

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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It is a curious fact that the expression "kingdom of God" does not occur in the OT. The reality, however, is affirmed in various ways throughout its length, above all in its assertions of the sovereignty of God. A typical example is in Psalm 99:

The LORD is king;
let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth quake! . . .
Mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
Extol the LORD our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he!

It is precisely in the exercise of the royal power of God, notably in his acts of judgment and salvation, that the kingdom of God is seen.

The fundamental meaning of the terms for "kingdom" in Hebrew (*mal'kût*), Aramaic (*mal'kû*) and Greek (*basileia*) is the same—namely, kingship or sovereignty. Curiously enough, the same is true of the English word "kingdom." Its primary meaning is the authority and power of a king, not the country ruled or the people ruled by a king. The *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes a statement of Hobbes in the seventeenth century, in which he defined monarchy as a form of government "which, if he limit it by law, is called *Kingdom*; if by his own will, *Tyranny*." Kingdom thus is viewed as the lawful exercise of royal power, as over against tyranny, the unjust use of such authority. That is in accord with its meaning in the Bible.

In the teaching of Jesus, however, as in the NT as a whole, the kingdom of God has specific reference to the fulfillment of the promises of God in the OT of the time when God puts forth his royal power to end injustice and oppression by this world's evil powers and to establish his rule of righteousness, peace and joy for humanity—in a word, to fulfill his purpose in creating the world. The gospels were written to show how the accomplishment of that task was and is the intention of the mission of Jesus from the Father.

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I. SAYINGS OF JESUS CONCERNING
THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN HIS MINISTRY

It is usual, and right, to commence a study of our Lord's teaching on the kingdom of God with a consideration of Mark 1:14-15: "Jesus came proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time has been completed and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and believe in the good news.'" The first thing to be observed about this statement is that it is not a merely isolated saying among the many that Jesus said; it is a summary of his message. Having described the mission of John the Baptist, culminating in the baptism of Jesus and his temptation, Mark concludes his introduction to the ministry of Jesus by giving in a sentence the subject of our Lord's proclamation to his people. It was "the good news of God." That is Isaianic language for the coming of God for the redemption of his people, as in Isa 40:9; 52:7. The time of waiting for God to do that is over; he has "come close." The debate that has gone on concerning the meaning of *ēngiken* in this sentence is well known. Does it signify "It has drawn near," in the sense that it will shortly come? Or does it mean "It has come" in the present? From the beginning of this century German NT scholarship, through the influence of Albert Schweitzer, has been characterized by the former view: Jesus preached that the kingdom of God is about to come in the very near future. British NT scholarship, through the influence of C. H. Dodd, has commonly affirmed the latter understanding: Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was now present. There has been a significant change of conviction on this issue, alike in the European continent and in North America. The change has been due to the recognition that the summary of Jesus' message is reproduced not in one line but in two parallel affirmations: "The time for the fulfillment of God's promise has now reached its completion; the kingdom of God has come upon us." If the time of waiting for the promise of the kingdom is completed, the time of the kingdom has surely come. In this W. Trilling is emphatic: "The time has become really full, not 'almost' or 'nearly.' The unsurpassable future of God has begun."¹ It is clear, therefore, that Jesus was referring to the beginning of the sovereign action of God that brings salvation, the end of which will be a transformed universe. The saving sovereignty of God has begun because God has come to initiate it in and through Jesus. For that reason it is better to speak of the inauguration of the kingdom (Jeremias) through Jesus rather than its realization (Dodd).

It is interesting to observe that whereas Matthew reproduces Mark's summary of the message of Jesus, Luke replaces it with his account of the visit of Jesus to his hometown of Nazareth. He places it at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus because of its immense significance for the understanding of the mission of Jesus. When Jesus stood up to read Scripture in the synagogue he was handed the scroll of Isaiah. He found in it chap. 61,

¹ W. Trilling, *Christus Verkündigung in den synoptischen Evangelien* (Biblische Handbibliothek 4; München, 1969) 47-48.

probably the prophetic passage appointed for the day. Luke cites the beginning of the chapter:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

