

Appendix – An Analysis of Passages Commonly Associated with Realized Eschatology

From its earliest origins in the New Testament (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:18), the plague of realized eschatology has persisted throughout the history of the church. It has seen a significant resurgence in modern times, however, becoming the standard of much theological exposition across a wide spectrum of denominations and theological camps. This resurgence is largely due to the writings of C. H. Dodd¹ and those who have accommodated his ideas.²

Dodd's desire was to counter the rising tide of ultracritical scholars (Schweitzer et al.) who said that Jesus was nothing but a common Jew who believed and hoped in the common Jewish eschatology of his day. Being unbelievers, these scholars contended that Jesus was simply mistaken, and so his delusions came to a crashing end when the Romans killed him. (Of course the early church resurrected his delusions to cover over his failure.) Thus Dodd, to his credit, sought a noble end by restoring to Jesus a sense of divine identity and mission.

¹ See esp. *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 3rd ed. (London: Nisbet, 1936); and *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936).

² For example, Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950); W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment*, trans. D. M. Barton (London: SCM Press, 1957); Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, trans. H. de Jongste (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962); G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Bruce Chilton, ed., *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1984); Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993); N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); Arthur F. Glasser et al., *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); and G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

Some may protest the equation of Dodd's realized eschatology (which was blatantly Platonic) with subsequent inaugurationalism (which is less so). However, the common denominator of both is 1) the material "realization" of divine sovereignty and 2) the present "realization" of OT Jewish eschatology (note again the duplicity of language). Inaugurated eschatology is simply mitigated realized eschatology. If realized eschatology was to be removed from inaugurated eschatology (and somehow its effects reversed), we would be left simply with Jewish apocalypticism.

Realized eschatology was the tool Dodd used to save Jesus from the embarrassment of his failed Jewish dreams. Though Jesus was well aware of the eschatology of his day, he was supposedly unique in that he believed he was spiritually realizing those hopes within himself and his own ministry.³ As stated previously, Dodd's belief in this realization was based largely on a Platonic framework in which the "wholly other" transcendental order is manifested into material time and space.⁴ This belief in a present manifestation was justified by selective quotations of particular verses (Mark 1:15; Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc.) and a radical dismissal of the majority of Jesus' apocalyptic sayings.⁵

To put it bluntly, Dodd's critical method of writing off so many blatantly apocalyptic passages bordered on laughable.⁶ Therefore, few followed him

³ "We conclude that on the historical plane there is no 'eschatology of bliss' in the sayings of Jesus. He gave no promise that the future would bring with it any such perfection of human society as some Jewish thinkers had predicted under the form of a restored kingdom of David. He declared that the Kingdom of God had come. When He spoke of it in terms of the future, His words suggest, not any readjustment of conditions on this earth, but the glories of a world beyond this" (Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 74).

Furthermore,

It appears that while Jesus employed the traditional symbolism of apocalypse to indicate the "otherworldly" or absolute character of the Kingdom of God, He used parables to enforce and illustrate the idea that the Kingdom of God had come upon men there and then. The inconceivable had happened: history had become the vehicle of the eternal; the absolute was clothed with flesh and blood. Admittedly, it was a "mystery," to be understood by those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, by those to whom it is revealed "not by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven." (Ibid., 197)

Going beyond the common stereotypes, we see in Dodd's works (see esp. the conclusion of *Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 206–10) that his thought would better be understood as a recapitulation of Augustinianism: a manifest kingdom now (cf. church militant) unto a transcendent kingdom after death in the "great beyond" (cf. church triumphant). Dodd assigned the Jewish apocalyptic language to the latter, while justifying the former with the parables and specific verses, such as Mark 1:15; Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc.

⁴ For example, "Jesus declares that this ultimate, the Kingdom of God, has come into history, and He takes upon Himself the 'eschatological' role of 'Son of Man.' The absolute, the 'wholly other,' has entered into time and space. And as the Kingdom of God has come and the Son of Man has come, so also judgment and blessedness have come into human experience. The ancient images of the heavenly feast, of Doomsday, of the Son of Man at the right hand of power, are not only symbols of supra-sensible, supra-historical realities; they have also their corresponding actuality within history" (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 107).

⁵ See esp. *Parables of the Kingdom*, chap. 5; and *Apostolic Preaching*, chap. 2.

⁶ Anything that contradicted his theory was generally written off as an interpolation of the early church, which reverted to its Jewish roots because it was under "crisis" for a season but then came to its senses and fell in line with the revolutionary teachings of Jesus: "In the course of time the better

wholeheartedly. However, a mediating position, which sought to hold both realized eschatology and Jewish apocalypticism in tandem (i.e., inaugurated eschatology), began to take hold in Europe after World War II (note the irony of Dodd's anti-Semitic rhetoric during the war⁷). This inaugurationalist approach eventually made its way into American evangelicalism (G. E. Ladd et al.), and from there it has spread to the ends of the earth.

Unfortunately, the only people who have questioned the inaugurationalist dogma hold either a liberal or dispensational bias. I firmly reject both, holding to the divine inspiration of the Bible and the divine identity of Jesus, while also holding to a single redemptive plan involving both Jew and Gentile. I find no

minds of the Church, under the guidance of such teachers as Paul and the author of the Fourth Gospel, arrived at an interpretation which did justice to the deeper meaning of the teaching of Jesus. But meanwhile those who took his words literally built up a new Christian eschatology on the lines of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. It is that which we have in outline in the 'Little Apocalypse' of Mark xiii, elaborated in Matthew, and it is brought to its completion in the Revelation of John" (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 133).

