

## THE KINGDOM-OF-GOD SAYINGS IN MATTHEW

Mark Saucy

More than three decades ago Ridderbos made the observation that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry the kingdom was present (Matt. 4:17), but at the end of His ministry it was far away, almost "as if it had not yet come" (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:6-8).<sup>1</sup> While many will see in this observation evidence for the "already/not yet" view in regard to the timing of the kingdom, few have considered Ridderbos's observation as a warrant to say much else for the kingdom because of the narrative chronology he has assumed. Could the kingdom in the beginning of the Gospels have differed in nature from the kingdom at the end of the Gospels? This article proposes a yes answer to that question, as seen in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> Kingdom sayings at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel should not be "leveled" with those of the end and vice versa. Such a procedure, when applied to the investigation of the kingdom of God in Matthew, will aid in explaining Ridderbos's observation, and also will yield helpful insights into the nature of the kingdom Jesus preached.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN MATTHEW 1-10

#### JOHN THE BAPTIST

Though Matthew is replete with references to βασιλεία ("kingdom"), the phrase "kingdom of God" appears only rarely

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 469.

<sup>2</sup> Important resources for the kingdom theme specifically in the Gospel of Matthew are O. L. Cope, "'To the Close of the Age': The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Apocalyptic in the New Testament*, ed. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 113-24; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 166-72; Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel* (Munich: Kosel, 1964), 143-50.

compared with "kingdom of heaven," which is more than eight times as frequent.<sup>3</sup> As the synonymity of the two forms in Matthew has been upheld by exegetes since Dalman,<sup>4</sup> in this article "kingdom of God" shall be considered inclusive of both forms.

The kingdom of God in Matthew is first encountered in the wilderness proclamation of John the Baptist: **μετανοεῖτε ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν** ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," 3:2). Several observations about the kingdom are important here. First, the activity associated with the kingdom is "preaching" or proclamation (**κηρύσσω**, 3:1). The kingdom is proclaimed from the herald's mouth. "He cries aloud so that all who wish to hear may do so, and his summons is 'Repent.'"<sup>5</sup> Though more will be said about this later in conjunction with the "evangelizing" (**εὐαγγελίζω**), "teaching" (**διδάσκω**), and "preaching" (**κηρύσσω**) activities of Jesus relative to the kingdom, it is important to note that at the outset of Matthew the kingdom is the subject of a "herald's proclamation."

Second, in John's preaching, the kingdom is related in a formulaic way to the message of Jesus and the disciples. In this first portion of Matthew, John's proclamation is repeated verbatim in the proclamation of Jesus (4:17) and the disciples (10:7). "John the prototype, Jesus the teacher, the twelve disciples—all preach the same message."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew used kingdom vocabulary more than any other Gospel (53 times; Mark, 18 times; Luke, 45 times; John, 4 times). Matthew used "kingdom of God" four times with the probable addition of a fifth occurrence in 6:33—note the comment by Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1975), 18-19—and "kingdom of heaven" 33 times.

<sup>4</sup> Gustaf H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, trans. D. M. Kay (Edinburgh: Clark, 1909) has been a 20th-century benchmark for the kingdom of God in critical study particularly on the question of the kingdom as a dynamic rule versus a territorial realm. On the question of the synonymity of "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew, see *ibid.*, 93. Trilling summarizes, "That the expression **βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν** has been introduced for **βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ** by Matthew into the synoptic tradition belongs to the most assured results of Matthean exegesis" (*Das Wahre Israel*, 143). Also see Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 134; Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 17; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "**βασιλεία**," by Karl Ludwig Schmidt, 1:582; Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Becksche, 1969), 1:172. Some raise the possibility of a difference in the two since both forms are found in the Gospel. See for example Armin Kretzer, *Die Herrschaft der Himmel and die Sohne des Reiches* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971), 21-31, who denies a strict substitution and sees Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" emphasizing the dynamic of the divine kingdom's in-breaking rule toward earth.

<sup>5</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "**κηρύσσω**," by Gerhard Friedrich, 3:706.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 43.

Third, the message of John, Jesus, and the disciples associated the kingdom with a demand. Given the coming lordship of God in judgment, there is only one task for humanity: repent. The heralds' call for repentance demands nothing less than genuine conversion. The hearers must return to the prophetic piety of the Old Testament and surpass that of their Jewish contemporaries.<sup>7</sup> **Μετάνοια** as part of Matthew's summary formula for the proclamation of the kingdom indicates that repentance conditioned the whole kingdom proclamation.

The whole proclamation of Jesus, with its categorical demands for the sake of God's kingdom, is a proclamation of **μετάνοια** even when the term is not used. It is a proclamation of unconditional turning to God, or unconditional turning from all that is against God, not merely that which is downright evil, but that which in a given case makes total turning to God impossible.<sup>8</sup>

Fourth, the kingdom Jesus announced is in vital nexus with the one John announced. For Matthew the ministry and message of both John and Jesus came in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic promise.<sup>9</sup> John was referred to by Isaiah as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Matt. 3:3; Isa. 40:3). John is the one who carried on the line of the Old Testament prophets as their fulfillment (Matt. 11:13), and he is the one whom Jesus specifically identified as Elijah "who was to come" according to the prediction of the prophet Malachi (Matt. 11:14; 17:12; Mal. 3:1; 4:5). John's position as herald and fulfillment of the prophetic voice

<sup>7</sup> Behm notes that the traditional Jewish forms of expressing repentance (feelings of remorse, gestures of sorrow, works of penance, or self-mortification) have no value in John's announcement. "God's definitive revelation demands final and unconditional decision on man's part. It demands radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v., "**μετανοέω**," by J. Behm, 4:1002).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew's stress on the fulfillment theme for Jesus is well known from his formulaic usage of **πληρώω** in 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; and 27:9. John's nexus with Jesus also placed him in the time of fulfillment. In 3:15 Jesus and John participated in the fulfillment of the Old Testament righteousness at Jesus' baptism. In 21:23-27 Jesus and John had the same divine authority. Filson notes that Jesus' answer to the challenge of the chief priests and elders about His authority comes from the fact that "Jesus knows that his work and John's are connected, and that the Jewish leaders, in failing to see that God had sent John, had forfeited their right to judge John's successor" (Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 2d ed. [London: Black, 1975], 226). Mark 1:15 ("the time is fulfilled [**πεπλήρωται**], and the kingdom of God is at hand") presents the fulfillment theme as part of the proclamation itself, setting a precedent for New Testament literature in joining a kingdom-of-God saying with such a time element (Werner H. Kelber, *The Kingdom of God in Mark* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974], 10-11).

means he himself proclaimed the nearness<sup>10</sup> of the Old Testament messianic hope.

