense

Many scholars take the verb *βιάζεται* as a middle, and the noun *βιασταί* as "forceful men or vigorous men--men of courage, fortitude, determination," and the second verb *ἀρπάζουσιν* in a favorable sense as "to seize or to lay hold of." Thus this verse reads as ". . . the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold

⁵⁰ See Carson, Matthew, p. 267.

⁵¹ See above, pp. 169-70.

⁵² NIV; NASB; AV; and almost all the versions. See also below, pp. 183-89.

of it."⁵³ The two lines express two thoughts, the first relating to the Kingdom itself, the second to the men who are eagerly taking possession of it, or pressing their way into it. Yet between the two there is a very close connection. Hendriksen examines the context and makes this comment:

The Kingdom, says Jesus, ever since the days of John's first appearance upon the scene has been pressing forward vigorously, forcefully. It is doing so now, as is clear from the fact that sick are being healed, lepers cleansed, the dead raised, sinners converted to everlasting life, all this now as never before. Still, by no means everybody is entering. Many, very many, even now are refusing and resisting. But vigorous or forceful men, people who dare to break away from faulty human tradition and to return to the Word in all its purity, no matter what may be the cost to themselves, such individuals are eagerly taking possession of the Kingdom; that is, in their hearts and lives that kingship or reign of God and of Christ is being established.⁵⁴

Three main objections are raised against this interpretation. First, it brings a notion of "force" to the Kingdom contrary to the Gospels' emphases. Second, the noun βιασταί must designate violent, evil men. Third, the

⁵³NIV; RSVmg; See R. Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man (London: Lutterworth, 1943), pp. 108-9; N. B. Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ (London: Tyndale, 1951), pp. 247-48; T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus (London: S.C.M., 1949), pp. 134-35; G. Duncan, Jesus, Son of Man (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 100; A. T. Cadoux, The Theology of Jesus (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1940), p. 249; M. Black, Expository Times 63 (1952): 290; R. Schnackenburg, Kingdom, pp. 129-32; A. M. Hunter, Introducing New Testament Theology (London: S.C.M., 1957), p. 18; H. Ridderbos, Kingdom, p. 54; G. E. Ladd, Presence, pp. 162-64; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 437-38; W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 489-90; O. Betz, "The Eschatological Interpretation of the Sinai Tradition in Qumran and in the New Testament," Revue de Qumran 6 (1967):89-107; G. A. Deissmann, Bible Studies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 258.

⁵⁴Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 489-90.

second phrase must be taken as an expansion of the first, and thus the verb *βιάζεται* must be understood as "suffering violence from evil men" in the light of the meaning of *βιασταί*.⁵⁵ The first objection is insubstantial. The context obviously shows that the Kingdom has come with holy power and magnificent energy, such as healing the sick; cleansing the lepers; raising the dead; and so forth, and through these and Jesus' words the Holy Spirit was at work in the hearts of men. Against the second objection, linguistically, *βιασταί* does not always mean evil men. Clement of Alexandria, Basil, Chrysostom, Erasmus, Luther and many others felt no difficulty in understanding it to mean forceful good men who seize the Kingdom.⁵⁶ Against the third objection, there is no reason why the two parts of the sentence must describe the same thing. They can just as well in Biblical usage supplement and complement each other. To say that "the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and violent men assault it" is redundancy. To say, "The Kingdom of heaven acts powerfully and requires a powerful reaction" makes much better sense. Since Jesus uses radical metaphors to describe the reaction of men to the Kingdom, such as cutting off one's hand; plucking out one's eye (Mark 9:43, 45, 47), it is consistent with His teaching to interpret *βιασταί* in terms of the radical

⁵⁵Cf. Carson, Matthew, p. 266; Schrenk, "*βιάζομαι*" TDNT 1:610-14.

⁵⁶See above, p. 168; see also G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 81.

reaction of those who receive the Kingdom.

In other sayings, Jesus also demanded radical conduct of those who would be His disciples. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be My disciple . . . , any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26, 33)." What Jesus requires of His disciple is the attitude of total commitment. In His parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, again He taught that a man should be willing to surrender everything he possesses to secure the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:44-46).⁵⁷ He told a rich man that he must rid himself of all his earthly possessions to enter into the Kingdom (Matt. 19:16-24). Thus entrance into the Kingdom of God is not passively achieved, but actively, forcefully seized, although this is always the result of Holy Spirit's work. It demands radical, bold reaction. The words βιασταί and ἀπράζουσιν can adequately express this idea.

In Matthew chapter eleven, the entire trend of the discourse deals, not with violence against the Kingdom, but with the indifference and dissatisfaction that hinder men from entering it with zest.⁵⁸ Therefore Jesus pronounces the true situation and encourages His hearers to be stimulated by the energy and force with which the Kingdom comes and to press their way into it with energy and force too.

⁵⁷ See below, pp. 191-200.

⁵⁸ See Matt. 11:15-24; cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 437.

They are not "forceful" by nature, and thus better than others; but the Kingdom itself, with all its gifts, treasures, and blessings, puts power and courage into those who are willing to obey Jesus to seize it all.⁵⁹

This interpretation is also supported by Jesus' similar saying elsewhere in Luke 16:16, "The good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it (εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται)," which will be discussed next.

The Meaning of Luke 16:16

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the Kingdom of God is being preached (εὐαγγελίζομαι), and πᾶς εἰς αὐτὴν βιάζεται."

The verb εὐαγγελίζομαι in Luke 16:16 is spoken by Jesus as a paraphrase for βιάζεται in Matt. 11:12,⁶⁰ the meaning of the first phrase is commonly agreed as, "the Kingdom of God has come powerfully,"⁶¹ or "the message of the powerful kingly rule of God has come in Christ is preached."⁶² This interpretation fits in with Jesus' other positive statements about the coming of the Kingdom.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See above, pp. 166-67.

⁶¹ Marshall, Luke, *ibid.*

⁶² Cf. Geldenhuys, Luke, pp. 420-21.

⁶³ Eg. Matt. 11:12. In Luke 16:16 the passive verb εὐαγγελίζομαι has substituted the middle deponent βιάζεται in Matthew. Cf. Marshall, Luke, p. 629.

However, the second phrase has caused some debate, namely, is βιάζεται here passive or middle? If it is passive, what does it mean? If it is middle, is it in a positive sense, that is, "everyone forces his way into it"; or in a negative sense, that is, "everyone forces his way into it by wrong means"; or even in the sense of "everyone exerts force against it" that is, "the opponents, whether the Pharisees or demonic powers, oppress the Kingdom." What is the meaning of the word πᾶς? On those questions, the scholars are again divided.

Βιάζεται as Passive

In the Sense of "Everyone Is Forced Into It"

Some scholars thus interpret this phrase along the lines of Luke 14:23 "and compel them to come in (ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν)." ⁶⁴ However, this parallelism is not required. It is artificial to connect those two passages while the context of the latter plainly indicates the opposite. ⁶⁵ Besides, the parallel saying in Matt. 11:12 suggests a different view.

In the Sense of "Everyone Is Urgently Invited to Enter It"

Some scholars interpret βιάζεται in light of

⁶⁴Cf. B. S. Easton, The Gospel According to St. Luke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 248; E. Kasemann, Essays on New Testament Themes (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allason, 1964), p. 42.

⁶⁵Luke 14:26, 33, Jesus emphasizes the cost of being a disciple.

παραβιάζεται (urge or constrain) in Luke 24:29 and Acts 16:15, and propose the meaning "to be urgently invited" for it.⁶⁶ This alternative is somewhat better than the former one. However, it is not what the context suggests. Besides, the cognate word παραβιάζεται in both cases is definitely used as a deponent middle.

Βιάζεται as Middle

In the Sense of "Everyone Exerts Force Against It--the Opponents, Whether the Pharisees or Demonic Powers, Oppress the Kingdom"

While mentioning the demonic powers as a possibility, E. E. Ellis prefers to refer to the Pharisees as Jesus' opponents who fight against the Kingdom and seek to keep men out of it.⁶⁷ In either case, however, this violates the context. Because if there were a contrast with εὐαγγελίζεται one should expect an adversative such as, ἀλλά instead of καί. Furthermore, in Greek, βιάζεσθαι εἰς does not mean "to exert force against" but "forcefully to press into"; "to fight against" would be βιάζεσθαι with the accusative, and if a preposition were used it would be πρὸς or ἐπί.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Cf. W. F. Arndt, The Gospel According to St. Luke (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 361; I. H. Marshall, Luke, p. 629.

⁶⁷E. E. Ellis, The Gospel of Luke (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 204-5.

⁶⁸See G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:612.

In the Sense of "Everyone
Seeks to Force It to Its
Birth Through Violence"

Here "everyone" would mean everyone of the Zealots, who are trying to establish a national-political earthly kingdom by force.⁶⁹ However, this is unlikely also at this time in history. The criticism against the similar interpretation of Matt. 11:12 can also be applied here.⁷⁰

In the Sense of "Everyone Forces
His Way Into It by Wrong Means"

W. F. Arndt, followed by F. W. Danker,⁷¹ holds to this interpretation. Arndt views this phrase as a criticism leveled by Jesus against those who attempt to force their way into the Kingdom without lopping off their favorite sins, evil associations and habits. Although Danker supports this by insisting that εἰς here must imply hostile intent, this is not likely.⁷² This rendering, adding a bad sense to the verb, is similar to A. Plummer's improper treatment on βιάζεται both in Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 and must also be rejected.⁷³ Again, the context of Luke 16:16 is

⁶⁹Cf. Ellis, Luke, p. 204.

⁷⁰See Above, pp. 174-75.

⁷¹Arndt, Luke, p. 361; Danker, "Luke 16:16," pp. 34-36.

⁷²Danker, *Ibid*; for the opposite meaning of see Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:612.

⁷³Plummer inconsistently treats βιάζεται as passive in Matthew but middle in Luke. See above, p. Cf. A. Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 389.

definitely in favor of taking βιάζεται in a positive sense.⁷⁴

In the Sense of "Everyone Forces His Way Into It"

This positive view has been unanimously held by the Church Fathers,⁷⁵ and is shared by many modern scholars.⁷⁶ After linguistic and grammatical examinations, G. Schrenk asserts with full assurance that here βιάζεται is a deponent middle with a good sense, which reminds the reader of the ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν (strive to enter) of Luke 13:24 and expresses the resolute and directed movement of crowding masses.⁷⁷ N. Geldenhuys comments on this verse saying that everyone who listens to Jesus in faith (like many "publicans" and sinners) presses with the greatest earnestness, self-denial and determination, as though with spiritual violence, into the kingdom . . . ; they are the people who strive hard to enter by the narrow gate.⁷⁸ In other words, what Jesus means here is that, "Now the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, i.e., the Holy Spirit is at work, and everyone enters it with sincere repentance and genuine faith in Him

⁷⁴ See below, pp. 187-88.

⁷⁵ Cf. Danker, "Luke: 16:16," p. 233.

⁷⁶ Eg. R. Otto; T. W. Manson; R. Schnackenburg; H. Ridderbos; G. E. Ladd; R. C. H. Lenski; W. Hendrikson; etc., cf. footnote 49 above; others see the commentaries by N. Geldenhuys, Leon Morris, I. H. Marshall; G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:612-13; Deissmann, Bible Studies, p. 258.

⁷⁷ G. Schrenk, "βιάζομαι" TDNT 1:612-13.

⁷⁸ Luke 13:24.

with total commitment through the Holy Spirit's work; and only in this way, under the powerful rule of God, can one try to practice all the requirements of the Law." This interpretation is the most satisfactory one, and it fits well into the immediate context where Jesus wants His disciples to think of man like the Prudent Manager. As the unjust manager who handles the worldly possessions prudently and sacrificially in order to prepare places for himself after his imminent dismissal, so also the believers should use their earthly means wisely and sacrificially as an expression of their faith and in grace be received into heaven.⁷⁹ Similar to this parable, as those who, through the Spirit's work, respond to Jesus' message see the value of entrance to God's Kingdom they are ready to seek entrance, or in the words of Luke 16:16 to force their way in, in contrast to the Pharisees, who claim to hold the Law and the Prophets, who did not make use of their opportunity.⁸⁰

The Meaning of πᾶς (Everyone)

Here πᾶς cannot be understood as an assertion of universalism, for this is totally contrary to the context. There were many Pharisees and Jews who rejected the Gospel

⁷⁹Erich H. Kiehl, "The Parable of the Unjust Manager in the Light of Contemporary Economic Life" (an unpublished Doctor of Theology Dissertatin at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, 1959), pp. 77-78, 122, 131-34.

⁸⁰Cf. L. Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 251; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospel (Columbia: Luthern Book Concern, 1934), p. 528.

and still do today, and thus cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Lenski is right when he suggests that "everyone" is naturally restricted by the sense of the clause, and covers those who enter the Kingdom, and those alone.⁸¹

Summary

1. Both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 are genuine and similar sayings of Jesus, although they were spoken on two different occasions.

2. The verb *βιάζεται*, in both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16, is a deponent middle in a good sense. The meaning in Matt. 11:12 is that "the Kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing"; while in Luke 16:16, "everyone forces his way into it."

3. The noun *βιασταί* in Matt. 11:12 bears a good sense too, referring to the good men who through the Spirit's work forcefully seize the Kingdom.

4. The verb *ἀρπάζουσιν* in Matt. 11:12 is to be understood also in the good sense in this context, and carries the meaning of "men with resolute earnestness are taking possession of it."

5. Both Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 express the idea of the forceful coming of the Kingdom of God (that is, the dynamic rule of God in Jesus and the powerful ministry He manifests), and the forceful response of men (that is, the sincere repentance and faith in Jesus with total commitment

⁸¹Lenski, St. Luke's Gospel, p. 529.

to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit.)

6. The forceful, dramatic coming of the Kingdom of God can be seen from Jesus' powerful ministry of healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, converting the sinners, preaching the gospel, and so forth.

7. The thought of the forceful response of men can be seen in Jesus categorical teaching using phrases such as, cutting off one's hand, plucking out one's eye, loving Him more than anyone else, giving up everything one has, the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl,⁸² and so forth. All these emphasize or imply men's forceful response to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

⁸²See below, pp. 191-200.

CHAPTER VI

THE PARABLES OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL (ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND MEN'S TOTAL COMMITMENT TO JESUS)

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl in Matt. 13:44-46 express the important point that faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him is necessary for entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.¹ These two parables relate closely to each other just like twins. They reinforce and illustrate Jesus' saying of Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16. Although here the forceful, aggressive coming of the Kingdom of Heaven is not implied, the forceful and bold response of men for entering that Kingdom is explicitly asserted.² This chapter first discusses the relationship between these two parables, then investigates their historical settings, their central truth, their relationship with Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16, and finally evaluates some inappropriate interpretations of them.

¹This is not the merit of men but the work of the Holy Spirit. See below, p. 198-99.

²This forceful response of men is the result of the Holy Spirit's work, which leads men to repent sincerely and to believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him. See above, pp. 189-90.

The Relationship Between These Two Parables

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl have traditionally been treated as twin parables that teach the same main point, even though some scholars recently raise the question whether they originally belonged together.³ Their relatedness can be seen from three aspects: first, from their same structure, that is, a single event narrated in past time;⁴ second, from their same major thought, that is, the value of the discovered objects; third, from their same emphasis on the total investment the man made in each case.⁵ In addition, the "again" (παλιν) of verse 45 clearly indicates that these two parables are intimately related in meaning, one following the other.⁶

³Because of the change of tense and his view of the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, see J. Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1972,) p. 90; because of the different introductory formula, see R. H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 102.

⁴The present verbs in v. 44 do not contradict this statement, since the present tense is that of the historical present. Cf. A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 203.

