

1.4.1 Kingdom of Heaven/God Teachings

When surveying the Gospels for Jesus' teachings, most theologians conclude that the primary thrust of Jesus' message was the eschatological kingdom of heaven/God per Matthew 4:12-17, 23; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15; and Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11 (Bald 1984:133; Chilton 1984:1-3; Grasser 1984:52-3, 64; Kummel 1984:36-7; Ladd 1984:45-8, 57). Most of the teaching on the kingdom is contained in the Kingdom Parables (Matt 13:3-50; 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Mark 4:26-34; Luke 13:18-21; 19:11-27) or the sayings of Jesus (Matt 5:3-20; 6:25-33; 7:13-29; 8:11-12; 11:11-19; 12:23-37; 18:1-14; 19:13-30; Luke 17:20-37; John 3:3-21). This body of teaching addresses the kingdom as having already come, in and through Jesus Christ spiritually, but that it will not be fully realized until the end of the Age physically (Jeremias 1963:230, 247-8; Chilton 1984:1-3; Ladd 1984:91, 93-104; Vincent 1991, 1:311; Geisler 2005:477-485). This concept also addresses the nature of the kingdom as eschatological and becomes an integral part of the Eschatological Gospel. The eschatological kingdom has been a focus of theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl, Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, August von Gall, Rudolf Otto, C. H. Dodd, Joachim Jeremias, and W. G. Kummel over the past one hundred years or so (Chilton 1984:6-16).

Speaking of the parables, Brad H. Young notes, "Probably one-third of all the recorded words of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are uttered in parables" (1998:37). He goes on to say that the parables of Jesus must best be understood in their Second Temple Jewish context (1998:275) or *Sitz im Leben*/original setting in life (Robinson 1928; Cadoux 1930; Dodd 1936:32; Stein 1981:58-9), and that although the kingdom could be understood in Jewish terms as being eschatological, the direct application was living a holy, obedient life in the here and now to enter

the kingdom after death (Young 1998:278-9). With this explanation as a backdrop, Jesus' teachings on the kingdom of heaven (*malkut shamayim*)/God will now be considered.

The mystery of the kingdom was communicated by Jesus in the following parables: the Sower (or Four Soils); *the Wheat and the Weeds*; the Mustard Seed; the Yeast (or Leaven); the Hidden Treasure; the Pearl; the Net (all of these are contained in Matt 13); and the Seed (Mark 4:26-29). Of these parables, *the Wheat and Weeds* and the Net both have eschatological implications about judgment at "the end of the age," while the others speak of the present spiritual kingdom during the Church Age (Ladd 1984:94-103; Biederwolf 1985:319; Geisler 2005:483, 485). *Actually, the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds speaks to both this present Church Age kingdom and the judgment at the "end of the age"* [emphasis added]. Additionally, the Parable of the Talents (Pounds) in Luke 19:11-27 speaks of stewardship in the Church Age (Young 1998:82) between both comings/advents of the Lord Jesus Christ (McClain 1974:343-3; Geisler 2005:483-4).

There are four more parables that speak of the Eschatological Gospel of the kingdom, two of which are definitely eschatological in nature. These four parables are addressed as follows: 1) the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-35), speaking of forgiveness (Young 1998:119); 2) the Fair Employer (Matt 20:1-16), speaking of God's goodness, grace and equality in the kingdom (Young 1998:69-70); 3) the Great Banquet (Matt 22:2-14; Luke 14:15-24), speaking of the urgent invitation or call to all to enter the kingdom (especially the Jews); however, "many are called, but few are chosen" because of their response (Young 1998:171-2, 186); and 4) the Ten Maidens (Virgins) in Matt 25:1-13, speaking of the *Parousia*/Coming of Jesus for eschatological judgment at the end of the age (Young 1998:282-3).

There are those who believe that the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Virgins) and the Parable of the Talents, that follows in Matthew 25:14-30, are specifically speaking about the judgment of Israel alone (Pentecost 1982:149-155). Following these two parables in Matthew 25, and on the same eschatological note, is the Parable (?) of the Sheep and the Goats (vv. 31-46). There has been much debate as to whether it should be considered a parable, a parabolic reference in Jesus' explanation of judgment connected with His *Parousia* or just an apocalyptic eschatological statement (See Buttrick 1928:253-6; Lockyer 1963:246; Jeremias 1972: 206-10; Kistemaker 1980:146; Stein 1981: 131; Pentecost 1982:157; Hunter 1983:75; Wenham 1989:88-9; Young 1998:295; and Hulgren 2000:310). In any case, it is contained in the eschatological Olivet Discourse of Jesus (Matt 24 - 25), follows two previous parables (at least one of which definitely speaks of eschatological judgment) and finishes the discourse with the theme of an eternal judgment. Much has been written about the interpretation of these verses, but all agree that they have to do with judgment in one form or another. The conclusion of the author, after researching and writing a paper on the subject (Hebert 2005a), was that the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats represents the judgment of the Gentile nations that remain after the Tribulation, Battle of Armageddon, and the judgment of Israel preceding it (For more information on this conclusion, see Lockyer 1963:246-7; Stein 1981:130-40; and Pentecost 1982:149-55).

Related to these verses, and again speaking of the eschatological nature of the kingdom, are Jesus' words found in Matthew 16:27-28: "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." The preview of the *Parousia*, described here, was

seen by Peter, James and John immediately following this, in Matthew 17, on the Mount of Transfiguration (and later by John in the vision on Patmos in Revelation 19).

The sayings of Jesus regarding the kingdom may be divided into three categories of proclamation, teaching and controversy (Chilton 1984:1-2). Of the list of ten sayings mentioned above, only three speak of the spiritual kingdom of the Church Age here and now exclusively (Matt 5:3-20; 6:25-33; 11:11-19). John 3:3-21 speaks of the spiritual kingdom, but in eschatological terms, while the remainder speak of the kingdom being both now (in the Church Age) and then (in the age to come/*olam habbah*) – (Biederwolf 1985:322-4, 371-5). The account of Jesus giving the Apostles and seventy or seventy-two disciples (Vincent 1991, 1:352-3) power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) over all of Satan’s kingdom, and then commissioning them to go “proclaim the kingdom of God” (as a practical training exercise under His tutelage) is contained in Matthew 10, Luke 9:1-6, 10; 10:1-24. In the explanation, Jesus teaches them about the kingdom of heaven/God. Again, Jesus refers to both the present (“is at hand”) and future (“until the Son of Man comes”) eschatological nature of the kingdom (Biederwolf 1985:314-5, 368-9).

The preponderance of testimony of the words of Jesus concerning the kingdom of heaven/God leads one to conclude that He taught about an eschatological kingdom that was present then, now and until the end of the Church Age through the power of the Holy Spirit. This kingdom concept will be consummated after the *Parousia* with the physical, literal, Millennial Kingdom on earth. Next, the *Parousia* Teachings of Jesus are explored.