Gowan has well summarized the Old Testament prophetic hope for Israel: "God must transform the human person; give a new heart and a new spirit.... God must transform human society; restore Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities, and make Israel's new status a witness to the nations. . . . And God must transform nature itself."<sup>11</sup> Because historically the kingship of God in the Old Testament had been closely connected with Israel's national life,<sup>12</sup> the prophetic hope also put the kingship and reign of God in physical and national terms for Israel when world events had caused her national life to decline. The coming manifestation of God's kingship was "the center of the whole Old Testament promise of salvation" (Isa. 24-27; 40-55, esp. 40:9-11;

<sup>10</sup> Kummel's discussion of the linguistic differences between ἥγγικεν (3:2) and ἔφθασεν (12:28) is largely thought to have laid to rest the contention of realized eschatology that equated the two words and would have meant that John, Jesus, and the disciples here announced that the kingdom had come in its fullness (W. G. Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1957], 105-9). On the strength of Kummel's observations most interpreters see a difference between the kingdom's near approach (ἥγγικεν) and its arrival (ἔφθασεν). See Ladd's discussion and bibliography in *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 138-45; G. W. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 75-80; Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 73; and Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 43-44. See, however, an attempt at equating the two words in Richard H. Hiers, *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1973), 61-63.

<sup>11</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 2. Sigmund Mowinckel concurs, noting the prophetic hope was "always a hope of restoration," and that the chief features in the hope are "in the main constant" (*He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson [New York: Abingdon, 1954], 133, 137). Mowinckel himself summarized the hope this way: (1) Yahweh will achieve the ultimate goal of the glory of His name in Israel. (2) The kingdom of David will then be established in its ancient glory. (3) The exiles will return and Israel will be united with Judah. (4) All the nations will pay homage to Yahweh as the only true God. (5) Pilgrims will stream to Jerusalem from all parts of the earth. (6) Wealth and produce from all the earth will be amassed at Jerusalem. (7) All blessing, fertility, and well-being will prevail in the land. (8) Disease and misfortune will be banished. (9) Everyone will enjoy the fruit of his labor, peace, and safety. (10) All offenders and sinners will be rooted out of Yahweh's people (*ibid.*, 137). Also see Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 45-75. Cf. the discussion of the expression of this messianic hope during first-century Judaism in Emil Schärer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979), 2:488-554.

<sup>12</sup> Von Rad makes the lexical observations that מלכות originally was used only in reference to a "concrete sphere of power" and that Yahweh is never called "king" before the monarchy (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "βασιλεύς," by Gerhard von Rad, 1:570). Patrick also notes that "the Kingdom language of the OT is historical and contains an irreducibly national strain" (Dale Patrick, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth Century In-*

52:7; Obad. 21; Mic. 4:3; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:16-17).<sup>13</sup>

Since the kingdom of the prophetic hope was to take a political and national form for Israel, John's heralding the near fulfillment of that same hope has bearing on the kingdom he preached. This is especially noteworthy when one considers that neither John, Jesus, nor the disciples defined the kingdom at the outset of their ministry. They simply proclaimed it.

Jesus uses "kingdom of God" to call to mind all that his auditors knew about the coming intervention of God to redeem his people and pacify the world. . . . The expression itself gives a particular coloring to the denouement of history, namely, a political and legal coloring. The whole of the Scripture and tradition prepare for and are completed in a political state in which God alone exercises sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

#### JESUS

As John before him, Jesus also proclaimed, **μετανοείτε ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν** ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," 4:17). Jesus' message and ministry, like that of John, were in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. However, Matthew gave additional indications of the necessary connection between the message of Jesus and that of the Old Testament.

First, alongside the preaching (**κηρύσσω**) of Jesus, the "gospel" (**εὐαγγέλιον**) is associated with the kingdom (4:23). In fact twice in the first nine chapters of Matthew Jesus' ministry is summarized as teaching in the synagogues, preaching the "gospel of the kingdom," and healing every disease and infirmity (4:23; 9:35). The "gospel of the kingdom," which is idiomatic to Matthew, inherently ties Jesus' good news about the kingdom<sup>15</sup> to the promised hope of the Old Testament.

Most significant for the NT concept of **εὐαγγέλιον** is Deutero-Isaiah and the literature influenced by it (Is 52:7; 61:1; 40:9; 41:27; Nah 2:1). . . . The close connection between this whole circle of thought and the NT is evident. The eschatological expectation, the proclamation of the **βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ**, the introduction of the Gentiles into salvation history, the rejection of the ordinary religion of cult and Law (Ps 40), the link with the terms **δικαιοσύνη** (Ps 40:9), **σωτηρία** (Is 52:7; Ps 95:1), and **εἰρήνη** (Is 52:7)—all point us to the NT.<sup>16</sup>

*terpretation*, ed. Wendell Willis [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987], 79).

<sup>13</sup> Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," 71; cf. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> The form is an objective genitive. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen* (London: SPCK, 1969), 19; cf. idem, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 128-29.

<sup>16</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "εὐαγγέλιον," by Gerhard Friedrich, 2:708-9.

Second, Jesus' healing ministry was in fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic hope.<sup>17</sup> Jesus Himself noted the significance of His miracles in light of His mission. In Matthew 11:5 Jesus' response to John's disciples summarizes His ministry activity up to that time. Quoting from Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1, Jesus told the disciples to report to John that "the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."<sup>18</sup> Matthew 8 and 9 chronicle the details of Jesus' healing a leper (8:3), a centurion's paralyzed servant (8:13), Peter's ill mother (8:15), the two demoniacs of the Gadarenes (8:32), a paralytic (9:7), a woman with a hemorrhage (9:22), a synagogue official's daughter who had died (9:25), two blind men (9:30), and a demonized dumb man (9:33). Therefore, as Matthew wrote, the words of Isaiah 53:4 were fulfilled: "He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases" (Matt. 8:17). The physical nature of the miracles points to the physical dimension of the kingdom. The kingdom Jesus announced was not a spiritual fulfillment of the promises to the lame, sick, and demonized; therefore one cannot assume that the promises to the nation of Israel were given a spiritual fulfillment.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Some have used rabbinic sources to dispute that the Messiah was expected to work miracles in the first century. "The Messiah is never mentioned anywhere in the Tannaitic literature as a wonder-worker per se" (Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, trans. W. F. Stinespring [New York: Macmillan, 1955], 506). However, Matthew (and other Gospel writers; see Luke 7:22; John 7:31) believed the Messiah would prove His identity by means of miracles (cf. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ [175 B.C.-A.D. 135]*, 2:525). In response to Klausner and the many scholars who lean on him (e.g., G. Delling, "Das Verstandnis des Wunders im Neuen Testament," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 24 [1955]: 274, n. 18, and Rudolf Pesch, *Jesu Ureigene Taten?* [Freiburg: Herder, 1970], 151), it should be noted that the rabbinic sources are notably anti-Christian (cf. the portrayal of Jesus as a sorcerer) and considerably later than the first century. The pseudepigrapha are somewhat ambivalent about a miracle-working Messiah. On one hand there are no explicit statements for or against the Messiah working miracles. On the other hand the portrait of the messianic age as a time of miracles, the affirmation of the Messiah as a type of Moses and Bearer of the miracle-working Holy Spirit all make a miracle-working Messiah compatible with the pre-Christian messianic hope. See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "Μωυσοϋ," by Joachim Jeremias, 4:863; A. Kolenkow, "Relationship between Miracle and Prophecy in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity," in *Aufstieg and Niedergang der Römischen Welt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 23:2:1471; P. W. Barnett, "The Jewish Sign Prophets 40-70 A.D.," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 682-83; *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (1992), s.v. "Miracles," by B. Blackburn, 558; and James H. Charlesworth, "Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha," in *Aufstieg and Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 19:1:188-218.