OT scholars point out that this passage cites the year of jubilee, expounded in Leviticus 25, as a symbol for the redemption of the kingdom of God. In that fiftieth year liberty was to be proclaimed to all Israel: Slaves sold for debts were to be released, debts were to be remitted, lands sold to pay debts were to be restored to their families. For the prophet it was a picture of the emancipation of Israel when God brings his kingdom into the world. The Qumran community actually linked Isaiah 61 with Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks of years that should lead to the kingdom of God. They calculated that the fulfillment of both prophecies was about to happen. Luke summarizes our Lord's exposition of the chapter in a sentence: "To-day this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Of that summary George Caird wrote: "He (Jesus) has not merely read the scripture; as the King's messenger he has turned it into a royal proclamation of release."²

There is a group of sayings of Jesus that affirm the revelation of the kingdom of God in the acts of power he performs.

When Pharisees alleged that Jesus achieved his exorcisms through being allied with the devil, Jesus rebutted the allegation with a little parable: "No one can enter the house of the strong man and plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man, and then he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:27). The language echoes that of Isa 49:24 ff.:

Can plunder be taken from the warriors,
or captives from the fierce? . . .
Yes, captives will be taken from warriors,
and plunder retrieved from the fierce;
I will contend with those who contend with you,
and your children will I save.

The parable clearly implies that Jesus by the power of God has defeated the "strong man" and released his captives. That is a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God in him, as Matt 12:28, set in the same context as the parable, makes evident: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out the demons, then be sure that the kingdom of God has arrived to you (has come upon you)." On that Ernst Percy rightly commented: "Where Satan is driven back, the rule of God begins."³

² G. Caird, *St. Luke* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; London, 1963) 86.

³ E. Percy, *Die Botschaft Jesu*, LUT 49/5, 179.

A further example of this teaching is seen in the answer of Jesus to the question of John the Baptist: "Are you the Coming One, or are we to look for another?" Characteristically, Jesus neither affirmed nor denied that he was the Messiah. He responded by describing his works in terms of a Scripture passage that speaks of the works of God in the day of the kingdom's coming (Matt 11:5): "The blind are gaining sight, lame people are walking, lepers are being cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised, and the poor are hearing the good news. Happy is the one who has not stumbled by reason of me." The passage to which Jesus was alluding is Isa 35:5-6:

Strengthen the weak hands
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

The meaning of the passage is plain: God is fulfilling these works of the kingdom in and through Jesus. That supplies the answer to John's question: He is God's representative, the Messiah through whom the kingdom comes.

In the same context Matthew has placed a highly ambiguous saying of Jesus: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence (*biazetai*), and the violent (*biastai*) take it by force (*harpazousin*)" (Matt 11:12 NRSV). Having puzzled over this at length I concluded that a single word in the language of Jesus (Aramaic) lies behind all three ambiguous terms. It is the verb *pēraṣ* (in Hebrew *pāraṣ*), the fundamental meaning of which is to "break through," especially breaking through a wall of a city under attack, and so the exercise of power, alike by God and man. It can also have a gentler meaning, to "spread abroad," and so it is used of news spreading. If behind Matthew's Greek lies the Aramaic statement, *malkūtā' dī šēmayyā' pēraṣat ūpārēšin pēraṣū bah*, one could render it as follows: "The kingdom of heaven is powerfully breaking through (into the world), and powerful men are powerfully attacking it." This would explain Luke's unexpected rendering of it: "The kingdom of God is being proclaimed as good news, and everyone is making strenuous efforts to enter it (is powerfully opposing it)." The application of the saying remains uncertain, but the primary utterance is clear: In the ministry of Jesus the kingdom of God is powerfully breaking through into the world. Whether people oppose it or welcome it, the kingdom is present in power.

One final saying of the presence of the kingdom of God in Jesus relates to its presence, not so much in his deeds or words but in his person. I have in mind Luke 17:20-21, the climax of which is also ambiguous. Some Pharisees

ask Jesus when the kingdom of God is coming. To them Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will they say, 'Look, (he is) here,' or 'there,' for look, the kingdom of God is within you." I take it that the observation of which Jesus speaks is of the kind that enables people to calculate the date of the kingdom's coming. The invitation "Look, here" or "there" alludes to the belief that the Messiah's identity is unknown until it is revealed, alike to him and to others. Jesus said that, on the contrary, the kingdom of God is "within you." Is that a correct translation? Hardly, for the Bible does not confine the rule of God within the soul. It extends to all life, all creatures, and in the end to all creation. May we translate the phrase "in your midst"? That is possible, for Jesus was standing there; and where Jesus is, there is the kingdom. But that is a very rare use of the term *entos*. More likely we may take the meaning to be as in various contemporary papyri: "The kingdom of God is within your reach."⁴ That removes attention from speculation about the date of the kingdom's coming in the future to an appeal to be sure to enter it in the present and experience its power now.⁵ The parables of the kingdom, recounted by Jesus, have precisely that kind of application: "The kingdom of God is here; be sure not to miss it!"

