

The Kingdom of God: Now, Not, or Sort of?

A Biblical and Contemporary Survey of the Theological Understandings of βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ

By: Matthew Jones, MA, MTh, DMin (cand)

October 30, 2006

The Kingdom of God is a great theme of the Bible. In fact, it is so great that some consider it to be the very theme that holds the Bible together.¹ With just a cursory browse of the Gospels, one can see that the Kingdom of God “lay at the heart of Jesus’ teaching.”² The gospel of Luke records that it was Jesus’ purpose to “preach the gospel about the Kingdom” (Luke 4:43). Among readers of the Bible, there is no doubt that God’s Kingdom is of utter significance: however, the precise meaning of this theme or concept has been a matter of debate. Since the early history of the church all the way through our modern setting, interpreters have broadly maintained three distinct positions.³ Some hold that the Kingdom is a present reality, while others view it as a future age to come and lastly there are some who see it as sort of a combination of the two views, arguing it is a present reality that will be fully consummated in the future. In this paper, I will present a biblical survey of the Kingdom of God, briefly sketch these three theological positions in their historical and contemporary setting and lastly I will defend my own position of the Kingdom of God.

¹ See Alva J. McClain. *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959.

² Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) page 417.

³ J. Sidlow Baxter has identified six views: (1) The Idealistic; (2) The British Israel; (3) The Dispensationalist; (4) The Social Gospel; (5) The Spiritual and (6) The Messianic (J. Sidlow Baxter. *The Strategic Grasp of the Bible*. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973] pages 210-211). These views can easily be narrowed into my three broad categories.

Biblical Terminology of the Kingdom

Begin reading in the Synoptic Gospels and you will soon be confronted by the teaching of the Kingdom of God. As Gordon Fee says, “The universal witness of the Synoptic tradition is that the absolutely central theme of Jesus’ mission and message was ‘the good news of the kingdom of God.’”⁴ The Gospels use three interchangeable terms⁵ to express the idea of the kingdom of God: ἡ βασιλεια του τηου (“the kingdom of God”), ἡ βασιλεια τον ουρανον (“the kingdom of [the] Heaven[s]”) and the absolute ἡ βασιλεια (“the king dom”).⁶

Immediately we see John the Baptist and Jesus declaring the Kingdom without elaboration of its meaning. This implies the audience of the gospels understood this concept from their cultural context.⁷ Looking at their context to gain understanding, we find that the topic of the Kingdom is mentioned in both the Old Testament as well as other extra-biblical Jewish writings. Though not mentioned with the specific title Kingdom of God, the Old Testament contains a great deal of

⁴ Gordon Fee. “Kingdom of God” in *Called and Empowered: Pentecostal Perspectives on Global Mission*. edited by: Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klouse and Douglas Petersen. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) page 8.

⁵ In the synoptic Gospels, Mark and Luke use the term βασιλεια του τηου, commonly translated in English as “Kingdom of God,” while Matthew prefers the term βασιλεια των ουρανων which has been translated as “Kingdom of Heaven.” Many biblical scholars believe the Matthean text, while still based upon Mark and the Q document, used ‘heaven’ as a euphemism to avoid direct use of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), that is, the divine name of God. This would have been in keeping with the Hebrew culture of which the early Christians were a part of. Classic dispensationalist interpreters have argued that these terms are not interchangeable (see: Henry Clarence Thiessen. “Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation? Part 1” *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 92:365 (Jan 35)*. (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002) page 52). Classic dispensationalists see these terms as distinct: however, such a position is flawed. J. Barton Payne has correctly pointed out that the “kingdom of heaven” terminology is largely Matthean, and is consistent with the Jewish reticence to use the divine name of God (YHWH). Barton accurately states, “Heaven .. is therefore a circumlocution, in this case a metonymy, substituting the place where God’s glory is manifested for His name.” (J. Barton Payne. *The Theology of the Older Testament*. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962] pages 150–151). See also: J. Sidlow Baxter. *The Strategic Grasp of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973) pages 233-265.

⁶ The word Kingdom (βασιλεια) appears about 250 times in the Septuagint, over 100 times in the gospels and about 60 times in the remainder of the New Testament.

⁷ In “*Die Pedigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*,” Wilhelm Wrede noted, “Jesus never gave a discourse as to what he meant by the Kingdom. He never said to his disciples that his perspective of the Kingdom of God was anything other than the customary understanding. Overall there is the impression that he used the term in the same sense in which it was generally understood” (cited in Mark Saucy. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), page 14).

teaching on this concept.⁸ I will now turn to the Old Testament era before continuing in the Synoptic Gospels, since it is an earlier source which Jesus' contemporaries would have likely employed paradigmatically and therefore principal to be au fait with at the outset.

The term "kingdom" is a translation of the Greek word *basileia*, which is the Old Testament equivalent of the words *malkuth* (Hebrew) and *malkutha* (Aramaic).⁹ In the Old Testament itself and writings of that era, God is often spoken of as the supreme King over all.¹⁰ In this sense, all of creation is viewed as his kingdom, over which he now presently reigns. However, there are two additional understandings of the Kingdom that are closely associated to one another and much more specific than a general reigning of God over creation.

The second understanding of the Kingdom was the idea that God's covenant people were specifically his Kingdom. The Old Testament tells the narrative of the suzerainty of God over his people.¹¹ In the book of Genesis, God establishes a covenant with the descendants of Abraham who become the nation of Israel. In the book of Exodus, God delivers Israel as their lawful king over and against the Pharaoh of Egypt. In the conquest of Canaan, God apportions the nation of Israel, a land in which He will reign over. His kingship is beautifully captured in the book of Judges as God does not allow Israel to have an earthly king, because He Himself is their King. When Israel demanded to have an earthly king like the other nations (1 Sam 8:4-5), the Scriptures interpret this action as a betrayal of God's rule as king of his nation (1 Sam 8:6-8). As a merciful king, God permitted Israel to have an earthly king, which the people were to recognize as a representative under the suzerainty of God. In this sense, the nation of Israel was

⁸ The expression occurs once in Wisdom 10:10.

⁹ See: Willem A VanGemeren (ed.). *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Vol.2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997) pages 956-965; and Colin Brown (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament*. Vol.2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979) pages 372-373.

¹⁰ Some examples include: Deut 9:26, 1 Sam 12:12; 1 Chron. 29:10-12; Ps 24:10; 29:10; Dan.4:3; Is 6:5; 33:22; Zeph 3:15; Zech 14:16, 17; and Sir. 1:8.

¹¹ Andrew Hall and John Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) page 52.

viewed as God's kingdom: however, there is a second and final sense in which the kingdom was understood.

