

KINGDOM OF GOD/KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The term “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of Heaven” signifies God’s (see [God](#)) sovereign, dynamic and eschatological (see [Eschatology](#)) rule. The [kingdom of God](#) lay at the heart of Jesus’ teaching. As proclaimed by Jesus the [kingdom of God](#) had continuity with the OT promise as well as with Jewish [apocalyptic](#)* thinking, but differed from them in important respects. For example, it denoted God’s eternal rule rather than an earthly kingdom, its scope was universal rather than limited to the Jewish nation, and it was imminent and potentially present in him rather than a vague future hope, being inextricably connected with his own person and mission.

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1. Terminology

The Gospels use three terms to express the idea of the [kingdom of God](#): *hē basileia tou theou* (“the [kingdom of God](#)”), *hē basileia tōn ouranōn* (“the kingdom of [the] Heaven[s]”) and the absolute *hē basileia* (“the kingdom”). The equivalence of the first two expressions is indicated by their content, context and interchangeability in the Gospels. (The distinction between the [kingdom of God](#) as God’s [sovereignty](#), and the kingdom of Heaven conceived as an otherworldly, future reality, the former of which is the condition for entering the latter [Pamment], is without exegetical basis). The Greek for “the kingdom of (the) Heaven(s)” is a literal translation of the later Jewish *malʿkūt šāmayim* (e.g., [2 Apoc. Bar. 73](#); [3 Apoc. Bar. 11:2](#); [As. Mos. 10](#); [Pss. Sol. 17:4](#); [1QSb 3.5](#); [m. Ber. 2.2, 5](#); [y. Ber. 4a](#); [7b](#)), where “Heaven” replaces “God” out of reverence, as *ʾādōnay* (“lord,” “master”) had replaced *Yahweh* (“Lord”) and *mākôm* (“place”) in due time replaced *šāmayim* (“Heaven”) (Dalman, 91–101). The [kingdom of God](#) is also referred to by the absolute “kingdom” when the reference is obvious.

The primary meaning of the Hebrew *malʿkūt* (with synonyms), Aramaic *malkû* and Greek *basileia* is abstract and dynamic, that is, “sovereignty” or “royal rule.” This is almost always the case in the OT and Jewish literature when the term is applied to God. The sense of realm—a territorial kingdom—is secondary, arising out of the necessity for a definite locus as the sphere for the exercise of [sovereignty](#).

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2. Old Testament Antecedents

The Gospels introduce the ministries of John the Baptist (see [John the Baptist](#)) and of Jesus by stating that they proclaimed the nearness of the [kingdom of God](#). No word of explanation is ever offered, and the conclusion must be that the idea of God's kingdom was well known.

In contrast to this is the total absence in the OT canonical books of the expression "kingdom of God." (The expression occurs once in [Wis 10:10](#)). Yet though the term is absent, the idea is present throughout the OT. In a number of instances [Yahweh](#) is presented as king ([Deut 9:26](#) [LXX]; [1 Sam 12:12](#); [Ps 24:10](#) [LXX [23:10](#)]; [29:10](#) [LXX [28:10](#)]; [Is 6:5](#); [33:22](#); [Zeph 3:15](#); [Zech 14:16](#), [17](#)). At other places he is ascribed a royal throne ([Ps 9:4](#) [LXX [9:5](#)]; [45:6](#) [LXX [44:7](#)]; [47:8](#) [LXX [46:9](#)]; [Is 6:1](#); [66:1](#); [Ezek 1:26](#); [Sir 1:8](#)) while occasionally his continuous or future reign is affirmed ([Ps 10:16](#) [LXX [9:37](#)]; [146:10](#) [LXX [145:10](#)]; [Is 24:23](#); [Wis 3:8](#)). In fact [Psalm 22:28](#) (MT [22:29](#); LXX [21:29](#)) says "the kingdom" (*hamm^elûkâ*; LXX *basileia*) belongs to the Lord.

The idea is not, however, confined to these texts with explicitly royal attributes; it underlies [Yahweh](#)'s whole relation to [Israel](#)*. The demand presented to Pharaoh to let Israel go is the demand of the lawful king over against the usurper. The [covenant](#) with Israel is the [covenant](#) which affirms the suzerainty of [Yahweh](#) over his people. In the conquest of Canaan [Yahweh](#) as king apportions to his people a country; a country, moreover, which he, as the creator and king of the earth, can dispose as he pleases. The rule of God over Israel is especially exemplified in the time of the Judges, who functioned as his representatives. A crisis emerged with Israel's demand for a king ([1 Sam 8:4–5](#)), a demand that was interpreted as a rejection of [Yahweh](#)'s rule ([1 Sam 8:6–8](#)). With the accession of David to the throne, however, the situation was somewhat normalized and the king was understood to reign as [Yahweh](#)'s representative and be under [Yahweh](#)'s suzerainty. In other words, the monarchy was looked upon as the concrete manifestation of [Yahweh](#)'s rule.

This explains the (authoritative) role of the prophets at the court (e.g., Nathan, Gad, Elijah). The promise to establish David's throne forever, despite the rejection of Solomon ([1 Kings 11:11–14](#)), led to the focus upon a future [Messiah](#) (see [Christ](#)) who would rule over David's kingdom in [righteousness](#) and prosperity (see [Son of David](#)). Thus the Davidic kingdom was somehow conflated with [Yahweh](#)'s rule. The great ethical prophets portrayed Israel's unfaithfulness against the Creator and king (Lord) of the universe, who had been pleased to identify himself with Israel. The crisis became especially acute when the last vestiges of David's kingdom were swept away by the Babylonian captivity. The promise made to David for an everlasting kingdom was now in some circles radically reinterpreted.

No other writing of the OT has more to say about the [sovereignty](#) of God than Daniel, where the [kingdom of God](#) is the central theme. However, the conception of the [kingdom of God](#) by Daniel is transformed under the impact of the new situation. The divine [sovereignty](#) is set vis á vis human kingdoms. These are described as being under the control of the God of [heaven](#)*, who allots the [sovereignty](#) in accordance with his will. In [Daniel 2](#) the [kingdom of God](#) is described as a direct divine intervention. Its agent, in the form of a stone cut without hands, crushes the various human kingdoms,

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here symbolized by various metals (and clay), and grows until it (i.e., the kingdom, king and kingdom being interchangeable in Daniel) fills the whole earth. In [Daniel 7](#) the symbolism changes to one of wild beasts portraying the ungodly character of the human kingdoms. The agent for the [kingdom of God](#) is a figure described as “one like a son of man” (see [Son of Man](#)). This figure assumes the royal rule of the spiritual powers at work behind the earthly potentates, and his [saints](#) are given the kingly rule of the monarchs under the whole [heaven](#) (i.e., the earthly potentates).

Thus Daniel not only portrays the [kingdom of God](#) divested of its Davidic, earthly, political character, but also depicts its agent as a heavenly, transcendental being. The new situation has brought about not only a new concept of the [kingdom of God](#) but a transformation of its agent (see Caragounis 1986, 61–80). These new ideas were of decisive importance in shaping future messianic thought and [eschatology](#), not only in [Judaism](#)* but also in Jesus’ teaching.

3. Judaism

The concept of the [kingdom of God](#) in early [Judaism](#) was shaped principally by three factors. At the basis was the OT idea of [Yahweh](#)’s eschatological [epiphany](#) in [judgment](#)* to punish the wicked (i.e., Israel’s enemies) and reward the just (i.e., Israel). This was coupled with the idea of God’s reign through his elect messianic king of Davidic descent, bringing in a time of untold bliss for the Jewish people. The second factor was Daniel’s new understanding of the kingdom and its agent as transcendental, heavenly realities and the consequent deliverance of God’s people in primarily dynamic terms. The third factor was the centuries-long Gentile rule over Palestine which intensified the longing for liberation, national identity and [happiness](#) (see [Revolutionary Movements](#)).

Although the term “kingdom of God” is rare in [Judaism](#), the idea is almost ubiquitous, either explicitly as the kingdom of the [Messiah](#) or implicitly in descriptions of the messianic age. The two lines of messianic expectation to which [Judaism](#) was heir are reflected in the ambivalent descriptions of the messianic kingdom. This ambivalence, besides defying a strictly systematic presentation of kingdom teaching, also implies that motifs from both lines of thought are blended together to various degrees. The result is a variety of messianologies and kingdom conceptions, which are not always clearly demarcated from one another. In general, however, we may distinguish between two main tendencies in kingdom thinking: an earlier, political, this-worldly conception of a temporary, Davidic kingdom with Jerusalem as the center and the Jews as the primary beneficiaries—though sometimes encompassing the whole world—and a later, apocalyptic conception of an ultra-mundane, transcendental and everlasting kingdom, conceived in universalistic terms.