In this way Dodd believed the final book of the Bible to be the ultimate *Anti-Revelation* of Jesus Christ(!):

The God of the Apocalypse can hardly be recognized as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor has the fierce Messiah, whose warriors ride in blood up to their horses' bridles, many traits that could recall Him of whom the primitive *kerygma* proclaimed that He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him. This line of development led into a blind alley. In the second century its stream of thought ran out into the barren sands of millenarianism, which in the end was disavowed by the Church. . . . The possibility of eschatological fanaticism was no doubt present in the outlook of the primitive Church, but it was restrained by the essential character of the Gospel as apprehended in experience. (*Apostolic Preaching*, 41)

⁷ For example,

The hope of Israel had been that the temple should, on "the Day of the Lord" (when the Kingdom of God should be revealed), stand upon its lofty hill as the religious centre of the whole world. Jesus says, on the contrary, that, now that the Kingdom of God has come, the temple has no further place; it will be sunk, hill and all, into the sea. The "faith" by which this comes about is the acknowledgment that the Kingdom of God is here. . . . It is the fig-tree that is to be cast into the sea. The fig-tree, we know, was a symbol of the people of God. Whether it is the temple, or the Jewish community, the meaning is much the same. And here we probably have a clue to the episode of the blasted fig-tree (Mk. xi. 12-14, 20) which introduces the Marcan saying about the mountain. The "fig-tree" is Israel, now doomed to perpetual sterility. (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 63, n. 1)

Of course, the assumption behind such casting into the sea is that the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem — and all subsequent Jewish calamities — are the fulfillments of realized divine retribution upon "the Jewish community". How can such theology not lead to the justification of Jewish persecution within Christendom? (Cf. James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews, A History* [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001].)

embarrassment in Jesus' Jewish apocalyptic worldview, but rather embrace it wholeheartedly, for in it we find the fullness of truth and life. God ordained the cross as the sacrificial means of attaining the glorious hope of the resurrection and eternal life—to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

Multitudes who have followed in Dodd's footsteps, however, have rejected such Jewish eschatology (note also Dodd's notorious rejection of propitiatory atonement). And, like Dodd, they use the exact same verses to justify their rejection (Mark 1:15; Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:21; etc.).⁸ Of course, as Johannes Weiss noted in his day, liberal scholarship of the nineteenth century used the same verses to prove a present moralistic kingdom.⁹ This appendix will examine these verses in context, along with some of Jesus' parables and Paul's sayings that are also quoted out of context.¹⁰ The goal of this study is to demonstrate that, far from indicating a belief in the realization of Jewish eschatology, these verses are actually potent reinforcements of the apocalyptic worldview.

THE SAYINGS OF JESUS

At the heart of all controversy concerning realized eschatology is Jesus and his sayings. Did he affirm the Jewish hope of the Law and Prophets, or was he the Lone Ranger of second-temple Judaism who proclaimed the present spiritual

⁸ These verses are repeated, in the most literal sense, *like a mantra*—a sacred utterance quoted *ad infinitum*, seemingly as prayer, that one day it will inspire a movement that will finally establish the longed-for Christian utopia.

⁹ See Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. R. H. Hiers and D. L. Holland (German orig. 1892; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 67–74.

¹⁰ Though of a different conclusion, I agree with Alva J. McClain's approach:

In beginning this study it should be held axiomatic that any conception of the Kingdom of God which rests in large part upon a certain interpretation of a single text or passage of the Bible must be regarded with deep suspicion. In this category are the systems built around such passages as, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), or "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19), or the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33), or the ethical precepts of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), or the 20th chapter of the Book of Revelation. The doctrine of the Kingdom should be determined by an inductive examination of *all* the Biblical material on the subject, and it should not have to stand or fall by the inclusion or exclusion of isolated passages where interpretation may be in serious dispute. (*The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959], 16)

fulfillment of the kingdom?¹¹ Common sense suggests the former.¹² Since the inception of realized eschatology, however, a number of sayings have consistently been referenced as proof that Jesus was the pioneer in proclaiming the spiritual realization of Jewish eschatology.

Johannes Weiss identified the classic strongholds of Matthew 12:28 (“The kingdom of God has come upon you”) and Luke 17:21 (“The kingdom of God is within you,” KJV).¹³ C. H. Dodd embraced these wholeheartedly, as well as Mark 1:15 (“The kingdom of God is at hand”) and Matthew 11:12 (“The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence”).¹⁴ Dodd confidently declared, moreover, that Jesus’ parables reinforced the “mystery” (Mark 4:11, KJV) of realized eschatology contained in these sayings.¹⁵ Unfortunately, multitudes have blindly followed Dodd’s “hermeneutical castle built upon exegetical quicksand,”¹⁶ parroting nearly verbatim his supposed evidences for realized eschatology.

Before examining the sayings of both Jesus and Paul, a word must be said about the relationship between realized eschatology and Greek verbs. Historically, the entire edifice of realized eschatology has been primarily built upon the use of eschatological concepts (especially the kingdom of God) *with past-tense or present-tense Greek verbs*. Something of a revolution has happened in

¹¹ As Jewish theologian David Flusser put it, “This, then, is the ‘realized eschatology’ of Jesus. He is the only Jew of ancient times known to us who preached not only that people were on the threshold of the end of time, but that the new age of salvation had already begun” (David Flusser and R. Steven Notley, *Jesus* [Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2001], 110). Of course, Flusser justifies this statement by citing Luke 11:20, 16:16, and 17:21.

¹² Though the academy commonly chooses the latter, as exemplified by Craig Blomberg: “While an acceptance of the ‘whole counsel’ of Jesus’ teaching in parables demands that one recognize both a present and a future aspect to the kingdom, it was Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom’s presence which was by far the more distinctive of the two emphases. Jewish thought traditionally looked forward to the kingdom’s coming, but had never previously dared to believe that it had arrived” (*Interpreting the Parables* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990], 302).

¹³ “Certainly the two principal passages, Matt. 12:28 and Luke 17:21, are spoken in rejoinder to opponents who dismiss its presence” (Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom*, 74).