⁵Almost all the scholars and the major commentators agree on this point. Cf. the commentaries by A. H. McNeile, A. Plummer, H. B. Green, D. Hill, W. Hendriksen, F. W. Beare, etc., and the books by C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 86; A. M. Hunter, Interpreting the Parables (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), pp. 64-65; Jeremias, Parables, p. 201; J. D. Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13 (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), p. 113; Stein, Parables, p. 103. Some different opinions by commentators like C. I. Scofield, J. F. Walvoord, Watchman Nee, will be dealt with later, see pp. 200-6.

⁶See Arndt-Gingrich, pp. 606-7. Some scholars think that here is Matthew's arrangement of the Gospel traditions,

The Historical Setting of These Two Parables

The Hidden Treasure

In ancient times, it was not uncommon for people to safeguard their money, jewels, and other valuables by burying them in the ground, especially in time of war. If the owner died, such treasure would remain hidden, often for centuries, until by chance it was discovered. According to Talmudic law "moveables," such as the hidden treasure, could only be acquired by "lifting."⁷ If it was found by the new owner of the field or his slave, it would automatically belong to the new owner. Again, if it is found and lifted by a paid day laborer, it would also become the property of the owner. The man in this parable must have been a paid day laborer. He therefore covered up the treasure, purchased the field by selling all that he had, and then, as the new owner of the field possessed the treasure for himself by lifting it.⁸

About the question of the morality of the man's action, some suggest that this involved nothing immoral;⁹ others feel that it falls far short of the Golden Rule.¹⁰ Jeremias stresses that morality is not under consideration

cf., Stein, Parables, p. 102. However, it is more likely that this is spoken by Jesus Himself.

⁷ See J. D. M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Treasure in the Field (Mt. XIII, 44)," Zeitschrift Fur Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 54 (1963):35.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 31-42.

⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰ Stein, Parables, p. 100.

here at all.¹¹ In any case, it is important to remind an interpreter that a parable generally teaches a single main point; the details are not to be pressed.¹²

The Pearl

In the ancient Middle East, pearls were fabulously priced. Most of them were obtained from the Persian Gulf or from the Indian Ocean.¹³ Many merchants sought to buy good pearls. In this parable, the Greek term ἔμπορος indicates that the man is not a shopkeeper but a wholesale dealer.¹⁴ Dissatisfied with the pearls he has been able to obtain up to the present, he is in search of the very best. When he sees this pearl of great value, he sells all his possessions to buy it.

The Point of Comparison and The Central Truth of These Twin Parables

Both parables depict a similar and simple situation that is, a man who unexpectedly finds a very precious object and sells all in order to obtain it. However, a survey of scholars suggest that there is a diversity of opinion on the

¹¹Jeremias, Parables, p. 199.

¹²Cf. C. W. F. Smith, The Jesus of the Parables (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), pp. 93 E. Linnemann, Parables of Jesus (London: SPCK, 1966), pp. 98-99. Also see above, pp. 81, 86.

¹³See W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 576; Jeremias, Parables, p. 199.

¹⁴Modern Greek still uses the same word. Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, p. 257.

point Jesus was making in these two parables. Commentators have suggested the following possibilities:¹⁵

1. The hiddenness of the Kingdom of God.
2. The searching and finding of the Kingdom of God.
3. The joy of sharing in the Kingdom of God.
4. The value of the Kingdom of God.
5. The sacrifice or total investment required to enter the Kingdom of God.

The first three possibilities are not likely. Against the first, the "hiddenness" motif is present only in the first parable and not in the second. In the pearl market, anyone who came before the merchant might also have the opportunity to see the pearl and to purchase it. Furthermore, according to Jesus' teaching, the Kingdom of God is not hidden, but is manifesting itself through His ministry and His presence.¹⁶ Only to those unbelieving Jews, was there a hiddenness but this was not due to any quality innate in the Kingdom itself, but rather to their unwillingness to listen on Jesus' terms, to repent and receive the Kingdom.¹⁷

Against the second, the element of "searching" is definitely not contained in the parable of the Hidden Treasure. The man found it by sheer chance. Even in the parable

¹⁵Kingsbury, Parables, p. 113; Stein, Parables, p. 102.

¹⁶See above, pp. 39-43.

¹⁷Cf. Kingsbury, Parables, p. 114; Stein, Parables, pp. 102-3.

of the Pearl, the merchant does not set out to find exclusively one particularly valuable pearl. He was looking for all types of fine pearls. Therefore, neither parable can be interpreted as emphasizing the need to search for the Kingdom of God, even though Jesus did teach elsewhere to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33; 7:7).

Again, the element of "finding" should not be treated as a parallel to Jesus' teaching on finding the way to life (Matt. 7:14), although it is described in both parables. In either case, the finder finds the precious object by chance. Moreover, it is also improper to stress the point that the treasure is discovered accidentally, but the pearl only after strenuous search.¹⁸ In fact, the three elements of hiddenness, searching, and finding in these twin parables belong strictly to the scenic framework of the narrative.

Against the third, the emphasis on the "joy" of the finding is likewise found in only the first parable. The purpose for recording the joy of the laborer is to underline the great value of the treasure he has found. Thus it is improper to emphasize that here "joy" is the key word of these twin parables.¹⁹ In all these suggested possibilities, they

¹⁸So do McNeile, Matthew, p. 203; Plummer, Matthew, p. 196; Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 576; Green, Matthew, p. 137; Hunter, Parable, p. 64-65. The proper interpretation see, Beare, Matthew, p. 314-35; Hill, Matthew, pp. 237-38; Kingsbury, Parable, pp. 110-17; Jeremias, Parables, p. 200; Stein, Parables, pp. 102-3.

¹⁹So does Jeremias, Parables, pp. 200-1. The proper interpretation see Kingsbury, Parables, p. 114; Stein, Parables, p. 103.

either do not appear in both parables, or have been shown to be improper. It is logical to assert that the real central thought of these twin parables should be emphasized in both of the twin parables and can be fitted well into Jesus' teaching elsewhere about the Kingdom of God.

The fourth and the fifth possibilities are common and important elements which make up the narrative part of the parables: a precious object is found, and, in each case, the finder sells all he has to obtain the precious object. The former signifies that the "value" of the Kingdom is found by the man; the latter indicates the "sacrifice" or "total investment" of the man who wants to enter into the Kingdom. It is clear that the central truth lies in one of these common elements, even though they are in a cause-and-effect relationship.

In view of the facts that, first, these twin parables are addressed to the disciples,²⁰ and these disciples had some understanding of the precious value of the Kingdom--later events show that this was still an imperfect understanding (See Acts 1:6). What they needed to be often reminded of is the cost of discipleship. Second, the end stress of both parables is on each man selling all and purchasing the precious object.²¹ It is reasonable to conclude that the primary emphasis is the similar behavior of

²⁰See Matt. 13:36.

²¹The rule of end stress: usually the main point of a parable comes at the end of that parable. See Stein, Parables, pp. 56, 123, 127; Hunter, Parables, p. 11.

"sacrifice" or "total investment" of both men in the twin parables. This point agrees well with Jesus' teachings found elsewhere concerning counting the cost involved in following Him.²² However, some scholars object against the use of the term "sacrifice" to describe the central truth.²³ They are correct. Because to give up something of lesser value in order to obtain the supreme value is not "sacrifice" at all. The term "sacrifice" leads easily to a misconception of a reluctant, difficult, and heroic decision which is contrary to what Jesus means. In the first parable, it is from "joy" that the man sells all that he has. There is no trace of grief or sorrow, or reluctance in his heart, but, on the contrary, his heart is full of happiness and willingness. He invests totally all his wealth and future to what he has found. This attitude of willingness is also implicitly expressed in the second parable through the merchant's total investment on the precious pearl he saw. Therefore, both parables stress the picture of the "total commitment" of a disciple to the Lord Jesus. All those who want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, must respond through the Spirit's work in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.²⁴

²²See Luke 14:25-33; Matt. 8:19-22; 10:37-39; 11:12; 16:24; 19:21; etc.

²³Cf. Linnemann, Parables, p. 100; Stein, Parables, pp. 103-4.

²⁴Cf. Matt. 5:29, 30; 8:22; 10:34-39; 18:8-9; 19:12, 21, 29. Kingsbury, Parables, pp. 115-16. Of course, these responses are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit.

To sum up the discussions, the point of comparison of these twin parables can be stated as follows: Even as the laborer who found a treasure in a field responded by selling all he possessed to buy the field in order to obtain the treasure and as the merchant who found an especially valuable pearl also responded by selling all he possessed in order to buy the pearl, so the disciples through the Spirit's work, knowing the value of the Kingdom of Heaven, respond to God's kingly rule by committing themselves without reserve to Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.²⁵ Again, their central truth is that those who can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven are those who not only hear the Gospel of the Kingdom of God but also realize its value, respond to Jesus' kingly rule, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

The Relationship Between Matthew 11:12,
Luke 16:16 and These Twin Parables

It has been shown above that Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 refer to the forceful coming of the Kingdom of God and the forceful and bold response of those who want to enter into God's Kingdom.²⁶ Again, the meaning of "the forceful response" is the action of sincere repentance to God and faith in Jesus with total commitment, through the Spirit's work, to Him who is the King of God's Kingdom.²⁷ In the

²⁵ Cf. Kingsbury, *ibid.*

²⁶ See above, pp. 161-90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl, Jesus illustrates this total commitment by the central truth of these twin parables, that is, after knowing the value of the precious object, the man sells all that he has in order to obtain that precious object. In other words, when the value of the Kingdom of God is known by Jesus' followers, through the Spirit's work, they commit themselves totally and willingly to the King of God's Kingdom (Jesus), in order to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is evident that the passages of Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16 can be reinforced by the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl and vice versa.²⁸

Some Different Interpretations

To round out the discussions, two different but unsuitable interpretations are introduced as follows.

1. The Dispensationalists²⁹ assert that the buyers of the field and the pearl in Matt. 13:44-46 should not be identified with Jesus' disciples, because the sinners have nothing to sell, nor is Christ for sale. On the contrary, these parables should signify Jesus' purchase of the sinners, that is, the remnant of Israel and the Church, with the priceless cost of His own blood. Hence C. I. Scofield comments:

²⁸It is strange that many scholars while they agree with this interpretation of those twin parables, however, treat βιάζονται in Matt. 11:12 as passive in the bad sense, and make them irrelevant to each other. Cf. the commentaries by A. H. McNeil, D. Hill, H. B. Green, F. W. Beare, etc. Also see Kingsbury, Matthew, p. 142; Parables, pp. 113-17.

²⁹For the background and teachings of Dispensationalism see above, pp. 54-58.

The interpretation of the parable of the treasure, which makes the buyer of the field to be a sinner who is seeking Christ, has no warrant in the parable itself. . . . The seeking sinner does not buy. . . . the sinner has nothing to sell; neither is Christ for sale or hidden in a field; nor, having found Christ, does the sinner hide Him again. . . . At every point the interpretation breaks down. The field is the world (v. 38), which was purchased by our Lord at the priceless cost of His own blood in order that He might have the treasure (1 Peter 1:18). As Israel was God's treasure in the Old Testament times (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 135:4), so there is at the present time "a remnant [of Israel] chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5) The true Church is the pearl of great value. . . . Christ, having given Himself for the pearl, is now preparing it for presentation to Himself. . . .³⁰

Although this interpretation negates the idea that a man can pay for the Kingdom of God, that is, God's salvation, it twists the main point of these parables by using the allegorical method.

It is definitely incorrect to say that a man can pay a price to buy God's salvation. But it is also erroneous to emphasize the literal meaning of any single word in the parable. If the words "buy" and "sell" are pressed in their literal explanations, then strange questions follow, such as "What does Jesus sell?"; "to whom does He sell all He has?"; "Why does Jesus need to buy the Kingdom of God, since it already belongs to Him?"; "If the Kingdom of God is the kingly rule of God in and through the person and mission of Jesus, then what sense does it make that Jesus buys the Kingdom of God?" Furthermore, Scofield makes these parables incomplete, because according to his interpretation, nothing

³⁰ See C. I. Scofield, ed., Oxford NIV Scofield Study Bible, New Scofield Study System with introductions, annotations, and subject chain references (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 993.

in these parables can be used to denote the thought that one enters into the Kingdom through faith in Jesus. The elements of "selling" and "buying" in the parables, as well as "hidden-ness," "searching," and "finding," belong strictly to the incidental facts of the narrative. They declare a central truth of the parable, but their own literal meaning should not be pressed.³¹

J. F. Walvoord, elaborating on this interpretation, also refers the hidden treasure to the nation Israel.³² He relies on Ex. 19:5 and Ps. 135:4 to assert that throughout history Israel has been a treasure not recognized either by the world or even by the evangelical Christians. Therefore, he comments thus on the parable of the Hidden Treasure:

It was Jesus who sold all that He had in order to buy the treasure, Israel, and to purchase it with His own blood (Phil. 2:7-8; 1 Peter 1:18-19). During the present age, Israel is a hidden entity in the world, only to emerge at the end of the age as a major factor in the prophetic fulfillment leading up to the second coming of Christ.³³

In regard to the parable of the Pearl, Walvoord agrees that the same thought is presented as in the preceding one; only here, the pearl represents the church rather than Israel. Moreover, he also emphasizes the similarity between the formation of a pearl through an oyster's irritation and

³¹The central truth of these twin parables see above, p. 199.

³²J. F. Walvoord, Matthew--Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 104-5.

³³Ibid., p. 105.

that of the church causing by Christ's wounds. He comments:

In the world of gems, the pearl is uniquely formed organically. Its formation occurs because of an irritation in the tender side of an oyster. There is a sense in which the church was formed out of the wounds of Christ and has been made possible by His death and sacrifice.³⁴

This typical dispensational interpretation makes these twin parables represent a special doctrine of the Dispensationalism, that is, God has two major purposes and programs, one for Israel and another for the Church. This, however, brings with it many difficulties. Besides the criticisms applied to Scofield's interpretation,³⁵ one may ask the questions: On the basis of the Matthean text, how can Walvoord be so sure that the treasure represents Israel while the pearl is the Church? If this is true, why did not Jesus make it clear? Why did Jesus use the same term "the Kingdom of Heaven" in both parables, if, according to the dispensational view, it is only related to the Jews? How can the meaning of the formation of the pearl be pressed when it is not even mentioned in the parable? . . . God has only one plan of salvation through Christ for all mankind including both the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore the original meaning of Jesus cannot mean the hidden treasure as the nation of Israel and the pearl as being the Church, nor to render the man's selling and buying as His death and redemption.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵See above, pp. 200-2.

2. Watchman Nee proposes a similar but more sophisticated alternative. Again, he uses the allegorical method to interpret these twin parables:³⁶

"treasure"--the glory of the Kingdom of God.

"field"--the world.

"hidden in the field"--From the time of creation until John the Baptist, God Himself had hidden the glory of the Kingdom of God in the world.

"which a man found"--the work of Christ on earth. Christ is the one who first discovered it; neither angels nor prophets could have disclosed it.

"and hid"--Since the Jews have rejected Christ and His Kingdom, the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven is now hidden (Christ hides Himself and His many mighty works).

"in his joy"--the joy of Christ (Luke 10:17-21).

"he goes"--Christ goes to the cross at Jerusalem.

"and sells all that he has"--Christ sacrifices all, even His life.

"and buys that field"--The scope of the purchase is the world. Thus propitiation is for the whole world, while sin-offering is for believers. The Lord's heart is also upon the earth; therefore, He will come again to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

"pearl"--the beauty of the church.

"the man who finds pearls"--Christ intends to obtain many pearls.

³⁶Nee, Kingdom, pp. 161-66.

"a pearl of great price"--a glorious church without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27).

"sold all"--Christ's death.

"bought"--the church is bought with a price by Christ.

"the formation of pearl"--the formation of the church.