When the [kingdom of God](#) is considered as temporary, usually a [judgment](#) follows and a new world is posited, and a reign of God is looked for in [heaven](#) with greater bliss than that of the messianic kingdom. This view is sharply contrasted with the apocalyptic view, according to which the [kingdom of God](#) comes by a direct intervention of God and is transcendental and everlasting under a similarly transcendental and pre-existent [Messiah](#), described as Son of man (Daniel, the so-called Parables of [1](#)

[Enoch 37–71](#), 2 Ezra). In this case the [Messiah](#) takes part in the [judgment](#), which thus precedes the messianic kingdom. This kingdom is the final [kingdom of God](#) which is to last forever.

But as is natural, even the later expectation for the most part utilizes the messianic categories of the earlier expectation, and this makes it more difficult to isolate the traits of the one from those of the other. The following is an attempt to illustrate briefly some of the main lines of thought in Jewish expectations of the [kingdom of God](#) without attempting to draw a strict demarcating line between the early and the later forms of the expectation or between the different standpoints within early [Judaism](#).

Especially in works evincing Danielic influence, the inbreaking of the [kingdom of God](#) is preceded by a time of [tribulation](#) and upheaval both in [heaven](#) and on earth ([Sib. Or. 3:796–808](#); [2 Apoc. Bar. 70:2–8](#); [4 Ezra 6:24](#); [9:1–12](#); [13:29–31](#); [1QM 12:9](#); [19:1–2](#); cf. [Mt 24:7–12](#) par.). In rabbinic literature this came to be called the birth pangs of the [Messiah](#) ([b. Sanh. 98b.](#); Str-B I.950). The [Messiah](#)'s appearance is sometimes preceded by the coming of [Elijah](#)* ([Mal 4:4–5](#); [Sir 48:10–11](#); cf. [Mt 17:10](#) par.; [m. 'Ed. 8:7](#); Justin [Dial. Tryph. 8](#)) or of the prophet-like-[Moses](#)* ([Deut 18:15](#); [1QS 9:11](#); [4QTestim 5–8](#); [Jn 1:21](#)).

The [Messiah](#) himself is conceived variously. The traditional view of a fully human, Davidic [Messiah](#) ([Pss. Sol. 17:5](#), [23](#); [Sib. Or. 3:49](#)) who conquers the wicked ([Sib. Or. 3:652–56](#); [Pss. Sol. 17:23–32](#)) is frequent, while in works belonging to the Danielic [tradition](#) the [Messiah](#) is a pre-existent, supernatural being with powers to judge the kings and the mighty, in short, all the enemies of God, and to vindicate the righteous ([1 Enoch 46:1–6](#); [48:2–6](#); [62:5–7](#); [4 Ezra 12:32](#)). Another difference is that according to [1 Enoch 90:16–38](#) the [Messiah](#) will appear after the [judgment](#), whereas in most other works ([Sib. Or. 3:652–6](#); [Pss. Sol. 17:14–41](#); [1 Enoch 46:4–6](#); [62:3–12](#); [69:27–9](#); [4 Ezra 13:32–8](#); cf. [Mt 25:31–46](#)) he actually conquers or judges his enemies.

Echoing the sentiment of [Psalm 2:1–3](#) a number of works presuppose a final assault by the ungodly against the [Messiah](#) ([Sib. Or. 3:663–68](#); [1 Enoch 90:16](#); [1QM 15–19](#); [4 Ezra 13:33–34](#)) in order to thwart the establishment of the messianic kingdom. These powers are annihilated sometimes by God ([T. Mos. 10:2–7](#); [1 Enoch 90:18–19](#)) or more often by the [Messiah](#) himself ([4 Ezra 12:32–33](#); [13:27–28](#), [37–39](#); [2 Apoc. Bar. 39:7–40:2](#), who is occasionally presented as a warrior ([Tg. Isa. 10:27](#); [Gen 49:11](#)), and sometimes in judicial categories ([1 Enoch 46:4–6](#); [45:3](#); [52:4–9](#); [55:4](#); [61:8–10](#); cf. [Mt 25:31–46](#)).

The establishment of the [Messiah](#)'s kingdom involves the gathering of the scattered Israelites ([LXX Bar 4:36–37](#); [5:5–9](#); Philo [Praem. Poen. 28](#); [4 Ezra 13:39–47](#)) and the restoration of Jerusalem ([Pss. Sol. 17:25](#), [33](#); [1 Enoch 53:6](#); [90:28–29](#); [4 Ezra 7:26](#)). The messianic kingdom is understood to imply the ultimate reign of God over his people ([Sib. Or. 3:704–6](#), [756–59](#); [Pss. Sol. 17:1–4](#); [1QM 19:1](#); *Šēmôneh 'Esrêh*, 11 *b^erākâ*), thus fulfilling the OT idea of God being king over Israel. The kingdom is centered on Palestine, with Jerusalem being “the jewel of the world” ([Sib. Or. 3:423](#)), though Jubilees (mid-second century B.C.) probably presents the first instance of a temporary messianic kingdom of 1,000 years. This is brought about gradually by man's moral or spiritual development, and during this time the powers of evil are restrained ([1:29](#); [23:26–30](#)).

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Similarly, the third book of the *Sibylline Oracles* (second century B.C.) [762–71](#) exhorts to righteous living as the condition for God “to raise up his kingdom for all ages over men.” The [Messiah](#) is described in book 5 (c. A.D. 100) 414 as “a Blessed Man” from “the plains of [heaven](#),” perhaps reflecting Danielic influence. Under his reign there will be peace ([3:702](#)), fruitfulness and prosperity ([3:744](#)), in which even the animal world will share ([3:788–95](#)).

According to the *Testament of Moses* (first century A.D.) [10:1](#), God’s kingdom “shall appear throughout his whole [creation](#).” However, the kingdom seems to be earthly and appears to lack a [Messiah](#), being introduced by repentance ([1:18](#); [9:6–7](#)). The awaited kingdom will spell [glory](#) for Israel and punishment for the [Gentiles](#)* ([10:7–10](#)).

The *Second Apocalypse of Baruch* describes the messianic kingdom especially in three visions (considered pre-70 A.D.). In the first vision (27–30) the [revelation](#) of the [Messiah](#) will bring a time of prosperity for “those who are found in this land” and “have arrived at the [consummation](#) of time.” In the second vision (36–40) the [Messiah](#) will annihilate his enemy the fourth empire (reflecting [Dan 7](#)) and reign “until the world of corruption has ended ... and the times ... have been fulfilled.” In the third vision (53–74) prosperity and bliss follow the [Messiah](#)’s annihilation of Israel’s enemies. The kingdom is related to Israel’s long-cherished hope, though the [Messiah](#) has supernatural status.

The two works bearing the clearest influence of the Danielic Son of man, the Parables of *1 Enoch* and the book of 4 Ezra, follow their source in associating the concepts of kingdom and Son of man. At several points in the Parables the Son of man is portrayed as exercising the functions of judge and universal ruler ([46:4–6](#); [62:3–12](#); [63:4](#); [69:27–29](#), and the book closes with a description of the messianic age ([71:15–17](#), cf. [62:12–16](#)) (see Caragounis 1986, 84–119).

The book of 4 Ezra conflates the earthly with the transcendental [Messiah](#) ([12:32](#)), who dies after reigning for 400 years ([7:28–29](#), other versions have variously 1,000 and 30 years). The Davidic descent of the [Messiah](#) is perhaps his way of stressing continuity in messianic thought, though the content is that of a transcendental [Messiah](#), as seen from (e.g.) [12:32–34](#); [13:26](#) (see Caragounis 1986, 119–31).

In the [Qumran](#) scrolls the term *malʿkūt* occurs over a dozen times, but probably only once of God’s kingdom ([1QM 12:7](#)), most of the rest referring to Israel’s kingdom. The idea of God’s kingdom is, however, latent in the sectarians’ [belief](#) that they constituted God’s true people who were to fight the eschatological battle against God’s enemies (see [Dead Sea Scrolls](#); on [Judaism](#) generally, see Schürer II.492–554).