¹⁴ See *Parables of the Kingdom*, 43–48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ Clayton Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988), 65; see also Sullivan’s historical review of the widespread embrace of Dodd’s ideas (*Ibid.*, 4–11).

recent New Testament linguistic studies, however, concerning the Greek verb.¹⁷ Rather than communicating *time* (past, present, and future), Greek verbs primarily communicate *aspect* (perfective, imperfective, and stative).¹⁸ Akin to Hebrew verbs, Greek verbs generally do not communicate the time of the action, but rather describe “the way the user of the verb subjectively views the action.”¹⁹ The time of the action is chiefly determined by its *context*, including adverbs, genre, and historical references.²⁰

This approach to Greek verbs solves the historical problem of so many supposed “present-tense” verbs referring to realities both in the past (“historic present”) and in the future (“futuristic present”), and of so many supposed “past-tense” verbs referring to realities both in the present (“dramatic aorist”)

¹⁷ See the initial works by Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); cf. also Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

See a summary article by Robert E. Picirilli, “The Meaning of the Tenses in New Testament Greek: Where Are We?” *JETS* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 533–55. Picirilli’s opening statement is indeed true: “The world of scholarship about the Greek verb is in ferment, and the outcome promises to have a significant effect for all of us who interpret the NT.”

¹⁸ See Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, chap. 1. Porter uses the analogy of a parade to demonstrate the *perfective* (traditionally, the aorist tense), the *imperfective* (traditionally, the present and imperfect tenses), and the *stative* (traditionally, the perfect and pluperfect tenses):

If I am a television correspondent in a helicopter flying over the parade, I view the parade in its immediacy from a vantage outside the action as “perfective”; that is, in its entirety as a single and complete whole. If I am a spectator standing with others along the side of the road watching the parade pass by in front of me, I view the action immersed within it as “imperfective”; that is, as an event in progress. And if I am the parade manager in corporate headquarters considering all of the conditions in existence at this parade, including not only all the arrangements that are coming to fruition but all the accompanying events that allow the parade to operate, I view the process not in its particulars or its immediacy but as “stative”; that is, as a complex condition or state of affairs in existence. (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 24)

¹⁹ Picirilli, “Meaning of the Tenses,” 535.

²⁰ Scholars across the board, even those who hold to a more traditional view that time is encoded in the tense forms (e.g., Daniel Wallace), are at least in agreement that aspect is primary and that the time element can be suppressed by context: “While those of this persuasion agree that verbal aspect is the primary meaning of the Greek tenses, they hold that there is a secondary meaning in the indicative (and relatively in participles) of time involved” (*Ibid.*, 537).

and in the future (“proleptic aorist”).²¹ When Greek verbs are approached as aspectual, all the complicated terminology and elaborate systems of exceptions can be done away with, and translations of tense/time can be made according to appropriate context. The bottom line theologically is that supposed present-tense and past-tense verbs can no longer be used as proof of realized eschatology.

The Kingdom Is at Hand

The initial proclamation of both John the Baptist and Jesus was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2; 4:17).²² Following Dodd, many believe this to be a statement declaring the spiritual inauguration (i.e., reinterpretation) of the Jewish messianic kingdom.²³ The context of this statement, however, is clearly apocalyptic. It involves “the wrath to come” (v. 7), bad trees being axed and “thrown into the fire” (v. 10), and chaff being burned “with unquenchable fire” (v. 12). All of these references were borne out of the Prophets, and no one would have mistaken the quotation of Isaiah 40 as anything but the day of the Lord.²⁴

Jesus and John the Baptist were simply reiterating the heart of the prophetic declaration: “The Day of the Lord is at hand” (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:7, NKJV; cf. Ezek. 30:3; Obad. 1:15; Mal. 4:5). Everyone understood that the day of the Lord

²¹ See examples in Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 29–39. The “future tense” is grammatically derived from the subjunctive, and as such communicates possibility and expectation. Hence it is often used with future realities, though not exclusively (see *Ibid.*, 44–45). “Rather than temporal values, *the future form grammaticalizes the semantic (meaning) feature of expectation*” (*Ibid.*, 44; italics in the original).

²² Realized eschatology forces a delineation between the messages of John and Jesus. Though identical terminology is used, it is often claimed that John proclaimed the imminence of the messianic kingdom while Jesus proclaimed its spiritual fulfillment (e.g., Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 110–11). In light of the multitude of later apocalyptic references, I would contend that this delineation is unjustified. Rather, “Matthew wished to make the words of John in 3:2 and those of Jesus in 4:17 identical: the two heralds preach the same kingdom” (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC [London: T & T Clark, 2004], 387–88).

²³ Dodd argued that *ἔγγικεν* in Matt. 4:17 was synonymous with *ἐφθασεν* in Matt. 12:28, thus concluding, “Both imply the ‘arrival’ of the Kingdom. With an eye on the presumed Aramaic original, we should translate both: ‘The Kingdom of God has come’” (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 44). This awkward conflation has since been universally dismissed.

²⁴ The wrath of God was associated with the day of the Lord (cf. Ps. 110:5; Isa. 13:9–13; Zeph. 1:15–18), as was the fire of God (Ps. 21:9; Isa. 30:30; 66:15; Zeph. 1:18) and the burning of the wicked like “chaff” (Ps. 1:4; Isa. 40:24; Dan. 2:35; Zeph. 2:2; Mal. 4:1).

and the kingdom of God were functionally synonymous, because the day initiated the kingdom. Thus Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the coming kingdom (Luke 10:1–9), warning them:

When you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: *The kingdom of God is near.*’ I tell you, it will be more bearable *on that day* [“on the day of judgment,” Matt. 10:15] for Sodom than for that town. (vv. 10–12, NIV)

In like manner, Jesus concludes his eschatological discourse: “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. . . . When you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:28–31).

The same message of the temporal nearness of the day of the Lord and kingdom of God is likewise reiterated throughout the New Testament. Peter declares, “The end of all things is *at hand*; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded” (1 Peter 4:7). James says, “Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is *at hand*” (James 5:8). Paul states, “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is *at hand*” (Rom. 13:11–12). In light of the Lord’s coming (Phil. 3:20), our resurrection (3:21), and the “book of life” (4:3), Paul also exhorts, “The Lord is *at hand*; do not be anxious about anything” (4:5–6). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews urges corporate meetings and encouragement—“all the more as you see the Day *drawing near*” (Heb. 10:25). And the entire book of Revelation is given on the premise that “the time *is near*” (1:3; 22:10), for Jesus Christ “is coming with the clouds” (1:7; cf. 22:20).