Lastly, there was the idea that God's Messiah was going to intervene in human history at an undisclosed age to bring His Kingdom to His covenant people and punish the nations that oppressed His covenant people.¹² Although Israel saw herself as the Kingdom, there was still an expectation of a future day when the Kingdom would be fully realized.¹³ The Kingdom of God was promised to the great king of Israel, David. God told David that he would establish his Kingdom and he would never "lack a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 9:5). Under the reign of Solomon, there was the belief that the throne of David would be established again and it would last forever (1 Kings 11:11–14). Crucial to the re-establishment of David's throne, was the belief of a future Messiah who would come and rule over David's kingdom in righteousness and prosperity.¹⁴ As Israel was swept away by the Babylonian captivity, the expectation of a re-established Israel at the hands of the Messiah became the primary understanding of the Kingdom. The Jews would not deny that God was still King over the creation nor that God was the King of Israel, but they had yet to taste of the Kingdom to come. This understanding of the Kingdom was to be a political and physical reality in which God would establish a theocracy on

¹² The awaited kingdom was believed to bring glory for Israel and punishment for the Gentiles (Testament of Moses 10:7–10). The Messiah was expected to come and conquer the wicked (Sib. Or. 3:652–56; Pss. Sol. 17:23–32) with supernatural powers to judge kings and vindicate the righteous (1 Enoch 46:1–6; 48:2–6; 62:5–7; 4 Ezra 12:32).

¹³ The Second Apocalypse of Baruch (pre-70AD) speaks of the kingdom especially in three visions. The first vision (27–30) reveals the Kingdom as a physical kingdom in space and time (e.g. "those who are found in this land," "have arrived at the consummation of time"). The second vision (36–40) speaks of the Messiah who will rule the Kingdom and annihilate his physical enemies. The third vision (53–74) describes Israel's prosperity. Baruch clearly shows that the Kingdom was thought of by the Jews as a long-cherished hope for Israel.

¹⁴ This plays in with the significance of Jesus' title as "Son of David." "When used as a Christological title, Son of David points to Jesus as the royal Messiah in the line of David. As such he fulfills the promises God made to David regarding the eternal reign of David's "offspring" (e.g., 2 Sam 7:12–16), and he acts as the unique agent in bringing the rule of God to the earth, a rule that is characterized by salvation and blessing" (Joel B. Green (et.al). *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997] page 766).

earth through Israel to bring social justice to humanity.¹⁵ The prophets even maintain that God was going to resurrect the great king of Israel, David, to serve as a co-regent under His authority (Jer 30:9; Eze 37:24–25). The prophet Daniel spoke of the Kingdom as a future reality. He said that God’s kingdom would come as a stone cut without hands and crush the kingdoms of the world that were oppressing Israel (Daniel 2). Daniel saw this Kingdom as related with a future messiah figure whom he describes as, “one like a son of man” (Dan. 7:13).¹⁶ By the time of the second temple era, this was widespread and the messianic expectations were high. Israel was permitted to return to their physical land, though they were under the yoke of various rulers. In Wisdom we read this of the Kingdom, “They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever” (Wisdom 3:8). The expectation that God “will reign” was something yet to be realized in the Old Testament era.

With this context in mind, we return to the New Testament. In the Synoptics it is clear that Jesus assumes his hearers have an understanding of the concept of the Kingdom of God, for He does not offer a formal definition of it.¹⁷ Out of the three uses found in Jewish literature and

¹⁵ Isaiah 2:2-3 speaks about the Kingdom when all the peoples of the earth will worship God from Jerusalem. The Scripture speaks of a future day when God will reign on Mount Zion (Isaiah 24:23) and Jerusalem will be the joy of the whole earth (Ps 48:2) never to fear for her safety (Is 26:1–4). The prophet Zechariah spoke of a day when God “will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one” (14:9). God will be King in the earth (Dan 7:14), and he will establish a just theocracy where sin will be punished (Is 11:4; 65:20) and perfect righteousness established (Is 11:3–5).

¹⁶ This plays in with the significance of Jesus’ identification with the Son of Man. Jesus declared himself to be the “Son of Man” in Matthew 24:30. John Walton notes: “The phrase “son of man” is simply a common Semitic expression to describe someone or something as human or, at least, humanlike. In Israelite theology, Yahweh is the high God and also is portrayed as the rider on the clouds. In Canaanite mythology, the roles described here are filled by the god El, the high god of great age and his son, Baal, the rider on the clouds. In one of the Baal myths, Yamm, who represents the chaos of the sea, is defeated, and Baal is declared king and granted everlasting dominion. In the cosmic conflict myths of Mesopotamia (such as *Enuma Elish* or the *Anzu Myth*) a deity (Marduk and Ninurta respectively) defeats the threatening chaos and regains authority and dominion for the gods and for himself. Daniel has been trained in such literature, and his revelations build on that familiarity, though the common motifs are entirely repackaged. Intertestamental literature such as the book of *1 Enoch* as well as New Testament and early Christian literature identifies the son of man with the Messiah” (John H. Walton, Victor Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas (eds.) *IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*. [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000] page 741).

¹⁷ Anthony Hoekema notes that “Jesus himself never gives a definition of the kingdom” (*The Bible and the Future*. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979] page 44). During the period of the second quest for the historical Jesus, Albert Schweitzer wrote: “The fact that He [Jesus] did not need to explain to His contemporaries what He meant by the

culture, Christ seems most often to employ the final view opting to speak of the Kingdom as a future reality that He was to bring or was bringing to Israel.¹⁸ In fact, he teaches his disciples that the Kingdom had yet to come when he taught them to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10, Luke 11:2). He preached eschatological messages where he spoke of the Kingdom as a future reality yet to be obtained (Matt 24-25). Jesus' view of the Kingdom relied heavily upon Old Testament passages that spoke of the Kingdom as a future judgment and subsequent earthly age when Israel would be established again by God.¹⁹ Associated with his gospel message, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom as the destination for the righteous in the eschatological age to come. As one scholar has noted:

Throughout the earliest accounts of Jesus' words are found predictions of a Kingdom of God that is soon to appear, in which God will rule. This will be an actual kingdom here on earth. When it comes, the forces of evil will be overthrown, along with everyone who has sided with them, and only those who repent and follow Jesus' teachings will be allowed to enter. Judgment on all others will be brought by the Son of Man, a cosmic figure who may arrive from heaven at any time. Being a member of Israel will not be enough to escape the coming judgment. People need to heed Jesus' words, return to God, and follow his commandments before it's too late.²⁰

In his famous sermon of the Mount, Jesus explained that those who obeyed his teachings were to be rewarded in the future with the inheritance of the Kingdom (Matt.25:34). Jesus spoke of

Kingdom of God constitutes a difficulty for us. The parables do not enlighten us, for they presuppose a knowledge of the conception" (Albert Schweitzer. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. [A&C Black, Ltd. 1910], page 18). While I agreed with Schweitzer on this point, there are some scholars who would disagree. For instance, Bruce Chilton in his book *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God*, surveys the various understandings of the Kingdom in Judaism as I did (though he identifies 5) and then concludes that "Jesus' understanding of the kingdom cannot be identified with any of them" (*Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996], page 30). Chilton's stance strikes me as being far more presumptuous than Schweitzer, for if Christ was redefining terms he certainly did not make that clear in his teaching. For a rebuttal of Chilton's view see Glen Stassen and David Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics*. [Downers Grove, IVP: 2003] pages 22-25).