<sup>18</sup> O. Betz and Werner Grimm note how the Gospel miracle accounts typified in Matthew 11:5 are clearly related to the new age promises of Isaiah 26:19; 29:18; 35:4-6; 42:18; and 61:1-2 (*Wesen and Wirklichkeit der Wunder Jesu* [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1977], 31).

<sup>19</sup> It would be a mistake to conclude that since Jesus did not fulfill all the na-

Third, Matthew also shows that Jesus is the eschatological fulfillment of the prophetic hope by pointing up the ethnic aspect of His ministry. Jesus' heralding the good news of the kingdom to the Jewish people places Him squarely within the Old Testament prophetic hope for a restored nation of Israel.<sup>20</sup> Jesus' taught in their synagogues (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), thus revealing the Jewishness of His itinerary. Also at the outset of His ministry, Jesus selected 12 disciples—a number suited for the ultimate task of judging the 12 tribes of Israel from 12 thrones (19:28). And when Jesus commissioned the disciples to proclaim the kingdom (which message was identical to His and John's, 10:5-7), He instructed them to go not to Gentiles or Samaritans, but only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (cf. 15:24).

### SUMMARY

For Matthew, then, the antecedent of Jesus' original message and ministry is clear. In every way Jesus' "gospel about the kingdom" was the gospel of the Old Testament prophets. In word and miracle, proclamation and raising the dead, the longed-for

tional promises of the Old Testament, those promises are to be spiritually realized only. First, as Horsley and others show, Jesus' ministry was very politically charged in His opposition to the temple cult of the day (Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987]; cf. also Klaus Berger, "Jesus als Pharisaer and Fruhe Christen als Pharisaer," *Novum Testamentum* 30 [1988]: 231-62; Ben F. Myers, *The Aims of Jesus* [London: SCM, 1979]; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982]; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985]; and idem, "Jesus and the Kingdom: The Restoration of Israel and the New People of God," in *Jesus, the Gospels, and the Church*, ed. E. P. Sanders [Macon, GA: Mercer, 1987]). Second, the complete establishment of the kingdom was conditioned on the spiritual requirement of repentance. Too much physical, political action would have subverted the demand for spiritual humility.

<sup>20</sup> Though the universality of the kingdom seen in apocalyptic literature (i.e., Daniel and noncanonical apocalyptic literature which is doubtless influential in Matthew, e.g., the two-age doctrine in 12:32) is often thought to argue against the Jewishness of the kingdom, it should be noted that universality does not necessitate nonethnicity. In the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, the kingdom (with Jerusalem as its capital and the land of Palestine as its immediate sphere) will cast influence over the lands and peoples of the earth as they learn the ways of Israel's God (Isa. 2:2-4). "The Kingdom intimated in the Book of Daniel, for example, or in the Pharisaic Psalms of Solomon from the first century BCE is universal in scope, yet no less Jewish for all its universality. It is the Kingdom of God, and at the same time the Kingdom of Israel (see, e.g., Ps Sol 17:3-4)" (J. Ramsey Michaels, "The Kingdom of God and the Historical Jesus," in *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth Century Interpretation*, 114). Psalms of Solomon 17:3-4 reads, "But we will hope in God our saviour; For the might of our God is for ever with mercy, and the Kingdom of our God is for ever over the nations in judgment. Thou, Lord, didst choose David as king over Israel, and thou didst swear to him concerning his posterity for ever, that his Kingdom would not fail before thee" ("The Psalms of Solomon," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks, trans. S. P. Brock [Oxford: Clarendon, 1984], 676).

promise for Israel was in the dawn of fulfillment. For the kingdom the implications are apparent. Matthew's vital connection between the ministries of John and Jesus, coupled with their literal fulfillment of the Old Testament at all other points physical and spiritual, warrants a similar conclusion for the kingdom: the kingdom message of John, Jesus, and the disciples in Matthew 1-10 was the same kingship of Yahweh called for in the Old Testament. This included not only the dynamic rule of Yahweh's sovereignty, but also the sphere or realm of a restored nation of Israel in which this rule would be exercised.<sup>21</sup>

#### THE REJECTION OF THE KINGDOM IN MATTHEW 11-12

The next movement in Matthew's Gospel demonstrates the response of Jesus' audience to His proclamation of the kingdom of God. After the formulaic, "And it came about when Jesus had finished" (in 11:1), which divides the book into its larger divisions (cf. also 13:53),<sup>22</sup> Matthew 11 and 12 continue the narrative with a series of *Streitgespräche* between Jesus and His opponents. These two chapters lay a foundation for the discourse of parables in chapter 13, in which the kingdom of God appears in new terms as a "mystery."

Matthew 11 and 12 show that the King and His kingdom were rejected by most of those to whom Jesus ministered. This is not to say opposition had not been experienced earlier,<sup>23</sup> but in these

<sup>21</sup> Many New Testament scholars view the kingdom of God as the dynamic reign of Yahweh (see the bibliography in Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 127, n. 11). It would be incorrect, however, to say that βασιλεία language is completely devoid of the physical element of a sphere or realm in which the rule is exercised. While the emphasis of the term may be on the reign, one can hardly imagine a reign that has no realm. As Ridderbos wrote, "In the nature of the case a dominion to be effective must create or maintain a territory where it can operate. So the absence of any idea of a spatial Kingdom would be very strange" (*The Coming of the Kingdom*, 26). Michaels considers that the first meaning of kingdom is abstract, but he adds that this of necessity requires the concrete ("The Kingdom of God in the Historical Jesus," 114). Ridderbos also thinks it is difficult to deny the "territorial" connotations for a kingdom that is possible to "enter" (Matt. 5:20), to be "in" (11:11), and to "shut off" (23:13) (*The Coming of the Kingdom*, 343-44).

<sup>22</sup> Whether one commits Matthew to the traditional five-division scheme for the Gospel (e.g., Benjamin W. Bacon, "The Matthean Discourse in Parables," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46 [1927]: 237-38; and Edward F. Siegman, "Teaching in Parables [Mk 4, 10-12; Lk 8, 9-10; Mt 13, 10-15]," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 [1961]: 161-81) or some other configuration (Kingsbury, e.g., sees only three divisions [*Matthew: Structure, Christology and Kingdom*, 25]), all agree that chapters 11-13 mark off one narrative unit.

<sup>23</sup> Opposition to Jesus began early in Matthew's chronology. Chapter 2 records Herod's attempt to murder the baby Jesus. Chapter 3 records the ministry of John, who, Jesus later said was rejected by the religious officials (21:23-26). In Matthew

chapters there is a particular climax of rejection of Jesus, which evoked a corresponding climax in His public rebuke. Chapter 11 opens with Jesus still teaching (διδάσκειν) and preaching (κηρύσσειν) in their cities. In this context the disciples of John, who was imprisoned, asked Jesus if He was the "Expected One" (11:3), and Jesus answered from the prophets (vv. 4-5). With this introduction Jesus then set the tone for what was to follow. "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me" (v. 6). Then Jesus reproached His "generation" (i.e., the crowds in His presence; cf. v. 7) for its rejection of John the Baptist and the Son of Man (vv. 16-19), and the cities that had witnessed His miracles, because they did not repent in response to His proclamation (vv. 21-24).