4. Jesus and the Kingdom of God

In the teaching of Jesus the discussion of the [kingdom of God](#) revolves around two questions: (1) the character and (2) the [imminence](#) of the [kingdom of God](#). These two questions are interrelated and have been at the center of scholarly discussion during the past hundred years.

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4.1. Jesus' Dynamic View. Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God had continuity with the OT promise as well as shared certain features with apocalyptic Judaism, particularly Daniel, but went beyond them in certain important respects: (1) the kingdom of God was primarily dynamic rather than a geographical entity; (2) it was connected with the destiny of the Son of man; (3) entrance into it was not based on the covenant or confined to Jewish participation and (4) whereas in apocalypticism it was a vague future hope, in Jesus it is definite and imminent; in fact it demands immediate response.

With the apocalypticists Jesus held that the [kingdom of God](#) was no human achievement but an act of God. However, unlike them he did not expect the [kingdom of God](#) to follow on upheavals and catastrophes, but to appear in a gentle, quiet and unobtrusive manner. The catastrophic element for Jesus lay in the upheaval his call caused to his followers' relations with their [family](#),* friends and even their own selves. Jesus' followers should be willing to "hate" their own life in order to be worthy of him, worthy of the [kingdom of God](#) (see [Discipleship](#)).

4.2. The Kingdom As Present or Future—The Modern Debate. In modern discussion the kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus has actualized three questions: (1) What is its essence? (2) How is it related to Jesus' person and work? (3) When does it come?

In the past hundred years since the work of A. Ritschl and J. Weiss the [kingdom of God](#) has been at the center of discussion and the three questions above have received a variety of answers. Ritschl, influenced by [Kant's](#) idealistic [philosophy](#), conceived of the [kingdom of God](#) in primarily ethical terms as the organization of redeemed humanity, whose actions are inspired by love (see [Historical Jesus](#)).

The interest generated by Ritschl's work gave rise to several interpretations of the [kingdom of God](#), principally: (1) the individualistic, spiritual and non-eschatological interpretation (which located the [kingdom of God](#) in the experience of a person's own heart, an interpretation which was associated with the liberal school, for which the [essence](#) of Christianity lay in certain general principles taught by Jesus, as e.g., the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all people [e.g., A. von [Harnack](#), 1886, and W. Herrmann, 1901]); (2) the Social Gospel movement in Germany (C. Blumhardt, c. 1900, and L. Ragaz, 1911) and especially in America with its emphasis on a present social order based on love and solidarity (S. Mathews, 1897; F. G. Peabody, 1900; and particularly W. Rauschenbusch, 1912).

But the most important interpretation for the continued scholarly discussion was given by Ritschl's own son-in-law, J. Weiss, in his epoch-making work *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (1892, ET *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, 1971). Weiss reacted strongly against Ritschl's interpretation, emphasizing the future, eschatological and apocalyptic character of the [kingdom of God](#) which is opposed by the kingdom of Satan. The [kingdom of God](#) would erupt suddenly, be solely the work of God and sweep away the present order. The work of Weiss aroused a storm and with it an unprecedented interest in the theme of the [kingdom of God](#). In the hands of A. Schweitzer the line Weiss had struck out became known as *Konsequente Eschatologie* ("consistent," "futuristic" or "thoroughgoing [eschatology](#)"). In due time this found its opposite pole in Dodd's [realized eschatology](#). In the meantime Dalman (1898), by means of philology demonstrated the dynamic character of the [kingdom of God](#) in [Judaism](#) and the

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NT, which has been the basic assumption of almost all subsequent discussions. According to Dalman the idea of [kingdom of God](#) has no territorial or geographical reference but expresses dynamically the kingly rule of God which is basically eschatological. However, the theological interpretation was given by A. Schweitzer.

In his landmark works *Das Messianitäts und Leidens geheimnis* (1901, ET *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, 1925) and especially in *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906, ET *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1910), Schweitzer interpreted not only Jesus' teaching (as Weiss had done), but also Jesus' whole ministry in consistently eschatological terms. Jesus was understood as an apocalyptic figure who expected the end to come during the mission of the Twelve ([Mk 6:7–13](#) par.), wherefore he did not expect to see the [disciples](#)* again. In this he was, however, mistaken. The end, and with it the [kingdom of God](#), did not come. Having staked everything on this expectation and been proved wrong in his prediction of the end, Jesus decided to cast himself headlong to [death](#) in a final, heroic attempt to force God to set up his kingdom. Schweitzer's impact, particularly in Germany, can be gauged from the fact that his futuristic [eschatology](#) became the characteristic German line.

As a reaction to the one-sidedness of this German position, a number of British scholars like A. T. Cadoux (1930) and T. W. Manson (1931) (and even Germans like E. von Dobschütz and H. D. Wendland) laid emphasis on the present element of the [kingdom of God](#) in the teaching of Jesus. Like Schweitzer, R. Bultmann thought that Jesus expected the [kingdom of God](#) to begin at his [death](#) and went up to Jerusalem to purify the [Temple](#)* in preparation for it. The [kingdom of God](#) is conceived by Bultmann as a future, eschatological, supra-historical and supernatural entity, which places a person at the position of decision. But differently from Schweitzer, in Bultmann's demythologizing interpretation the [kingdom of God](#) is ever coming and thus ceases to be a future event that is and can be hoped for. Since the decision is a continual decision, the [kingdom of God](#) is not an event in time. Thus the [kingdom of God](#), emptied of its content, transcends time without ever entering it. In short, Bultmann sees the [kingdom of God](#) primarily in existentialist fashion as the hour for the individual's decision.

However, the scholar who gave definitive form to this reaction was C. H. Dodd. In his important little book *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1935), Dodd interpreted the *ēngiken* of (e.g.) [Mark 1:15](#) and its parallels in light of the *ephthasen* of [Matthew 12:28](#) (par. [Lk 11:20](#)). His claim was that LXX usage translating the Aramaic of Daniel, Modern Greek idiomatic usage and the [parables](#)* of the kingdom all lent their united support to his thesis that the [kingdom of God](#) was already a present reality during Jesus' ministry. The decisive event had occurred in the coming of Jesus. Jesus' [healings](#)*, particularly his casting out of [demons](#) (see [Demon, Devil, Satan](#)), were proof that in Jesus' person and works the divine [sovereignty](#) had dealt the decisive blow to the kingdom of Satan and was indubitably a wholly present reality. In a sense Dodd identified the [kingdom of God](#) with the person of Jesus. This opened the way to viewing the [kingdom of God](#) as a timeless reality. "The absolute, the 'wholly other', has entered into time and space" (Dodd, 81). "The inconceivable had happened: history had become the vehicle of the eternal; the absolute was clothed with flesh and blood" (147). In Dodd's interpretation of the [kingdom of God](#), "futurist [eschatology](#) disappears, and all that is left is 'the [eschaton](#)' as the Eternal" (Lundström,

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121). To achieve this Dodd played down the Gospel statements which presented the [kingdom of God](#) as future.

Dodd's influence has been far-reaching, forcing significant modifications upon the futuristic interpretation. This has led in the last forty-five years to a number of mediating positions according to which the [kingdom of God](#) is conceived as both present and future (with the German side inclining more toward the future and the British more toward the present aspect), e.g., Kümmel in his important *Verheissung und Erfüllung* (1945, *Promise and Fulfilment*, 1961), G. R. Beasley-Murray (1954, 312–16; 1986, 75–80), E. Jüngel, Schnackenburg, N. Perrin, D. C. Allison (99–114). In a similar vein J. Jeremias, at the suggestion of Haenchen, speaks of the [kingdom of God](#) as *sich realisierende Eschatologie* ("an [eschatology](#) in process of realization"), a term preferred by Dodd but apparently never allowed to change his basic viewpoint. R. H. Fuller (25–27) interprets *ephthasen* as "has come," but understands it by way of the prophetic device of speaking of an event proleptically as though it had already taken place. For Fuller the powers of the [kingdom of God](#) were already making themselves felt in the deeds of Jesus by operating in advance, and his viewpoint received the label of proleptic [eschatology](#). G. Florovsky and A. M. Hunter (94) speak of [inaugurated eschatology](#), while G. E. Ladd argues from a rendering of *ephthasen* as "has come," for a fulfillment of the [kingdom of God](#) in history (i.e., in Jesus' ministry) as well as a full [consummation](#) at the end of history, and calls his position an [eschatology](#) of biblical realism.