Although this interpretation appears "neat" on the surface, it shares some of the same errors of the previous two. Moreover, the allegorical methodology is definitely inappropriate in interpreting parables.³⁷ A parable is a story drawn from everyday life to convey a religious truth. Normally a parable has only one point of comparison and therefore it is designed essentially to convey a single central truth rather than more than one. Interpreters must not press the details of a parable.

Summary

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl are intimately related in meaning. They teach the same main point that while a man knows the value of the object, he responds by selling all he possesses in order to obtain that precious object. In other words, the primary emphasis of these twin parables is man's "total investment" for obtaining precious object. The elements of "hiddenness," "finding,"

³⁷Cf. Martin H. Scharlemann, Proclaiming the Parables (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 28. See also above, pp. 79-81.

"searching," "selling," "buying" in the parables belong strictly to the incidental facts of the narrative, and thus their literal meaning should not be pressed.

The central truth of these twin parables is not that when Jesus knew the value of the Kingdom of God, He spent all He had, His life, in order to purchase it for His disciples but that when the disciples of Jesus recognized the value of the Kingdom of God, they were led by the Holy Spirit to commit themselves totally to the King of God's Kingdom, that is, Jesus, in order, in grace, to enter into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, these twin parables underline emphatically the meaning of "the forceful response," that is, the sincere repentance to God and the genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the work of the Holy Spirit in the passages of Matt. 11:12 and Luke 16:16.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 18:3 AND MARK 10:15 (BEING LIKE A CHILD AND ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN)

The Interpretation of Matthew 18:3 (Turning and Becoming Like A Child And Entering the Kingdom of God)

Matt. 18:1-5, paralleled in Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48, is an account delineating the disciples' controversy about greatness. Mark notes that on their journey back to Capernaum that the disciples disputed as to which of them was the greatest. When they arrived back in Capernaum Jesus asked, "What were you discussing on the way?" The twelve disciples, with some embarrassment, hesitated to answer.¹ But finally they opened up and asked Him to settle their argument. And their question was, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"²

In answering this question, Jesus first delineated the "entrance requirement" of the Kingdom as, "Unless you turn (*στραφήτε*) and become like the little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Then He said, "Whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the

¹ Mark 9:33-34.

² Matt. 18:1.

Kingdom of Heaven."³ This does not mean that the twelve disciples were not as yet in the Kingdom of Heaven, but they failed to understand the true nature of Jesus' role as the Obedient Servant.⁴ In the Kingdom of Heaven, whoever wants to be great must be others' minister, and whoever wants to be first must be others' servant--as Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.⁵ In actuality, the thrust of Jesus' answer here is an on-going grateful humility, but never the thought of special recognition.

The Meaning of στραφήτε in Matthew 18:3

Jesus juxtaposed the word "turn" and the phrase "become like a child" in one sentence. This indicates that they describe one and the same act.⁶ By this "turning" one will become like a child, and becoming such means to "turn." The Greek word for "turn" here is στραφήτε (στρέφω). Its cognates are literal renderings of the Aramaic-Hebrew 𐤇𐤓𐤐 in the Septuagint.⁷ In order to ascertain the significance of

³Matt. 18:3-4. These two verses were recorded only by Matthew. Passages parallel to Matt. 18:3 can be found in Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17.

⁴See Matt. 16:21-24.

⁵Matt. 20:26-28.

⁶Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943), pp. 680-81; W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 688.

⁷The Septuagint translates 𐤇𐤓𐤐 usually by ἀναστρέφω, ἀποστρέφω, and ἐπιστρέφω, but not, as in the New Testament, by μετανοέω. The theological meaning of 𐤇𐤓𐤐 can be clearly

the "turning" here, the Biblical meaning of **גָּוַר** and **στραφήτε** must first be examined.

The Meaning of **גָּוַר**
in the Old Testament

The word **גָּוַר** is the twelfth most frequently used verb in the Old Testament, appearing just over 1050 times.⁸ In the Qal stem it has been suggested that there are ten different meanings for **גָּוַר** with subdivisions within each, plus some uses difficult to pinpoint.⁹ Generally speaking, it means a physical motion of turning;¹⁰ sometimes it may act as a sort of an auxiliary verb to repeat the action of the second verb.¹¹ Nevertheless, the most important usage is in passages dealing with the covenant community's return to God (in the sense of repentance), or turning away from evil (in the sense of renouncing and disowning sin), or, in some cases, turning away from God (in the sense of becoming apostate).¹² It is estimated that there is a total of 164 uses

traced in the New Testament use of these words. See F. Lauback, "**ἐπιστρέφω**," NIDNTT 1:354-55; Bertram, "**στρέφω**," TDNT 7:715, fn. 4; 7:716, fn. 3.

⁸ See R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, B. K. Waltke, ed., Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 2:909.

⁹ W. L. Holladay, The Root ŠUBH in the Old Testament (Leiden: Brill, 1958), pp. 59-62.

¹⁰ Cf. Gen. 18:14; 22:5, etc.

¹¹ Cf. Gen. 26:18, etc.

¹² Most of these usages are found in the Prophets, such as Isaiah 10 times, Jeremiah 113 times. Cf. Harris, et al, Wordbook, p. 909.

with the root שׁוּב in this covenantal context.¹³ Therefore, the crucial theological meaning of שׁוּב is in the sense of repentance and conversion as "turning to God and turning away from evil."¹⁴

In the Old Testament, the doctrine of repentance can be seen in various texts. Some illustrations such as Psalms 32 and 51, express the idea. Again, the fact that people are often called "to turn to God and to turn away from evil" clearly indicates God's serious attitude toward sin and His earnest demand of man's repentance.

However, according to the Old Testament, it is God who gives the impulse to conversion. Through His Spirit and His work, God first moves man,¹⁵ then man returns because of God's initiative and God's work in his heart.¹⁶ Sometimes man can be so permeated by evil that he resists such turning.¹⁷ Those who refuse to turn to God will experience God's judgment;¹⁸ but those who return to God will receive God's blessings.¹⁹ Therefore, repentance or conversion involves the act of God's grace in calling people, moving through His Spirit

¹³See Holladay, ŠUBH, p. 117.

¹⁴Cf. Jer. 18:8; Mal. 3:7, etc.

¹⁵Jer. 31:18; Lam. 5:21.

¹⁶Jer. 24:7.

¹⁷Hos. 5:4; 2 Chron. 36:13.

¹⁸Amos. 4:6-8; Hos. 11:5; 1 Kings 9:6-9; Ezek. 33:9, 11.

¹⁹Isa. 55:7; Jonah 3:9-10; Hos. 14:5-8; Ezek. 33:14-16.

within their hearts, working the willingness of man's turning of his heart through the Spirit's work.

The Meaning of στραφήτε
in the New Testament

The Septuagint does not use simple form of στρέφω, but its cognates, to render the Hebrew word בָּשׁוּ; however στρέφω sometimes may also mean conversion as its cognates do.²⁰ In the New Testament, this word is clearly used to translate בָּשׁוּ of Isa. 6:10 in John 12:40 which definitely signifies repentance and conversion.²¹

Basically, στρέφω means "to turn, turn over, turn round, transform, change, and turn towards."²² Here in Matt. 18:3, the word στραφήτε is the second aorist passive subjunctive of στρέφω, which is used reflexively with the meaning of "turn yourself."²³ Jesus here stresses an inward change

²⁰Bertram, "στρέφω," TDNT 7:714-16; G. Ebel, "ἀναστρέφω," NIDNTT 3:933; F. Laubach, "ἐπιστρέφω," NIDNTT 1:354-55.

²¹See Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 1:258; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Isaiah in Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 vols., trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 7:201; W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to John, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) 2:212; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1931), p. 866; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 604. However, more usually בָּשׁוּ is translated by ἐπιστρέφειν. See Matt. 13:15; Acts 28:27; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19.

²²F. Laubach, pp. 354-55; G. Ebel, p. 933; Bertram, pp. 714-16; Arndt-Gingrich, p. 771.

²³See Lenski, Matthew, p. 680; Bertram, p. 714.

which may signify "be converted."²⁴ This "turning" is an action of the heart and not only a change of conduct.

Through the Spirit's work it is both a turning away from the selfishness, worldly ambition, jealousy, quarrel, the power of sin and a turning to God in humility, humble trustfulness like a little child.²⁵ This implies that those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven are the ones who repent and are converted and have humble trust in Jesus through the Spirit's work.

This interpretation is consistent with the New Testament conception of conversion and repentance. In the New Testament, these terms mean both a turning to God with faith in Christ and a repenting of sinful thoughts and deeds--all through the Spirit's work.²⁶ "The turning to God, or conversion, was accomplished by faith in the preaching of the Lord Jesus. . . conversion takes place in that moment when the Holy Spirit engenders faith in the heart of the penitent sinner."²⁷

²⁴Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, p. 771; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), p. 1654; F. Laubach, p. 355.

²⁵The concept of humble trustfulness can be derived from the immediate context of Matt. 18:4, ". . . humbles himself like this child. . ." and Matt. 18:6, "who believe in me." Cf. Titus 3:4-8, etc.

²⁶See Luke 15:11-24; Acts 20:21; 26:20; Rev. 16:9; Acts 8:22; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:21-22; etc. Cf. J. Goetzmann, "μετάνοια," NIDNTT 1:357-59.

²⁷J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 337. In the theological sense, repentance and conversion are synonymous. See also, pp. 362-66.

During Jesus' earthly ministry as well as also today, the attitude of mind that most frequently militates against repentance is man's self-righteousness and presumption, so that "genuine repentance, the repentance that opens to itself the Kingdom of God, is only possible when a man knows he is small and slight as a child before God."²⁸ This means that genuine repentance cannot be separated from childlike humble attitude. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer *στραφήτε* in Matt. 18:3 to the Biblical concept of repentance and conversion.

The Childlike Qualities of Humility, Total
Dependence, Trustfulness, and Entering
the Kingdom of Heaven

The phrase "becoming like a child" has been interpreted variously. Some incorrectly refer it to a child's innocence, purity, or moral perfection.²⁹ Others improperly stress the characteristic of imperfection with the possibility of growth and development.³⁰ Still others regard it as a description of unconcern with status,³¹ or simplicity,

²⁸R. Schnackenburg, The Moral Teaching of the New Testament, trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O'Hara from the 2nd rev. German ed., 1962 (New York: Herder, 1965), pp. 29-30.

²⁹So Pierre Bonnard, L'Évangile selon saint Matthieu (Paris: Editions Delachaux & Niestle, 1963), p. 268. His view was criticized by F. W. Beard, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 375.

³⁰H. H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), p. 241.

³¹Cf. David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 273. This is one of his interpretations.

frankness, obedience, and unpretentiousness.³² However, the Greek word for "child" in Matt. 18:1-5 is *παιδίον*,³³ which refers to a very little child, including the new born baby up to seven years of age.³⁴ Evidently, the most distinguishing characteristic of a little child in this range of age is his total dependence on his parents. Jesus emphasizes that if one wishes to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he must return to God with an attitude of total dependence on Him just like a little child is totally dependent on his parents. Again, in light of the immediate context, this childlike quality can also be explained in terms of humility and humble trustfulness in Jesus.³⁵ Jesus Himself explicitly mentions these two qualities of a little child in Matt. 18:4, "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this little child. . ." and in Matt. 18:6, "these little ones who believe in me. . ."

This childlike attitude of humility, total dependence, and humble trustfulness also supports the concept of repentance and conversion through the word *σπλαγχνίζεσθε* in Matt. 18:3. In the Scripture, humility and contrition are closely linked together. Again, a spirit of contrition before God and a

³²Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 688. These are part of his renderings, however, his favorite interpretation is humility or humble trustfulness.

³³"*παιδίον*" in Matt. 18:2, 5; "*τὸ παιδίον*" in Matt. 18:4; "*τὰ παιδία*" in Matt. 18:3.

³⁴Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, p. 604; G. Braumann, "Child," *NIDNTT* 1:280-83; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), p. 1287.

³⁵So Lenski, *St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 681; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 688; Hill, *Matthew*, p. 273.

sense of total dependence upon God in humble faith cannot be separated either. In Isa. 57:15 and some other passages,³⁶ God comes to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite, and to save those who are crushed in spirit. This simply means that he who humbles himself is the one who is contrite before God, that is, who sincerely repents and totally depends upon God's grace for salvation.³⁷

This childlike humility, total dependence, and trust are indeed the heart of the call to repentance (στραφήτε) in Matt. 18:3. It is correct to say that repentance means learning to say, through the Spirit's work, "Abba" to God, putting one's whole trust in the Heavenly Father, returning to the Father's house and the Father's arms, doing the same thing which the prodigal son was doing toward his father.³⁸ In Luke 15:11-32, the repentance of the lost son consists in finding his way home to his father, trusting in his father's forgiving grace. Therefore, Matt. 18:4 reinforces the assertion that στραφήτε in Matt. 18:3 is referring to conversion and repentance. In other words, he who wants to enter the Kingdom of Heaven must first humble himself with total dependence on God, through the Spirit's work, in sincere repentance and genuine trust in Jesus like a little child, and keep this humble attitude all his life if he wishes

³⁶Cf. Isa. 66:2; Ps. 34:18; 51:17.

³⁷Keil and Delitzsch, Isaiah, p. 379-80; Young, Isaiah 3:410-11.

³⁸Cf. J. Jeremias, The Lord's Prayer, trans. John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 20.

to be in the Kingdom of God, let alone even wishes to become the greatest in the Kingdom. The latter is always up to God.

Summary

In answering the disciples' question, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus first points out what is necessary for entering the Kingdom of Heaven and then mentions that whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in that Kingdom. With reference to the entrance into the Kingdom Jesus uses the word **στραφήτε** to express the Hebrew term **כָּשׁוּ** which signifies "turning to God and turning away from evil," that is, "repentance and conversion."

Again, Jesus' meaning of "becoming like a child" stresses the need for "childlike humility, total dependence, and humble trustfulness" which also indicate repentance and conversion. Genuine repentance means returning to God completely and depending on Him utterly like a little child. Such childlike, total dependence on God is a basic characteristic of being a member of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Therefore, all who through the Spirit's work sincerely repent and trust wholeheartedly in Jesus with total dependence on His grace will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Interpretation of Mark 10:15
(Receiving the Kingdom of God
Like A Child and Entering
into It)

The Context of Mark 10:15

Mark 10:13-16, paralleled in Matt. 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17, is an account describing Jesus' blessing of

the little children. This so-called pronouncement-story³⁹ about children seemed to be sandwiched suitably between sections concerned with marriage in verses 2-12 and attitudes toward property in verses 17-31. On the basis of Mark 10:1, 17, 32, it is clear that this event took place somewhere in Jesus' Later Perea Ministry, while He and the disciples were traveling to Jerusalem to attend the Passover.

The three accounts of the Synoptic Gospels, on the one hand, closely resemble each other; but on the other hand, each is also distinct. Each evangelist, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, chose what he wrote to fit in with his purpose. Mark 10:14-15, as well as Luke 18:16-17, reveals how Jesus dampened the disciples' misunderstanding of the true nature of the Kingdom of God and presented it as a present experience and as God's gracious gift. This will be given to anyone who receives it as a little child.⁴⁰ The parallel account in Matt. 19:13-15 does not record the phrase "anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" of Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17. However, a similar saying is found only in Matt. 18:3-4, which was discussed above.

³⁹ Cf. W. L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 359-61. C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 322; Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 421.

⁴⁰ Taylor, Mark, p. 422.