In light of the prior language of the Prophets and its continued use throughout the New Testament, it is clear that Jesus was not changing the commonly understood Jewish eschatology of his day when he declared the nearness of the kingdom. He was simply urging *repentance* and a devout, wholehearted response to that kingdom.²⁵ This same urgency for repentance in

²⁵ Contrary to the obnoxious conclusion of N. T. Wright:

Jesus spent his whole ministry *redefining* what the kingdom meant. He refused to give up the symbolic language of the kingdom, but filled it with such new content that, as we have seen, he powerfully subverted Jewish expectations.

This shift of meaning in the original context, coupled with scholarly misreading of apocalyptic in the modern one, has produced the real problem, which cannot actually be solved by lexical studies of the Greek word *engiken*. Lexicography is ultimately a branch of

light of the day of the Lord is mirrored throughout the apostolic witness (cf. Acts 2:28; 3:19; 5:31; etc.).

What then is to be said about the much-debated “delay” of Jesus’ return? Because Jesus and the apostles declared the imminence of the kingdom, does it mean they were mistaken?²⁶ By no means! Was Isaiah mistaken when he declared the imminence of the day of the Lord over seven centuries prior to Jesus and the apostles? Or Zephaniah a century later? Or Malachi two centuries after that? Of course not. They were simply functioning in their prophetic role and speaking the message they had received from God.

Why then would the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles uniformly declare the nearness of the day of the Lord when its coming was actually thousands of years in the future? *Because time is relative to God, and thus the oracles prove true in relation to their Author.* This is the explanation given by Peter concerning the delay of the day of judgment (about thirty years at that time). Peter states the core question of the scoffers: “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:4).²⁷ Then he responds, declaring that they overlook the simple fact “that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (v. 8). In other words, time is relative to God, and likewise to his oracles. Therefore, “The Lord is *not slow* to fulfill his promise *as some count slowness*, but is patient toward you. . . . But the day of the Lord *will come* like a thief” (vv. 9–10).

Though humans may count the delay in God’s coming as slowness, God counts it as imminence because of his transcendence of time. In this way, the

history, and bears little fruit if separated from its parent stock. Jesus’ redefinition of YHWH’s kingdom, as we have studied it so far, indicates that in his view the kingdom was indeed present, but that it was not like Israel had thought it would be. Israel’s god was becoming king in and through the work of Jesus; this kingdom would reach its climax in the battle which he was going to Jerusalem to fight; within a generation there would be an event which would show that Jesus was right to claim all this. (*Jesus and the Victory of God* [London: SPCK, 1996], 471–72)

To say the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was the vindication of realized eschatology constitutes the height of Gentile arrogance (cf. Rom. 11:17–25).

²⁶ This, of course, is the liberal conclusion of Schweitzer et al.

²⁷ The scoffers here are assumedly those spoken of throughout chap. 2. They are “false teachers” and “false prophets” who introduce “destructive heresies” (2:1). Though claiming to be Christians, they “turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2:21). Since the tone of both of Peter’s letters is so apocalyptic, it would seem these false believers are of a gnostic tendency (note the use of *ginōskontes* in 3:3), akin to those elsewhere described by Paul (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16). As such, realized eschatology has always produced a mocking spirit concerning the apocalyptic.

oracles remain true regardless of the time or means of their delivery. Those who speak on behalf of God have always had, and always will have, one driving message: *Repent, for the day of the Lord is at hand.*

The Kingdom Has Come upon You

If one of Jesus' sayings has become the "hermeneutical cornerstone" for realized eschatology, it would be Matthew 12:28 (cf. Luke 11:20),²⁸ where Jesus states, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."²⁹ Based upon a rigid tense translation of the Greek verb *ephthasen* ("has come"), inaugurationists claim absolute proof of the spiritual realization of the kingdom.³⁰ When we look at the passage as a whole

²⁸ Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology*, 67. This passage was C. H. Dodd's "golden nugget," as Krister Stendahl put it (*Ibid.*, 75). Yet Sullivan rightly reasons,

An obscure verse should not determine the meaning of unambiguous verses. Matthew 12:28 || Luke 11:20 is an obscure, puzzling statement—Jesus' rejoinder to hostile critics who were accusing him of working in league with Beelzebul. Should problematic Matthew 12:28 || Luke 11:20 be the hermeneutical cornerstone for interpreting the Kingdom? This question becomes acute when one notes that there are more than a hundred statements concerning the Kingdom of God in the Synoptics. The majority of these statements (see "Appendix I") present the Kingdom as a place, not an exorcistic power. The majority of these statements present the Kingdom as future hope, not a present reality. . . .

When this wider interpretive task is undertaken, when all the evidence is considered, hermeneutical weight would have to be assigned to the scores of synoptic statements portraying the Kingdom as a future realm, rather than to Matthew 12:28 || Luke 11:20 (which—according to Dodd—portrays the Kingdom as a curative power). Realized eschatologists reverse this procedure. They assign hermeneutical weight to problematic Matthew 12:28 || Luke 11:20 and ignore the scores of statements portraying the Kingdom as a future realm. (*Ibid.*, 81–82)

²⁹ Ladd asserts, "C. H. Dodd is right in affirming that the most characteristic and distinctive of the gospel sayings are those which speak of a present coming of the Kingdom. . . . Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus' mission is repeatedly understood as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. The sayings about the Kingdom of God as a present reality must be interpreted against this background. The strongest statement is Matthew 12:28: 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you'" (*A Theology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 63).

³⁰ Usually the argumentation goes something like this: "Jesus himself claims that he exorcises by the power of the Holy Spirit, who descended on him at his baptism, marking the inauguration of God's reign, and who permanently empowers all disciples for ministry in the messianic age. Verse 28 is arguably the single most important teaching of Jesus on realized eschatology—the present aspect of the kingdom" (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 202).