Kümmel has been described as the scholar who came closest to a "genuine synthesis of realized and futurist [eschatology](#) in the teaching of our Lord" (Beasley-Murray 1954, 103). Thus, while duly recognizing the future character of sayings admitting an interval between the passion and the Parousia ([Mk 2:18–20](#); [8:38](#) par. [Lk 12:8–9](#)), he understands the *ephthasen* of [Matthew 12:28](#), with Dodd, as "has come" and as implying that the [eschaton](#) was already active in Jesus. In Jesus' person and actions the future was already realized since he who was to usher in [salvation](#)* at the end was already present. In this way the future of the [kingdom of God](#) and its coming were linked closely with the present, which had Jesus as its center. The [kingdom of God](#) was present in the person, teaching and works of Jesus. By [faith](#) in him people received the [kingdom of God](#) and the guarantee of its appearance. This guarantee implied that the [kingdom of God](#) is to be fulfilled in him. Thus promise and fulfillment are insolubly connected with each other. Ladd (123–24) criticizes Kümmel for failing to define precisely what the [kingdom of God](#) is. According to Grässer (7) what is understood as present by Kümmel is not the [kingdom of God](#) itself, but its [imminence](#).

Morgenthaler, Schnackenburg and Beasley-Murray (1986) all take *ephthasen* as "has come" though for Morgenthaler it only implies that the [kingdom of God](#) is around here but not actually present. For Schnackenburg it means that the [kingdom of God](#) is "connected with his [Jesus'] person and his work" (109). Although he speaks of the [kingdom of God](#) as something entirely eschatological and wholly supernatural, he also conceives of it in its salvific character as present and active in Jesus. The miracles of Jesus were "the [kingdom of God](#) in [action](#)." On the other hand, it would be an overstatement to claim

that the presence of the [kingdom of God](#) indicates something completed; the present kingdom functions as a precursor of the coming, perfected [kingdom of God](#).

Beasley-Murray thinks that the meaning of “has come” for *ephthasen* in [Matthew 12:28](#) and parallel is “unambiguously plain” and criticizes the defenders of futuristic [eschatology](#) for looking for “ways of muting its testimony” (1986, 75–76). The miracles of Jesus, especially his driving out [demons](#), speak eloquently of the presence of the kingdom. However, the arrival of the [kingdom of God](#) spoken of in [Matthew 12:28](#) and parallel was not the same thing as its [consummation](#), which Beasley-Murray, like Schnackenburg, Kümmel, Ladd and others, considers as future.

A basically similar position is that of D. C. Allison. He follows the usual interpretation of *ephthasen* and thus subscribes to the present consensus that the [kingdom of God](#) is both present and future. The relation between present and future is explained by appealing to Jewish thought which “could envision the final events—the [judgment](#) of evil and the arrival of the [kingdom of God](#)—as extending over a time and as a process or series of events that could involve the present. When Jesus announced that the [kingdom of God](#) has come and is coming, this means that the last act has begun but has not yet reached its climax; the last things have come and will come” (105–6). And again, “For Jesus, the [kingdom of God](#), the eschatological establishment of God’s kingly rule, was due to come in its fullness soon” (114).

It may then be concluded that those who emphasize the presence of the [kingdom of God](#) in Jesus’ works of power also allow for a future [perfection](#) or [consummation](#) of the [kingdom of God](#), while those who advocate the futurity of the [kingdom of God](#) allow for some kind of effect which the imminently near [kingdom of God](#) exercised in the ministry of Jesus. Both of these positions are attempts to explain important elements in the Gospel data.

Of rather different nature is the more recent work of Perrin, who has retreated from his earlier positions (1963). Receiving impulses from literary critics like P. Wheelwright (1962), P. Ricoeur (1969), A. N. Wilder (1964), R. W. Funk (1966), D. O. Via (1967) and F. D. Crossan (1973), Perrin has suggested that “kingdom of God” is not an idea or a conception, but a mythical symbol (1976, 33). He adopts Wheelwright’s distinction of steno-symbol, which has fixed meaning—a one-to-one correspondence between symbol and [referent](#) as in apocalyptic language—and tensive symbol, which is open and multi-significant, having an inexhaustible set of meanings. Jesus’ proclamation of the [kingdom of God](#) involved the tensive symbol, which, however, his followers turned to an apocalyptic steno-symbol, making the [kingdom of God](#) lose its rich variety of reference and instead refer to a particular event of universal experience. Perrin thinks that Jesus’ whole teaching claimed “to mediate an [experience of God](#) as king, an experience of such an order that it brings world to an end” (Perrin 1976, 54). Though the symbolic and metaphorical aspects of the [kingdom of God](#) and its parables should be profitably explored, Perrin’s analysis and claims can hardly be said to do justice to the biblical data or to have led to a deeper or more valid understanding of the [kingdom of God](#). Not infrequently Perrin’s position involves self-contradictions, and his categories are plainly inapplicable to the Gospel texts (see further the criticism of Beasley-Murray 1986, 338–44 and Allison, [107–12](#)).

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4.3. The Imminence of the Kingdom. From the above it must have become clear that the interpretation of *ephthasen* of [Matthew 12:28](#) and its parallel [Luke 11:20](#), which is normally accepted as an authentic saying of Jesus, has played a most crucial role in discussions of the kingdom of God. This is so because it is the only kingdom saying in the Synoptics that apparently describes the kingdom of God as having arrived. Dodd was so certain of this meaning that he let it determine his interpretation of the *ēngiken*-type of sayings. The claim that the kingdom of God had arrived in Jesus' person and that it consisted of, or at least was active in, his driving out demons is hardly a satisfactory answer to the three questions regarding the essence, the arrival and the relation of the kingdom of God to Jesus' person and work. If the kingdom of God had come already, say, by the time Jesus uttered the saying in [Matthew 12:28](#) and [Luke 11:20](#), how is the remainder of Jesus' earthly existence to be understood? And what about the Son of man's duty "to give his life a ransom for many"? What is the significance of his death? And how did Jesus relate his death to the kingdom of God? To speak of a final or full consummation at a future point of time does not satisfactorily answer these questions. And to emphasize the coming of the kingdom prior to the time of the *ephthasen* saying raises the question of whether the death of Jesus is superfluous to that coming. Any viable solution must take account of (1) the language used and (2) the relation of the kingdom of God to the Son of man ([4.5.](#) below).

4.3.1. *Ephthasen* ([Mt 12:28/Lk 11:20](#)). The most indubitable fact is that the Synoptics present Jesus as having spoken of the kingdom of God as imminently near (*ēngiken*), just as John did ([Mt 3:2](#)). The problem which the *ephthasen* saying raises is due to its being interpreted in a dubious way. The *ephthasen* saying makes excellent sense if understood according to a well-attested but little-known and generally misunderstood Greek idiom. The aorist tense is sometimes used to emphasize the certainty and immediacy of an action that properly belongs in the future by describing it as though it had already transpired (Caragounis 1989, 12–23). In comparison with the *ēngiken*-type of sayings the *ephthasen* logion implies an advance, but not quite the presence of the kingdom of God which, in the context of [Matthew 12:28](#) and [Luke 11:20](#), is still future. What Jesus is saying in effect is, "If it is by the Spirit/finger of God (rather than by Beelzebul, as you claim) that I drive out the demons (i.e., preparing for the coming of the kingdom of God by defeating the forces of evil), then the kingdom of God is about to break in upon you (and overtake you in your obstinate and unrepentant state)" (see [Holy Spirit](#)).

Ephthasen implies that the coming of the [kingdom of God](#) is so imminent that the [kingdom of God](#) may be considered as being virtually here. This means that the force of the saying is not purely informative, in which case the force of *eph'hymas* ("upon you") would have been lost, but one of warning, almost threat. This threatening force of *eph'hymas* shows clearly that the [kingdom of God](#) has not yet arrived. The relation of the miracles (see [Miracles and Miracle Stories](#)) of Jesus to the [kingdom of God](#) is that they bear witness to the warfare of the Son of man (i.e., the agent of the [kingdom of God](#)) against the powers of evil for the establishment of the [kingdom of God](#). But the [kingdom of God](#) does not consist of those miracles. Jesus' miracles are only the preliminaries, not the [kingdom of God](#) itself (contra Dodd). The [kingdom of God](#) is the dynamic reign of God over his people. The saying looks forward to the cross.