In chapter 12 the rejection of Jesus reached a high point as the religious leaders and His own family opposed Him. Jesus contended with the Pharisees about the Sabbath, a confrontation in which He rebuked them for not understanding the Law (12:1-8). Their opposition to Him intensified in the following scene when, after Jesus healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath, they "counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (v. 14). The zenith for both the leaders and Jesus was reached with the charge from the Pharisees that Jesus cast out demons because He was in league with Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons (v. 24). Jesus responded with the most serious invective thus far in Matthew's report. (1) He told them they were guilty of an unpardonable sin (vv. 31-32). (2) He affirmed their evil and adulterous nature because of their sinful deeds (vv. 33-37; cf. v. 39). (3) For the first time since John the Baptist, Jesus spoke of them contemptuously as a "brood of vipers" (v. 34).<sup>24</sup>

Matthew 12:46-50 continues and concludes the same theme ("While He was still speaking to the multitudes"), with even Jesus' own family rejecting Him. Though the Marcan parallel to this incident (3:20-21, 31-35) gives the reason for the family's appearance ("they were saying, 'He has lost his senses,' 3:21), similar conclusions are forthcoming from Matthew's record. (1) The context of the incident plus Jesus' answer implies that His family

8-11 there are also hints of resistance to Him. In 8:10-12 Jesus chided the meager faith of Israel compared to that of a Gentile centurion. In 8:34 people in the region of the Gadarenes begged Jesus to leave. Matthew 9:3 records the first charge of blasphemy by the scribes. In 9:15 Jesus gave a veiled comment about His death and in 9:34 the Pharisees first charged Jesus with casting out demons because He Himself was demonized.

<sup>24</sup> As Filson explains, vipers are "low, poisonous creatures who flee in haste before the onrushing fire that sweeps across the wilderness" (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 65).

was not in sympathy with Him. (2) They were not His active followers, for they seemingly made a special trip to see Him. (3) Jesus' answer about the identity of His true family (Matt. 12:50) shows His ties to the disciples were stronger than to His immediate relatives.<sup>25</sup>

The rejection of Jesus by these three groups (the crowds, the leaders, and His family) is related to the subject of the kingdom through His discussion about the Holy Spirit. In the episode of the demon exorcism, Jesus related the kingdom to Himself because of His unique status as the Spirit-bearer. "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come [ἐφθασεν] upon you" (12:28). Where the Spirit of God is, there is the kingdom of God. Jesus, as the One on whom the Spirit descended (3:16-17), manifested the kingdom when He manifested the Spirit's power.<sup>26</sup> Jesus, then, in Matthew was not simply the Herald of the kingdom; He was also the Bearer of the kingdom, and His ministry would thereby chart the course of the kingdom.

The kingdom's presence through the Spirit in Jesus also helps explain the meaning of its nearness (ἤγγικεν). Up to this point in Matthew the proclamation by Jesus (4:17) and His disciples (10:7) had been that the kingdom of God was at hand or near (ἤγγικεν). Yet contemporaneous with this proclamation were Jesus' manifestations of Spirit-power, which individually and locally displayed the kingdom's presence (ἐφθασεν). So while there seems to be reason to separate the two notions linguistically, as do most scholars (see note 10), on another level the two terms must be allowed the same conceptual domain. That is, the kingdom's presence through the Holy Spirit's power constituted its nearness to His audience.<sup>27</sup> However, the presence of the kingdom in Jesus established only the kingdom's nearness, not its complete fulfillment. The kingdom of God, then, is something greater than

<sup>25</sup> See *ibid.*, 154; and Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 248.

<sup>26</sup> As James Dunn has noted, "the Kingdom is present in Jesus only because He has the Spirit. It is not so much the case of Where Jesus is there is the Kingdom, as Where the Spirit is there is the Kingdom" ("Spirit and Kingdom," *Expository Times* 82 [October 1970–September 1971]: 38 [*italics his*]).

<sup>27</sup> The two terms seem to demand an overlap in meaning, though many commentators appear to leave them in tension or to subsume one under the other. Strecker's comment on Matthew 12:28 reflects the opinion of the majority of commentators and leans most heavily toward the kingdom's presence at the expense of its nearness: "'The reign of God has come to you.' Thus not only the 'inbreaking' of the reign of God is announced as in the case of 'nearness,' also not only are the signs of the Kingdom present, rather the powerful acts of Jesus are to be understood as signs of the presence of the reign of God; but that means the kingdom is not only signified, but actually present" (*Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 169).

the Spirit manifestations of Jesus. Miracles were still "signs" of the kingdom.<sup>28</sup>

The Spirit's relationship to Jesus confirms that in Matthew Jesus and the kingdom He announced are meant as a literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesied hope. The Spirit's function in the messianic age was well known from the Old Testament in Jesus' day, as is apparent from Matthew's own application of Isaiah to Jesus: "Behold My Servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him" (12:18).<sup>29</sup> Also, much earlier in the Gospel, John the Baptist alerted his audience to Jesus' eschatological significance: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11).<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that Jesus condemned His generation and its leaders because of their lack of repentance (11:20-21). The people failed to turn to God. This was serious, given the demand of the kingdom accompanied by evidence of the kingdom's power in Jesus' miracles.<sup>31</sup> He did not condemn the crowds because of political or national notions about the kingdom. Instead, His condemnation was because they had failed to meet the spiritual demand of the kingdom by repenting. The contention of many scholars that Jesus condemned the particularly Jewish-political messianic kingdom from the beginning of His ministry seems to outrun Matthew at this point of the narrative. Instead, Jesus condemned the lack of a change of heart which is to accompany the kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ridderbos has correctly noted the kingdom's presence in Jesus' miracles as only signatory and provisional. They are not the kingdom; they are signs of the kingdom. For example despite kingdom presence in exorcism, Satan was allowed further activity and demons were allowed to escape because it was "before the time" (Matt. 8:29). Those healed by Jesus would yet experience death (Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 113, 115-21).

<sup>29</sup> That the Messiah will possess the Spirit of God is an Old Testament idea, which Sjoberg says lived on in Judaism according to the apocryphal, pseudepigraphal, and rabbinic literature (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "πνεῦμα," by Eric Sjoberg, 6:384). On the Spirit in the last times see D. Wilhelm Michaelis, *Reich Gottes and Geist Gottes nach dem Neuen Testament* (Basel: Reinhardt, n. d.), 3-6; Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 57-60; and *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Spirit," by Eberhard Kamlah, 3:692.

<sup>30</sup> From the perspective of the Old Testament, the new relationship between man and God through the Spirit is the "central miracle of the new age" (Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 57).

<sup>31</sup> Behm is correct in observing that the presence of the kingdom in Jesus (as demonstrated by His miracles) increased the urgency and imperative of Jesus' proclamation as compared to John (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "μετανοέω," 4:1001).