Of course, this begs the question, *What about the previous Jewish exorcisms mentioned in verse 27?* Exorcism was a commonly accepted phenomenon among both Jews and Gentiles at that time. Did those exorcisms also mark the realization of the kingdom? And if so, when was the kingdom truly inaugurated? So Sullivan reasons, "If demon exorcism signified that the Kingdom had come, could it

and interpret the verb according to aspect, however, we actually find a *forceful affirmation* of the commonly understood Jewish messianic kingdom.

This saying was spoken in the context of Jesus healing a demon-oppressed man (Matt. 12:22). Everyone was amazed and asked, “Can this be *the Son of David?*” (v. 23). Clearly they took this exorcism to mean that the Jewish messianic kingdom was in view. The Pharisees rejected such a possibility and accused Jesus of driving out the demon by the power of Satan (v. 24). Jesus’ response to this accusation (vv. 25–37) was threefold: 1) it was illogical; 2) it was immoral; and 3) it was the basis of their eternal judgment.

Since space prohibits a detailed commentary of Jesus’ response, we can only summarize the main point Jesus was making—*people will be judged according to their words on the day of the Lord*. Consequently the Pharisees’ present accusation makes certain their eternal damnation, as Jesus concludes, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (vv. 36–37). If the exorcisms happened by the Spirit of God, then Jesus is actually the Jewish Messiah (i.e., the Son of David). And if he is the Jewish Messiah, then the careless accusation of the Pharisees secures their eternal judgment.

This certainty lies behind the perfective aspect (traditionally aorist/past tense) of the verb *ephthasen*. Jesus is simply communicating the completed and finalized reality of their judgment based upon their careless words.³¹ A better translation of verse 28 would thus be: “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God *will most certainly come upon you!*” Though some have

be argued that the Kingdom also arrived when Tobias expelled a demon with smoke from the heart and liver of a fish [Tobit 8:1ff.]. In other words, if Jesus’ exorcisms ‘mean’ the Kingdom had arrived, why did not exorcisms by the Jewish exorcists also ‘mean’ the Kingdom had arrived?” (*Rethinking Realized Eschatology*, 80).

³¹ Unfortunately, Weiss mistook this statement (as well as Matt. 1:15 and Luke 17:21) to be an overzealous declaration of the imminent arrival of the kingdom: “These are moments of sublime prophetic enthusiasm, when an awareness of victory comes over him” (*Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom*, 78). Thus he relates the following analogy:

Whether he favors the one expression or the other depends on what suits his mood at the time. When storm clouds gather and the lightning flashes on the horizon, one may say: “A thunder storm is coming.” But one can also say, proleptically: “It is storming.” Or, again, when the sun shines warm and brightly for the first time, and the first buds begin to swell, one will usually say: “Spring is near.” But who will restrain his feeling of yearning when it joyfully welcomes in these first signs the whole springtime, as if it were already there with all its splendor? (Ibid., 41)

previously acknowledged the possibility of a “proleptic aorist,”³² I find the context of the passage to be most obviously eschatological.³³ As such, “the day of judgment” (v. 36), “the age to come” (v. 32), “the kingdom of God” (v. 28), and “the Son of David” (v. 23) all refer to the same Jewish apocalyptic reality. Hence the perfective aspect of *ephthasen* simply communicates the certainty of this future reality.

This common-sense approach coincides with the fearful and negative use of the same phraseology throughout the Old Testament.³⁴ Based upon violations of the law, “all these curses shall *come upon you* and overtake you” (Deut. 28:15). The prophets regularly rehearsed the same language, as Jeremiah declared, “Because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice, this thing has *come upon you*” (40:3). Or as Zephaniah exhorted, “Gather together, yes, gather, O shameless nation, before the decree takes effect—before the day passes away like chaff—before there *comes upon you* the burning anger of the LORD, before there *comes upon you* the day of the anger of the LORD” (2:1–2). Or as Daniel prayed, “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has *come upon us*; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth” (9:13).

The idea of divine judgment coming upon the wicked is similarly seen throughout the New Testament. So Jesus warns, “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day *come upon you* suddenly like a trap. For it will *come upon* all who dwell on the face of the whole earth” (Luke 21:34–35). Likewise, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day will be “sentenced to hell” (Matt. 23:33), for “all these things will *come upon* this generation” (v. 36). Therefore “the wrath of God *comes upon* the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6). For “sudden destruction will *come upon* them as labor pains *come upon* a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (1

³² See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 564.

³³ Note also the identification of futuristic aorists in the New Testament and beyond by Chrys C. Caragounis, “Kingdom of God, Son of Man, and Jesus’ Self-Understanding, Part I,” *TynBul* 40, no. 1 (1989): 20–23.

³⁴ For example, Deut. 28:15,45; 30:1; 31:17,21; Josh. 22:20; Judg. 20:41; 1 Sam. 16:16; 2 Sam. 19:7; 24:13; 2 Chron. 20:9; 32:26; Neh. 9:32; Job 2:11; 3:25; 5:14; 20:22; 21:17; 27:9; Ps. 69:24; 119:143; Prov. 1:26; 3:25; 6:15; 10:14; Eccl. 11:2; Isa. 26:9; 47:9,11; 51:19; Jer. 6:26; 22:23; 44:23; 51:60; Lam. 1:14; Ezek. 7:2,7; 30:4; Dan. 9:13; Hos. 13:7; Amos 4:2; 5:9; 9:10; Jonah 1:7f,12; Mic. 2:6; 3:11; Zeph. 1:6; 2:2; 3:7.

Thess. 5:3). Thus the rich should “weep and howl for the miseries that are *coming upon you*” (James 5:1). Yet, for the righteous, “I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to *come upon* the whole world to test those who live on the earth” (Rev. 3:10, NIV).