4.3.2. *Entos Hymōn Estin* ([Lk 17:21](#)). Another saying often adduced as evidence of the presence of the kingdom of God is [Luke 17:21](#). Here Jesus is represented answering the [Pharisees'](#)* question about the time of the coming of the kingdom of God by saying, "the kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (*entos hymōn estin*) (NIV). The basic meaning of *entos* is "within," "inside," being the opposite of *ektos*, "with out" (i.e., "outside"). This meaning is borne out by the entire Greek literary corpus including the papyri and Modern Greek. The attempt has sometimes been made to construe *entos hymōn* in the sense of "in your midst," "among you," "in your domain," "within your grasp," etc. in accordance with whether *hymōn* is interpreted of the Pharisees or of eventual followers of Jesus, in which case the *estin* ("is") is taken with future significance (i.e., "the kingdom of God will suddenly be among you," etc.).

An examination of the ancient Greek texts that have been appealed to for these meanings (e.g., Herodotus, Xenophon, Symmachus' translation of the OT, Papyri) shows that the meaning is regularly "within" and that the sense of "among" has been based on a few (sometimes obscure) instances in Aquila and Symmachus. On the other hand, P. Oxy 654, 16 (which is parallel to the *Gospel of Thomas*) has a saying similar to Luke's, where the meaning is unambiguously "the kingdom (of God) is within you." Luke's usage must be considered decisive. The sense of "among" occurs a good many times in [Luke-Acts](#), but the expression is always *en (tōi) mesō hymōn*, never *entos*. The *entos hymōn* is the opposite of *meta paratērēseōs* ("with (apocalyptic?) signs that can be observed") with its amplification " 'Here it is' or 'There it is.' " Therefore any interpretation that fails to set *entos hymōn* in its intended contradistinction to *meta paratērēseōs* fails to do justice to Luke's intention. Jesus is here trying to discourage (apocalyptic) speculations and calculations based on observable signs (see [Apocalyptic Teaching](#)). "Within you," therefore, seems to be Luke's way of expressing the inward nature and dynamic of the [kingdom of God](#), rather than refer to any actual presence in or among the Pharisees.

In the Synoptics there does not seem to be a single [kingdom of God](#) saying which unequivocally demands to be taken in the present sense. The [kingdom of God](#) is presented either timelessly (notably in the parables), or as the object of proclamation, or in its demands ([Mk 9](#) [10]x; [Lk 17](#) [19]x; [Mt 25](#) [31]x) or as something future from the standpoint of the utterance ([Mk 5](#) [6]x; [Lk 19](#) [21]x; [Mt 19](#) [25]x; the figures in [] fitting either category).

4.4. The Kingdom in Jesus' Teaching. The Synoptics present Jesus from the start as charged with one message, compelling and irresistible, the message that the kingdom of God was at hand. The impression is that the eschaton has drawn near, the long-promised kingdom of God is about to appear, and the hour of decision has come. The kingdom of God is presented in two ways: (1) it forms the heart of Jesus' teaching and (2) it is confirmed by his mighty works (see e.g., [Mt 4:23](#); [9:35](#)). A third component is that the kingdom of God is inextricably connected with Jesus' person as Son of man (see [4.5.](#) below).

4.4.1. *The Conditions and Demands of the Kingdom.* The first condition is to "repent and believe the gospel" (see [Repentance](#); [Mk 1:15](#); [Mt 4:17](#)). A childlike (see [Children](#)) faith is a presupposition for entering into the kingdom of God ([Mt 18:3](#); [Mk 10:14](#) par.). The gospel is the good news about the sovereignty of God. God's eschatological, salvific act demands an undivided heart ([Mk 12:29–30](#) par.). Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

Therefore, it is not lip service or even the use of Jesus' name in performing miracles, but the performance of God's will that opens the door to the kingdom of God ([Mt 7:21–23](#)). Nothing may stand in the way of the kingdom since no one who has put his hand on the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God ([Lk 9:62](#)). The kingdom may demand the sacrifice of marriage and family ([Mt 19:12](#)) as well as of possessions (see [Rich and Poor](#); [Mk 10:21–27](#) par.). At the other end it holds the promise of repaying to a hundredfold ([Mk 10:29–31](#) par.). The demand is radicalized still further when the would-be disciple is given the choice of either letting the tempting hand be cut off or the tempting eye plucked out for the kingdom of God, or keeping them and being cast into Gehenna (see [Heaven and Hell](#); [Mk 9:47](#) par.). The kingdom must be preferred to everything. All this illustrates the seriousness with which people must act with regard to the kingdom of God rather than superior moral attributes qualifying for entrance into it. In other words, they must seek to enter in by the narrow gate ([Mt 7:13–14](#)); in fact they must actively storm the kingdom ([Mt 11:12](#)).

4.4.2. *The Ethics of the Kingdom.* The ethics of the kingdom of God (see [Ethics of Jesus](#)) are the ethics that God expects from those who are set to do his will. The ethical demands are scattered throughout Jesus' teaching but occur in more concentrated form in the Sermon on the Mount (see [Sermon on the Mount](#); [Mt 5–7](#); cf. also [Lk 6:17–49](#)). Here we see a continuation with the ethical teaching of the OT, although Jesus' requirements go beyond it by penetrating behind the letter to the spirit and intent of it. In the end Jesus lifts up a performance motivated by pure [love](#)* and devotion to God and love to one's neighbor. Thus, for example, the [commandments](#)* "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," "Do not break your oath" are only partial and particular aspects of the greatest commandment of all, namely undivided love toward God and neighbor. Love is the fulfilling of all the commandments (cf. [Mt 22:40](#)), in fact the logical conclusion would seem to be that love makes commandments superfluous.

4.4.3. *The Parables of the Kingdom.* Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God also through the medium of parables (see [Parable](#)). After centuries of allegorical interpretation of the parables (in which every detail was given a particular significance), A. Jülicher demonstrated that the parables had one essential point, the other details being the necessary trappings of the story. (Jülicher's principle should not be applied rigidly as there are occasions when more than one point may have been intended.)

The parables of the kingdom have been regarded as the most authentic element in Jesus' teaching (see [Form Criticism](#)) and occur in concentrated collections in [Mark 4](#) and [Matthew 13](#). These parables illustrate different aspects of the [kingdom of God](#): people's response to the message of the [kingdom of God](#) (the sower, [Mk 4:3–9](#); [Mt 13:3–9](#)), the unobtrusive character of the [kingdom of God](#) as contrasted with the apocalyptic expectation of upheaval (the seed growing quietly, [Mk 4:26–29](#)), the immense growth of the kingdom from an insignificant beginning (the mustard-seed, [Mk 4:30–32](#); [Mt 13:31–32](#), and the leaven, [Mt 13:33](#)), the mixed nature of those presently involved in the [kingdom of God](#), who will be separated at the end (the weeds, [Mt 13:24–30](#), with its probably later allegorical interpretation, [Mt 13:36–43](#), and in all probability the dragnet, [Mt 13:47–50](#)) and the inestimable value of the [kingdom of](#)

[God](#), for which people must be prepared to give up everything (the treasure and the pearl, [Mt 13:44–46](#)).

Jesus' use of parables raises the question of their purpose or function. Matthew has the disciples raise the question ([Mt 13:10](#)). Jesus' answer, "to you it is given to learn the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to those it is not given" ([Mt 13:11](#)), has given rise to many interpretations. The point of the explanation seems to be that, having rejected the message of Jesus when exposed to it, these "outsiders" ([Mk 4:10](#)) have willfully chosen to keep their eyes shut and their hearts hardened, that the continued message is now given in the form of half-revealing, half-concealing parables. But though the interpretation—and therewith the precise meaning—is denied to them, they still perceive their gist sufficiently well (cf. [Mk 12:12](#) par.: "they knew he had spoken the parable against them"). It is not therefore an [exaggeration](#) to say that sometimes the parables have a polemical tone in addition to their usage to illustrate the [kingdom of God](#).