¹⁸ Although, Jesus also preached in some passages that the Kingdom was "at hand" by his very presence (cf. Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, Mark 1:15).

¹⁹ Ehrman writes, "The prediction that God would enter into judgment with his people, destroying them and their sacred places, is as old as the Hebrew prophets that Jesus heard read as a child in the synagogue in Nazareth" (Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999] page 158). For example, just like Jeremiah, Jesus spoke of the coming judgment and destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:2 cf. Jer.7:3-4,9-11,14-15,34). Also, like the prophet Isaiah, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom as a time of peace where the wolf and the lamb can co-exist in harmony (Is.11:1-9).

²⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), page 128.

“eternal life” and salvation as synonyms for entering the future Kingdom of God (Matt. 19). At the same time, Jesus spoke of himself as the Messiah, the one who was expected to bring the Kingdom. He even preached that the Kingdom was “at hand” by his very presence (cf. Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, Mark 1:15). He called his audience to repent in light of the nearness of the Kingdom, but as the gospels end the Kingdom had still not arrived. At the beginning of the book of Acts, Jesus is asked, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Jesus acknowledges that it is still a future age and the day had yet to come (1:7). Readers of the New Testament have grappled with this data from the Synoptics in many different ways.

Three Contemporary Views of the Kingdom

From records quite early in the interpretation of the Church (not too mention interpretation outside of the Christian community²¹), we find a divergence of understandings concerning the Kingdom of God.²² In our contemporary setting we find the same divergence of views.²³ In the above biblical data, we see that the term was used broadly in reference to God’s

²¹ For example the Essenes saw the Kingdom as a political and physical coming age, whereas the Gnostics believed the Kingdom was a present reality. Consider saying 113 in the gospel of Thomas states, “His [Jesus’] disciples said to him, “on what day will the Kingdom come?” [He said] “It will not come by expectation. They will not say, ‘Look here,’ or ‘Look there,’ but the Kingdom of the Father is spread out on the earth and people do not see it.”

²² David Criswell writes, “The debate is old as the debate over prophetic interpretation. The earliest church fathers looked forward to a literal kingdom to be inaugurated at the second coming of Christ. Given the persecutions which they had endured for three hundred years, it would have seemed absurd to subscribe to the belief that the kingdom of God is present on earth, but with the rise of Augustinianism in the Middle Ages, the kingdom of God came to be viewed as synonymous with the medieval church. God they said, was ruling on earth now through the Vicar of Christ. By accepting Augustine’s allegorical interpretation, Pope Clement V was even able to declare, in his *Rex glorioe* bull, that France was the New Israel. From the time of the Reformation, this view had been rejected, but only inasmuch as the catholic church was seen as the kingdom. Many Reformers refused to let go of the idea that the kingdom of God was still present in the true church” (Ron Bigalke (ed.). *Progressive Dispensationalism*. [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005] page 146).

²³ The contemporary study of the Kingdom was credited by Albert Schweitzer to the writings of Herman Reimarus (1694-1768) who sparked critical studies of Christ (Albert Schweitzer. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. A&C Black, Ltd. 1910); though Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was the first to place the teaching of the Kingdom in the historical Jesus (Norman Perrin. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* [London: SCM, 1963], page 13). Reimarus understood the Kingdom to be a future reality that was grandly physical and national (Reimarus: Fragments, trans. Ralph S. Fraser, ed. Charles H. Talbert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). Schleiermacher spiritualized the Kingdom as a present reality (Perrin, 13-14): viewing it as “entirely a spiritual reality that is in evidence wherever the blessings of redemption are enjoyed by God’s people” (Perrin, page 6). Ritschl, influenced by Kant’s idealistic philosophy, conceived of the kingdom of God in primarily ethical terms as the organization of redeemed

rule over His creation, to His covenant with Israel and to a future age when the Messiah would reign on earth. There is not much debate that the Kingdom is used in different biblical contexts: however, the argument begins in regards to what context we stand in today. Mainly, did Jesus inaugurate the age of the Kingdom in His earthly ministry or not? Some hold that the Kingdom is a present reality. Others view it as a future age that Christ will bring in the eschaton. A third view holds that Christ did bring the Kingdom in His earthly ministry, so it is now: however, Christ will bring it more fully at His return, so it is also future. I will now briefly survey these positions in their contemporary setting.

The view that the Kingdom age is a present reality has existed since the time of Jerome and Augustine.²⁴ In our contemporary setting, this view began growing with the influences of Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) and Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922) who all interpreted the Kingdom of God as a present reality.²⁵ More contemporary examples include scholars like A. T. Cadoux, T. W. Manson, E. von Dobschütz, H. D. Wendland, Anthony Hoekema and NT Wright. This view understands God's Kingdom to be a spiritual reality that speaks of the sovereign and royal rule of God. While this position can be expressed in many idiosyncratic and nuanced forms due to the differences among those who hold this view, for purpose of this paper I am broadly treating them as one.²⁶ The view that the Kingdom is now a present reality has largely been defended in the

humanity, whose actions are inspired by love. (The analysis contained in this footnote is largely gleaned from: Mark Saucy. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*. [Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997], chapter 1).

²⁴ H. Wayne House and Randall Price. *Charts of Bible Prophecy*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), page 83.

²⁵ Mark Saucy. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), pages 5 -8.

²⁶ There is a wide variety of positions among scholars, partially due to the semantic range of the word Kingdom in biblical texts. Marcus Borg speaks of the Kingdom as having various "nuances of meaning" (Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*. [Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1994], page 87). For example, among such different nuances, we find (to name just a small few): Herman Ridderbos who believes the Kingdom is a present and progressing spiritual reality (see: Herman Ridderbos. *The Coming of the Kingdom*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); Albrecht Ritschl who believes the Kingdom is sociological and an ethical sort of "moral society of nation" (Albrecht Ritschl. *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. edited by: H.R. Mackintosh and

current third quest for the historical Jesus by historical critics, Roman Catholics, some Protestants and Anglicans, the Jesus Seminar, Liberation theologians and most recently by the Emergent church. These groups prefer to speak of the Kingdom of God using such phraseology as God's Dominion or Imperial Rule. They see Jesus in the context of the 1st century setting his spiritual rule over and against the Roman Empire and the Jewish Temple State, which extends today as we are now presently in the Kingdom of God. Historical critics like Bultmann understand the Kingdom in existential terms as a present reality.²⁷ Roman Catholic theology views the Kingdom as a present reality arguing that the Church is the Kingdom of God.²⁸ Some Protestants who hold to this view will tend to make a distinction between the Church and the Kingdom, maintaining that the Church is a vehicle through which the Kingdom is manifest.²⁹ Protestant theologian, Anthony Hoekema, has argued that the Kingdom "is to be understood as the reign of God dynamically active in human history through Jesus Christ."³⁰ As a voice for

A.B. Macaulay. [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900] page 10); and Norman Perri who speaks of the Kingdom as a "tensive symbol," that "can represent or evoke a whole range or series of conceptions" (Norman Perrin. *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976] page 33). (The analysis contained in this footnote is largely gleaned from: Mark Saucy. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*. [Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997], chapter 1).