II. SAYINGS OF JESUS RELATING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE FUTURE

We have concentrated attention on teachings of Jesus relative to the presence of the kingdom in his ministry because its importance has been frequently undervalued, but Jesus had just as much to say about the future revelation of the kingdom of God.

Two crucial passages suffice to illustrate what he taught of the future coming of the kingdom—namely, the Lord's prayer and the beatitudes. Both are fuller in Matthew than in Luke. Indeed, Matthew appears to have brought together a number of beatitudes of Jesus, presumably spoken at various times.

The Lord's prayer consists of six petitions, the first three for the coming of God's kingdom, the latter three for human needs. The dictum "Seek first the kingdom of God" is to be observed in prayer as in conduct. The three petitions for the kingdom are to be understood as parallel, though with distinctive features (Matt 6:9–10):

Your name be hallowed,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
As in heaven, so also on earth.

⁴ See the discussion of C. H. Roberts, "The Kingdom of Heaven (Lk XVII.21)," *HTR* 41 (1948) 1–8; A. Rustow, "ENTOS HUMON ESTIN: Zur Deutung von Lukas 17.20–21," *ZNW* 51 (1960) 214–224. The interpretation was suggested long ago by Cyril of Alexandria, who defined *entos hymōn* as "in the scope of your choices, (it lies) in your power to receive it" (*Commentary on Luke*, sec. 368).

⁵ Cf. the similar reply of Jesus to a curious questioner about the kingdom of God in Luke 13:23–25.

The first petition is not a plea for a cessation of irreverent use of the name of God but, rather, that God should so manifest his powerful deliverance that people should be in awe and acknowledge his holiness. Such is illustrated by the remarkable prophecy in Ezek 36:16–38 with its central utterance: “I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, . . . and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes” (Ezek 36:23).

“Your kingdom come” is a prayer that the great prophecies of the manifestation of God’s powerful saving rule will come to pass. “Your will be done” similarly is an entreaty for God so to act that his “good pleasure,” his purpose for the world when he created it, may be brought to realization. “As in heaven, so on earth” covers all three petitions.

The beatitudes of Jesus, set by Matthew at the beginning of the sermon on the mount, also primarily have in view the future kingdom, when God shall give to the redeemed of humanity the “blessedness”—that is, the happiness—of his kingdom. They are not in the first instance calls for ethical behavior but proclamation of the gospel. And they relate not to the present but to the future manifestation of the kingdom. This is clear when we look at the second member of each beatitude:

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (i.e. they are its heirs).

They shall be comforted.

They shall inherit the earth.

They shall be satisfied (i.e. satiated in the feast of the kingdom).

They shall obtain mercy (i.e. from God in the judgment).

They shall see God.

They shall be called sons of God (i.e. owned as such by God).

Great is their reward in heaven (i.e. with God in his kingdom).

The beatitudes thus are revelations of the riches of the grace that, experienced in the present, will be known to the full in the unveiling of the glory of the consummated kingdom of God.

III. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The time has to come when Jesus makes known that his ministry of bringing the kingdom of God to humankind entailed his suffering for it. Peter’s confession that he is the Messiah enabled Jesus to reveal it plainly for the first time: “The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

How is it that Jesus arrived at this conclusion? Not alone by reason of the increase of opposition to him, although he will have been fully aware of its danger. Rather the nature of his commission from God will have been sharpened by his meditation on the Scriptures relating to the accomplishment of God’s will. Hitherto scholars have been impressed by one or

other strain in the OT: the importance of the suffering servant of the Lord in the servant songs of Isaiah 40–55; the righteous man who suffers at the hand of the unrighteous, featured especially in the Psalms; the prophet whose word from the Lord is rejected, and who may well die for it; the martyrs for the cause of God, who are in the background of the book of Daniel. It is my conviction that not one but all of these elements of the Word of God will have been significant for Jesus as he pondered his way, and that they flow together in his utterances concerning his sufferings unto death.