4.5. The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man. The kingdom of God should not be dissociated from the Son of man, who in Jesus' teaching, as in Daniel, is its agent. The destiny of the Son of man is therefore directly connected with the coming of the kingdom of God. The present activity of the Son of man, especially his casting-out of demons, is an integral part of the proclamation of the kingdom of God, but they should be seen not so much as indicating the actual occurrence of the decisive event of the kingdom of God, but as the preliminary warfare of the Son of man against the evil powers in his work of making possible the entrance of the kingdom of God in human history. This warfare, the Son of man's attacks on the kingdom of evil, ought not to be construed in terms of the Hellenistic or Jewish exorcist's activity, but rather be connected with the Son of man's mission to "serve and to give his life a ransom for many" ([Mk 10:45](#) par.), otherwise the link between the kingdom of God and the cross becomes illegitimately obscured.

We would thus submit that it was the near prospect of a violent [death](#) (see [Death of Jesus](#)), to which Jesus attributed atoning significance (see [Ransom Saying](#)), that led him to change the *ēngiken* to *ephthasen* and thus characterize the coming of the [kingdom of God](#) as unprecedentedly certain and imminent. Viewed from this perspective, though the [kingdom of God](#) had come nearer than in the *ēngiken* type of sayings, it had not arrived, as the last pre-passion occurrence(s) of [kingdom of God](#) in all three Synoptics would seem to testify.

4.6. Potential Eschatology. By way of conclusion it may be said that during Jesus' ministry the kingdom of God is spoken of always as a future event. It is expected, hoped for and prayed for. But it is never said explicitly to have arrived, not even at the Last Supper (see [Last Supper](#)). What is present is the agent of the kingdom of God, Jesus. But because the agent of the kingdom of God is present and active through his teaching and mighty works, the kingdom of God may also be said to be potentially present. However, the decisive event for its coming, that is, for the release of its powers in salvific blessings, still lies ahead.

The term *potential* does not qualify the term “kingdom of God,” but only the term “present in Jesus.” Thus, it should not be construed as in any way implying uncertainty as to the kingdom’s coming. *Potential* simply means that the [kingdom of God](#) in Jesus’ ministry is not present in any absolute or independent sense but only in so far as it is represented by Jesus. Its arrival and presence in its own right is depicted as a future event. Thus if we are to speak of [eschatology](#) in connection with the [kingdom of God](#) during Jesus’ earthly ministry at all, then it is more accurate to speak of *potential* [eschatology](#). This is an [eschatology](#) that has not yet begun to unfold itself in final, catastrophic events, but the [eschaton](#) is, nevertheless, in principle present in Jesus, because he, as Son of man, is the agent of the [kingdom of God](#). Nonetheless, the ministry of Jesus and his teaching look forward to the awful and more immediate event of the cross, the event in which the Son of man fulfills his God-given mission for the arrival of the [kingdom of God](#).

4.7. The Consummation. But even this decisive event (the cross-resurrection complex) does not exhaust the entire content or expectation of the promise. It seems to be the key event that makes possible the arrival of the kingdom of God in time, but also in principle its full manifestation and consummation which lies at the end of history (see Ladd 1966, 307–28). In this regard the concept of the kingdom of God is parallel with the Johannine concept of eternal life (see [Life](#)) and the Pauline concept of salvation. Precisely as those who put their faith in the atoning work of Christ are said to possess eternal life, to be in Christ or to be saved, in spite of the fact that eternal life or salvation (see [Salvation](#)) are essentially eschatological concepts, so also believers may be said to have entered into the kingdom of God despite the fact that the kingdom of God, like eternal life and salvation, can be properly experienced only at the end of time.

5. The Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels contain 76 different kingdom sayings, or 103, including the parallels:

(1) *Mark-Matthew-Luke* ([Mk 4:11](#) par. [Mt 13:11](#) and [Lk 8:10](#); [Mk 4:30](#) par. [Mt 13:31](#) and [Lk 13:18](#); [Mk 9:1](#) par. [Mt 16:28](#) and [Lk 9:27](#); [Mk 10:14](#) par. [Mt 19:14](#) and [Lk 18:16](#); [Mk 10:15](#) par. [Mt 18:3](#) and [Lk 18:17](#); [Mk 10:23](#) par. [Mt 19:23](#) and [Lk 18:24](#); [Mk 10:25](#) par. [Mt 19:24](#) and [Lk 18:25](#); [Mk 14:25](#) par. [Mt 26:29](#) and [Lk 22:18](#));

(2) *Mark-Matthew* ([Mk 1:15](#) par. [Mt 4:17](#));

(3) *Mark-Luke* ([Mk 15:43](#) par. [Lk 23:51](#));

(4) *Matthew-Luke* ([Mt 5:3](#) par. [Lk 6:20](#); [Mt 6:10](#) par. [Lk 11:2](#); [Mt 6:33](#) par. [Lk 12:31](#); [Mt 8:11](#) par. [Lk 13:29](#); [Mt 10:7](#) par. [Lk 9:2](#); [Mt 11:11](#) par. [Lk 7:28](#); [Mt 11:12](#) par. [Lk 16:16](#); [Mt 12:28](#) par. [Lk 11:20](#); [Mt 13:33](#) par. [Lk 13:20](#));

(5) *Mark* ([4:26](#); [9:47](#); [10:24](#); [12:34](#));

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(6) *Matthew* ([3:2](#); [4:23](#); [5:10](#), [19](#) [bis], [20](#); [7:21](#); [8:12](#); [9:35](#); [13:19](#), [24](#), [38](#), [41](#), [43](#), [44](#), [45](#), [47](#), [52](#); [16:19](#); [18:1](#), [4](#), [23](#); [19:12](#); [20:1](#), [21](#); [21:31](#), [43](#); [22:2](#); [23:13](#); [24:14](#); [25:1](#), [34](#));

(7) *Luke* ([1:33](#); [4:43](#); [8:1](#); [9:11](#), [60](#), [62](#); [10:11](#); [12:32](#); [13:28](#); [14:15](#); [17:20–21](#); [18:29](#); [19:11](#); [21:31](#); [22:16](#), [29–30](#); [23:42](#));

In addition, Matthew has one more reference to “kingdom of God” ([7:21](#)) and one to “kingdom” ([6:13](#)) in part of the textual [tradition](#). The Gospel data on the distribution of the various expressions is as follows:

	Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn
Kingdom of God	5	14	32	2
Kindgom of Heaven	32	—	—	—
Kingdom	13	—	7	3
Total	50	14	39	5

The [Johannine](#) sayings have no parallels in the Synoptics. The three expressions “Kingdom of God” (KG), “Kingdom of Heaven” (KH) and “Kingdom” (K) are distributed as follows:

Gospel	Total	Peculiar	Mt-Mk-Lk	Mt-Mk	Mt-Lk	Mk-Lk
Mt	50	32: 20 KH	8: 5 KH	1 KG	9: 6 KH	—

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		2 KG	1 KG	—	2 KG	—
		10 K	2K	—	1 K	—
Mk	14	4 KG	8 KG	1 KG	—	1 KG
Lk	39	21: 17 KG	8 KG	—	9: 7 KG	1 KG
		4 K	—	—	2 K	

5.1. Mark. Mark (see [Mark, Gospel of](#)) introduces the public ministry of Jesus with the summary statement that Jesus proclaimed the gospel of God saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel” ([1:15](#)). The position of the statement within the structure of Mark indicates that the proclamation of the kingdom of God was at the heart of Jesus’ preaching. The saying announces the fulfillment of the time for the arrival of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is still future, but has drawn near and already makes its demands for preparation to receive it: these are repentance and believing (see [Faith](#)) acceptance of the gospel. This saying does not give any clear indications whether “kingdom” refers to the national or to a more apocalyptic type of hope. The collocation of “repent” and “believe” might favor the second alternative, but even for the national hope Israel was expected to keep the [Law](#)* flawlessly for at least one day (see *b. Ta’an.* 64a).

In [Mark 4](#) Jesus’ parabolic teaching is concerned with the [mystery](#) of the [kingdom of God](#) which is given to the group of Jesus’ inner disciples, while to the outsiders the [kingdom of God](#) is being conveyed in dark, unintelligible parables ([4:11](#)). The description of the [kingdom of God](#) as seed sown, shooting up and growing quietly ([4:26](#)) implies that the [kingdom of God](#) here is conceived neither in nationalistic terms of open revolt and warfare for liberation, nor in the style of apocalyptic upheavals. The emphasis in the similar idea expressed at [4:30](#) is on the contrast between the insignificant beginning and the immense growth of the [kingdom of God](#).