²⁷ Bultmann believed that Jesus purified the Temple because he expected the kingdom of God to begin at his death. Bultmann is famously known for having a demythologized interpretation of the kingdom of God, which saw the Kingdom not as an event in time but rather in the existential terms of one's individual's decision.

²⁸ John Dominic Crossan, a prominent Catholic New Testament scholar, has argued for the Kingdom to be understood as a present reality of God's dominion (see John Dominic Crossan. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. San Francisco: Harper, 1994). In order to argue his case, he makes the bold assertion that our earliest sources, Q, Mark, M and L are not our earliest sources (all of which portray Jesus as an apocalypticist). He claims much later documents like the Egerton Gospel and the Gospel of Hebrews are more reliable. Ehrman comments "the argument strikes most scholars as ingenious but odd; at worse it's an argument driven by an ultimate goal" (*Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. [NY: Oxford University Press], 1999. page 133).

²⁹ In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century this was held by major Protestant theologians like Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, B. B. Warfield, A. A. Hodge, and A. H. Strong who argued that the "Kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the 'Millennium'" (Lorraine Boettner. *The Millennium*. [Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1966], page 14). The idea that the Kingdom is now is commonly held in Protestant circles today (see: George Elton Ladd. *A Theology of the New Testament*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974], pages 111-19).

³⁰ Anthony Hoekema states, "Man's duty is not to bring the kingdom into existence, but to enter into it by faith, and to pray that he may be enabled more and more to submit himself to the beneficent rule of God in every area of his life. The kingdom is not man's upward climb to perfection but God's breaking into human history to establish his

Anglicans, N.T. Wright, has endorsed this position in his writings arguing that Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of God.³¹ Jesus Seminar scholars view the Kingdom as a present “reality one can be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of.”³² Among Liberation theologians, the Kingdom is seen as a sort of countercultural force to break oppressive societal constructs.³³ Most recently with the advent of the Emergent Church in Europe and America, the idea of the Kingdom of God being here and now has become very popular among laity in many mainline churches.³⁴

Biblically, the Kingdom as a present reality is presented and argued via etymology and certain key scriptural texts. Etymologically, the Greek word for Kingdom, βασιλεία, is argued to have been derived from a word that best means dominion.³⁵ In this sense, Jesus is understood to have been advancing the dominion of God in the gospels when he spoke of the Kingdom being “at hand” (cf. Matt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, Mark 1:15). Likewise, when Jesus performs miracles, it is believed that he is advancing the power of his reign in the earth. In support of this, it is pointed out that Jesus instructed his disciples to preach that “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt

reign and to advance his purposes” (Anthony Hoekema. *The Bible and the Future*. [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994], page 45).

³¹ N.T. Wright. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997) page 197. For a critical review of Wright’s views see: Carey C. Newman, ed., *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

³² Marcus J. Borg. *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1994) page 88.

³³ For example, among Liberation theologians, the popular feminist theologian, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, argues that due to the feminine gender of the Greek word for Kingdom, we see Jesus’ ethic of liberation for the oppressed, specifically the women in the Jesus sect (see: Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. *A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroads, 1992).

³⁴ The poster child of the Emergent Church, Brian McLaren, recently published a book arguing that the Kingdom is now (Brian McLaren. *The Secret Message of Jesus*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing Group, 2006). Brian McLaren said in an interview with “Christianity Today” in 2004 that Dallas Willard is one of the “key mentors for the emerging church.” Willard has written books contending for the Kingdom now position (see Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress Publishing Group, 2002 [see pages 15-16, 86-87]). Fuller Seminary Professor Ray Anderson has argued for a Kingdom now theology in the Emergent Church context (Ray Anderson. *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006 [see chapter 5]).

³⁵ See: Ben Witherington III. *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World. A Comparative Study of New Testament Eschatology*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992) pages 49-73.

10:7), while they performed miracles and exorcisms (v.8).³⁶ Other references in support of this view include Luke 17:21, where Jesus speaks about the Kingdom as though it were present, for he says that one cannot say, “Look here it is!” or “There it is!” but rather he claims that “the kingdom of God is within you.”³⁷ Some of Jesus’ sayings appear to instruct his listeners that they could receive the Kingdom in the present. For example, he implied that the Kingdom could be received through wisdom (Mark 12:34), having a child like attitude (Mark 10:15), doing the will of God (Matt.7:21) or regeneration by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). In handling Pauline texts, it is pointed out that Paul speaks of the kingdom of God as if it were present, because it can be experienced by believers (Romans 14:17 and 1 Corinthians 4:20).³⁸

In stark contrast to the idea that the Kingdom is now present, is the view that maintains the Kingdom is a future reality yet to have arrived. This idea of the Kingdom as a future reality is seen as an apocalyptic event in redemption history. Proponents of this view argue that the Kingdom is properly understood as a physical reign of Christ as King of the earth. This Kingdom is said to have been offered to Israel in the ministry of Jesus: however, his offer was rejected and thus his reign on earth postponed until his second coming. This belief was held very early in church history.³⁹ In our contemporary setting, this view began gaining ground with the

³⁶ This line of argument is commonly put forth in Pentecostal Theology (see: John Wimber. *Power Healing*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1987 and John Wimber. *Power Evangelism*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986).

³⁷ It must be pointed out that this translation “within you” is not the only possible translation and most likely it is not the correct rendering. Craig Evans writes, “The phrase translated “within you” should probably be translated “among you,” for the kingdom is not within people in some sort of mystical or spiritual sense (as Marshall [p.655] supposes), but it is among people in the sense of Jesus’ presence” (Craig Evans. *Luke. New International Biblical Commentary*. Volume 3. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990] page 264). In this sense, Jesus is answering the Pharisees’ question by saying that they don’t need to look for the Kingdom, because the one who is going to bring it is standing before their very eyes.