In such light, 1 Thessalonians 2:16—“God’s wrath has *come upon* them at last”—stands out as particularly important, since it most closely corresponds grammatically to Matthew 12:28 (i.e., both have an aorist *ephthasen* with the preposition *epi*). Moreover, Jesus’ situation and Paul’s situation are quite similar. Both are being persecuted by unbelieving Jews, and both are declaring that the present actions of those Jews are securing their future damnation. Some claim that Paul’s use of the aorist within such a clear eschatological context (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15–17; 5:1–9) makes this verse “one of the more problematic passages in the entire Pauline corpus.”³⁵ Of course, it is only problematic if *ephthasen* is translated as past tense rather than as perfective aspect. A better translation (quite akin to Matthew 12:28) would thus be: “God’s wrath *will most certainly come upon them* in the end!”³⁶

In this way both Jesus and Paul use the perfective form of *ephthasen* to *forcefully affirm* the Jewish apocalyptic end of their enemies.³⁷ Far from being

³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 101.

³⁶ Therefore I agree with the century-old conclusion of James E. Frame:

In view of the eschatological bearing of ἡ ὄργη, the reference in ἔφθασε (= ἦλθε), not withstanding ἡ ὄργη ἡ ἐρχομένη (1:10), cannot be to a series of punishments in the past . . . nor to a specific event in the past, whether the loss of Jewish independence, or the famine (Acts 11:28), or the banishment from Rome (Acts 18:2; cf. Schmidt, 86–90); nor quite to the destruction of Jerusalem, even if Paul shared the view that the day of judgment was to be simultaneous with the destruction of Jerusalem; but must be simply to the day of judgment which is near at hand. ἔφθασε is accordingly proleptic. Instead of speaking of that day as coming upon the sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:6), he speaks of it as at last arrived. Such a proleptic use of the aorist is natural in a prophetic passage and has its analogy in the LXX. (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1912], 113–14)

³⁷ Contrary to the common convoluted inaugurationalist conclusion. For example, “If this wrath is yet future, why then does Paul speak of it as happening in the past (*ephthasen*, ‘has come’)? The best explanation of the verb’s aorist tense comes from comparing the only other NT combinations of *phthanō epi* (‘come upon’; see Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20), where Jesus uses comparable terminology to speak of the kingdom’s arrival. The unique force of this verb connotes ‘arrival upon the threshold of fulfillment and accessible experience, *not* the entrance into that experience’” (K. W. Clark, “Realized Eschatology,” *JBL* 59 [1940]: 379).

proof of realized eschatology, they speak in the perfective (like the Hebrew prophets) to communicate the complete surety of the future reality.³⁸ Furthermore, the cumulative effect of the “come upon” phraseology throughout prophetic witness would have created a compounded *negative emotional response* within the hearer. The mere mention of the kingdom coming upon someone, in light of the day of judgment, was meant to instill fear and trembling, leading to repentance. If the kingdom comes upon you (Matt. 12:28), it means you have been shut off from divine forgiveness (v. 32), and at the day of judgment (v. 36) “you will be condemned” (v. 37).

The Kingdom Is within You

Perhaps no other saying of Jesus has been more misunderstood and perverted throughout the church’s history than Luke 17:21: “Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” Assumedly derived from the Gnostic tradition,³⁹ Anthony⁴⁰ and Origen⁴¹ propagated a spiritualistic interpretation of

Just as the kingdom reached the covenant people at Christ’s first coming without their enjoying “the experience ensuing upon the initial contact” (Ibid.), so the wrath that will precede that kingdom has come before the Jews’ full experience of it (Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 12 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 397).

³⁸ It has long been understood that Hebrew verbs are in the main aspectual. Thus the “prophetic perfect” is commonly used by the prophets (cf. Num. 24:17; Isa. 5:14; 9:2; 42:1; Hos. 10:15; Amos 5:2) to communicate the surety of accomplishment of the oracle being spoken. “The perfect is used to express actions which a lively imagination conceives as completed, but for which the future is more usual in English. . . . It often happens, especially in the higher style, that in the midst of descriptions of the future the imagination suddenly conceives the act as accomplished, and interjects a perfect amidst a number of imperfections. Job 5:20, 23 *hath redeemed* (4:10); Hos. 5:5 *Judah is fallen*. This usage receives an extension among the prophets, whose imagination so vividly projects before them the event or scene which they predict that it appears realised” (A. B. Davidson, *Introductory Hebrew Grammar Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902], 61–62).

³⁹ Note *Gospel of Thomas* 3:

Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘See, the kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty.” (NHLE, 126)

And, *Gospel of Thomas* 113: “His disciples said to him, ‘When will the kingdom come?’ Jesus said, ‘It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying “here it is” or “there it is.” Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it’” (NHLE, 138).

this saying that continues to date, supported by a number of English translations (e.g., “The kingdom of God *is within you*,” KJV, NKJV, NIV). Modern commentaries offer a multitude of interpretive options,⁴² yet the most common-sense approach is tragically absent.⁴³

In this passage (Luke 17:20–37), Jesus is simply correcting *Jewish zealotry* and its perverted expectation of the kingdom of God.⁴⁴ Within first-century Pharisaism (especially within the House of Shammai) there was sympathy with

And, *Gospel of Mary* 8: “When the blessed one had said this, he greeted them all, saying, ‘Peace be with you. Receive my peace to yourselves. Beware that no one lead you astray, saying, “Lo here!” or “Lo there!” For the Son of Man is within you. Follow after him! Those who seek him will find him. Go then and preach the gospel of the kingdom” (NHLE, 525).

⁴⁰ “That they may get knowledge, the Greeks live abroad and cross the sea, but we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue. For the Lord aforetime hath said, ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you.’ Wherefore virtue hath need at our hands of willingness alone, since it is in us and is formed from us” (*Life of Antony* 20; NPNF2 4:201).

⁴¹ “Moreover, that all men are not without communion with God, is taught in the Gospel thus, by the Saviour’s words: ‘The kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! but the kingdom of God is within you.’ But here we must see whether this does not bear the same meaning with the expression in Genesis: ‘And He breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul.’ For if this be understood as applying generally to all men, then all men have a share in God” (*On First Principles* 1.3.6; ANF, 4.254).

⁴² None are more thorough in their analysis of this passage, and its various interpretations, than Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1408–19.