Interpretations on Mark 10:15

Παιδίον as the Accusative Case

Grammatically, the word **παιδίον** in Mark 10:15 can be either nominative as a subject or accusative as an object. If it is used in the former case, and thus **ὡς παιδίον** signifies "as though he were a little child," then this phrase is rendered as "whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child receives it shall not enter it at all." If it is used in the latter case, then **ὡς παιδίον** means "as though the Kingdom were a child," then this phrase signifies, "whoever does not receive God's Kingdom as one receives a little child," that is, the nature of God's Kingdom is identified with that of a child, and thus the disciples are to welcome God's Kingdom just as Jesus welcomes the child.⁴¹

Those who support the latter rendering argue that traditional interpretations of the passage, which refer to **παιδίον** as nominative, arose from the harmonizing mind which subordinated the surprising remark of Jesus in Mark 10:15 to the more ordinary meaning of Matt. 18:3. Thus, it made the two mean the same thing, and deprived Mark 10:15 of its originality.⁴² In this interpretation, Mark's purpose is to show the close identity of the way and conduct of Jesus with

⁴¹So W. K. L. Clarke, New Testament Problems (London: SPCK, 1929), pp. 36-38; F. A. Schilling, "What means the saying about receiving the Kingdom of God as a little child (**τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον**)? Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17" The Expository Times 77 (1965-66):56-58; H. Anderson, The Gospel of Mark (London: Oliphants, 1976), p. 246.

⁴²Cf. Schilling, "Mark 10:15," p. 57.

the way and conduct of the disciples. In the same way as Jesus receives a little child, likewise the disciples themselves should receive the Kingdom of God.

Along this line, H. Anderson comments, "the Kingdom of God in its nature as a child in Jesus' teaching may describe it as neither forced upon men nor forced by them, but as God's gracious gift even as the child is His gift."⁴³ Again, F. A. Schilling elaborates this thought in comparing a child's need to receive affection and love with the same need of God's Kingdom to be nicely treated by the disciples, in contrast to their immediate reaction of impatience.⁴⁴ This interpretation is inappropriate, since it has no parallel in Jesus' teaching, or elsewhere in the New Testament on the nature of the Kingdom as a child. This inappropriateness can also be seen from the immediate context in Mark 10:14, where Jesus says "for the Kingdom of God belongs to 'such as these' (little children)" not to "such as receiving these."

Different Meanings of Receiving and Entering

Since in Mark 9:47 Jesus connects the idea of entering the Kingdom of God with the future condemnation of being thrown into hell, some scholars suggest Mark 10:15 has a different meaning for receiving and entering. They assert that two different ideas of God's Kingdom are combined here:

⁴³Anderson, Mark, p. 246.

⁴⁴Schilling, "Mark 10:15," pp. 57-58.

the present Kingdom is received, the future Kingdom is entered.⁴⁵ In other words, whoever does not receive the Kingdom as a gift now, with the simplicity of a child, will not enter into it when it is finally established in the consummation.⁴⁶ Thus, "receiving" is a present requisite, while "entering" is a future blessing.

Grammatically and theologically, within such a short sentence, the Kingdom idea cannot be divided into two separated phases. There is no analogy in Scripture to warrant such an interpretation. In Mark 9:43-48, although "being thrown into hell" is a future result, the phrase "to enter the Kingdom of God" as well as "to enter life" still signify the kind of life which belongs to the rule of God, both of which have already begun as a present human experience and will extend into the future age.⁴⁷ Again, this present

⁴⁵So Clarke, Problems, pp. 37-39; also see W. L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 361; and others. It is criticized by C. J. Cadoux, The Historic Mission of Jesus (London and Redhill: Lutterworth, 1941), p. 230, fn. 2; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1964), p. 428; W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 383.

⁴⁶See Lane, Mark, p. 361; also see E. Best, "Mark 10:13-16: The Child as Model Recipient," in J. R. McKay and J. F. Miller, eds., Biblical Studies: Essays in Honour of William Barclay (London: William Collins Sons, 1976), p. 134.

⁴⁷See Taylor, Mark, p. 412. The phrases "entering God's Kingdom," "entering life," "getting eternal life," and "being saved" are synonymous in expressing both the believer's present experience and future blessing. Cf. Mark 9:45,47; 10:17,23; Matt. 19:16,24,25. See the discussion below, pp. . In the Gospel of John, the phrases "entering the Kingdom of God" and "having eternal life" are also synonymous and signify both the present experience (John 3:5,15,16; 5:24) and the future blessing (John 5:29). John emphasizes that

experience of entering the Kingdom of God is explicitly expressed in the parallel saying of Matt. 18:3 as discussed above. On this basis, in keeping with both texts, it is correct to say that Jesus uses the "entering phrase" to explain the "receiving phrase," that is, "entering" by "receiving." In this way, Jesus says that "whoever does not receive the Kingdom as a gift cannot enter and receive its blessings and responsibilities."⁴⁸ On the contrary, whoever receives it like a little child, he immediately experiences entering upon some of the blessings of the future Kingdom of God as a present experience.⁴⁹

Children's Active Response of
Coming to Jesus as the Human
Response to the Lord's Call

G. R. Beasley-Murray improperly suggests that the emphasis of Mark 10:13-16 lies in the active response of the little children's coming to Jesus. He asserts that these

the purpose of Jesus' mission was to bring men a present experience of the future life (John 10:10; 6:33,35,63; 12:49-50; etc.) Salmond is right in saying that, "This eternal life is the spiritual order of being, the existence of fellowship with God into which Christ brings men; and the eternal life is this life in its quality of the divine order of life, the life which fulfills the whole idea of life, . . ." Cf. S. D. F. Salmond, The Christian Doctrine of Immortality (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1907), p. 391; Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 81-84, 226-27; G. E. Ladd, A Theology of The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 256-59.

⁴⁸Cf. Taylor, Mark, pp. 423-24; see also Lenski, St. Mark's Gospel, p. 428.

⁴⁹Cf. Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Mark, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1970), p. 207.

verses describe the condition of entering the Kingdom of God by presenting a picture of little children coming to Jesus, running to Him, clinging to Him, that is, a picture of the ideal human response to the Lord's call in the Gospel.⁵⁰

Hence he comments that "there is nothing strange in the idea of children listening to Jesus, receiving in simplicity his 'call' (invitation) to the Kingdom and of loving Him with all their hearts."⁵¹

It is true that some of the subjective childlike qualities can be used as reference in interpreting Mark 10:15.⁵² However, the point of little children's active response of coming to Jesus, or running to Him, is not indicated in the text at all. The little children are brought to Jesus passively; some of them may even have been babies (τὰ βρέφη),⁵³ with all the utter dependence that this term implies. The main emphasis here is not their response of coming to Jesus but their total dependence on their parents and Jesus' simply receiving them. Therefore, this interpretation is forced and inappropriate.

Objective Qualities of a Little Child

Some scholars emphasize the objective qualities of a little child as the requisite for entering God's Kingdom in

⁵⁰G. R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 324.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²See the discussion below, pp. 224-26.

⁵³See Luke 18:15-18.

Mark 10:14-15. A. Oepke explains that, "the child's littleness, immaturity, and need of assistance, though commonly disparaged, keep the way open for the fatherly love of God, whereas grown-ups so often block it."⁵⁴ Similar to this, C. E. B. Cranfield argues that the reference here is not to the subjective childlike qualities such as, the receptiveness, humility, imagination, trustfulness, or imaginativeness, but to their objective littleness and helplessness.⁵⁵ Thus, to receive the Kingdom as a little child is to be given to. One does not bring or do anything. One cannot claim it as one's right or attempt to earn it. Cranfield even asserts that to think of any subjective qualities of children here is to turn faith into a work.⁵⁶

Along this line of thought, W. L. Lane also rejects the possibility that any subjective quality is implied here but rather the stress is only on the objective childlike qualities of littleness, helplessness, and being without claim or merit. Thus, God's Kingdom is God's gift based on the pure grace of God, and man only receives it as a gift.⁵⁷

This interpretation is correct in emphasizing the gift character of God's Kingdom, the grace of God in giving His gift, and the realization of human helplessness in entering God's Kingdom. However, it is improper and also

⁵⁴A. Oepke, "παῖς," TDNT 5:649.

⁵⁵Cranfield, Mark, p. 324.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Lane, Mark, pp. 360-61.

impossible to separate totally a situation of objective humbleness from some subjective qualities which are coexistent with the former. The element of humble response to the Gospel, solely through the Spirit's work, cannot be eliminated simply because a wrong emphasis on this would make it a work of merit.⁵⁸ Besides, in the parallel saying of Matt. 18:3, Jesus clearly relates some subjective childlike qualities to the condition of entering the Kingdom of God. Therefore, this interpretation is not totally satisfactory.

Subjective Qualities of a Little Child

Many scholars use some subjective childlike qualities to interpret the phrase "receive the Kingdom of God like a little child" in Mark 10:15. Various qualities have been suggested. A. Rawlinson, while rejecting innocence and humility, asserts a child's unselfconsciousness, dependence and especially receptiveness as the point of comparison.⁵⁹ C. F. D. Moule also mentions the receptiveness and dependence of a child.⁶⁰ J. Bowman prefers humility, receptiveness, meekness and trust.⁶¹ Again, both Lenski and Hendriksen emphasize the

⁵⁸Robert N. Brown, "Jesus and the Child as a Model of Spirituality" Irish Biblical Studies 4 (1982):186-87.

⁵⁹A. E. J. Rawlinson, St. Mark (London: Methuen, 1925), pp. 136-37.

⁶⁰C. F. D. Moule, The Gospel According to Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 79.

⁶¹J. Bowman, The Gospel of Mark (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 211.

aspects of unassuming humility, undeserving receptiveness and unquestioning trustfulness.⁶²

Despite the various suggestions on what the appropriate subjective qualities are, all scholars agree on the main points of the interpretation, that is, the Kingdom of God can only be received by those who know that they are utterly dependent on God, as little children are utterly dependent on their parents. Those believers trust God and His grace as little children do to their parents. Those believers also realize that they cannot earn God's Kingdom or deserve it, but only accept it gratefully as God's gift.

Obviously, the four most important elements can be seen from the above interpretation; humility, dependence, trustfulness, and receptiveness. These elements, actually, are very closely connected with the Biblical meaning of faith. Thus, Lenski comments that, "this humility and trustfulness, when they are directed to Christ, become the very essence of saving faith."⁶³ This interpretation also reflects clearly one of Jesus' repeated criticisms of Judaism of His time. Since it strongly emphasized man's own works and merits, and was too often associated with its pride and a sense of self-righteousness, Jesus criticized and condemned its thought of any claim on God on whatever basis.⁶⁴

⁶² Lenski, St. Mark's Gospel, p. 428; Hendriksen, Mark, p. 383.

⁶³ Lenski, St. Mark's Gospel, p. 428.

⁶⁴ B. H. Branscomb, The Gospel of Mark (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), p. 180.

Therefore, in Mark 10:15, Jesus promises to give the Kingdom of God to those who have nothing to show for themselves. They are simply given to, that is childlike faith.⁶⁵

Biblical Father-Child Relationship

This approach actually combines the positive points of both the objective and the subjective childlike qualities and thus has the merits of both sides. T. W. Manson suggests that a clue to the better understanding of those sayings of Jesus about the necessity of becoming like children if one is to enter the Kingdom of God might be found in "the distinctive and characteristic use by Jesus of the term Abba for God and His teaching of the disciples to use the same term."⁶⁶ Jeremias also emphasizes the significance involved in the use of Abba and asserts that "only he who through Jesus lets himself be given the childlike trust which resides in the word Abba finds his way into the Kingdom of God."⁶⁷

In his later writing, Manson elaborates the father-child relationship and says that:

The child is dependent on his father and that in any decent family the relation between parent and child is that of care and protection on the one side and dependence and trust on the other. This means that the primary condition of entry into the Kingdom of God is total trust in God springing from a sense of total dependence upon Him. The total love of God which is required in the

⁶⁵Cf. Schweizer, Mark, p. 207.

⁶⁶T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 331.

⁶⁷J. Jeremias, Prayer, p. 20; New Testament Theology, trans. John Bowden (London: S. C. M. Press, 1971), p. 156.

first and greatest commandment springs naturally from this trust and dependence.⁶⁸

Here, the subjective childlike qualities of total dependence and trust are stressed while the objective littleness and helplessness of a child and also the gracious care of the father are implied.

This father-child relationship can be seen as early as in the special relationship between God and Israel in the Old Testament. On the one hand, God graciously chose Israel as His child and continuously expressed His tender feeling of affection in His exercise of the fatherly and parental function of nurture and training,⁶⁹ in His merciful forgiveness of sins, and in His special care for the fatherless and the poor.⁷⁰ On the other hand, Israel was expected to have the childlike attitudes of dependence and trust, obedience and gratitude to God,⁷¹ even though she failed these aspects most of the time.

In the New Testament, Jesus developed this Old Testament imagery to speak both of His own experience of God and of His disciples' relationship to God.⁷² He often described

⁶⁸T. W. Manson, "The Lord's Prayer II" Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 38 (1955-56):437-38.

⁶⁹See Deut. 1:31; 32:6; Isa. 49:15; 66:13; Jer. 3:19; 4:22; etc.

⁷⁰See Ex. 19:5; Deut. 4:4; 11:22; 30:20; etc.

⁷¹See Ps. 68:5; 10:14; 146:9; Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; etc.

⁷²Cf. Brown, "Child," p. 178.

the gracious character of God so that His disciples might understand the need for total dependence and trust on God.⁷³ Through this imagery of father-child relationship, not only both aspects of the grace of God in giving His Kingdom as a gift to men and the response of men, through the Spirit's work, in receiving God's free gift are emphasized, but also both positive elements of the subjective and objective child-like quality are connected together.

Therefore, in interpreting the meaning of Mark 10:14-15, it is not necessary to stress either the subjective or the objective qualities of a child, but just to apply the main principles of the father-child relationship, which may include the positive values of both approaches. Understanding Mark 10:14-15 in this way, the themes of child's littleness, helplessness, dependence, trustfulness, receptiveness and the emphases of the grace of God, the gift-character of God's Kingdom are blended together. Thus, the meaning of Jesus in these passages can be stated as: God's Kingdom is the gracious gift of God; anyone who does not realize his utter spiritual helplessness and thus depend totally on God's grace and trust completely in Him to receive this free gift of grace will never enter it.

Summary

1. The term **παιδίον** in Mark 10:15 is not accusative but nominative and is used as the subject but not object of

⁷³See Matt. 5:45; 6:25-34; 7:9-11; Luke 12:22-34; etc.

the phrase. Thus, this phrase should be rendered as "whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child who receives it will never enter it," but not as "whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as one receives a little child will never enter it."

2. The terms "receive" and "enter" in Mark 10:15 are simultaneous and mutually explanatory. It is inappropriate to assert that, "'receiving' is a present requisite, while 'entering' is a future blessing," and that "the present Kingdom is received, the future Kingdom is entered." The proper interpretation is that: "Entering" by "receiving"; or "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child receives it, cannot now enter the Kingdom of God as a present experience."

3. Mark 10:13-16 does not emphasize the point of little children's response in coming to Jesus, or running to Him. Thus these verses do not depict in this way a picture of human response to the Lord's call, because they were brought to Jesus passively. They were totally dependent on others.

4. It is proper to stress some objective qualities of a child as belonging to entering God's Kingdom in Mark 10:14-15. They are: littleness, utter helplessness, and being without any claim or merit. In this way, God's Kingdom is understood as God's gift based only on God's grace; man enters it only by receiving it as a gift.

5. It is also proper to emphasize some subjective qualities of a child as the condition of entering God's Kingdom in Mark 10:14-15. They are: humility, dependence, trustfulness and receptiveness--all worked by the Spirit. These elements are characteristic of the saving faith. In this way, God's Kingdom is also understood as God's gift based only on God's grace; man enters it only by receiving it as a gift through childlike faith in Jesus.

6. The best approach to interpret Mark 10:14-15 is through the imagery of the Biblical father-child relationship. This relationship is expressed mainly in the care and protection of the father and the dependence and trust of the child. This interpretation which combines the positive values of both the subjective and the objective quality of a child can best express Jesus' meaning in Mark 10:15. Understood in this manner, this passage can be rendered as: God's Kingdom is God's gracious gift in Jesus; anyone who does not realize his helplessness and thus have childlike faith in Jesus to receive Him wholeheartedly will never enter it."