³⁸ The Scriptures say quite plainly that the Kingdom today is not a matter of talk, but of power (1 Cor 4:20), nor does it consist of eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

³⁹ In fact, this view is the earliest position of the apostolic fathers. Thus is it not surprising to see that those who think the Kingdom is present—such as Hoekema—would be so bold as to claim that we do not “find such a definition in the apostolic writings” (Anthony Hoekema. *The Bible and the Future*. [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994], page 44). How can Hoekema make such an a-historical claim? “According to H. M. Herrick, in

scholarly work of Ritschl's own son-in-law, J. Weiss. Unlike his father-in-law, who thought the Kingdom was now present, Weiss saw it to be a future event. In fact, he became known for the phrase *Konsequente Eschatologie* ("consistent," "futuristic" or "thoroughgoing eschatology").⁴⁰ In his epoch-making work in 1892 *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (*Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*), Weiss argued for the future and apocalyptic character of the kingdom of God that was to erupt suddenly and end our present age. Weiss' work aroused other scholars, including Albert Schweitzer who argued that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher. In his landmark works *Das Messianitäts und Leidens geheimnis* (*The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, 1910) and *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (*The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1906), Schweitzer presented Jesus' Kingdom in consistent eschatological terms. More contemporaneous than Weiss and Schweitzer, this view is commonly found in Evangelical and Liberal circles today though it has "come under increasing attack in academic circles. For anyone conversant with the ebb and flow of historical study, this should come as no surprise."⁴¹ Bart Ehrman has argued skillfully in his book *Jesus Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* that Jesus was a:

Jewish apocalypticist who responded to the political and social crises of his day, including the domination of his nation by a foreign power, by proclaiming that his generation was living at the end of the age, that God would soon intervene on behalf of his people, sending a cosmic judge from heaven, the Son of Man who would destroy the forces of evil and set up God's Kingdom.⁴²

the apostolic fathers there are fifty-two references to the kingdom, of which ten are quotations from the NT; the full phrase "kingdom of God" occurs twenty-seven times. These references maintain several features of Jesus' and his apostles' preachings as well as beginning to enunciate some new features. The main emphasis is put on the eschatological or futuristic nature of the kingdom of God. Having been commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus Christ, "the apostles went forth in the assurance of the Holy Spirit and preached the gospel that the kingdom of God was about to come" (1 Clem. 42.3). In contrast to the mean and brief life in this world, "the promise of Christ, namely, the rest of the coming kingdom and of eternal life, is great and wonderful" (2 Clem. 5.5). We must "await anytime the kingdom of God in love and righteousness, since we know not the day of God's appearing" (2 Clem. 12.1)" (D.R.W. Wood and I.H. Marshall. *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.). [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1996] electronic database).

⁴⁰ Mark Saucy. *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1997), pages 8-16.

⁴¹ Bart Ehrman. *Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), page 127

⁴² *Ibid*, page 123.

The preaching of Jesus was in keeping with his audience's expectation of the Kingdom, which was believed to be "the imminent end of the age, an end that would involve the destruction of Israel, including the Temple... prior to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth."⁴³ While Ehrman himself is admittedly a non-Christian, his scholarship in biblical studies is renowned, having recently revised the writings of the great Evangelical scholar, Bruce Metzger (who was his mentor).⁴⁴ Among those in the Christian community, we find EP Sanders who has argued that the Kingdom is not a present reality but rather future.⁴⁵ Likewise, there is Dale C. Allison and Scot McKnight who both argue that the Kingdom is not now.⁴⁶

For Biblical support, those convinced that the Kingdom has not arrived appeal to texts that speak of the Kingdom in future tenses. After the death and resurrection of Christ, Luke-Acts records the messianic expectation for a future established Kingdom still in the disciples' minds. They ask Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus acknowledges that the Kingdom had not arrived and it was still a future event (Acts 1:7). Instead of waiting idly for the Kingdom, he instructs them to go preach the gospel (Acts 1:8), which the disciples subsequently did, even linking the gospel with the idea of the coming Kingdom in their preaching (cf. Acts 8:12, 19:8, 28:23, 31) seeing it as a future reality to be entered into (14:22) at the return of Christ (17:30-31). Outside of the Synoptic Gospels, Paul and

⁴³ Bart Ehrman. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. 2nd Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), page 241.

⁴⁴ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 4th Edition. NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁴⁵ E.P. Sanders. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. (NY: Penguin, 1996), pages 169-188.

⁴⁶ Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998; and Scot McKnight. *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in a National Context*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999. These positions are both non-present, though they differ with each other. Mainly, McKnight's position is that Jesus was an eschatological prophet of Israel's renewal which was fulfilled in the 1st century with the fall of Jerusalem (he's a preterist, which I am not in agreement with in totality).

others continued the idea that the Kingdom was a future reality.⁴⁷ Paul spoke of the Kingdom as something that would be inherited in the future (1 Cor 6:9-10, 15:50, Gal.5:21, Eph.5:5). James spoke of the Kingdom as something we are “heirs of” and have been “promised” to receive in the future (James 2:5). Peter spoke of the Kingdom as something we will enter in the future (2 Peter 1:11). Paul, Peter, and James speak of the kingdom using future tenses. Paul considered himself to be a worker and sufferer for the Kingdom (Col.4:11, 2 Thess. 1:5) that would arrive in the future “when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire... when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day...” (2 Thess. 1:7-10). Though Paul saw himself as a worker of the Kingdom, he did not believe the Kingdom had arrived for he spoke of a future day when he would be brought “safely to His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18).

In contrast to both of the above views (now and not yet), there has more recently developed a new understanding of the Kingdom that is sort of a combination of both views.⁴⁸ This view believes that the Kingdom is “both a future event and a present reality.”⁴⁹ Many have referred to this position by such titles as “inaugurated eschatology” or the “already-not-yet” position.⁵⁰ The advent of this view, at least its popularity, can largely be attributed to the rise of

⁴⁷ In Paul, the term *basileia* (“reign,” “kingdom”) occurs only fifteen times (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 4:1, 14, 18), while the verb *basileuō* (“to reign”) occurs nine times (Rom 5:14, 17 [twice], 21 [twice]; 6:12; 1 Cor 4:8 [twice]; 15:25). The phrase “kingdom of God” (or its equivalent) occurs a mere eight times within the Pauline letters (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12 [“his kingdom”]; 2 Thess 1:5). In the General Epistles, the term “the kingdom [of God]” appears only in James 2:5 and 2 Peter 1:11; related concepts are found in 1 Peter 2:4–10. In Revelation it speaks of a ransomed people who become a “kingdom and priests to serve God” (Rev 5:9–10) and Christ is throughout portrayed as a conqueror who brings his Kingdom.

⁴⁸ Although I use the word “recently,” it can be argued that this view of the Kingdom as “already-not-yet” was held at different points in church history. For example, T. F. Torrance has shown sufficient reasoning to conclude that the great reformer, Martin Luther, held elements of this view in a sort of dialectical tension (see T. F. Torrance, “The Eschatology of the Reformation,” *Eschatology (Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers No. 2; Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., [n.d.], pages 41-52).*

⁴⁹ Gordon Fee. “Kingdom of God” in *Called and Empowered: Pentecostal Perspectives on Global Mission*. edited by: Murray Dempster, Byron D. Klouse and Douglas Petersen. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) page 11.