⁴³ Though we find an interesting comment by Jewish scholar Kaufmann Kohler: “Jesus preached the same Kingdom of God (Matthew has preserved in ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ the rabbinical expression ‘Malkut Shamayim’), and when he said, ‘the kingdom of God cometh not by observation [that is, calculation] . . . for, behold, the kingdom of God is among [not within] you’ (Luke 17:21, Syriac version), he meant, ‘It does not come through rebellion or by force” (“Kingdom of God,” *JE*, 7:503; brackets in the original).

⁴⁴ Though falsely characterizing the “nationalistic ideal” and failing to carry out his statement, Herman Ridderbos does reference the underlying problem:

Jesus here refers to the messianic movements and rumors that arose again and again among the Jewish people. They originated in a nationalistic ideal of the Messiah and often made it difficult for its adherents to know what to think with respect to this ideal. This explains the question of the Pharisees about the time “when.” When Jesus answers them by saying that the coming of the kingdom and of the Messiah “is not accompanied by observations,” he does not mean that we should not “heed” the signs of the times, but he rejects the idea—entertained by the adherents of the nationalistic expectations of the Messiah—that the coming of the kingdom *itself* is something that can only be detected by the well-trained eyes of the “observer.” Its appearance will be so (overpowering) that nobody will be in need of any indication nor will have any doubt at all. (*Coming of the Kingdom*, 474)

the Jewish insurgent movements, which distorted their view of the Law and the Prophets. Instead of a radically apocalyptic expectation of the kingdom (cf. Isa. 13; 65; Dan. 7; Joel 3; etc.), a mixture of hope was introduced that incorporated the strength of the flesh in synergy with the coming of God. Patterned after the Maccabean revolt,⁴⁵ it was supposed that God would anoint a descendant of David, who would gather an army and come forth from the wilderness (and/or inner rooms) and progressively grow in power, with heaven approving and the angels attending.⁴⁶ Such insurgent movements were relatively common at the time (cf. Acts 5:36–37; 21:38).⁴⁷

When asked when the kingdom of God would come (Luke 17:20), Jesus responded, “The kingdom of God is not coming *with signs to be observed*” (NASB).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ As Josephus described,

He [Mattathias] also overthrew the idol altar, and cried out, “If,” said he, “anyone be zealous for the laws of his country, and for the worship of God, let him follow me;” and when he had said this, he made haste into the desert with his sons, and left all his substance in the village. Many others did the same also, and fled with their children and wives into the desert and dwelt in caves. . . .

Many of those that escaped joined themselves to Mattathias, and appointed him to be their ruler, who taught them to fight even on the Sabbath day. . . . So Mattathias got a great army about him, and overthrew their idol altars, and slew those that broke the laws, even all that he could get under his power; for many of them were dispersed among the nations round about them for fear of him. (*Antiquities* 12.270–78; cf. 1 Maccabees 2:27–48)

⁴⁶ There is, however, some precedent for God coming forth from the wilderness to initiate the day of the Lord (cf. Isa. 35:1; 40:3; 63:1; Zech. 9:14). Moreover, the historical precedent was shaped by Israel coming forth from the wilderness (cf. “the One of Sinai,” Ps. 68:8), David gathering his mighty men in the wilderness (1 Sam. 22:2; 23:13), and the prophets receiving the word of the Lord in the wilderness (1 Kings 18:4; 19:9; Heb. 11:38).

⁴⁷ Josephus also described such movements:

These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government, and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty; but Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.

But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place. (*Wars* 2.259–62; cf. *Wars* 6.351, 7.438; *Antiquities* 20.97–99, 167–72, 188)

⁴⁸ Bock summarizes the four common interpretations of “signs to be observed” (Gk. *paratērēsis*), yet with no reference to *signs of insurgency* (see Luke 9:51–24:53, 1412–14). Ironically, the majority of interpreters argue that Jesus was referring to “general apocalyptic signs” (Ibid., 1413), and as such he

There is much dispute concerning the nature of these “signs,” but Jesus makes clear he is speaking about Jewish insurgencies by qualifying, “Nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’” (v. 21, NASB). The Matthean parallel elaborates: “So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is *in the wilderness*,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is *in the inner rooms*,’ do not believe it” (24:26). Such an insurgent hope, which organized itself in the wilderness or in the inner rooms, is countered in both Gospel accounts with Jesus’ declaration, “As the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day” (Luke 17:24; cf. Matt. 24:27). Simply put, the Pharisaical vision for the day of the Lord had become polluted. It was not apocalyptic *enough*.

We must therefore interpret this passage, as well as the entire Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24 and parallels), as a *polemic against zealotry*.⁴⁹ The strength of the flesh is corrupt beyond measure, and as such it will play no part in the redemption of the earth. Conversely, it only degenerates an already miserable situation, adding fuel to the coming fire. The kingdom of God will not come progressively by the strength of the flesh, but rather *suddenly* by the power of God, “as the lightning flashes” (v. 24), “as it was in the days of Noah” (v. 26), and “as it was in the days of Lot” (v. 28). Moreover, that day will not require observation; it will be *obvious* to all, just as the existence of a corpse is obvious when vultures circle overhead (v. 37).

was supposedly correcting the Pharisees for their overly apocalyptic hope(!). This approach completely misses the point and turns the entire interaction on its head.

⁴⁹ We would also do well to understand John 3:1–21 in such a light. As “the teacher of Israel” (v. 9), Nicodemus should have understood that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 15:50). Therefore one must be “born from above” (John 3:3, NRSV) to inherit/see the kingdom. Being “born of water and the Spirit” (v. 5) is most likely a reference to Ezek. 36, apocalyptically understood (cf. chaps. 37–48); and as the wind “blows where it wishes” (John 3:8), so also human beings do not determine the day of God (cf. Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7; 1 Tim. 6:15).