In an isolated logion at [9:1](#) the [kingdom of God](#) is described as imminent, to occur within a generation or two. At [9:47](#) in the context of resisting various temptations, the importance of entering the [kingdom of God](#) at any price—even losing one’s eye—is underlined, and entering the [kingdom of God](#) is compared to entering “life” ([9:43–44](#)).

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According to [10:14](#) children should be allowed access to Jesus because the [kingdom of God](#) belongs to such as these. In fact the [kingdom of God](#) demands a childlike [faith](#) ([10:15](#)).

In the group of sayings at [10:23](#), [24](#) and [25](#), love of possessions is a hindrance to entering the [kingdom of God](#), which demands the sacrifice of everything and implies being “saved” ([10:26](#)).

The [scribe](#) who recognized that the heart of Hebrew/Jewish religion lay in undivided devotion to God was told that he was not far from the [kingdom of God](#) ([12:34](#)). In the Last Supper ([14:25](#)) the kingdom of God is eschatological. In traditional Jewish imagery Jesus will feast with his own (see [Table Fellowship](#)). Finally, at [15:43](#) Joseph of Arimathea is described as awaiting the [kingdom of God](#), presumably in the sense of the traditional hope of Israel.

5.2. Matthew. As implied above, Matthew (see [Matthew, Gospel of](#)) offers a richer and more nuanced picture of Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God than Mark. For in addition to his nine Markan and his nine [Q](#)* sayings, he has another thirty-two sayings peculiar to himself.

At the very outset of his Gospel Matthew describes the preaching of John as being one of repentance in view of the nearness of the kingdom of Heaven ([3:2](#)). The wording—probably stylized by Matthew to bring out the continuity—is placed on Jesus’ lips by way of a summary of his proclamation from the time of John’s arrest onwards ([4:17](#)). The summary character of Jesus’ preaching is repeated at [4:23](#) (and again at [9:35](#)) along with the information that Jesus’ preaching was accompanied by healing. The same emphasis occurs in the mission of the Twelve ([10:5–8](#)).

The [kingdom of God](#) figures at the first and last beatitude ([5:3](#), [10](#)), thus framing the collection of Beatitudes (an *inclusio*) and suggesting that they must be understood within its thought-compass (note: *autōn estin* [“theirs is”] occurs only in these two beatitudes. The beatitude of [5:11](#) is in different form [second person]). Humility and righteous suffering are necessary presuppositions for possessing the kingdom.

The three logia at [5:19–20](#) teach that even the least commandments affect people’s relation to the kingdom of God and that scribal or Pharisaic (i.e., Jewish) religiosity is insufficient for entrance into it. The centrality of the [kingdom of God](#) is seen also in the Lord’s Prayer (see [Prayer](#)), where its future coming constitutes the first petition ([6:10](#)). Some textual witnesses end the Lord’s Prayer with the mention of the kingdom. If this uncertain reading were original, it would imply that here too, as in the case of the Beatitudes, the [prayer](#) occurs within the frame of the [kingdom of God](#).

The radicalism associated with the [kingdom of God](#) is underscored at [6:33](#) where the interests of the [kingdom of God](#) are to go before all other interests. The Sermon on the Mount actually closes by emphasizing that entrance into the [kingdom of God](#) will depend not on mere lip-service, but on a faithful performance of God’s will ([7:21](#)). Indeed, not only will there be a distinction among the Jews as far as entering into the [kingdom of God](#) is concerned, but with [faith](#) rather than descent as a condition the door to it will be opened to many Gentiles, while many of the “children of the kingdom” (i.e., physical descendants of the Patriarchs) will be excluded ([8:11–12](#); [21:43](#); [22:2](#)).

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In a dispute concerning John, Jesus declares him to be the greatest of those born, but still lesser than the least in the kingdom of Heaven ([11:11](#)), the kingdom being pictured as the final eschatological reality. John's crucial role in [salvation history](#) is underscored by the statement that his day marks a new period in the realization of the kingdom. From his time on the [kingdom of God](#) is proclaimed and is being stormed by those who are eager to get in. His coming has given the signal that the [kingdom of God](#) has now drawn near and people can prepare themselves by repentance and [baptism](#) ([11:12](#)). From [21:31](#) we understand that those most eager to enter the [kingdom of God](#) are precisely the ones considered furthest from it. The [imminence](#) of the [kingdom of God](#) is expressed in unprecedentedly strong terms at [12:28](#), where Jesus' miracles, wrought by the Spirit of God, are interpreted as a sign of it.

The chapter on the parables of the kingdom contains no less than twelve kingdom logia (see [4.4.3.](#) above). The point made in [16:19](#), where Peter is given the keys of the kingdom, is probably in polemic against the Jewish dispensers of God's [truth](#), who according to [23:13](#) not only would not enter the kingdom themselves, but also closed the door to those who wanted to enter. The logion is often understood as the Christian counterpart to the Jewish way of speaking of [authority](#) in teaching as binding and loosing.

Matthew ascribes a kingdom to the Son of man ([16:28](#); [20:21](#)), which is thought of as being future. The disciples' questions as to who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven ([18:1](#)) elicits from Jesus the statement that a condition for entering into the kingdom and being greatest in it is childlike [faith](#) and humility ([18:3-4](#)). In fact the kingdom belongs to such ([19:14](#)).

The [kingdom of God](#) illustrates God's forgiveness (see [Forgiveness of Sins](#)) and demands a spirit of forgiveness from those who would enter it ([18:23](#)). It may demand abstention from marriage ([19:12](#)), and it certainly demands being taken seriously and loved more than possessions ([19:23-24](#)).

The rewards of the kingdom are apportioned by different principles. Personal achievement is of little importance. In God's evaluation scheme the last can become first and the first last ([20:1](#)).

In the Olivet [discourse](#) the [kingdom of God](#) is presented in future, apocalyptic terms. Those who persevere faithfully to the end will be saved. But the end will not come until the [gospel](#) of the kingdom has been proclaimed throughout the world. The parable of the ten virgins ([25:1](#)) was intended to teach perseverance and watchfulness. This finds its fitting sequel in the great [judgment](#), when the Son of man invites the faithful to inherit the kingdom which had been prepared for them from the time of the foundation of the world ([25:34](#)). The righteous are to go into its bliss, while the unjust are to go to everlasting torment. This picture bears the well-known features of apocalyptic thought.

The last occurrence of kingdom in Matthew is in connection with the Last Supper, when Jesus, looking forward to the eschatological feast in the Father's kingdom, promises to abstain from [wine](#)* until that day.

5.3. Luke. Luke's (see [Luke, Gospel of](#)) presentation of the kingdom of God is richer than Mark's but less nuanced than Matthew's, having no less than twenty-one sayings peculiar to himself.

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The first mention of kingdom occurs at [1:33](#) and is put on the angel's lips, when he brought Mary the message of the birth of the [Messiah](#) who was to sit on the throne of his father David, reigning forever as the definitive [Messiah](#) (see [Birth of Jesus](#)).

The first clear reference to kingdom in connection with Jesus' ministry occurs at [4:43](#), in which Jesus' mission consists of the proclamation of the [kingdom of God](#). This gives the saying the character of a summary statement and implies that Jesus' previous ministry too was concerned with the [kingdom of God](#). The same is repeated at [8:1](#).

In his Sermon on the Plain Luke has a logion similar to Matthew's first beatitude, but the saying is here directed to the poor rather than the humble ([6:20](#)). This is in line with Jesus' sermon in Nazareth ([4:18](#)) and Luke's sociological interests. Luke also has the saying on the least in the [kingdom of God](#) being greater than John ([7:28](#)). In interpreting the parable of the sower Luke too affirms that the [knowledge](#) of the mysteries of the [kingdom of God](#) are given to Jesus' disciples, but the rest must be content with unexplained parables ([8:10](#)).

Luke has both a mission of the Twelve and a mission of the Seventy-Two. The Twelve were to proclaim the [kingdom of God](#) ([9:2](#)), while the Seventy-Two were to proclaim that the kingdom had drawn near ([10:9](#), [11](#)). The preaching of both groups was to be accompanied by healing. And the crowds (see [People, Crowd](#)) that followed Jesus were instructed by him in the [kingdom of God](#) ([9:11](#)).