Summary of the Childlike Quality and
Entering the Kingdom of God

Both Matt. 18:3 and Mark 10:15 record Jesus' sayings concerning the childlike quality and entering the Kingdom of God. In Matt. 18:3, Jesus proclaims, "Unless you turn and become like the little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven," while in Mark 10:15, He announced, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom

of God like a little child will never enter it."

Although these two sayings have different contexts and deal with different problems, they convey the same concept of how one can enter the Kingdom of God. The former emphasizes one's turning and becoming like a little child, with sincere repentance and wholehearted trust in Jesus with total dependence on Him. The latter stresses receiving the Kingdom of God like a little child, realizing one's utter helplessness, being without any claim or merit, and trusting completely in Jesus with total dependence on Him. Since the meaning of "trusting with total dependence" is essentially equivalent to that of "believing with total commitment," the central idea of these two sayings can be restated in the following sentences: anyone who wants to enter the Kingdom of God must first realize, through the Spirit's work, his helplessness and being without claim or merit, then repent sincerely and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

Therefore, Matt. 18:3 and Mark 10:15 express a similar message as the passages and parables discussed above.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 19:16-20:16

(THE GRACE OF GOD AND ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN)

The Rich Young Man and Entering the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19:16-26)

The synonymity of "to Have Eternal Life," "to Enter Life," "to Enter the Kingdom of Heaven," "to Enter the Kingdom of God," and "to be Saved."

In Matt. 19:16-26, after the rich young man's inquiry about the way of having eternal life, Jesus uses four expressions in relation to this topic; "entering life," "entering the Kingdom of Heaven," "entering the Kingdom of God," and "being saved." One question may naturally arise: Do these five expressions, that is, the young man's question and Jesus' four phrases, signify the same spiritual blessing? Or do they describe different levels of God's blessings?¹ The

¹For instance, Watchman Nee asserts that there are two different spiritual blessings and two different requirements or "entering conditions" for them described in these passages. The first one, i.e., "getting eternal life" or "being saved," may be obtained by all Christians who believe in Jesus, while the second one, i.e., "entering the Kingdom of Heaven," is a reward only for those Christians who can meet the higher requirement. He incorrectly distinguishes three meanings for the Kingdom of Heaven: (1) Christendom, (2) the Church, and (3) the millennial kingdom. Again he also improperly gives three meanings for the Kingdom of God: (1) a spiritual experience, (2) the millennial kingdom, and (3) eternity. Then, in contrast to his normal usage of distinguishing them as discussed above in chapter two, he refers both the Kingdom of Heaven in verse 23 and the Kingdom

purpose of this first paragraph is to show, on the basis of Scripture, that these five expressions are synonymous.²

It is evident that both the rich young man and Jesus understood the phrase "to have eternal life" and "to enter life" as having the same meaning. Otherwise the rich young man would not have been satisfied with Jesus' answer. Actually in Judaism, the phrases "to inherit eternal life," "to have eternal life," "to inherit life," and "to enter life" are equivalent to each other.³ Although Jesus adds a new aspect, that is, the present realization of the eternal life, along with its original eschatological aspect, these two

of God in verse 24 to the millennial kingdom, and makes them synonymous here. Furthermore, Nee makes Jesus in this conversation shift strangely from the question of eternal life in verses 16-19 to the matter of reward in verses 20-24, then return again to the question of salvation in verses 25-26. See Watchman Nee, The King and the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study of Matthew (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1978), pp. 231-35

² It has been shown above that "the Kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with "the Kingdom of God," see above, pp. 15-16.

³ Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18 use the phrase "to inherit eternal life" for Matthew's parallel saying "to have eternal life." Matthew uses the word "inherit" later in 19:29 with the emphasis on its eschatological fulfillment. Nevertheless they all express the same meaning in Judaism. In later Jewish thought the life of the age to come, the eternal life, the age to come has replaced the land of Canaan as the inheritance of the saints. To inherit eternal life, the age to come, or the life of the age to come, are frequently recurring phrases in later Jewish writings. See Dan. 12:2; Psalms of Solomon 3:16; 14:6,10; 1 Enoch 38:4; 40:9; 48:3; 2 Macc. 7:9; 4 Macc. 15:3; TB Berachoth 28. Cf. H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1926-61) 1:808-14; (Hereafter SB) A. Richardson, A Theological Word Book to the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 112-14; Foerster, "κληρονόμος," TDNT 3:780; C. E. B. Cranfield, "Riches and the Kingdom of God," St. Mark 10:17-31" Scottish Journal of Theology 4 (1951):304.

phrases "to have eternal life" and "to enter life" still signify the same thing. "Eternal life" refers to both quantity and quality, i.e., the life approved by God and to which access to the Kingdom (present and eschatological) is promised.⁴

Again, the equivalence of "entering into life" to "entering into the Kingdom of Heaven" can first be seen from the context of Matt. 19:23. It is because of this rich young man's preference for his earthly possessions to entering into life that Jesus speaks of the difficulty for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus here speaks of the difficulty of the young man to enter into life. Similarly, in Mark 9:43-47, "entering into life" and "entering into the Kingdom of God" are used as synonyms. Jesus uses them to express the same meaning.⁵

Furthermore, this parallel usage can also be found in the Old Testament Book of Daniel. The description of an eternal Kingdom of the Son of man, which will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, is paralleled by that of the awakening of the dead, whose names are written in the Book, to eternal life.⁶ Thus, the phrases "to enter into life" and "to enter into the Kingdom of God" signify the

⁴David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 283; Greek Words and Hebrew Meaning (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), pp. 163-201.

⁵W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 366.

⁶See Dan. 7:13-28; 12:1-2. Cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsh, "Daniel" in Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 9:229-45, 477-84.

same. Finally, a comparison of verses 23, 24 with verses 25 shows that the disciples understood "entering the Kingdom of God" to mean "being saved." The disciples' question, "Who then can be saved," is a response to Jesus' comment on the difficulty for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. To Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, "the coming of the Kingdom of God" equals "the coming of the Messianic Salvation."⁷ The metaphor of a feast and especially of a wedding feast was a common Jewish picture of both the Kingdom of God and the eschatological salvation.⁸ In the person and ministry of Jesus, this eschatological Kingdom of God or salvation has become a present reality enjoyed by His followers.⁹

Thus, while preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus announced that Isaiah's prophecy of the messianic salvation had been fulfilled among His hearers.¹⁰ To a repentant Zaccheus Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house. . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."¹¹ The coming of the Kingdom of God simultaneously

⁷Cf. Herman Ridderbos, The Coming of the Kingdom, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), pp. 76-81; G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 73-77.

⁸See Matt. 8:11; 9:10-15; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15-24; etc. Cf. J. Jeremias, "νύμφη, νυμφίος" TDNT 4:1101; G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, the Age of the Tannaim, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 2:363-65.

⁹See above, pp. 39-43.

¹⁰Especially Isa. 61:1-3 in Luke 4:16-21, and Isa. 35:4-6 in Matt. 11:4-5.

¹¹Luke 19:1-10. Cf. Ezek. 34:11-16.

brings the messianic salvation to men both as a present experience and as an eschatological hope. Therefore, in the disciples' minds, the meaning of "entering the Kingdom of God" is equivalent to that of "being saved."

To sum up, a study of these five expressions in Matt. 19:16-26, that is, "to have eternal life," "entering life," "entering the Kingdom of Heaven," "entering the Kingdom of God," and "being saved" demonstrates that they are synonymous.¹² They all delineate the basic spiritual blessing of following Jesus.

The Merit of Man and to Have Eternal Life

Soon after Jesus bestowed a blessing upon the little children, He started on His way to Jerusalem.¹³ A rich young ruler¹⁴ came to Jesus with eagerness and reverence¹⁵ and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to have eternal

¹²Most of the commentators agree with each other on this point, such as A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 280; Hill, Matthew, p. 284; W. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 727; F. W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 397; D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 12 vols., ed., Frank E. Gaebelin, et al (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8:425; etc.

¹³See Mark 10:17,32.

¹⁴He was rich (Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23); he was young (Matt. 19:20, **νεανίσκος** is indefinite as to how young he was, but it may include up to 40 or even 50 years of age. Cf. L. Coenen, "Bishop, Presbyter, Elder," NIDNTT 1:192); he was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

¹⁵He ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him (Mark 10:17).

life?"¹⁶ His question shows his earnest intention to earn eternal life by his own merit. This reflects an attitude totally opposite to what Jesus had just said about the child-like total dependence and humble faith which characterize all who belong to God's Kingdom.¹⁷

On the one hand, this young man realized that he had not as yet by his own efforts attained eternal life, not even in principle. This drove him to come to ask for Jesus' opinion. On the other hand, he was confident that he could do whatever Jesus might advise, even beyond the demands of the law to assure his salvation.¹⁸ He shared with many of his Jewish contemporaries' conviction that a specific act of

¹⁶ Although there are slight differences recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, the essence of the question is the same. Some differences are: (1) "Teacher" in Matthew; "Good Teacher" in Mark and Luke; (2) "What good thing" in Matthew; "what" in Mark and Luke; and (3) "to have" in Matthew; "to inherit" in Mark and Luke. These differences should be explained not by Styler's theory of growing Christology, nor by the common Two-Source Theory, nor by Lohmeyer's suggestion that the variations stem from different translations of an Aramaic report of the incident, but rather by the three authors' reconstruction of the incident according to their emphases, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They reproduce the happening in their own characteristic manner and may substitute a synonym for the actual word that was spoken, as long as this synonym conveys the same meaning. Cf. G. M. Styler, "Stages in Christology in the Synoptic Gospels" New Testament Studies 10 (1963-64):404-6; Robert L. Thomas, "The Rich Young Man in Matthew" Grace Theological Journal 3.2 (1982):235-46; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 421-23; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 723-24; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg, 1943), p. 746.

¹⁷ Matt. 19:13-15. The detailed discussion of its parallel saying in Mark 10:14-15, see above, pp. 216-31.

¹⁸ In the light of his words in Matt. 19:20.

goodness could win eternal life.¹⁹ Thus, he came and hoped that Jesus would give him definite instruction.

Jesus replied, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One Who is good." This does not mean that Jesus doubted His own competence to discuss what is good,²⁰ nor that He denied his deity by implying that He did not share God's goodness.²¹ Instead, on the one hand, Jesus pointed out the young man's inadequate understanding of goodness and emphasized that nothing other than God's will could determine what is good;²² on the other hand, Jesus directed the questioner's attention to God alone to realize that his only hope was a total dependence upon God, who alone could bestow eternal life.

The purpose of Jesus' instruction, "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments" is not to assert that eternal life is earned by keeping the commandments, but once

¹⁹ See SB 1:808-14. Strack and Billerbeck also say on p. 814: "That man possesses the ability to fulfill the Commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the Rabbis, that they spoke in all seriousness of people who had kept the whole Law from A to Z"; and they give two pages of illustrations. Cf. Cranfield, "Riches," p. 307.

²⁰ In Markan and Luken Text, "Why do you call me good? No one is good--except God alone." Here Jesus is not denying that He is good either. Cf. William L. Lane, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 365-66.

²¹ See B. B. Warfield, "Jesus' Alleged Confession of Sin," Princeton Theological Review 12 (1914):177-228; W. Grundmann, "ἄραθός," TDNT 1:15-17.

²² In the light of Matt. 19:16,20, it is evident that this rich young man expects something beyond God's will. Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 748.

more to direct the questioner's attention to God.²³ Since the young man asks about doing good, Jesus points out that the only good is the will of God. Keeping the commandments is the answer to the question about eternal life for two reasons. First, God's grace and obedience to God's will, which must be clearly distinguished, should not be falsely split;²⁴ second, if one honestly tries to keep them, he will perceive his own spiritual bankruptcy and be prepared through the Spirit's work to receive the Kingdom of God like a little child.²⁵

The impulsive reply of this rich young man, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" indicates his self-confidence in the fulfillment of the demands of the law. Because in the Jewish thought patterns riches were regarded as God's reward for one's outstanding goodness.²⁶ This misconception was as wrong as Paul's situation of self-righteousness and misunderstanding of the Law before his repentance.²⁷ But the second part also shows his uncertainty

²³C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 328.

²⁴Paul, the strongest supporter of grace, insists that no sinner can inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 423. See also the discussion above pp. 136-44, on Jesus' stern demand on Matt. 5:20.

²⁵Cranfield, Mark, p. 328.

²⁶Lane, Mark, p. 369.

²⁷See Phil. 3:6, "as to righteousness under the Law, blameless." However, after Paul's conversion, he realized that man could never fulfill the demands of the Law by his own power. In fact, Paul described what before his conversion he had considered outstanding self-righteousness as dung (Phil. 3:7-9). The failure experience in Rom. 7:7-13 is Paul's depicting of his and everyone's pre-Christian being

of ever being good enough for salvation. Probably he realizes that his attitude toward keeping the commandments is of a superficial character, not in accordance with Jesus' deeply spiritual interpretation in His Sermon on the Mount. This rich young man is perhaps not satisfied with his merely outwardly exemplary life. When he answers, "All these I have kept," he may have had some doubt about his practice in loving his neighbor as himself. His inner conflict pushed him to ask, "What do I still lack?" In this way, Jesus leads him into the real issue of his question.

The Meaning of "If You Want to be Perfect"

This phrase, recorded only by Matthew, has caused much debate. Some think that since Jesus was dealing with two different questions, i.e., "if you want to enter into life" in verse 17 and "if you want to be perfect" in verse 21, these verses indicate a two-level ethic: some believers find eternal life, and others go further and become perfect by practicing extraordinary good works.²⁸

Watchman Nee understands verse 21 as a condition requiring more than just the matter of initial salvation

from a Christian standpoint. Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, The Epistle to the Romans ICC, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975-79) 1:340-55; E. Kasemann, Commentary on Romans, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 192-98; Martin H. Franzmann, Concordia Commentary: Romans (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), pp. 125-27.

²⁸So Watchman Nee, B. W. Bacon, see fn. 29, 30; R. Schippers, "Goal" NIDNTT 2:63; see also the criticism in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, H. J. Held, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, trans. Percy Scott (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 95-105.

discussed in verses 16-20, but dealing further with entering the Kingdom of Heaven (the future millennial kingdom), as a reward for the faithful Christians.²⁹ Roman Catholicism considers voluntary poverty a work that merits salvation; it calls this command to give all to the poor a "consilium evangelicum" (evangelical counsel) that goes beyond the Decalog, and the observance of such counsel an "opus supererogativum" (work of supererogation).³⁰ Inevitably, this has been applied to the distinction between clergy and laity, and especially to the monastic vocation with its requirements of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.³¹ In other words, those who want "to be perfect" must have the fullness of moral achievement, that is, the monastic discipline.

However, these two-level interpretations have many difficulties:³²

1. The young man's question "What do I still lack?" in verse 20 definitely refers to gaining eternal life in

²⁹Nee, Kingdom, pp. 233-35; 114; 17-23. See also the discussion above, pp. 58-59.

³⁰Cf. Bernard Orchard, E. F. Sutcliffe, R. C. Fuller, Ralph Russell, eds. A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 886. Bacon also made this distinction, see B. W. Bacon, "Jesus and the Law" Journal of Biblical Literature 47 (1928):225. The opposite view see G. Bornkamm, Matthew, pp. 95-98; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 751-3.

³¹Usually they also use Matt. 19:12 to support celibacy. This interpretation is criticized by Beare, Cf. F. W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 395.

³²Cf. Bornkamm, Matthew, pp. 96-105; Carson, "Matthew," p. 424.

verse 17 and not to a higher perfection. Thus, Jesus' answer in verse 21 must be understood as dealing with the question.