There are in fact certain features that bind these types together. The righteous sufferer is frequently represented as suffering precisely because he is righteous and trusts God (cf. Psalms 22, 60; Wisdom 2, 5); the Isaianic servant of the Lord is the righteous sufferer par excellence, enduring death on behalf of the unrighteous;⁶ the rejected prophet is closely related to both figures, especially to the servant of the Lord, who has the ministry of prophet; the martyr for God's truth unites all three figures, for he bears witness as he suffers and dies for the Lord and his people. A further striking feature of the four types of sufferer is that each experiences vindication from the Lord. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous man, but the Lord rescues him out of them all," is the simple pattern of Ps 34:19, which in later writings becomes resurrection to glory. The description of the servant of the Lord's sufferings begins and ends with a declaration of his exaltation (Isa 52:13–15; 53:10–12). The rejected prophet is vindicated through the fulfillment of his words and by his promised participation in the kingdom of God (Dan 12:13; cf. Matt 5:12). The martyrs for God's cause in the book of Daniel are certainly among those who rise to everlasting life (12:2–3), and in later writings they are said to be placed at the right hand of God on thrones of glory (e.g. *Apoc. Elijah* 3). Accordingly all three predictions of the passion in Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:32) conclude with the resurrection of Jesus. This is not due to post-Easter influence on the records of Jesus' teaching, as is frequently claimed; it is integral to his ministry for the kingdom of God. Even Mark's "after three days" is reflected in the teaching of his people. The midrash on Gen 42:17 has a famous comment: "The Holy One, blessed be he, never leaves the righteous in distress more than three days," and it illustrates the principle by reference to the third day in the Scriptures, including Hos 6:2: "On the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his presence." Most importantly, the subject of Jesus' predictions of the passion is the Son of Man of Daniel's vision of the kingdom. It is evident that the presupposition of these sayings is that through his death and resurrection the service for the kingdom of God that he as Son of Man is sent to accomplish reaches its climax. His utterances at the last supper complete the picture, as Jesus breaks the loaf and says, "My body . . . for you," and passes the cup around with the words: "My blood of the covenant poured out for many." By Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection to the right hand of God,

⁶ See M. J. Suggs, "Wisdom of Solomon 2 10–5: A Homily Based on the Fourth Servant Song," *JBL* 76 (1957) 26–33.

the saving sovereignty of God in all its redemptive power becomes available for all humanity.

IV. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE *PAROUSIA* OF JESUS

If we accept that Jesus saw his impending death and resurrection as the decisive event in his earthly ministry of establishing the kingdom of God in the world, what did he see beyond that event? Assuredly not the immediate end of the age, as Albert Schweitzer and others have postulated. A major consequence of the confusion of tongues over the eschatological discourse in the synoptic gospels (Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21) has been a neglect of its significance for our Lord's understanding of history following his death and resurrection prior to the end. His prophecy that the temple would be destroyed clearly anticipates a period prior to that event. There is no evidence that he looked for it to take place immediately upon his death—as though, like Samson, he was to pull down the edifice and engulf the nation and himself in destruction. On the contrary, the language of Mark 13:14–20 speaks in terms of the action of a military power against Israel that will be the agent of destruction and from which the faithful must flee (so Luke 21:20–24; cf. 13:1–5; 19:41–44; 23:27–31). The use of Danielic language in relation to this event in Mark 13:14, 19 further suggests that Jesus saw the coming calamity as the Day of the Lord on Jerusalem and Israel, in harmony with the prophets before him. Positively, however, the period consequent upon his death and resurrection he saw as one of continuation by his followers of the mission entrusted to him. Such is the import of Mark 13:9–13. Its language indicates that the Church, in carrying out its mission, will not only share his sufferings but will also know the aid of the Holy Spirit in its witness. The mission, while described especially in relation to Israel, also has the nations in view: "The gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations" (Mark 13:10). But the Day of the Lord on Israel does not bring history to an end. The lament over Jerusalem concludes with the words: "Your house is abandoned to you. For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until you say, 'Blessed in the name of the Lord is the Coming One'" (Matt 23:34). Therein is expressed our Lord's anticipation of the turning of his own nation to him before the end comes—that is, before the *parousia* of the Son of Man.