⁵⁰ Anthony Hoekema. *The Bible and the Future*. [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1994], pages 68–75. See also Anthony Hoekema. “Amillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL:

the Dispensationalist movement in the early 1800s and the Fundamentalists of the 1900s.⁵¹ Dispensationalism is a camp that has wide differences:⁵² however, it has consistently and publicly maintained that God’s Kingdom is both now and future.⁵³ Currently, the most well accredited and published Dispensationalist, Darrell Bock, holds this view.⁵⁴ Many dispensationalists refer to the present aspect of the Kingdom as the “mystery” form of the Kingdom to be realized fully in the future.⁵⁵ The Fundamentalist movement earned its title “fundamentalist” in 1910 with the publication of a series of (originally) twelve volumes (containing 94 essays) entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*. With a large endowment from a generous gift, about three million sets of these books were distributed to churches throughout the world. In essay 85, “The Coming of Christ” by Dr. Charles R.

InterVarsity Press, 1977), pages 156–187; and Robert H. Stein. *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pages 75–79.

⁵¹ A distinction should be made between these two movements. For further study see: George Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980; and George Marsden. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

⁵² New terms have been suggested to designate the various historical currents of dispensational thought. “Classical Dispensationalism” is being used to describe the Darby-Scofield-Chafer version; the approach of McClain, Ryrie, Walvoord, Pentecost et al (1950’s/1980’s) has been labeled “essentialist,” or better, “revised Dispensationalism.” These two strands, both of which pre-date the so-called “progressive Dispensationalism,” is what is meant here by “traditional Dispensationalism.” (Ronald N. Glass. “The Parables of the Kingdom: A Paradigm for Consistent Dispensational Hermeneutics” in *Michigan Theological Journal*. Volume 5. 1994).

⁵³ All of the major players in Dispensationalism hold to this view: Alva McClain and Stan Toussaint (say that Kingdom is here as a interim rule but not mediatorial), Charles Ryrie and John Walvoord (say that Kingdom is now in a mystery form), Dwight Pentecost (says that the Kingdom now is God’s ongoing theocratic Kingdom rule from heaven). Even the ever-popular dispensationalist, C.I. Scofield, who is often dubbed as the “father” figure of the movement, has argued that Kingdom is now (as the Kingdom of Heaven and still future as the Kingdom of God). Later dispensationalists like Darrell Bock, Craig Blaising and Robert Saucy, all hold that the Kingdom is now present in some form and still future (see: Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock. *Progressive Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Victor Books, 1993; and Robert Saucy. *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

⁵⁴ Darrell Bock claims that the Kingdom is “already-not-yet” ((Daryl Bock. *Luke. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Vol.2. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004] page 1418), “the kingdom currently manifests itself in the church...[though] ...the kingdom program is larger than that of the church” (ibid), and that “Jesus’ coming inaugurates the kingdom; the process of kingdom growth has begun” (ibid, page 1439).

⁵⁵ For example: Dwight Pentecost writes, “The mystery form of the kingdom, then, has reference to the age between the two advents of Christ” (J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology*. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964], page 143). Likewise, John Walvoord says that the “mystery of the kingdom of heaven is... the time between His first and second coming...” (John Walvoord. “Biblical Kingdoms Compared and Contrasted,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*. ed Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994] pages 75–76). Similarly, Charles Ryrie writes, “It is the mystery form of this kingdom... in which the kingdom is established in this present age” (Charles C. Ryrie. *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1953), page 95).

Eerdman, there is a case for the already-not-yet position. Though fundamentalism as a movement has largely evolved, we still find fundamentalists today, such as John MacArthur, avidly arguing this view.⁵⁶ In addition to fundamentalists and dispensationalists, this position is very popular in circles that would be at serious odds with both groups.⁵⁷ Outside of these conservative groups there are many arguing this position such as: Werner G. Kümmel, Rudolf Schnackenburg, G. R. Beasley-Murray, Joachim Jeremias, A. M. Hunter, John Meier, Bruce Chilton, C.H. Dodd and G. E. Ladd.⁵⁸ Ladd is the most popular perhaps of all of these scholars, especially in Evangelical circles, having published more widely on the topic than his contemporaries.⁵⁹ Like the other positions there are variations and disagreements within this view, but overall they all agree the Kingdom is somehow present and future.⁶⁰

In support of this position, it is argued from the Scripture that Christ is presently reigning as the Messianic King of his people (Phil. 2:5–10 cf. 1 Cor. 15:24; 1 Tim. 6:15). The book of

⁵⁶ John MacArthur is the president of a conservative fundamentalist seminary (The Master's Seminary) whose motto is "The Master's Seminary exists to *advance the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ* by equipping godly men to be pastors and/or trainers of pastors for excellence in service to Christ in strategic fields of Christian ministry" (<http://www.tms.edu/> [emphasis added]).

⁵⁷ For example, Louis Berkhof, who is a Reformed theologian (the anti-thesis of Dispensationalism) has argued much like the Dispensationalists that the Kingdom "...is both present and future. It is on the one hand a present, ever developing, spiritual reality in the hearts and lives of men, and as such exercises influence in a constantly widening sphere.... On the other hand it is also a future hope, an eschatological reality..." (Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology*. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996; repr. 1938 ed.] page 409).

⁵⁸ For reference, these are the major works of these scholars: W. G. Kümmel. *Promise and Fulfilment: Eschatological Message of Jesus*. English translation by: D. M. Barton of *Verheissung und Erfüllung*. 1956. (Studies in Biblical Theology, 23.) London: SCM Press, 1957; Rudolf Schnackenburg. *God's Rule and Kingdom*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1968; G. R. Beasley-Murray. *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986; Joachim Jeremias. *The Parables of Jesus*. New York: Scribners, 1954; Archibald Hunter. *Interpreting the Parables*. Louisville: Westminster Press, 1970; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume 2: Mentor, Message and Miracles*. New York: Doubleday, 1994; Bruce Chilton (ed.). *The Kingdom of God. Issues in Religion and Theology 5*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984; C.H. Dodd. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. San Francisco: Harpercollins, 1981.

⁵⁹ Some of Ladd's notably works on this topic include: George Ladd. *The Presence of the Future*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974; George Ladd. *Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993; George Ladd. *Gospel of the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959; George Ladd. *Presence of the Future*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996; George Ladd. *The Last Things*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988; George Ladd. *Blessed Hope*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980; George Ladd. *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999.

⁶⁰ Much of the differences relate to emphasis. Mainly, it seems that German scholars tend to emphasize more of the future element of the Kingdom while British scholars speak more of the present implications.

Hebrews speaks of Christians having already received an unshakable Kingdom (Heb. 12:22-28). Revelation 1:6 states that Christ has “already” made Christians into a “Kingdom [of], priests to His God and Father” (Rev. 1:6). While the King was once thought to necessarily reign from earth over a physical Kingdom, Acts 2:34–35 (which quotes Psalm 110:2) seems to indicate that that physical throne—the throne of David—has been transferred from Jerusalem to heaven where he reigns over a kingdom of priests. Hence, it is argued that Christ is reigning from heaven spiritually in this age, and yet he is going to return in the future to establish a Kingdom on earth that we now await (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Acts 14:22; 2 Pt. 1:11). We can see this tension of the Kingdom being present and yet still awaiting to be fulfilled in the biblical phrase “a time is coming and has now come” (Jn 4:23; 5:24–29; 16:25–26, 32).