2. The purpose of this young man's coming to Jesus was to find a way to get eternal life. If he already had eternal life but only lacked moral perfection, he would not have gone away sad.

3. Jesus' comment in verses 23-26 must deal with what had happened in verses 16-22, but He only mentioned one question in verses 23-26, that is, entering the Kingdom of Heaven, or entering the Kingdom of God, or being saved, which is synonymous with having eternal life or entering life. There is no sign of a two-level question involved.

4. In light of Jesus' teaching in Matt. 23:8-12, it is not possible to assert the distinction of two levels of the Christian life.

5. The word τέλειος (perfect) is used in the Synoptic Gospels in Matthew only. In Matthew 5:48, the requirement to be perfect applies not to some of Jesus' better disciples, but to all of His disciples.

In view of all the Biblical evidence, τέλειος in Matt. 19:21 should not be understood in the Greek sense of the perfect ethical personality, but in the Old Testament sense of undivided humble loyalty, total obedience, and complete dedication to God;³³ or in the New Testament terms of

³³In the Septuagint, τέλειος is generally a translation of words of the stems $\alpha\lambda\psi$ and $\alpha\lambda\mu\tau$ in the passages like 1 Kings 11:4; 15:3,4; 8:61; 1 Chron. 28:9; Deut. 18:13, Jer. 13:19; Ex. 12:5. See R. Schippers, "Goal" NIDNTT 2:60; Delling "τέλειος" TDNT 8:72-73; Bornkamm, Matthew, pp. 98, 101.

genuine discipleship which consists of sincere repentance and true faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.³⁴ Both in Matt. 19:21 and 5:48, τέλειος links with the commandments of neighbourly love, which sums up all other commandments as an important aspect of discipleship. Therefore, Matt. 19:21 simply means the radicalizing of the demand expressed in Matt. 19:17-20. In other words, only one who is perfect (τέλειος) in this sense will enter into life, or enter the Kingdom of Heaven. If this is the case, then, does it mean that eternal life is earned by obeying all of the commandments perfectly? What Jesus really means in this verse will now be taken up.

Selling One's Possessions, Giving to
The Poor, and Following Jesus

Jesus knows the real conflict in this rich young man's heart. On the one hand, he is willing to seek to observe all the outward stipulations which may help him to gain eternal life; but because of his love of his wealth, he had a divided heart. He cannot love God wholeheartedly, nor has he an undivided loyalty, total obedience, and complete dedication to God; nor can he really love his neighbor as himself in God's standard; nor is he willing to surrender and commit himself to the absolute, radical discipleship which Jesus everywhere demands as a condition for eternal life.³⁵

³⁴In Matthew's Gospel, discipleship is required of all Jesus' followers. Discipleship is not only the way to perfection but also already "perfection" itself. Cf. Bornkamm, Matthew, pp. 100-1.

³⁵See Matt. 4:17; 5:20-48; & 13-27; 10:37-39; 11:12; 13:44-46; 16:24-27, 18:3, 8-9; etc.

William L. Lane rightly comments that, "Keeping the individual commandments is no substitute for the readiness for self-surrender to the absolute claim of God imposed through the call of the Gospel. Jesus' summons in this context means that true obedience to the Law is rendered ultimately in discipleship."³⁶ Only when a man, through the Spirit's work, surrenders himself and follows Jesus, will he achieve the perfect observance of the Law. The reason of this achievement is that self-surrender indicates a total dependence on God with a utter commitment to Him, a renunciation of his own achievement and the reception of divine forgiveness. In this way he is not bound to keep the commandments in order to earn eternal life--something he is unable to do, but receives it as God's gift in a childlike total dependence and humble trust.

In Matt. 19:21, Jesus wants this rich young man to know that his outward obedience to the Law is utterly useless for salvation, and what he desperately needs is a complete inward change of heart.³⁷ By selling all he had and giving the proceeds away, he may express his true sorrow of contrition over the chief sin in his heart, that is, the love of his earthly possessions more than God, and thus show his true love for his neighbor as himself. Again, since Jesus' coming is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy in the Old

³⁶ Lane, Mark, p. 367.

³⁷ Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 752.

Testament,³⁸ by following Jesus with complete trust and total dedication, submission, and commitment, he may give the evidence of his true obedience to God's commandments. It is evident that the center of the will of God is to honor Jesus, to accept Him, to follow Him, to believe in Him with total commitment to Him on the basis of the prophecies and fulfillment in Him--all through the Spirit's work. And this crucial factor this young man lacks for salvation, for having eternal life.

Usually when Jesus called people to follow Him, He did not ask them to give up their earthly possessions. Rich people among Jesus' followers were not required to do this.³⁹

In the Jewish thought pattern, not only riches are an evidence of God's reward for one's outstanding goodness, but the scribal legislation also limited the amount to be distributed in almsgiving to one-fifth of one's property, lest, by giving away one's wealth, he himself may become not a source of alms but an object of charity.⁴⁰ Matt. 19:21 is a special requirement for this special rich young man in this special circumstance.⁴¹ Besides the reasons discussed above, Jesus

³⁸See Matt. 2:15; 5:17-20; 11:11-13.

³⁹For instance: Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10); Joseph of Arimathaea (Matt. 27:57); Ananias (Acts 5:1); cf. 2 Cor. 9:11; James 2:1-3; etc.

⁴⁰T. B. Kethubim 50a; cf. T. B. Baba Bathra 116a: "poverty is worse than all the plagues of Egypt." See Lane, Mark, p. 367.

⁴¹This special case is an example of the radical statement in Matt. 18:8-9.

wants him to get rid of every basis for self-merit or self-righteousness and realize his utter helplessness in his quest for eternal life, which must be given by God as a gift.

Above all, Jesus wants to stress that the only way to eternal life is to follow Him without reservation, with total dedication and commitment; that is faith.

Therefore, anyone who wants eternal life must be willing to surrender himself absolutely to Jesus and follow Him wholeheartedly in sincere repentance and genuine faith with total commitment, and this is possible only through the work of God as declared by Jesus in Matt. 19:26.

The Grace of God and Entering The Kingdom of Heaven

In Matt. 19:23-26, Jesus not only speaks of the difficulty for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven but actually proclaims the impossibility for him or anyone else to enter it by his own effort. The reference to the camel and the needle should be interpreted literally. The suggestion of changing the word camel (κάμελος) into a heavy "rope" or "cable" (κάμιλος) is not helpful at all, nor can this be textually established.⁴² Again, the attempt to enlarge the

⁴²Verse 24 is a proverbial saying. It is quoted in the Koran (7:38). A very similar saying, with "elephant" instead of "camel," is found in the Talmud, since elephants were not uncommon in Babylon, "Perhaps you are from Pumbeditha, where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle" (TB Baba Metzia 38b); "This is proved by the fact that a man is never shown in a dream a date palm of gold or an elephant going through the eye of a needle" (TB Berachoth 55b). Not until the fifth century was κάμελος changed to κάμιλος. Cf. P. Minear, "The Needle's Eye. A Study in Form-Criticism," Journal of Biblical Literature 61 (1942):157-69;

needle's eye from that of a sewing needle to a small gate through which an unloaded camel could just squeeze through on its knees cannot be historically validated.⁴³ The tremendous contrast here between the real camel and the real needle's eye exactly express the impossibility.

This astonishing pronouncement of Jesus shocked His disciples. To most Jews, the rich were commonly expected to inherit eternal life, because their wealth was considered as reward for their goodness.⁴⁴ Besides, their almsgivings, practiced according to the regulation of contemporary Judaism, were also treated as an accumulation of merit before God.⁴⁵ If the pious rich were unable to enter the Kingdom of God, who then could be saved?

Jesus' answer, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible," provides the most important principle for man's salvation. Negatively, no one can do anything toward his salvation by his own powers. It is completely beyond the sphere of human possibilities. Any

Michael, "κάμηλος" TDNT 3:592-94; Hill, Matthew, p. 284; McNeile, Matthew, p. 280; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 755.

⁴³This view has been tried since the fifteenth century but without success. Since in Matt. 23:24 Jesus had an actual gnat and an actual camel in mind, so here camel and needle's eye are probably actual too. Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 755. See also Carson, "Matthew," p. 425.

⁴⁴See Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps. 128:1-2; Isa. 3:10; etc. Many Old Testament saints were rich; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job, etc. Interestingly to note that in later usage, sometimes the rich stood for the oppressors, while the poor represented those who were oppressed and thus depended upon God for their hope. See above, pp. 128-32.

⁴⁵Cf. Lane, Mark, p. 369.

attempt on the basis of human achievement or merit to earn salvation is definitely impossible. Positively, God alone has the power to save people, both rich and poor. It is all dependent on the grace of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit who engenders the saving faith in the heart of the penitent sinner.⁴⁶

To sum up: When a man, by God's grace, through the Spirit's work surrenders all claims based on himself and is only given to, then faith issues in following Him wholeheartedly in sincere repentance and genuine faith with total commitment. Such a one has been given God's salvation, has eternal life, enters life, enters the Kingdom of Heaven, or enters the Kingdom of God.

The Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven
(Matthew 19:27-30)

After hearing Jesus' comment on entering the Kingdom of God, the disciples want to make sure not only that their own salvation is guaranteed but also that they will receive proper reward for sacrificing all to follow Jesus. Since they have left everything and followed Jesus, what then will there be for them? In answering this question, asked by Peter on behalf of the Twelve, Jesus assures them that in the regeneration (*παλιγγενεσία*) besides inheriting eternal life, they will receive in grace great glory and a hundredfold of "reward" for their sacrifices. He also warns them that to

⁴⁶J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), pp. 328, 337; Hendriksen, Matthew, 728-29.

expect this as an earned reward endangers this promise for "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." (Matt. 19:30). Jesus then told a parable to underline this (Matt. 20:1-16).

The Scripture stresses that God delights in bestowing a gracious reward on believers.⁴⁷ Although their salvation is totally a free gift of God's grace, they themselves will be richly rewarded in grace for what they have sacrificed for Jesus' sake.⁴⁸ Lenski is right in saying that "The generosity and the magnanimity of God are so great that He accepts nothing from us without rewarding it beyond all computation."⁴⁹ However, the reward is of God's grace. Disciples should serve the Lord out of an attitude of love and gratitude,⁵⁰ but never with a mercenary attitude of expecting a reward based on supposed merit.⁵¹

Here, in Matt. 19:27-30, Jesus first promises the Twelve a special reward of sharing in His glory by performing

⁴⁷Matt. 5:11-12; 6:4,6,18; 10:41-42; 16:27; 25:21,23; 31-40; Luke 12:37, 42-44; 19:17-19; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:8,14; 9:17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 3:14, Col. 2:18; 3:24-25; 2 Tim. 2:12; 4:7-8; Heb. 10:35; 11:6,26; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Rev. 2:7,10,17, 26-28; 3:5, 10-12, 21; 22:12, etc.

⁴⁸Cf. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 729. "For My (Jesus') names's sake" in Matt. 19:29; "for Me (Jesus) and the Gospel" in Mark 10:29; "for the sake of the Kingdom of God" in Luke 18:29.

⁴⁹Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 758.

⁵⁰See John 21:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Gal. 2:20. See also the discussin below in the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matt. 20:1-16.

⁵¹See G. De Ru, "The Conception of Reward in the Teaching of Jesus" Novum Testamentum 8 (1966):211-22.

judgment in the regeneration. To all those who have forsaken their own earthly belongings for His sake, He promises that they will receive a hundredfold "reward" and will inherit eternal life. But, in His conclusion, He warns His disciples to avoid their wrong attitude both of work-righteousness toward God's salvation and of work-merit toward God's reward by the proverbial saying, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

In the Regeneration

The term "regeneration" (παλιγγενεσία) is used only here and in Titus 3:5 in the New Testament. The latter occurrence deals with the individual rebirth by the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism. This word is also used by Josephus for the new birth of the Jewish nation after the return from Babylonian exile,⁵² and by Philo of the new birth of the earth after the flood and after its destruction by fire.⁵³ Evidently, it carries the idea of "rebirth," "new birth," or "renewal."

Some suggest that in Matt. 19:28, παλιγγενεσία has reference to the endless Stoic cycles of conflagration and

⁵²Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, XI. iii. 9, in Josephus, 9 vols., trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (London: William Heinemann, 1926) 6:345. Cf. C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospel, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1927) 2:270; McNeil, Matthew, p. 281.

⁵³By the flood, see Philo, Questions and Answers on Geneses, Book II 51. (Gen. vii. 20); by fire see, Philo, On the Life of Moses, Book II XII, in PHILO, 10 vols., trans. F. H. Colson, in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) Supplement 1:132; 6:481. Cf. W. C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 212.

renewal.⁵⁴ Others refer to it as "resurrection."⁵⁵ However, the best explanation of it should be in harmony with Jewish teleological and apocalyptic expectation, that is, a renewal in terms of a final, once for all, change that brings a new order of things in which all the evils of this present age will be done away. This may also be expressed as: "the rebirth of the world," or "the renewal of the universe," or "the new heaven and earth,"⁵⁶ or "the consummation of the Kingdom of God."⁵⁷

Evidently, the time of this regeneration is linked with the enthronement of the Son of Man as the glorified Jesus. In other words, this universal renewal will begin with the day of Jesus' second coming for judgment.⁵⁸ He will seat

⁵⁴ So E. Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, trans. David E. Green (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1975), p. 389-90. The word παλιγγενεσία was apparently first developed by the Stoics to mean the commencement of the next cycle of the universe, following the cosmic conflagration in which the universe would be totally consumed. This παλιγγενεσία was periodic, and the new cycle could not but be an exact replica of the one that preceded it, for the universe as it is, is the best of all possible worlds, and everything comes to pass in accord with perfect reason and common law. Cf. F. W. Beare, "Stoics" IDB 4:443-45. However, Beare does not think that this word in Matt. 19:28 is used under Stoic influence, see Beare, Matthew, p. 398.

⁵⁵ So J. D. M. Derrett, "PALINGENESIA (Matthew 19:28)" Journal for the Study of the New Testament 20 (1984):51-58.

⁵⁶ Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5; 1 QS 4:25; 1 QH 13:11-12; 1 Enoch 45:4-5; 72:1; 2 Apoc. Bar 32:1-4, 6; 44:12; 57:2. Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 759.

⁵⁷ Carson, "Matthew," p. 425.

⁵⁸ Cf. Matt. 25:31-46; 16:27-28. See also Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 759.

Himself on His "throne of glory,"⁵⁹ and the Twelve will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.⁶⁰

The Reward of the Twelve

Matt. 19:28 records Jesus' promise intended only for the twelve apostles--excluding Judas, but since he would be replaced the number twelve is still correct. Jesus said that when He comes again, they will be seated on twelve thrones sharing judgment with Him in glory. However, the meaning of this promise has been variously interpreted as follows:

1. The twelve apostles will exercise judgment over the racial and physical twelve tribes of Israel.⁶¹ In other words, at the consummation, the Twelve will judge the nation of Israel for its general rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

2. The twelve apostles will judge, in the sense of "govern," or "reign"⁶² the racial and physical Israel. This

⁵⁹The phrase "throne of glory" (θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ), cf. 1 Sam. 2:8; Isa. 22:23; Jer. 14:21; 17:12; Wis. 9:10; Sir. 47:11; 1 Enoch 9:4; 14:18-20; 45:3; 51:3, etc., Matt. 25;31. In the Semitic manner of speaking, the phrases "the throne of his glory," "his glorious throne," and "his throne of glory" are synonymous. See Maximilian Zerwick, Biblical Greek, English edition adapted from the fourth Latin edition by Joseph Smith (Rome: Scripta Pontifici Instituti Biblici, 1963), p. 15; Nigel Turner, Syntax, volume III in A Grammar of New Testament Greek by J. H. Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 214.

⁶⁰The similar idea may be found in Dan. 7:22, 27; Matt. 20:21-23; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 20:4. Cf. Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 759.