Luke connects the [death](#) of the Son of man with the coming of the [kingdom of God](#) and envisages the latter event as taking place within the lifetime of some who were present on the occasion ([9:27](#)). This indicates not only that the kingdom is thought of as future, but also that its coming is fairly imminent. The urgency of the kingdom makes it imperative that those who aspire to it do not let anything stand in the way—even the [death](#) of relatives ([9:60](#))—but must devote themselves wholly to it, never looking back ([9:62](#)).

As in Matthew the coming of the kingdom figures prominently in the [prayer](#) Jesus taught his disciples ([11:2](#)). In the Beelzebul controversy Jesus' works of power accomplished through the finger (Mt: "Spirit") of God are a strong indication of the [imminence](#) of the kingdom ([11:20](#)).

The concerns of the [kingdom of God](#) are to affect all attitudes toward life. Undue worry about worldly matters is to be laid aside and the interests of the kingdom to be given priority. Then God will see to it that all legitimate needs are supplied ([12:31](#)). Trust rather than fear is to characterize Jesus' followers since God has been pleased to give them the kingdom ([13:18](#), [20](#)). Like Matthew, Luke too makes it clear that entrance to the [kingdom of God](#) is not based on physical acquaintance with Jesus or physical descent, but it is based on accepting the conditions of the kingdom—entering through the narrow gate. This, while leaving out many descendants of [Abraham](#),* Isaac and Jacob, will open the door for many [Gentiles](#)* to feast with the Patriarchs in the kingdom ([13:28–29](#)).

The comment made by an outsider as to the blessed state of those who feast in the [kingdom of God](#) ([14:15](#)) leads to the parable of the great banquet, in which, with a view to the Jewish rejection of Jesus

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and his message, the point is made that those called first were not worthy and were replaced by the sordid mob of Gentiles. Luke does not record the incident of the man who had no wedding gown.

Luke too considers John's ministry as the beginning of a new era distinguished from that of the Law and the Prophets. It is the era of the proclamation of the [kingdom of God](#) when everyone has the chance to force their way into it ([16:16](#)). This shows that Luke does not share the apocalyptic view of the [kingdom of God](#) as being introduced suddenly following great eschatological upheavals. The subject is broached by the Pharisees. The answer is that the kingdom does not come in a way open to physical observation ([17:20](#)). No one will be able to point to it as being here or there. The [kingdom of God](#) is "within you" ([17:21](#); see [4.3.2.](#) above). The view of the kingdom advocated here is one in which God is at work quietly in those who have accepted his claims and faithfully take on them the yoke of his will.

The [kingdom of God](#) must be accepted in childlike trust ([18:16–17](#)). On the other hand, those who put their trust in their riches will not be able to enter into it ([18:24–25](#)). But to those who forsake everything for the [kingdom of God](#) a rich reward is promised, not only in the life to come, but even in this world ([18:29–30](#)).

By relating the parable of the pounds, Luke has Jesus correct the popular notion that the [kingdom of God](#) was about to break out in the apocalyptic way ([19:11](#)). The point is that Jesus' hearers had rather see to it that they administer faithfully what was entrusted to them and wait quietly for its full realization than speculate on the time of its full arrival. Luke generally discourages such speculation (cf. [Acts 1:6–8](#)). Even in the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, only general signs are given for the arrival in power of God's kingdom ([21:31](#)). It is obvious that Luke thinks of the [kingdom of God](#) as something that in a way has drawn near, so that from John's time onward people can prepare for it and be actively engaged in it, while in its full power it is something future, promised to appear after the fulfillment of certain events. Thus the apocalyptic element is not altogether absent from Luke.

That the kingdom can be spoken of as a future event is confirmed by the Last Supper, where Jesus promises to abstain from further eating and drinking until he can do so in the [kingdom of God](#) ([22:16, 18](#)).

Occasionally the kingdom is ascribed to Jesus as given to him by the Father ([22:29–30](#)). The context is again eschatological.

Finally, the thief on the cross asks to be remembered by Jesus when the latter comes in his kingdom ([23:42](#)), and Joseph of Arimathea is described as a man waiting for the [kingdom of God](#) ([23:51](#)), though it is by no means easy to decide whether his expectation was for a mundane or a transcendental kingdom.

5.4. John. The kingdom of God plays no significant role in John's Gospel (see [John, Gospel of](#)), its place being taken by the typically Johannine concept of "eternal life" (seventeen times) or simply "life" (nineteen times; see [Life](#)). The equivalence of eternal life with kingdom of God is proved from the occasional interchange of the two terms in the Synoptics ([Mk 9:43–47](#) par.; [10:17–30](#) par.; [Mt 25:31–46](#)) Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

and has its roots in rabbinic tradition (see Dalman, 116–17, 156–58). John’s avoidance of the term “kingdom of God” may be owing to his desire to avoid association with current apocalyptic hopes. It may also be due to his writing for non-Jewish readers to whom a typically Jewish conception might pose communication problems, and especially because the term had been in rather rare use in the church, where the emphasis had been laid on Christ’s person and work (christology and soteriology) as well as on the church (ecclesiology).

The concept [kingdom of God](#) occurs twice in the Nicodemus story and the expression “my kingdom” occurs three times in Jesus’ answer to Pilate (see [Pontius Pilate](#)). In the Nicodemus incident no indication is given that the [kingdom of God](#) had been the main emphasis in Jesus’ teaching or even a subject of discussion. But with Nathanael’s [confession](#), “Rabbi ... you are the king of Israel!” ([1:49](#)), the reader is, however, not totally unprepared.

At [John 3:3, 5](#) Jesus tells Nicodemus that spiritual [regeneration](#) is the condition to seeing or entering the [kingdom of God](#). From this it becomes obvious that the idea bears no relation to the Jewish national hope. It is the [sovereignty](#) of God under which people place themselves by accepting the message of Jesus in [faith](#) and undergoing a spiritual rebirth (see [New Birth](#)).

In Pilate’s interrogation Jesus answers the question “Are you the king of Israel?” ([18:33](#)) by explaining that “my kingdom is not of this world” ([18:36](#), “my kingdom” being repeated three times). No clearer statement than this could be made to show that the kingdom of which Jesus thought had very little relation to Israel’s national expectation. This accusation, which stemmed from the Jews as well as from the *titulus* on the cross, indicates that in John’s Gospel the rejection and condemnation of Jesus depended to a large extent on the Jews’ disappointment by Jesus’ refusal to accept the role of the national, political messiah (cf. also [6:15](#), [26](#)).

6. The Kingdom of God and the Church Today

Does the concept of the [kingdom of God](#) have any relevance for the present proclamation of the [church](#)? Here we are confronted with the kind of dilemma that led R. [Bultmann](#) to launch his controversial [demythologization](#) program.

In his proclamation of the [kingdom of God](#) Jesus was standing firmly on OT ground. At the same time he was proclaiming a subject that made every Jewish heart throb. Yet Jesus took this concept and transformed it from a narrow-minded nationalistic hope to a universal, spiritual order in which humankind could find the fulfillment of its ultimate desires for [righteousness](#), justice, peace, [happiness](#), freedom from sin and guilt, and a restored relationship to God—an order in which God was king. Given the fact that the basic human problem of sin and alienation from God is as true today as it ever has been, the message of the [kingdom of God](#) ought to have as great a relevance today as it ever had.

The [kingdom of God](#) need not be demythologized (see [Myth](#)). But it is instructive to note that the early [church](#), addressing primarily Gentile converts, avoided using a term loaded with Jewish national or

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apocalyptic connotations which might introduce confusion, seeking instead other dynamic equivalents such as “eternal life” or “salvation” as more appropriate, though “kingdom of God” did not disappear entirely from its lips. The [church](#) continued to proclaim the legacy of its Master, but in dynamic forms. Every age has to find its own appropriate forms for expressing the ever-relevant message of Jesus on the [kingdom of God](#). The forms may change but the [essence](#) remains.

See also [APOCALYPTIC](#); [APOCALYPTIC TEACHING](#); [CHURCH](#); [ESCHATOLOGY](#); [ETHICS OF JESUS](#); [GOSPEL \[GOOD NEWS\]](#); [HEALING](#); [HOLY SPIRIT*](#); [JUBILEE](#); [LIFE](#); [PARABLE](#); [REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENTS](#); [SERMON ON THE MOUNT](#).

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