A Humble Presentation of My View: The Inherited Kingdom

Having surveyed the biblical texts of the Kingdom of God and considered the major three interpretive views, I now to turn to discuss my own position. I find myself much at home with the ideas of Schweitzer and Ehrman, though I wholeheartedly reject their overall thesis.⁶¹ Strangely, neither of these men are within the pale of orthodoxy. Perhaps it is because of this that their views on this topic are refreshing. They are not arguing from a particular theological grid that restrains them from considering texts in their original context nor forces them to push

⁶¹ As a Christian I cannot agree with the whole message of Ehrman and Schweitzer. In fact, they don't even agree with each other as liberals. Even Ehrman states that “Schweitzer was dead wrong on a number of critical points” (*Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* page 128). However, I suspect that our points may be drastically different. The overall thesis of Ehrman and Schweitzer is a rejection of Jesus (both his person and message). They paint him as an eschatological speaker who said He was going to bring the Kingdom (which I agree with) and then conclude that since the Kingdom did not come Jesus must not be who Christians believe him to be. For example, Bart Ehrman has argued that, “the imminent end of the age, an end that would involve the destruction of Israel, including the Temple and its cult, prior to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.” Since all of this did not occur (granted the Temple was destroyed), Jesus is not the Messiah in Ehrman's mind. This argument has led many Christians to not only reject the research of the third quest for the historical Jesus, but also to reject the idea that Christ taught a physical Kingdom was to come. This presents no problem to me. The fact that it did not come, does not mean that it will not come in the future. This seems intuitively obvious.

texts into their a priori paradigms. Much of this debate has been sidetracked by either: liberals and conservatives arguing about which texts we can use,⁶² or covenantal and dispensational theologians who cannot see through their own systems.⁶³ Within the limitations of this paper I cannot do justice to my entire view: however, I will present four points to illustrate my current understanding of the Kingdom.

My first three points deal with my reasons for departure from the inaugurated views. My first reason is Scripture. At the end of day, what convinces me the most is one's handling of the biblical text in light of the mechanics of its genre and the ears of its original audience. I remain unconvinced that the original audience would have understood Jesus' message in any sort of inaugurated view, be it the present or the already-not-yet. There are ways to counter the exegesis of texts understood in the present tense. In addition to this, there are too many texts that illustrate the Kingdom was still future after the ministry of Christ and too many extra-biblical texts that suggest they understood the Kingdom in physical and national terms. The only way to understand the Kingdom as present is to reinterpret it from how the original audience would have understood it. This is exactly what N.T. Wright does; admitting, he believes Jesus reinterpreted

⁶² For example, Perrin who argued against the idea of imminence and the future kingdom saying that the "coming Son of Man" sayings have been generally accepted to be "products of the early Church" (Perrin, Norman. *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), page 203). Perrin's commitment to such critical methods (be they correct or not) stop him from even considering other views, as seen in his review of Ladd's book where he attacks Ladd's realism calling it "curious" and "unusual," while he fails to wrestle with Ladd's actual ideas (Norman Perrin. "Against the Current." *Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology*. [Volume XIX., 1965] pages 228-231). Perrin attacks Ladd by saying that as he read his book (*Jesus and the Kingdom*) he felt "an increasing disquietude, for the author's approach and methodology, his understanding of contemporary critical scholarship and his attitude to its findings all seem to raise rather serious questions" (pages 228-229). Men like Perrin are more concerned about methods than the ideas themselves. Likewise, Marcus Borg, agrees with Perrin also claiming that these were additions (*Contemporary*, page 54). Even if they are additions, they are still early documents and thus their ideas should be considered as possible understandings of what the original authors were trying to communicate in that community.

⁶³ For example, John Gerstner who resorts to name calling when he suggests that dispensationalists are heretics because they don't share his covenantal ecclesiology and eschatology (John H. Gerstner. *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth A Critique of Dispensationalism*. [Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991], page 150). Or, dispensationalists who resort to name calling by saying that Covenantalists are just "spiritualizing" the text, without realizing they are all too often doing the same. The dispensationalists rigid "historical-grammatical" hermeneutic keeps them from seeing the elasticity of apocalyptic genre and the Covenantalists a priori commitment that to their own system keeps the discussion at bay.

the Jewish hope, which he calls a “scandalous implied redefinition of the kingdom.”⁶⁴ I have a problem with this sort of reinterpreting or redefining, for it seems to accuse Jesus of taking texts that originally meant one thing, and then using it for something entirely different. This would effectively erase the original meaning the prophets once intended, which Jesus was definitely against as he maintained that he did not come to erase the Scripture (Matt 5:17-18).

Furthermore, it is one thing to reinterpret a phrase, but it is entirely another thing to reinterpret grand themes and covenants of the Bible. One must reinterpret not only the physical nature and features of the Kingdom, but also the Messiah and God’s covenants. The Messiah was seen as the fulfiller of the covenants. The Abrahamic covenant promised Israel a physical land and a ruler (Gen. 12:1–3 cf. Deut. 30:1–10); the Davidic covenant promised a physical ruler on David’s throne (2 Sam. 7:16); and the New Covenant promised that Israel would be blessed as an actual nation (Jer. 31:31–34). I do not see how those things are occurring today even with a very loose semantic range on the genre of apocalyptic texts.⁶⁵ Such interpretive methodology would produce absurdity to the text of the Bible or at least meaningless ambiguity if applied consistently.

My second point for rejecting the present and the already-not-yet views is that the early church did not believe the Kingdom was present, rather they held to a future arrival of a physical Kingdom.⁶⁶ I consider myself an evangelical and sadly there is little appreciation for church

⁶⁴ N.T. Wright. *Jesus and the Victory of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume 2.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), page 274.

⁶⁵ Ben Witherington has argued that the texts are more appropriately categorized as eschatological and not apocalyptic (Ben Witherington. *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World.* [Downers, Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992], pages 16-20). Many who advocate for the Kingdom being present do so by pointing out the flexibility and allegorical nature of the apocalyptic texts: however, eschatological texts have entirely different constraints that would nullify much of their presuppositions. Some would say that the church is the new Israel and Jesus is on the throne in heaven and thus we are in the Kingdom. This is not a fair treatment of the genre of the given texts in their socio-rhetorical setting.