Three passages in Mark speak of that event (Mark 8:38; 13:24–27; 14:62), and it dominates the so-called Q apocalypse in Luke 17:22–37. Perhaps the most crucial of these statements is Mark 14:62, spoken by Jesus at his trial before the Sanhedrin. Failing to secure the needful agreement of witnesses on charges against Jesus, the high priest tries his hand and asks Jesus whether he is the Messiah. Jesus replies: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Whereupon the high priest declares that Jesus has blasphemed, and the court agrees that he should be put to death. On this we would comment:

1. For Jesus to state "*I am the Messiah*" is not blasphemy, and it is insufficient to warrant the death penalty. The offense was his exposition of the nature of his Messiahship. His judges are to see him as the Son of Man of Daniel's vision, coming with the clouds of heaven as God comes. Thereby he will be revealed as the Lord set at God's right hand in fulfillment of Ps 110:1. That was the blasphemous element in the eyes of the high priest—namely, that Jesus should claim to come in theophanic clouds of glory as Lord of the kingdom of God and to occupy a place that no man has the right to take (i.e. at God's right hand).

2. This is the only public occasion when Jesus plainly declared that he was the Messiah, and he knew perfectly well that he would die for it. He was standing on trial for his life, and his utterance is linked with the Son of Man sayings relating to his death and resurrection, for it is as representative of the kingdom of God that he declares this prophecy of revelation as the Lord at God's right hand when he comes as Son of Man.

3. The linking of Ps 110:1 with Dan 7:13 has been queried, as though it would not have been thought of prior to the resurrection of Jesus. On the contrary, the two passages are conjoined in the midrash on Ps 2:7: "I will declare the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my son.'" The midrash states that the children of Israel are declared to be sons in the decree of the Law, in the decree of the Prophets, and in the decree of the Writings; it cites Exod 4:22 ("Israel is my son"), followed by Isa 52:13, 42:1, Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13–14. Note that these scriptures are said to relate to "the children of Israel," but R. Yudan said that they will be fulfilled by God for the lord Messiah. Their juxtaposition in the midrash is remarkable and suggests that the connection may well have been traditional among the Jews of the time of Jesus.

4. The question has been raised as to whether Mark 14:62 is rightly understood of the *parousia* of the Son of Man from heaven or of his ascent to heaven, since in Dan 7:13 the one like a son of man comes on the clouds to God, who has summoned the angels to assemble in court. Although this view has become increasingly common, I am convinced that it is mistaken.⁷ Daniel 7:13 occurs in a vision depicting the rise of successive empires, culminating in one led by an arrogant king who warred with God's "holy ones" "until the Ancient of Days came"—so it is stated in the explanation (v. 22).

⁷ The interpretation of Mark 14:62 in terms of the exaltation of the Son of Man was expounded by T. Colani in *Jésus Christ et les croyances de son temps* (Strasbourg, 1964) 20 and is maintained among others by M. J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Marc* (Paris: Gabalda, 1922) 403; T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent: The Origin of the New Testament Doctrine* (London, 1945) 64–65; "The Reply to Caiaphas (Mark xiv.62)," *NTS* 7 (1960) 91; J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (London, 1957) 45. J. Jeremias considered that in the original sayings of Jesus the movement of the Son of Man was an ascent (so Mark 13:26–27; cf. Luke 22:69) and that Mark 14:62 reflects larger Church interpretation that divided the vindication of Christ into resurrection-exaltation and *parousia* (*New Testament Theology* [London, 1971] 273–274).

That is to say, the vision records a theophany of God to the scene of the rampaging of the antigod power, and hence the one like a son of man comes on the clouds of God's presence to receive the kingdom that replaces the kingdoms of this world. A theophany in the Bible is always from heaven to earth, for judgment or salvation, and this one is no exception. It should be added that Jewish teachers always so viewed the passage. G. Vermes states that there is no exception to this.⁸ The same applies to the NT writers. They clearly distinguished the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus from his *parousia*, as the primitive saying in 1 Thess 1:10 and Acts 17:30–31 exemplifies.