<sup>32</sup> That the people did not meet the spiritual requirement for the kingdom does not mean they did not have political or nationalistic hopes for the messianic age.

The climax of popular and official rejection of Jesus in Matthew 11 and 12 yields several observations about the kingdom of God. First, the kingdom was again confirmed to be that of the Old Testament prophetic hope through the presence of the Holy Spirit's power in Jesus' working of miracles. The miracles intimated that the kingdom was physical as well as spiritual. Second, the presence of the kingdom in the Holy Spirit's power is not the presence of the kingdom itself; it is more properly the presence of the kingdom's power. In this way the localized and incomplete nature of the power Jesus exhibited was a sign that pointed to the eschatological kingdom's nearness. Third, the kingdom's advent was conditioned on repentance. The humility demanded was to precede the complete establishment of the kingdom that would have ushered in the Old Testament hope in its entirety. Because the people and their leaders refused this demand, a critical point had been reached in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.

#### THE KINGDOM-OF-GOD SAYINGS AND REJECTION IN MATTHEW 13

On the very day in which the kingdom's rejection reached its zenith (13:1), Jesus introduced for the first time in Matthew the "parables" of the kingdom, which He later also designated as revealing the "mysteries" of the kingdom (v. 11). This strange fact—that the kingdom, which was the public proclamation of the herald, is now a "secret," in addition to the proximity of these parables to the rejection of Christ—hints at a change in the kingdom concept.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

With the advent of modern critical parable study in Adolf Julicher's *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* at the end of the 19th century,<sup>33</sup> one of the assured conclusions of scholars about the mean-

Oscar Cullmann's discussion of the title "Christ" in the Gospels is an example of reading into Matthew the false dichotomy between spiritual messianism and political messianism and reading the narrative without regard for its own order. He contends that Jesus' refusal of the term "Christ" meant also His sweeping denial of all the political expressions associated with it throughout His ministry (*The Christology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 116-20). One should, however, note that Jesus' "messianic secret" in Matthew falls after chapter 13. Therefore it is wrong to say Jesus condemned all the crowd's kingdom hopes.

<sup>33</sup> For a survey of the history of parable study see Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 53-71; Bastiaan Van Elderen, "The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 180-81; and Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 121-22.

ing of παραβολή in the New Testament is its derivation from the Hebrew לְשׁוֹן.<sup>34</sup> Ironically in the Old Testament לְשׁוֹן has a broad range of applications. It can refer to a proverb (1 Sam. 10:12), a satire or taunt (Isa. 14:3-4), a riddle (Ps. 78:2), or an allegory (Ezek. 24:2-5).<sup>35</sup> In the New Testament παραβολή seems to have inherited an equally broad application. As Stein has categorized the forms, a parable may be a proverb, a metaphorical saying, a similitude, a story parable, an example parable, or an allegory.<sup>36</sup> Again a concise definition is not forthcoming. Similarly Jeremias termed a "fruitless labor" the work of the form critics who sought earlier in this century to classify the parables with terms such as "metaphor," "simile," "allegory," "similitude," or "illustration."<sup>37</sup>

Not until Matthew 13 did this Gospel writer refer to Jesus' teaching or preaching as παραβολή. When the multitudes gathered to Him on the shore soon after He had inveighed against their rejection, He spoke "many things to them in parables" (ἐν παραβολαῖς, 13:3). And yet in the Gospel of Matthew there is an abundance of parablelike material before chapter 13.<sup>38</sup> Some of this material is even labeled παραβολαῖς in parallel accounts.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus told the disciples, "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because [ὅτι<sup>40</sup>] while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (13:13). This was Jesus' response to the spiritual dullness of the people who had just demonstrated their rejection of His message.<sup>41</sup> They had proved

<sup>34</sup> The Septuagint in all but two cases translates לְשׁוֹן with παραβολή.

<sup>35</sup> Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 15-21; cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "παραβολή," by Friedrich Hauck, 5:749.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 18-21.

<sup>37</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, rev. ed., trans S. H. Hooke (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1972), 20. Along this line Stein admits the impossibility of identifying with any certainty the parables in the Gospels if a broad definition from לְשׁוֹן is used (*An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, 22).

<sup>38</sup> With a broad understanding of παραβολή Kingsbury identifies the following material as "parabolic," though Matthew does not label it as such: 5:25-26; 6:19; 7:24-27; 9:16-17; 11:16-19 ff.; 12:34 ff.; 18:12 ff., 23-35; 20:1-16; 21:28-32; 24:43-44, 45-51; 25:1-13, 14-30 (*The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 30).

<sup>39</sup> Jesus' statement about the divided house (Matt. 12:25-26) is called a παραβολή in Mark 3:23.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew's use of ὅτι need not be seen as different from Mark and Luke's ἵνα (Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10), because within the New Testament and in extrabiblical Greek literature ἵνα may be causal (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), §369 [21]).

<sup>41</sup> The idea that Jesus used parables to conceal and confuse is not popular with many commentators who contend from rabbinic literature that parables are for en-

themselves hardened and thus not suited to know the subjects about which He spoke in the parables. So Jesus obliged them according to their state and used the parables as tools to that end. Jesus' citation in verse 15 of Isaiah 6:10 from the Septuagint<sup>42</sup> confirms this. Their eyes and ears did not admit the truth because they had closed their eyes. Matthew 13:12, "whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him," is also best explained by seeing the parables this way. As Via has noted, the structure of 13:10-13 suggests a causal and concealing understanding of parables, by the pattern *διὰ τί* (v. 10), *ὅτι* (v. 11), *διὰ τοῦτο* (v. 13), and *ὅτι* (v. 13), implying that the *ὅτι* in both cases is causal.<sup>43</sup>

While the parables functioned to confound the crowds, they revealed truth to the disciples. "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (13:11). This revelatory purpose is borne out in Jesus' change of attention from the crowds to the disciples in verses 15-16. "They [the people] have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return. . . . But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." The disciples' privileged status allowed them access to information the prophets and righteous men of old longed to see and hear (*ἀκούσαι*, v. 17). So Jesus began to explain the parables with the words, "Hear [*ἀκούσατε*] then the parable of the sower" (v. 18).

lightenment and that Jesus here used them out of pity for the dullness of the crowds. See, for example, D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 128; and C. F. D. Moule, "Mark 4:1-20 Yet Once More," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh: Clark, 1969), 95-113; both cited by J. W. Bowker, "Mystery and Parable: Mark iv. 1-20," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 NS (1974): 301. Others who deny a "hardening theory" of parables for other form critical reasons include Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 13-14; Sherman E. Johnson, "The Gospel according to St. Matthew," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1951), 7:410, 636; John Knox, "The Gospel according to St. Luke," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 8:148; and C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 1:123, cited by J. Arthur Baird, "A Pragmatic Approach to Parable Exegesis: Some New Evidence on Mark 4:11, 33-34," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 201-2. Some of those who see the parables as a judgment for hardness are Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 226-27; Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 48-49; Van Elderen, "The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17," 188; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, trans. John Murray (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 187; Dan O. Via, "Matthew on the Understandability of the Parables," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965): 430-32; and Bowker, "Mystery and Parable," *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> The Septuagint is significant also in that the verbs in Isaiah 6:10 are in the aorist tense and indicative mood, compared to the imperative of the Hebrew. The Septuagint therefore describes more of the people's existing condition (Van Elderen, "The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17," 188).