⁶⁶ Bengt Hagglund. *History of Theology.* (Translated by Gene J. Lund). (Saint Louis: CPH, 1968), page 23.

history among many in my camp.⁶⁷ I believe there is a place for tradition and that it carries authority, which in this case is critical. Those who hold that the kingdom is now, cannot support their view from the early church. The early apostolic community was very clearly awaiting the Kingdom. In the *Didache*, written around AD 100, we read prayers for the Lord to gather the church from the four corners of the earth into his kingdom (*Didache* 9.4; 10.5-6), which would be in keeping with Jesus' instruction for his disciples to pray for the Kingdom to come. Likewise, we see that Clement of Rome (A.D. 96 or 97), the *Shepherd of Hermas* (A.D. 140–150), Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 50–115?), Papias (A.D. 80–163), Justin Martyr (b. A.D. 100), Irenaeus (d. A.D. 200), Tertullian (A.D. 150–225), and many other early sources indicate that the early church believed in the return of Jesus Christ to establish His earthly kingdom.⁶⁸

Thirdly, as I consider the biases of the modern Western reader, I find that I am suspicious of the present and the already-not-yet views. Much of Western Christianity has been shaped by two key factors: (1) a radical individualism and (2) a dualistic spirituality that values spirit over flesh. Radical individualism causes us to miss out on much of the riches of the Scriptures, because it was written to groups and communities, not individuals.⁶⁹ There is a tendency to individualize and personalize texts, thereby destroying the meaning of the text. As it relates to the Kingdom, many in the West individualize it as a present reality (in “my” heart) and personalize it to such a degree that they remove the Jewish context. The Kingdom however dealt with the people of God, specifically the nation of Israel in a corporate context.⁷⁰ The Kingdom

⁶⁷ D.H. Williams. *Evangelicals and Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005.

⁶⁸ Charles C. Ryrie. *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1953), pages 17–26.

⁶⁹ Walter Russell writes in his book on hermeneutics that “...anthropologists tells us that most Westerners literally view each person as his or her own universe” (Walter Russell. *Playing With Fire*. [Colorado Springs, CO: 2000] page 25, see also through page 32).

⁷⁰ Alfred Edersheim writes: “...all that Israel hoped for was national restoration and glory. Everything else was but means to these ends; the Messiah Himself only the grand instrument in attaining them. Thus viewed, the picture presented would be of Israel’s exaltation, rather than of the salvation of the world.... The Rabbinic ideal of the Messiah was not that of a ‘light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel’ -the satisfaction of the

message was specifically targeted at the Jews (Matt 10:6-7, 15:24), or at least to audiences that understood Jewish culture. Having no understanding of community, yet alone the historical Jewish understandings of the Kingdom, Westerners have grossly individualized this teaching and negated the beauty of the Kingdom as an offer to a specific community. Likewise, our dualistic approach to faith that values spirit over flesh has caused us to miss the glory of the Kingdom. Westerners want the Kingdom to be spiritual and not physical. We hear more talk about heaven in our churches than we do the resurrection of our flesh, which is an unbiblical emphasis. The Kingdom is easily accepted as a spiritual reality without credence to the Jewish spirituality that penned these texts and which saw no dualistic estrangement. The Jewish hope was that the dead would physically be raised and the Kingdom would physically come at the physical return of their risen Messiah. This was the salvation message that Jesus and the Apostles preached, not some sort of individual ticket to heaven or personal membership in a spiritual dominion.

My final point is a positive assertion of my view. I have labeled my position “the inherited Kingdom” view. I understand that the Kingdom is not here and it is not the church.⁷¹ The Kingdom is fully a future physical reality that Christ will bring upon his return, but I also contend that there is a sense in which we can speak of being a part of the Kingdom in the present. By using the word “sense” I still want to be clear that I think there is no ontological or metaphysical sense in which the kingdom is present. The sense that I speak of is the biblical notion of inheritance.⁷² The idea of “receiving an inheritance from one’s father is a socio-legal

wants of humanity, and the completion of Israel’s mission-but quite different, even to contrariety” (Alfred Edersheim. *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Vol. VI, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1942), page 164.

⁷¹ If the Kingdom is synonymous with “the church,” then how is it that Luke considers the church something that people “enter violently”? (Lk. 16.16). That’s one church I don’t want to visit. ☺

⁷² κληρονομία (*klēronomia*), ας (*as*), ἡ (*hē*): n.fem.; ≡ DBLHebr 5709; Str 2817; TDNT 3.767—1. LN 57.132 possession (Ac 7:5); 2. LN 57.140 inheritance, transfer land or possessions from adj. (deceased) parent to adj. child or adj. descendant (Lk 12:13; Ro 11:1 v.r.; Ac 13:33 v.r. NA26). κληρονόμος (*klēronomos*), ου (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.masc.; ≡ DBLHebr 3769; Str 2818; TDNT 3.767—1. LN 57.133 receiver (Jas 2:5), for another interp, see next; 2.

practice well attested throughout the history and variety of cultures of the Bible.”⁷³ Throughout the Bible and Hebrew culture we read how an inheritance provides progeny with real property and blessings to be passed on in the family line (Num 27:1–11; Deut 21:15–17). In the New Testament we find the language of inheritance in reference to the Kingdom. God pledges an inheritance of the Kingdom of God to his church (1 Cor 6:9–10, cf. Col.1:12). The Apostle makes it very clear that we are not in the Kingdom since we “cannot inherit the kingdom of God” until after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:50–51). He warns that “those who practice” sin “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal.5:21 cf. Eph.5:5). James speaks of the inheritance we have as “heirs of the kingdom which He [God] promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5). Craig Keener explains that:

“Heirs” refers to the Old Testament idea that the Promised Land was Israel’s inheritance; the “promise” was also a sole possession of Abraham’s descendants (and those who joined that nation by circumcision). To make uncircumcised Gentile Christians part of this same covenant would have sounded like heresy to many Jewish readers, jolting their ethnic sensitivities.⁷⁴

When Jesus spoke of his second coming, he said that it will be then that he will inaugurate the Kingdom as he declares to his people, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34). Jesus made it crystal clear that the Kingdom would arrive when he returned to earth (Mt 19:28; 20:21; 26:29; Mk 14:25, 62; Lk. 19:11–12; 21:31; 22:16, 18, 30; cf. Rev 11:15, 17). Since Christ has yet to return, it follows that his kingdom is an inheritance properly understood to be a possession received in the future. Hence, it makes no sense to speak of His kingdom being here and now, when our King’s physical body is not here and now. Sure, Christ is my King right now in the sense that I

LN 57.139 heir, one who gets the inheritance (Mk 12:7). (Swanson, J. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*. (electronic ed.) . Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

⁷³ Leland Ryken (et.al.). *Dictionary of biblical imagery*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) page 420.

⁷⁴ Craig Keener. *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) page 545.

obey him: however, the biblical sense of him as coming King is much more in-depth than mere obedience. It deals with physical land in which the King will rule. This event has yet to come and it is my hope, as it was of the early church, that the Kingdom will arrive in any day to give his people the inheritance he has promised.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ R. H. Fuller stated it very well when he said, “The Kingdom of God is not yet present, it is imminent; but the imminent event is already at work, producing signs of its coming. The Kingdom is dawning, but it has not yet arrived” (R. H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus: An Examination of the Presuppositions of New Testament Theology*. Studies in Biblical Theology 12. [London, SCM Press, 1954] page 48).

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