The saying in Mark 8:38 has not only parallels in Matthew and Luke in the same context but also a Q parallel (Matt 18:32–33 = Luke 12:8–9) that is briefer but very instructive. Whereas Mark 8:38 speaks in terms of the Son of Man at his *parousia* being "ashamed" of one ashamed of him, the Q version has a double saying:

Everyone who confesses me before men
the Son of Man will confess before the angels of God;
everyone who denies me before men
the Son of Man will deny before the angels (of God).

The Q saying makes no mention of the *parousia*, but the setting is the same as Mark 8:38 and parallels—namely, the judgment scene of Daniel 7. Accordingly W. G. Kümmel argued for the original form of the saying in Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8–9 as follows:

Everyone who confesses me before men
the Son of Man will confess
when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.
Everyone who denies me before men
the Son of Man will deny
when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.⁹

The importance of the saying is twofold—namely, that entrance into the kingdom of God is determined by the confession or denial of Jesus, and that entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom is declared by the Son of Man. Jesus is the supreme witness before the court of heaven, and his witness represents the Father's will. (The concept is perfectly expressed in John 5:26–27.)

The description of the *parousia* in the eschatological discourse of Mark 13 follows a portrayal of events dominated by the disciples' request for information concerning the destruction of the temple announced by Jesus in Mark 13:2. The statement about the abomination of desolation in vv. 14–20, and the tribulation of Israel entailed as a consequence, relates to the generation that rejected Jesus and his message (hence v. 30: "This generation shall not pass away until all these things are fulfilled," cf. Matt

⁸ G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (New York, 1973) 187.

⁹ W. G. Kümmel, *Jesus der Menschensohn?* (Stuttgart, 1984) 220.

23:34–36). The section in the discourse on “signs” begins and ends with warnings relating to the activities of pseudoprophets and pseudomessiahs. They have been so placed by Mark to accentuate the danger of such in his times. The statement about the *parousia* in vv. 24–27 differs from those we have considered through one important feature. It commences with a description of so-called “cosmic signs” in vv. 24–25:

The sun will become darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling out of heaven,
and the powers that are in heaven will be shaken.
And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds
With great power and glory.

This does not mean that at the Lord’s appearing the earth is destroyed or the universe collapses. It is the familiar and time-honored language of theophany, going back to ancient representations that when God steps forth for action in the world all creation is in confusion and dread before his appearing. The application of such picture language to describe the coming of the Son of Man shows that he comes with the glory and power of God himself. He who was the representative of the kingdom of God in his ministry is to come back as the representative of the kingdom of God in theophanic glory. The sole purpose of his coming mentioned in this passage is the gathering of his “elect” from the four winds, “from the end of earth to the end of heaven” (v. 27), a phrase that conjoins reminiscences of Deut 30:3 with Zech 2:6. Interestingly this passage appears to be the “word of the Lord” on which Paul bases his description of the *parousia* in 1 Thess 4:15–18. On the lips of Jesus it envisages the gathering of the elect of all nations, along with the penitents of Israel, into a single community under the lordship and in the fellowship of the Son of Man.

V. CONCLUSION

When I was a young pastor I had a conversation with a veteran theologian. He asked me what element of theology I was interested in, and I replied, “Eschatology.” He snorted in disdain. “Don’t get bogged down in that subject,” said he. “Why don’t you work on the doctrine of God? Eschatology is simply an aspect of the doctrine of God.” He was, of course, essentially right. The central element of eschatology is the kingdom of God, and that signifies God in sovereign action for judgment and salvation in the world. The gospels, however, make it plain that God accomplishes that sovereign action in and through Jesus. In the teaching of Jesus we see his role in the kingdom of God as its champion (Mark 3:27), its initiator (Matt 11:12), its instrument (12:28), its revealer (Luke 17:20–21), its mediator (Mark 2:18–19). That last term, in fact, covers all the rest and is most clearly seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the climax of his ministry. But his service of the kingdom was not concluded in that dual event. It continues in the Church, working by the aid of the Holy Spirit of the kingdom, as he

presses on to the consummation of God's sovereign action in the *parousia*. It is one unbroken action of God through the mediator Son of God. In the deeds of the kingdom the revelation of God is perfectly manifested. In light of the accomplishment of that revelation in Jesus in the past, we confidently and joyously look for its completion in the great and glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ (1 Tim 6:14).