⁶¹So Carson, "Matthew," p. 426; Lanski, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 758-60.

⁶²Judging can apply to both believer and non-believer, but governing can only fit for the believer. Two reasons may support the latter. First, the Hebrew word

means that at the Parousia the Twelve will reign, in assisting Jesus, the nation of renewed Israel in an earthly messianic Kingdom.⁶³

3. The twelve apostles will judge or reign the spiritual twelve tribes of Israel. This signifies that when Jesus comes again, the Twelve will judge or rule the entire Christian Church including all the believers of both the Jews and the Gentiles.⁶⁴

4. The twelve apostles symbolized the entire Christian Church and the twelve tribes of Israel understood as the racial Israel. In this way, Jesus promises that the entire church will judge the nation of Israel at His Second Coming.⁶⁵

5. The twelve apostles are taken literally, but the twelve thrones are spiritualized as the pulpits they occupied. Again the twelve tribes of Israel are expanded to include all

(judge) has a wider sense than simply to judge, but carries the meaning of to rule. The Hebrew "judge," such as Samuel or Gideon, is not only the deliverer, counsellor, judge of Israel but also her ruler, cf. G. F. Moore, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. xii. Second, the parallelism between Matt. 19:28 and Dan. 7:9-27 also suggest that judging may include governing. However, the Greek word κρίνω in the New Testament and especially in Matthew's Gospel does not carry the meaning of reign, but is used for judgment. See Matt. 5:22, 25-26; 7:1-2; 11:20-24; etc., cf. Bushsel, "κρίνω" TDNT 3:933-41; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 760.

⁶³So R. H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 393-94; J. F. Walvoord, Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 146.

⁶⁴So Hill, Matthew, p. 284; Beare, Matthew, p. 400. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 730.

⁶⁵This view is criticized by D. A. Carson, "Matthew," p. 426.

men or at least Christians in general; furthermore the regeneration is dated right after the ascension of Jesus. Thus, this verse means that after Jesus' ascension the twelve apostles, through their proclamation of salvation, will judge and rule those who hear their message.⁶⁶

Since the regeneration is better to be dated at Jesus' Second Coming,⁶⁷ and the thrones are nowhere in the Bible to be spiritualized as pulpits, the fifth alternative is not appropriate; the fourth one also lacks parallel teachings in the Scripture and is thus improper; the third one is possible but unnatural, because Matthew's Gospel usually distinguishes between Gentiles and Jews,⁶⁸ even though it applies Old Testament promises to both of them to form a new group, that is, the church of the Messiah; the second one asserting an earthly messianic kingdom for the Jewish people after Jesus' Second Coming is not acceptable. This is one of the errors of the dispensationalism.⁶⁹ The first one is the most suitable interpretation here. In other words, Jesus promises the Twelve that at the Parousia, when the Jews will be judged, He will let them in grace share His glory and authority in judging all the people of the nation of Israel,

⁶⁶This view is cited and discredited by Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 760.

⁶⁷See above, pp. 250-52.

⁶⁸See Matt. 8:10-14; 10:5-6, 18, 23; 15:21-28; etc., cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 426.

⁶⁹See the discussion above, pp. 54-58.

though not necessarily each apostle on one tribe, for their general rejection of His Messiahship and Lordship.

The Reward of the Other Disciples

The promise in Matt. 19:29 is for all the loyal followers of Jesus, who have made sacrifices for His sake.⁷⁰ In God's grace, no one will miss his due reward. This reward of grace is first given here on earth, in this age and then it will be extended into the future.⁷¹ This is to be distinguished from the gracious gift of eternal life in the Age to Come. Jesus announced that what one has lost for His sake in society will be regained a hundredfold in the spiritual society created by Him.⁷² Nevertheless, this promise should not be understood literally but analogically with the emphases on the truth that God will take nothing away from a man without restoring it to him in a new and glorious form.

⁷⁰Matthew's phrase "for my name's sake" is synonymous with Mark's phrase "for my sake," because the "name" of Jesus indicates Jesus Himself as He has revealed Himself. See Matt. 6:9; 7:22; 10:22, 41, 42; 12:21, cf. Hendriksen, Matthew, p. 730.

⁷¹Matt. 19:28-29 puts all the reward in the future, and to obtain it is coincident with entering eternal life. So Hill, Matthew, p. 284; Hendriksen, St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 730-31. However, its parallel saying in Mark 10:29-30 and Luke 18:29-30 clearly refer this reward to this present age. Many commentators assert that Matthew's passages should be interpreted in the light of Markan and Luken parallel passages. Cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 425; Lenski, St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 761; Lane, Mark, pp. 371-72. However, it is probably right to combine these two situations and say that this reward is first given here in this age, and then it will be extended into the future.

⁷²Cf. Matt. 12:47-50.

The First-Last Saying

Matt. 19:30 is a proverbial saying which Jesus repeats on various occasions.⁷³ In this context it is clearly eschatological and speaks of the reversal of earthly gradation of rank in the regeneration. Its main point is not that the rich become poor and the poor rich;⁷⁴ nor that the Jews become last and the Gentile become first;⁷⁵ but Jesus emphasizes the contrast between those who depend totally on God's grace and those who depend on either their self-righteousness for having eternal life or their self-merit for the reward.⁷⁶

This twofold function can be seen from the context of the rich young man's response and the more immediate context of Peter's attitude. The rich young man who in the Jewish thought pattern ranked among the first in this world will become the last in the future, because he was not willing to sacrifice worldly possessions in following Jesus in order to receive eternal life as God's gracious gift. Rather he wants to depend on his own self-righteousness to earn this eternal life. On the contrary, depending totally on God's grace, the disciples by surrendering everything now to follow Jesus without

⁷³ See Matt. 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30.

⁷⁴ This reversal is not absolute. Many rich people are in the Kingdom of God, such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57), etc., in the New Testament; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob in the Old Testament.

⁷⁵ Although this reversal is a historical fact, it is not prominent in this context.

⁷⁶ So Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 271; Cf. Lane, Mark, pp. 372-73; McNeile, Matthew, p. 238.

thought of reward have placed themselves among the last, will then be found among the first. In this way, the first are those who in grace are in the Kingdom of God and the last are those who are outside of it.⁷⁷

Again, in reaction to Peter's remark, Jesus warns His disciples against their mercenary spirit concerning their reward. God's reward is based on His grace and does not depend on man's supposed self-merit. The disciples are warned to avoid considering discipleship a matter of giving up possessions now in order to receive a reward later. All Christian service or sacrifice must not be motivated by reward but only by the love of Jesus.

Therefore, the central principle of the first-last saying is the contrast between one's dependence on God's grace and reliance on one's own merit, both in the seeking of eternal life and in the expecting of God's reward. The imagery of the first and the last may signify more than one meaning. Those who approach God in childlike total dependence and humble trust will both first be received in the Kingdom of God and then advanced in it. This proverbial saying of first and last is illustrated and explained by the following parable of the Workers in the Vineyard.

The Parable of the Worker In the
Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

This parable is found only in Matthew's Gospel and

⁷⁷ Lenski accepts only this interpretation, see St. Matthew's Gospel, pp 762-63. However, this is not likely.

serves as an explanation of "how" it can happen that, "the first will be last and the last will be first" in Matt. 19:30. Therefore, the immediate context of this parable involves: (1) the rich young man's intention to earn eternal life by doing the good thing (19:16-22); (2) Jesus' comment on the impossibility of entering the Kingdom of God by man's own power; the possibility depends strictly on God's grace (19:23-26); (3) Peter's question concerning the reward for the disciples' sacrifices for Jesus' sake (19:27); (4) Jesus' promise of a hundredfold reward for one's sacrifices and a gracious gift of eternal life (19:28-29); (5) Jesus' warning against all who, depending on their own merit, either try to enter the Kingdom of Heaven or expect to earn reward in that Kingdom (19:30).

Reference may also be made to the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-collector in Luke 18:9-14, which Jesus told shortly before the incident of the rich young man. In that parable, Jesus spoke of a self-righteous Pharisee who despised a humble, penitent tax-collector. The former depended on his own merit but the latter depended totally on God's grace to a sinner. However, it was the latter who was justified by God. At the close Jesus said, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humble, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This is another way of stating what Jesus said in Matt. 19:30 and 20:16.

The Inappropriate Points of Comparison

Many inappropriate points of the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard have been proposed by different scholars. The following common ones will be briefly described and evaluated.

The Call to God's Vineyard

This school usually links with the allegorical interpretation. Two kinds of God's call have been suggested. First, some regard this call as God's call to salvation either in different periods of history or at the different periods of human life. For instance, the early church father Irenaeus connected the hours of the five-times repeated summons with the periods in history of salvation beginning with Adam.⁷⁸ Later, Origen understood them to mean the different ages of human life when one can become a Christian.⁷⁹

Second, some refer it to God's summons to accept work in His Church.⁸⁰ Again, the two same distinctions of time periods as the above one are suggested. The most popular interpretation among recent Chinese churches regards the five-time repeated summons as God's call in the different

⁷⁸ Against Heresies IV. 36, 7, in S. Irenaeus, trans. John Keble, in The Library of Fathers, 44 vols. (London: James Parker and Co., 1872) 42:429.

⁷⁹ Commentary on Matthew XV, 36. Cf. J. Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 33-34.

⁸⁰ So the Roman Church placed this parable in their lectionaries at the beginning of Lent and associated it with 1 Cor. 9:21-27--Paul's summons to his readers to run the Christian race. Cf. Jeremias, Parables, p. 33.

periods of Church's history for missionary movements. This call was first accepted by Paul, then by the following Christians, and later was greatly revived by the European Christians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and then was continued by the American Christians, and now it is time for the Chinese Christians to respond to God's call in participating in the missionary work.⁸¹ Watchman Nee asserts a less popular interpretation which refers the different summons to the different ages of Christian's human life at which he begins to do God's work.⁸²

Interesting as it is, unfortunately, however, this point of comparison and its interpretations have missed the true stress of the parable. It does not emphasize the call to work in the vineyard, but the contrast between the grace and generosity of the employer and the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers.

The Sovereignty of God

Some find the point of the parable in verse 15, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?" and regard it as the assertion of the sovereignty of God Who can do whatever He wills.⁸³ It is true that God is sovereign

⁸¹Too many to name them. One can find this kind of sermon in many recent mission conference among Chinese churches. Their purpose is to encourage Chinese Christians to participate the mission work as the workers who are summoned at the eleventh hour in this parable.

⁸²Nee, Kingdom, p. 238.

⁸³This view is criticized by R. H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 126.

and omnipotent; however, this is not emphasized in this parable. Although the owner has the right to give more to the last workers than they deserve, he cannot give less than the agreed upon wage to the first workers.

The Equal Reward for All

Some scholars take the concept of "the equal reward" as the point of this parable. They assert that since the payment of the wages are the same for everyone no matter when hired whether first or last, the reward for every Christian in the Kingdom of God must be equal no matter what kind of life he lives or what kind of work he does for the Lord in this world.⁸⁴

However, this concept is contrary to Jesus' own teaching and many New Testament passages.⁸⁵ If one were to add that this equal reward is "a reward of grace," which demonstrates that every Christian will receive the same reward that is, his salvation, one would miss the point even more

⁸⁴This view is criticized by Jeremias, Parables, p. 36, and by Ru, "Reward," p. 206, even though there is a parallel story in 4 Ezra (a Jewish text of the late first century A.D.): The seer of 4 Ezra is perplexed by the question whether the preceding generations will be at a disadvantage in comparison with those who survive to the End. He receives the answer, "He said to me--I shall liken my judgment to a circle, just as for those who are last there is no slowness, so for those who are first there is no haste." (4 Ezra 5:42). Another parallel saying concerning the general resurrection of the righteous: ". . . And the first ones will enjoy themselves and the last ones will not be sad." (2 Baurch 30:2, a Jewish text of the early second century A.D., preserved in Syriac in its entirety). Cf. James H. Charlesworth, editor, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:533, 631.

⁸⁵See Fn. 47 in this chapter.

seriously. The first are given the wages they have worked for and agreed to; they receive it *κατὰ ὀφείλημα*, not *κατὰ χάριν* (Rom. 4:4). It is definitely not adequate to say that some people are saved by grace alone (eleventh hour); some people earn their salvation totally by their own work (first workers); and others obtain their salvation by various combinations of works and grace (third, sixth, and ninth hours). Besides such inappropriateness, the main point of this parable is certainly not "equal reward for all," but stresses the contrast between the grace and generosity of the employer and the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers.⁸⁶

Therefore, even though the concept of salvation by grace alone is implied in this parable, it is not emphasized through this point of "equal reward for all." Nevertheless, it can build on the most appropriate main point of this parable, that is, the amazing grace and surprising generosity of the employer as they stand in contrast to the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers.

The Different Quality of Work

Some interpreters try to maintain the fairness and justice of the owner for his equal payment of the wages by stressing the point of the different quality of work. They assert that the quality of work which was done by the last in one hour was equivalent to that of the first in the entire

⁸⁶Cf. Jeremias, Parables, p. 36; Ru, "Reward," p. 206.

day.⁸⁷ There is a late rabbinic parable to that effect, but there is no reason to suggest any connection between them.⁸⁸ This interpretation is an attempt to solve a "problem" with human logic and reason, but is not indicated by the text itself.

The Willingness of the Latecomers

This approach is parallel to the above one. Instead of relying on the latecomers' quality of work, some look for the point of the parable in the latecomers' attitude of willingness to work matching that of the all-day workers.⁸⁹ In other words, these latecomers by holding themselves in readiness to be employed all day qualify to receive the same pay, though their actual contribution to the product is negligible.⁹⁰ This is also a logical and rational solution for the owner's equal payment; however, it is also not mentioned nor hinted in the text.

The Point of Comparison and the Central Truth

The rule of end-stress indicates that the real point

⁸⁷ This view is criticized by Carson, "Matthew," p. 427, and R. H. Albers, "Text in Context: Perspective on the Parables--Glimpses of the Kingdom of God" Word & World 4(1984):443.

⁸⁸ About A.D. 325, there was a Jewish parable spoke of a man who on the ground of good quality of his work was paid a month's wages for a few hours' discussion. Cf. Carson, "Matthew," p. 427.

⁸⁹ So Preisker, "μισθός" TDNT 4:717.

⁹⁰ J. D. M. Derrett, "Workers in the Vineyard: A Parable of Jesus" Journal of Jewish Studies 25 (1, 1974):89.

of this parable lies in the surprising large amount given to the last and the interaction of the owner and the grumbling first workers. This parable begins with a typical scene and introduces atypical elements to surprise the reader and make a powerful point.⁹¹ This point is that the grace and generosity of the employer stand in contrast to the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers. Thus, this parable stresses that when God is active redemptively in order to reestablish His rule over and among men, He is like a gracious employer whose surprising generosity and amazing grace in treating his employees will irritate those who have a mind of worker-for-wages or a spirit of self-merit and self-righteousness. If so, those who depend on their own merit will become last and those who depend on God's grace will become first.

As for the saying in Matt. 19:30, this point can be applied to both areas of seeking to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and of expecting reward in that Kingdom.⁹² When it is applied to the first case, both contexts of the contrasts between the rich young man and the disciples, and between the Pharisee and the tax-collector fit well the point of this parable. The rich young man and the Pharisee, treated as

⁹¹See Norman A. Huffman, "Atypical Features in the Parable of Jesus," Journal of Biblical Literature 97 (1978): 207-20. He correctly says on p. 209 that, "Jesus deliberately and cleverly led the listeners along by degrees until they understood that if God's generosity was to be represented by a man, such a man would be different from any man ever encountered."