<sup>43</sup> Via, "Matthew on the Understandability of the Parables," 431.

## THE CONTENT OF THE PARABLES

Closely related to one's understanding of the purpose of the parables is the question of what they teach, which of necessity also entails the meaning of the "mysteries [μυστήρια] of the kingdom of heaven" (13:11). If these parables were given to conceal information from those who had heard the proclamation of the kingdom but rejected it, then one may ask what information (mysteries) was now being withheld from the crowds and revealed to the disciples. If, on the other hand, these parables were meant to illustrate the spiritual dullness of the crowds and have little or no connection with their rejection (in chap. 12), then the information (mysteries) they contained was not necessarily new. In that case the parables only represented in different form what Jesus had been saying all along, which had always been a "mystery" to those outside. The crowds still did not understand the "mystery" announced from the beginning, namely, that the kingdom of God had come in the Person of Jesus.<sup>44</sup>

Several writers suggest a number of lines of support to show that the parables and "mysteries" of Matthew 13 presented no new information, but broad categories about the dawn of the messianic age in Jesus. (1) Dunn, for example, leans heavily on the statement of Jesus about parables in Mark 4:11, "but those who are outside get everything (τὰ πάντα) in parables." That is, for the unbelieving, everything spiritual has always been and always will be an enigma (cf. Matt. 13:34, "He did not speak to them without a parable").<sup>45</sup> (2) The secretive content of the parables would support the messianic secret theme in which Jesus supposedly had been involved since the beginning of His ministry.<sup>46</sup> (3) The understanding of parables in Matthew and Mark as enigmatic speech, or a type of riddle, suggests that the unbelieving crowds never understood Jesus' parables.<sup>47</sup> (4) The plural μυστήρια denotes all that

<sup>44</sup> Beasley-Murray has a full listing of many scholars who hold this position (*Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 364, n. 169), to which should be added Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 125; *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Secret," by G. Finkenrath, 3:503; Van Elderen, "The Purpose of Parables," 184; and Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, 188.

<sup>45</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "The Messianic Secret in Mark," *Tyndale Bulletin* 21 (1970): 113; also Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 105; for others see *ibid.* 365, n. 178.

<sup>46</sup> Bornkamm, who advocates this view, reveals its heritage in Wilhelm Wrede (*Das Messiasgeheimnis* [1901], 58-59), the father of the *Messiasgeheimnis* in modern study (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "μυστήριον," by Bornkamm, 4:819, n. 130). For others in agreement with Bornkamm and Wrede see *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Messianic Secret," by Colin Brown, 3:507; and Dunn, "The Messianic Secret in Mark," 95.

<sup>47</sup> Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 30.

Jesus taught about the kingdom's laws, conditions of entrance, and related information.<sup>48</sup> (5) Critical methodologies demand the artificial grouping of the parables found in Matthew 13. To these critics this chapter is useless as a guide to understanding its own parables. Jeremias, for example, believes Mark 4:11-12 (=Matt. 13:11, 13) was inserted into the passage from a misunderstanding and has nothing to do with the parables' true teaching. Jesus announced "no special 'secrets,' but only the one 'secret of the kingdom of God,' to wit, the secret of the present dawning in the words and works of Jesus."<sup>49</sup>

Compelling as these arguments may seem, when Matthew 13 is carefully read,<sup>50</sup> a strong case can be made that something new was then happening to the kingdom. For one thing, the parables of this chapter are new on two counts: (a) as already noted, only here in Matthew did Jesus begin teaching ἐν παραβολαῖς, and no earlier literary form in Matthew gets this title; and (b) these parables are specifically designated as ones whose content concerns the kingdom of God.

This second point is significant in chapter 13 because it relates directly to Jesus' point that "parables" are enigmatic to those whose hearts He had said were spiritually hardened (13:11-13). Baird examines the subsequent practice of Jesus relative to His professed enigmatic intent and the parables.<sup>51</sup> His premise is that if the parables of the kingdom were meant to conceal information from the crowds, then that intent would be borne out in Jesus' subsequent practice in the Gospels. Baird noted that though Jesus told many parables to the crowds, only a few of them were explained. Of those explained, none deals specifically with the kingdom of God.<sup>52</sup> This implies two things for the kingdom. First, through

<sup>48</sup> Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (New York: Macmillan, 1915; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 189.

<sup>49</sup> Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 18; cf. Siegman, "Teaching in Parables," 181.

<sup>50</sup> Much of the force of the preceding arguments is tied to a theory of Marcan priority (which is not without its own detractors), which does not necessarily take into account the argument of Matthew. For example the messianic secret is virtually nonexistent in Matthew 1-12. The one exception could be Matthew 8:4, but when Jesus instructed the healed man to tell no one, the miracle had already occurred in the sight of "great multitudes" (v. 1) and was hardly a secret. The intent of the instruction is elsewhere. See for example Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 140. If anything the very opposite for Matthew is true, considering the "herald" quality of the proclamation, the large crowds, and the public displays of miracles. On the overinflated importance of the messianic secret in general, see Dunn, "The Messianic Secret in Mark."

<sup>51</sup> J. Arthur Baird, "A Pragmatic Approach to Parable Exegesis: Some New Evidence on Mark 4:11, 33-34," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 201-7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-7. Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 35, n. 110. Brown

certain "kingdom" parables Jesus did in fact deny understanding to the crowds in response to their rejection (Matt. 13:11).<sup>53</sup> Second, since Jesus explained some parabolic teaching to the crowds, a distinction seems to exist between specific "kingdom" parables and the other parables Jesus may have spoken in His general ministry. Thus it is wrong simply to say that the mysteries of the kingdom are synonymous with everything Jesus said and did (e.g., Kingsbury<sup>54</sup>).<sup>55</sup>

By extension, another possible implication concerns the point at which the mysteries of the kingdom were enigmatic to the crowds. Were the mysteries enigmatic when they were joined to the parables, which Jesus did not explain, or were they enigmatic to the hard-hearted crowds from the beginning of Jesus' ministry? Baird's findings argue for the former. Since according to

concur with Baird's conclusions.

<sup>53</sup> After the crowds rejected Jesus (Matt. 12), they (and the leaders) understood only three parables specifically about the kingdom (21:27-32; 21:33-44; 22:1-14), each of which explains how the kingdom had been taken from them. Matthew 13:34 seems to indicate that Jesus told more kingdom parables to the crowds but that they were unexplained and still enigmatic. Thus no positive information about the kingdom of God was revealed in parabolic form to those in rejection, though the disciples were privy to every kingdom parable that followed. In addition to the three parables noted above, the only public statement about the kingdom from Jesus is in 23:13 ("But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in"), which again was addressed to the leaders and is also negative.

<sup>54</sup> *The Parables of the Kingdom in Matthew Thirteen*, 44-45.