⁹²See above, p. 256-57.

first in this world, depending on their own merit and righteousness, become last in the future world, that is, cannot get the eternal life; while the disciples and the tax-collector, treated as last in this world, depending totally on the grace of God, become first in the future world, that is, in grace receive eternal life. Furthermore, this parable also reflects the fact that just like the first workers envy the latecomers and grumble at the owner, the Pharisees also despised the sinners and the tax-collectors, and opposed Jesus' offer of God's grace to them.⁹³ Thus, this parable may also serve to illustrate Jesus' association with tax-collectors and sinners and His offering to them the Kingdom of God.⁹⁴

As for the second case, the immediate context of the disciples' anticipation of receiving a reward in the Kingdom of God because of their sacrifices and Jesus' answer in promising reward in grace and also firmly warning the disciples, also fits the point of this parable.⁹⁵ The rewards of God depend strictly on God's grace. Christians should avoid having an envious attitude toward their fellow-Christians

⁹³ See Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 15-17; Luke 5:29-32; 7:36-50; 15:1-2; 11-32; 18:9-14.

⁹⁴ J. Jeremias, G. De Ru, and R. H. Stein all emphasize that this is the main point of this parable. The former two writers eliminate Matt. 20:16 from the text and think that it has been added to this parable but does not suit the whole narrative. However, Stein correctly asserts that this elimination is not necessary. See, Jeremias, Parables, pp. 36-38; Ru, "Reward," pp. 206-11; Stein, Parables, pp. 127-28.

⁹⁵ Cf. Carson, "Matthew," pp. 427-28; Hendriksen, Matthew, pp. 735-40.

and, above all, never serve the Lord with a mercenary spirit, depending on their own merit to receive great reward from God. Those who serve the Lord with this mercenary spirit will become last, and those who serve the Lord humbly, depending totally on His grace, will be first.

Summary

In Matt. 19:16 to 20:16, Jesus emphasizes an important principle in connection with two issues. This principle is God's grace in contrast to man's merit. The two issues are, first, how to get eternal life, and second, what is the reward for disciples. This principle is further explained and illustrated by the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard.

The rich young man, depending on his own merit, intended to earn eternal life by doing good instead of receiving it as God's gracious gift. By refusing to follow Jesus with humble trust and total commitment through the sacrifice of his wealth, he will not receive eternal life, or be saved, or enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, although, he thought he ranked among the first in this world, he will become the last in the future. On the contrary, Jesus' disciples, depending totally on God's grace, following Jesus with humble trust and total commitment through surrendering everything, will, through God's grace and the Spirit's work, have eternal life, be saved, and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In this way, although they are ranked among the last in this world, they will become the first in the future.

Again, in response to the disciples' expressed tendency of expecting reward for their sacrifices in following Him, Jesus warns them against this mercenary spirit of self-merit. God will reward those who loyally follow Jesus according to His grace. Christians should never serve the Lord or sacrifice for His sake in expectation of future reward. As those given to beyond any calculation, they are motivated by the humble love of Jesus, worked by the Spirit. Otherwise, those who serve with this work-for-wages spirit will become last, and those who serve faithfully with love and humble spirit, depending totally on His grace, will become first.

The main point of the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is the contrast between the grace and generosity of the employer and the self-merit and self-righteous mind of the first workers. When God is active redemptively in order to reestablish His rule over and among men, He is like this gracious employer whose amazing grace and surprising generosity in treating his employees will irritate those who have a self-merit and self-righteousness spirit. In this way, all those who depend on their own merit before God will become last, and all those who depend totally on God's grace will become first. This point may apply to both cases of one's intending to earn eternal life and disciples' expecting to earn God's reward.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the meaning of Jesus' teaching on entering the Kingdom of Heaven through the exegesis and interpretation of the selected Matthean texts and parables. Seven texts which record Jesus' explicit teaching on this topic (Matt. 5:3, 10, 20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23, 24, along with their related passages such as Matt. 5:6; 6:33; 7:21-23; 18:4; 19:16-30; Mark 10:14-1; Luke 16:16) and three parables (the Hidden Treasure [13:44], the Pearl [13:45-46], and the Workers in the Vineyard [20:1-16]) are examined from chapter two to chapter eight.

These investigations have clarified the following questions, such as, What is the meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven? Is it synonymous with the Kingdom of God? Is the "Kingdom" something only in connection with the future world as claimed by the consistent eschatology, or something that has already been realized in this present age as claimed by the realized eschatology, or something which contains both aspects of the present and the future? Does it relate to all mankind, that is, both the Jews and the Gentiles, or only the former as claimed by the Dispensationalism? Or does it involve all Christians, both the faithful ones and the

ordinary believers, or only the former as claimed by Watchman Nee? Does "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" have the same meaning with "being saved" and getting eternal life? Is "entering the Kingdom" a gift of God based on His grace? Or is it a reward of reigning with Christ in the future millennial kingdom only for the faithful Christians based on their own merit? Are the terms "Jesus' believers," "Jesus' followers," and "Jesus' disciples" synonymous in signifying those who sincerely repent and believe in Jesus? Or do they represent different levels of Christian life? What is the relationship between "to repent and believe in Jesus" and "to commit oneself totally to Jesus"?

The Matthean texts are interpreted in light of their parallel texts in the other books of the Synoptic Gospels. Because these three authors reconstruct the incidents in their own characteristic manner according to their own emphasis, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they are complementary to each other. The procedure of the exegesis includes: the linguistic study, the grammatical analysis, the formatic recognition, the immediate context examination, the historical and geographical setting investigation, the broad and total context consideration, and the theological reflection.

The parables are interpreted under two main principles: First, parables are not to be interpreted as though they were allegories. Normally a parable only has one point of comparison. The details of the parable have no independent meanings of their own. Second, parables must be understood

in the historical life setting of Jesus' ministry, which is always connected with the divine purpose of redemption.

Based on these two principles, one may find the point of comparison and the central truth of a parable, and then apply the truth to the present situation.

From the exegesis and interpretation of the selected Matthean texts and parables, it is clear that the Kingdom of Heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God, the dynamic and redemptive reign of God to establish His gracious rule among men, and that this glorious eschatological Kingdom has already invaded human history in the person and ministry of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, to lead men to repent sincerely and believe in Jesus, to follow Him wholeheartedly, to commit themselves to Him totally--all through the Spirit's work. The results are synonymous in describing the same experience of one's becoming a Christian. The believers may enter the Kingdom of Heaven only by God's grace and enjoy the blessings of God's reign such as being saved, having eternal life, and through the Spirit's work seek to practice the high ethical demands of Jesus.

Therefore, the interpretations on the topic of the Kingdom of Heaven by the Dispensationalism and Watchman Nee are unbiblical. Dispensationalism distinguishes the "Kingdom of Heaven" from the "Kingdom of God" by referring the latter to God's eternal rule which reigns all intelligences in heaven or on earth who are willingly subject to God, but the former only to God's promise to the nation of Israel, that

is, the messianic, mediatorial, Davidic and millennial kingdom, in which the Messiah Jesus, as the Son of David, will rule on earth for one thousand years after His second coming.

Again, while criticising the dispensational view, Watchman Nee also differentiates the "Kingdom of Heaven" from the "Kingdom of God." He refers the latter to the rule of God over all believers but the former as the reward part of the future millennial kingdom only for the faithful Christians who will reign with the Lord for a thousand years. To him, the distinction is not between the Jews and the Gentiles, but between the faithful Christians and the unfaithful Christians. However, both the dispensational view and Watchman Nee's view cannot stand, because it is impossible to establish their thesis on the basis of Scripture that the Kingdom of Heaven is different from the Kingdom of God. To make a differentiation between them is to make a very serious mistake.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' ethical teaching demands a perfect righteous inner attitude and character as well as outward acts. Obviously, this is beyond the ability of any human being. All are sinners, however, God promises to give this righteousness as a gift to those who hunger and thirst for it, and through God's redemptive reign in their hearts, this righteousness, which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, can be actually experienced even in this present age, qualitatively if not quantitatively. The perfect righteousness still awaits the eschatological

consummation. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount presupposes the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, and contains not only demand but also gift; not only conduct but also promise; not only the required "greater righteousness" but also the gifts to achieve that righteousness; not only Law but also Gospel, and the Gospel is the foundation for one to fulfill the Law, after the Law has first shown a person that he is a sinner with no hope but in a gracious God, and so he is propter Christum (on account of Christ).

Matt. 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," has its background in the messianic promise of Isa. 61:1-3. The phrase "the poor in spirit" refers to those who are aware of their spiritual poverty and need, and turn to God with total dependence on Him for their deliverance. Thus, this verse signifies that: while seeing so many desperate spiritually poor followers who, through the Spirit's work, receive His message of the Kingdom of Heaven in sincere repentance and genuine faith with total commitment, Jesus uses the language of Isaiah 61, to declare such "poor" as blessed, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, Jesus is blessing His followers and announcing the fulfillment of the age of salvation in and through His person and ministry, and also challenging the other hearers to accept this same salvation for the "poor in spirit."

Matt. 5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,"

has its clue in Matt. 5:6, "Blessed are they who are hungry and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." The latter means that all who, through the Spirit's work, aware of their desperate spiritual need and turn to God in sincere repentance and genuine faith with total commitment will be granted God's gift of righteousness. In verse 10 Jesus continues what He has just said and speaks of those believers who not only receive righteousness as God's gift, but also live out a life of righteousness which stands inevitably in conflict with the worldly standards and results in persecution. They are blessed "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," that is, for God's redemptive rule has already been given them and is at work and manifested in their lives.

Matt. 5:20, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will surely never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" has its background in Matthew 5:17, 18, and Isaiah 61. These indicate that Jesus' coming and ministry have fulfilled the Old Testament promise of God's eschatological redemptive activity in imparting His righteousness to His people. In light of Matthew 5:6; 6:33; and 5:21-48, what Jesus means in 5:20 is that the righteousness is given by God as a gift because Jesus fulfilled God's messianic promise, thereby making possible sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him through the Spirit's work. This righteousness of faith will inevitably result in the righteousness of life which surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Believing in Jesus means submitting oneself totally to God's redemptive and dynamic rule, which not only brings him a new relationship with God, but also endows him with the transforming power to live out the greater righteousness. The gift-character and the enablement-character of this greater righteousness have an inseparable link in God's redemptive rule through Jesus' ministry and the Spirit's work.

Matt. 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" has its background in Matt. 7:13-20 where Jesus exhorts the hearers to enter the narrow gate and warns against the false prophets. In verse 21, those false prophets could publically call Jesus with the polite title of "Lord, Lord" but without believing in Him, let alone being obedient to Him by doing the will of the Father. They will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Actually, the will of the Father has eschatological, soteriological, and ethical aspects. It is the Father's will that Jesus came into this world to fulfill the promises of the Torah and Prophets concerning the eschatological salvation. Again, it is the Father's will that one receives the Gospel promises and be granted the righteousness as a gift from God, resulting in a new relationship between him and God. Furthermore, it is the Father's will that one who receives the gift of righteousness in grace is simultaneously receiving God's redemptive rule in his life, which will empower him to live out God's ethical demands.

Therefore, those who do the Father's will are those disciples who, through the Spirit's work, receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him. They will not only freely receive God's gift of righteousness but also thus live under God's redemptive rule which will provide the power for them to live the ethical demand of the Father's will. And they are the ones who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt. 11:12, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" expresses the idea of the forceful, dramatic coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the forceful, vigorous response of men. The former can be seen in Jesus' powerful ministry of healing the sick, cleansing the leper, casting out the demons, raising the dead, preaching the Gospel, converting the sinners, and the like. Jesus' categorical teaching using phrases such as, cutting off one's hand, plucking out one's eye, loving Him more than anyone else, giving up everything one has--all these emphasize men's forceful or vigorous response to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit, in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him. A similar idea of this verse can be found in Luke 16:16.

Matt. 18:3, ". . . unless you turn and become like the little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of

Heaven," emphasizes the conditions for entering the Kingdom of Heaven in terms of sincere repentance and childlike total dependence, childlike humble trustfulness in Jesus. Here, Jesus uses the word turn (*στραφήτε*) to express the Hebrew term *בָּשׁוּ* which signifies "turning to God and turning away from evil," that is, "repentance and conversion." The childlike quality implied in this verse is a little child's total dependence and humble trustfulness. Since the meaning of "trusting with total dependence" is essentially equivalent to that of "believing with total commitment," the central idea of this verse is that anyone who wants to enter the Kingdom of Heaven must first realize, through the Spirit's work, his spiritual helplessness and being without any claim before God, repent sincerely and believe in Jesus with total commitment to Him. A similar concept but with slightly different emphasis of this verse can be found in Mark 10:15.

Matt. 19:23-24, ". . . it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. . . it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" should be understood within the context of the entire paragraph of Matt. 19:16-26. In these passages, the expressions, "have eternal life," "entering life," "entering the Kingdom of Heaven," "entering the Kingdom of God," and "being saved" are synonymous. Here, Jesus uses the tremendous contrast between a real camel and a real needle's eye to express the impossibility for a rich man or any man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven by his own effort or merit.

In Matt. 19:21, Jesus wants this rich young man to know that his outward obedience to the commandments is utterly useless for salvation, and what he desperately needs is a complete inward change of heart. By selling and giving away his possessions, he may express his sincere repentance of his chief sin, that is, the love of his wealth more than God. And, by following Jesus, which is the focus of all commandments, he may show the evidence of his true obedience to the commandments through his genuine faith in Him with total commitment to Him.

This inward change, however, is made possible only by the grace of God. It is by the grace of God and through the work of the Holy Spirit that one may surrender himself absolutely to Jesus, to become His disciple, to follow Him wholeheartedly in sincere repentance and genuine faith with total commitment. In this way and only in this way, one may enter the Kingdom of Heaven, or have eternal life, or be saved.

The parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl relate closely to each other just like twins. Their same main point is that: Even as the laborer who found a treasure in a field responded by selling all he possessed to buy the field in order to obtain the treasure and as the merchant who found an especially valuable pearl also responded by selling all he possessed in order to buy the pearl, so the disciples, through the Spirit's work, knowing the value of the Kingdom of Heaven, respond to God's kingly rule by committing themselves totally to Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.

Therefore, these twin parables illustrate the truth that those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven are those who, through the Spirit's work, respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

The parable of the Workers in the Vineyard stresses the contrast between the grace and generosity of the employer and the self-merit and envious mind of the first workers. The main point is that when God is active redemptively in order to reestablish His rule over and among men, He is like a gracious employer whose surprising generosity and amazing grace in providing for all his employees in the same amount irritates those who have a mind of work-for-wages and self-merit. If so, the latter who depend on their own merit will become last and those who depend on God's grace will become first. And this point is true both in the non-Christian's seeking for the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven and in the Christian's expecting of the reward for discipleship in that Kingdom.

The rich young man and the Pharisees, depending on their own merit to earn eternal life, can never get it. Although they, in the Jewish thought pattern, ranked among the first in this world will become the last in the future. But the disciples, depending totally on God's grace in following Jesus with genuine faith and total commitment, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In this way, although the disciples, who in the Jewish thought pattern, ranked among the last in

this world will become the first in the future.

Again, this parable warns against the disciples' tendency of expecting reward for their sacrifice in following Jesus. Christians must avoid the work-for-wages mind and the envious attitude toward their followmen in the serving of the Lord. Otherwise, they will become last. Those who serve the Lord faithfully out of love and humble spirit, depending totally on His grace, will be first.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the central message of His teaching is the Kingdom of Heaven. He preached constantly the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven and frequently urged His hearers to enter this Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God; "entering the Kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with "entering life," or "having eternal life," or "being saved." Again, "Jesus' believers" is synonymous with "Jesus' disciples," or "Jesus' followers"; "repenting and believing in Jesus" is synonymous with "following Jesus wholeheartedly," or "committing oneself totally to Jesus as his Savior and Lord." Therefore, those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven, according to Jesus' teaching, are those who, through the Spirit's work, receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven in sincere repentance and genuine faith in Jesus with total commitment to Him.

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