<sup>55</sup> Another argument against such a broad understanding of the mysteries is the background of the term itself. Many scholars believe *μυστήριον* in the Gospels is derived from the Hebrew word *סֵתֵר* in canonical (Dan. 2:18-19, 27-30, 47; 4:6) and non-canonical literature. It is a designation for the plan of God for the unfolding of the events of history hidden from human eyes and disclosed only by divine revelation. According to Bornkamm the term in the New Testament "always has an eschatological sense" which would seem to be different from other subjects Jesus addressed, such as ethics (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*μυστήριον*," 4:822). On mysteries as essentially eschatological topics see also Carson, "Matthew," 308; Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 222; and Cope, "'To the Close of the Age,'" 20. Cope argues for the eschatological emphasis for mystery rather than Christological, ethical, or catechetical in the Qumran documents. For the concept of mystery in the Old Testament, apocryphal, and pseudepigraphal literature, see Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 104; Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*, 2-22; Lucien Cerfaux, "La Connaissance des Secrets du Royaume D'Après Matt XIII. 11 et Paralleles," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1956): 238-49; and G. Minette deTillesse, *Le Secret Messianique dan L'Euangile de Marc*, *Lectio Divina* 47 (Paris: Cerf, 1968), 194-98. For the concept of mystery in Qumran literature see Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 46-47; Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*, 22-30; Siegman, "Teaching in Parables," 172; Cope, "'To the Close of the Age,'" 17; and Van Elderen, "The Purpose of Parables according to Matthew 13:10-17," 184-85.

Matthew's chronology, the mysteries of the kingdom are coterminous with the parables of the kingdom (which Jesus also never explained in response to the rejection of chap. 12), it would follow that the mysteries were not present in Jesus' ministry before that time of rejection. In other words for Matthew the locus of the enigma of the mysteries comes in the kingdom parables after the rejection, not before.

A second argument suggesting that after the crowd rejected Jesus the kingdom was different is the stated content of the kingdom parables in Matthew 13. Many commentators maintain the only difference in the mysteries of the kingdom before and after the rejection by the people is whether the mysteries were explained. However, a surprising discontinuity exists between what the parables themselves reveal about the kingdom and the substance of Jesus' ministry before. For example, since Jesus and John came in fulfillment of the Old Testament promise including its physical kingdom notions for Israel, where is the correlation of that picture of the kingdom with the kingdom in Matthew 13? Many scholars speak only in broad terms about the content of the parables (i.e., mysteries) regarding the kingdom in chapter 13. Kingsbury, for example, speaks of the parabolic message as the "present reality" of the kingdom.<sup>56</sup> Yet the parables themselves say more, and they clearly portray the presence of the kingdom as secret and hidden—far different from the kingdom expected by the messianic hope, the kingdom that would break forth apocalyptically and conquer political systems.<sup>57</sup> Beasley-Murray, speaking for many, shrouds the details of the kingdom mysteries under the Christological cloak. "The secret of the kingdom given to the disciples relates to the realization in and through Jesus of God's purpose in the establishment of his saving rule."<sup>58</sup> Yet in these parables Jesus' presence is only one of several facts taught about the kingdom. These other points include the different responses to the word in the kingdom (Sower), the future judgment of the kingdom (Wheat and Tares, and Dragnet), the initial insignificance and great growth of the kingdom (Mustard Seed, and Leaven), and the great value and sacrifice

<sup>56</sup> *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ladd (*The Presence of the Future*, 225) and Carson ("Matthew," 307-8) have noted the discontinuity between the Old Testament kingdom and the kingdom of the parables. Ladd observes, "That there should be a coming of God's Kingdom in the way Jesus proclaimed, in a hidden, secret form, working quietly among men, was utterly novel to Jesus' contemporaries. The Old Testament gave no such promise" (ibid.).

<sup>58</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 105.

required for the kingdom (Treasure, and Pearl).<sup>59</sup> These details of the mysteries of the kingdom show that differences existed between Jesus' kingdom message before and after His rejection.

Those who make little of the details of the kingdom parables, when put in terms of kingdom "mysteries," also seek to apply those details to the whole of Jesus' proclamation. Yet in Matthew this is not so easily done. For example Beasley-Murray, speaking of the kingdom mysteries, writes, "The fact that it [the kingdom] continues to be a secret in spite of Jesus' proclamation is tied to the nature of the kingdom he brings."<sup>60</sup> Evidently he is saying that the hidden, steadily growing, initially tiny kingdom of the parables was the kingdom Jesus proclaimed all along. This position has two weaknesses. First, if Jesus intended from the beginning to proclaim a kingdom different from the one presented in the Old Testament, He greatly confused His audience by speaking and acting solely as if His ministry was in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophetic hope. Second, since Jesus presented the enigmatic parables as judgment because of the people's rejection of Him, on what grounds could Jesus condemn them for their hardness toward something in which He had misled them?

#### SUMMARY

Matthew 13 occupies a pivotal position in the presentation of the kingdom in Matthew's Gospel. The fact that this chapter follows the people's rejection and Jesus' condemnation in chapters 11–12 makes the kingdom sayings of chapter 13 stand out in bold relief. What was before proclaimed by the Herald has now become a secret. Matthew 13 is seen as a turning point in the narrative. The content of the *μυστήρια* and *παραβολή* indicates the novelty of something besides Jesus' methodology where the kingdom of God is concerned. The parables about the kingdom are distinct from everything Jesus had said to that point. The parables and the "mysteries" of the kingdom cannot be considered synonymous with what Jesus had already proclaimed. The new enigma that the parables represent (because they are judgment for rejection) means by extension that the mysteries of the kingdom are a new enigma. Also the kingdom content in the parables points to discontinuity with the kingdom Jesus announced at the beginning of His ministry.

<sup>59</sup> These are the interpretations given by Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables*, 95, 105, 140, 142.

<sup>60</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 105.

## THE KINGDOM-OF-GOD SAYINGS AFTER MATTHEW 13

If it is correct that in Matthew 13 Jesus changed His method of presentation and the content about the kingdom, one would expect to find indications of such a change in the narrative that follows. One change that points in this direction has already been noted in conjunction with the audience of the βασιλεία sayings. Starting in Matthew 13 Jesus did not tell or explain any positive kingdom information through parables to anyone except the disciples. The only information related in βασιλεία language to the crowds is negative, namely, the kingdom would be taken from them and they are not its citizens. This provides the first clue to the change in the kingdom's content, a change that may be pursued along several lines.

First, Jesus no longer spoke of the nearness of the kingdom. In the first 10 chapters the message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand [ἤγγικεν]," was repeated verbatim by John, Jesus, and the disciples (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). After the nation's rejection of Jesus in Matthew 11–12, this was no longer proclaimed. Rather than being "near," the kingdom, Jesus said, will appear in the future in association with His Second Coming and related events (Matt. 24–25; 26:29). The kingdom originally announced as "near" became far.

Second, before chapter 13, Matthew twice (4:23; 9:35) summarized Jesus' kingdom proclamation in vocabulary that uniquely tied his message to the Old Testament hope (κηρύσσω and εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας). Then after chapter 13 this "preaching" of the "gospel of the kingdom" was no longer part of the public discourses of Jesus. The phrase "gospel of the kingdom" is mentioned only as a message by Jesus' followers in the future (Matt. 24:14).<sup>61</sup> The verb κηρύσσω ("to preach") is no longer used in reference to Jesus' activity despite its key presence in Matthean summaries of Jesus' activity before His rejection (4:17, 23; 9:35;

<sup>61</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology and Kingdom*, 128-29. The only other appearance of εὐαγγέλιον is in 26:13 where it is also associated with the announcement of those after Jesus. All forms of the verb εὐαγγελίζω also vanish in Matthew after 11:5, in which Jesus referred to announcing the good news (εὐαγγελίζονται) to the poor. Similarly the Matthean use of the Old Testament fulfillment theme through the πληρώω ("fulfill") language and other expressions that associate Jesus with the Old Testament prophets (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:3 [of John]; 4:14; 8:17; 11:5, 9; 12:17; 13:14, 17, 35) drops off after 13:35. This theme is not mentioned again until 21:4, which speaks of Jesus' fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy when He approached Jerusalem riding a donkey colt (Zech. 9:9). It is as if Matthew intentionally distanced Jesus from the Old Testament hope for Israel during the intervening part of Jesus' ministry.

11:1).<sup>62</sup> However, κηρύσσω is used of those who in the future will follow Jesus (24:14; 26:13).

Third, Matthew's summaries of Jesus' ministry that do appear after chapter 13 argue that the kingdom message was modified. In 13:34 Matthew noted the enigma of Jesus' message of the kingdom through His parables, but in chapter 16 something new was noted. After a significant encounter with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, in which Jesus was reminded of His rejection by the crowds (only Peter understood who He really is, 16:13-15), Matthew summarized, "From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (16:21). That is, according to Matthew (and Mark and Luke, as well) Jesus did not make His sufferings on the cross a central feature of His message until after the rejection. Before chapter 13 Jesus made veiled allusions to His awareness of His mission and death (9:15, the bridegroom being taken away; 12:40, the sign of Jonah being three days in the sea), but His death was not a featured element of His kingdom proclamation of good news. This is significant because 12:28 ties the kingdom directly to Jesus' ministry by the Spirit. Before His rejection Jesus' working of miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit signified the kingdom's nearness. Afterward, as He focused on His suffering and "absence," He also spoke of the "distancing" of the kingdom (Matt. 24–25). This seems to indicate that the powerful, glorious, world-changing kingdom, presented in the Old Testament and announced by Jesus, is yet future. Just as His rejection points to His own future sufferings and absence until His glorious return, in like manner His rejection points to the kingdom's absence until His glorious return. Because He is absent, the kingdom is absent, though where the Spirit is there is kingdom signatory power (12:28).

Fourth, after Matthew 13 the kingdom is no longer related specifically to ethnic Israel. In contrast to the Old Testament messianic hope, now the kingdom parables state that the kingdom was taken from Israel and her leaders (21:27–22:14) and was given to another nation (21:43). Also in this postrejection period Jesus introduced for the first time the fact of the ἐκκλησία (the

<sup>62</sup> In conjunction with the use of λαλέω in 13:3, Kingsbury argues for the cessation of both the preaching (κηρύσσω) and teaching (διδάσκω) activities of Jesus to Jews after 11:1 (*The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 29). Though διδάσκω appears after 11:1, Kingsbury (*ibid.*) notes that it is never used positively of Jesus' message, but is always used in the "scenic framework" of a pericope (13:54; 21:23; 22:16; 26:55), or employed negatively in a denunciation of Jewish doctrine (15:9; 16:12), or in reference to His debate with His opponents (22:33).

church, 16:18), a designation of Jesus' followers. To Peter, the foundation of the church, were given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (16:19) with power to "bind" or "loose" accordingly (18:18).<sup>63</sup>

Commentators have long recognized that Matthew 13 is a critical turning point in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' ministry.<sup>64</sup> The force of these arguments suggests it is also a turning point for the nature of the kingdom of God. The references to the kingdom in Matthew 13 and following suggest a change in the nature of the kingdom. It is "far" rather than near, nonracial rather than ethnic, related to suffering rather than overtly powerful, and secretly disclosed to insiders rather than proclaimed to all.

### CONCLUSIONS

When the kingdom-of-God sayings in Matthew are interpreted in view of the chronology of Jesus' career, much light is thrown on the kingdom itself. Grouping and "leveling" all the kingdom-of-God sayings in Matthew tends to relegate the kingdom to vague terms (e.g., present and future) as the seemingly contradictory sayings are played off against one another (e.g., the mystery parables versus the ethnic Old Testament kingdom and realm of Israel) and reduced to their lowest common denominator. A recognition of the sequence of the kingdom-of-God sayings in Matthew reveals three major points. First, at the beginning of Jesus' career He proclaimed and offered to Israel the restoration of the rule of Yahweh in their land, which would bring His peace and righteousness, and through which they would be a blessing to the rest of the world. This kingdom of which He spoke is physical, glorious, and powerful, compelling the wicked either to repent or to feel its wrath.

Second, Israel, however, would not have it. They saw the signs of its nearness, heard the voice of its forerunner prophet, and rejected the King and His kingdom (Matt. 11-12).

Third, in response to their hardness of heart, Jesus withdrew His offer of the full manifestation of the Old Testament prophesied kingdom (Matt. 13:11-17). It was taken from them and given

<sup>63</sup> Jesus' answer to the Canaanite woman in 15:24 ("I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel") does not contradict the point being made here. His statement shows that after the nation's rejection of Jesus, His career demanded that He present Himself to Israel as the Messiah to bring their rejection to lethal levels. The same is true for Jesus' miracles, which also continue after chapter 13, as well as the politically charged Triumphal Entry (Matt. 21). Also see note 65.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Kingbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew Thirteen*, 31; and Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, 188.

to another until it will appear in the future. In the present interim period the kingdom is secret, hidden, and unknown to the world, as seen in the kingdom parables and mysteries (Matt. 13). Its power is not seen now in nationalistic forms (hence the messianic secret), and when its spiritual power is manifested physically in the present age it does not so much speak of the kingdom's temporal nearness as testify to its messengers.<sup>65</sup> During this interim the kingdom is still future, but it is still intact in its spiritual and physical character (the disciples can still expect one day to judge the 12 tribes of Israel, 19:28). When Jesus returns in righteous judgment, He will restore Israel and fulfill the prophetic voice completely.

<sup>65</sup> Though Jesus continued to perform miracles after His rejection, their effect was different for those who had rejected Him and those who were receptive to Him. By their nature as mute witnesses, the miracles served to further harden those in rejection and to deliver the revelation of their fate (the withered fig tree is typical of Israel in her rejection). His miracles continued to be interpreted by outsiders as more works of a sorcerer who was dangerous to the people and who ultimately must be done away with. For insiders, the miracles served to confirm the messianic Messenger and His message. Ladd (*The Presence of the Future*, 227) notes how both the Old and New Testaments confirm this idea that the same revelation can be both light and judgment, depending on the people's decision (Isa. 28:13; Jer. 23:29; John 12:40; Acts 28:26; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:8).

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