In this way, John and Jesus came preaching a radically apocalyptic message. “But *you* [Pharisees sympathetic to zealotry] do not receive our testimony” (John 3:11). Their message inherently undermined the Zealot cause, to which some (most?) of the Pharisees were sympathetic. Thus Jesus rebukes Nicodemus concerning the basic apocalyptic hope of the Law and the Prophets (i.e., “earthly things,” v. 12). If Nicodemus was guilty of confidence in the flesh concerning the basics of the day of the Lord, the kingdom, and the resurrection, how then would he understand the “heavenly things” of divine mercy and atonement (cf. Deut. 32:43; Ps. 79:9; Dan. 9:24)? Conversely, the Son of Man “has ascended” (v. 13) to stand in the council of the Lord (cf. Jer. 23:18), and “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (vv. 14–15). Hence the whole passage is most sensibly a polemic against confidence in the flesh concerning both the hope to be attained (resurrection) and the means of attaining that hope (atonement).

What then is to be said about the statement in verse 21 that “the kingdom of God *is* [Gk. *estin*] in the midst of you”? Unfortunately, modern debate has focused on the *tense* of the verbs in verses 20–21. Rather than the “present tense,” the imperfective aspect is used throughout to highlight the dramatic actions unfolding. To resolve the awkwardness created by a strict tense translation, some have suggested a “futuristic present tense” for all of the verbs, since the thrust of the original question concerns the future (thus, “the kingdom of God *will be* in the midst of you”).⁵⁰ Most of this debate, however, seems to be generally tangential, since neither Jesus nor the Pharisees would have questioned the futurity of the kingdom. Rather, the contention concerned *how* that futurity would unfold. The Pharisees saw it coming *progressively from men* out of the wilderness or inner courts, while Jesus saw it coming *suddenly from God* out of the heavens.

Consequently, the ultimate contention regards the *origin* of the kingdom (God vs. man), which in turn determines the timing of the kingdom (suddenly vs. progressively). As such, the translation of verse 21 should turn on the alternative meaning of *estin*: “to have a point of derivation or origin, *be/come from somewhere*.”⁵¹ As *estin* is elsewhere translated “come” (cf. Matt. 21:25; John 1:46; 7:27–29; 1 Cor. 11:8) and taken in its commonly understood futuristic context, we would thus translate Luke 17:21b:

⁵⁰ See a defense of this position in John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 849–54.

The final view to be considered is that of Bultmann (*History*, 121–22) and others that the reference is to a future sudden arrival of the kingdom of God. This view must first accept the possibility of giving ἐντός the sense “in your midst” and then needs to treat this idiomatically as conveying the idea of the kingdom of God being “right there,” as having arrived, while all the alert observers have failed to notice anything to base their prognostications upon. This assumes that ἐστιν, “is,” should be taken futuristically, but, in the absence of the second negation, this is a natural reading after the obviously futurist force of the present tense ἔρχεται (lit. “comes”). This view is somewhat vulnerable to the frequently leveled criticism that the key notion of a sudden and unheralded arrival of the kingdom of God must be taken as implied, because it is certainly not explicitly present. It is, nevertheless, the view that does best justice to the content of v 21, and the one view that easily makes room for vv 22–37 and does justice as well to Luke’s evident concern to link the two sections. (853–54)

⁵¹ BDAG, 285.

Behold, the kingdom of God *comes into* your midst.⁵²

In this way, Jesus' statement naturally leads into verses 22–37, for the kingdom will come into their midst just as it happened during the days of Noah and Lot.⁵³ The strength of the flesh played no part in the execution of divine judgment then, and the strength of the flesh (as embodied in Jewish insurgent movements) will play no part in the enthronement of the Son of Man on the last day. Far from being a pronouncement of realized eschatology (and some sort of internal or spiritualistic kingdom), Jesus' statement is actually a *radical indictment* of all non-apocalyptic eschatology. The Jewish messianic kingdom will come suddenly with divine power and glory.

The Kingdom Has Been Forcefully Advancing

The great irony of realized eschatology is that it relies on texts which in truth perfectly contradict its message. Realized eschatology argues that the texts above communicate (1) a good thing of divine blessing, (2) aimed at believers, (3) individually, (4) in the present. However, the kingdom being at hand, coming upon you, and coming into your midst is very much (1) a bad thing of divine judgment, (2) aimed at unbelievers, (3) corporately, (4) in the future.⁵⁴ Realized eschatology actually turns Jesus' message on its head and robs it of its strength and conviction. Instead of inducing fear and trembling, leading to repentance

⁵² I also find this to be a more natural integration of *entos* (see BDAG, 340–41), used in the NT only here and in Matt. 23:26 (“clean the *inside* of the cup”). Jesus' point concerns salvation coming *into* Israel's midst, rather than coming *out* of it.

⁵³ Rightly, Nolland: “Perhaps best is to see the statement [v. 21] as insisting that when the kingdom of God is due to come it will just be there, right in our midst, with no advance warning and no localized beginning. This understanding fits best with vv 22–37 to come” (*Luke 9:21–18:34*, 854).

Also Ridderbos:

In this connection, therefore, it is improbable that in verses 20 and 21 Jesus should have wanted to divert attention from the eschatological future and direct it to the already “fulfilled” present. This conclusion is also borne out by the future tense in verse 21 (“neither *shall* they say”). That is why in our opinion the words, “For, behold, the kingdom of God is among you,” certainly refer to the eschatological coming of the kingdom. As appears from the word “for,” they explain why they *shall* not say, “Lo here!, or, lo there!” For when the kingdom comes *it is in your midst*, i.e., it will no longer need any indication, but will fill your whole horizon. (*Coming of the Kingdom*, 475)

⁵⁴ The “corporate” quality comes from a reference to a plural “you” (Matt. 3:7; 12:28; Luke 17:21). Rather than an individual blessing from God, it is a corporate condemnation of a whole lot cast into the “fiery furnace” (Matt. 13:42).

and conversion, it deludes its hearers into believing a lie.⁵⁵ In the end, those who do not work out their salvation with fear and trembling will not inherit eternal life.

Similarly, realized eschatology has inverted Matthew 11:12—“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” Though the tone of the entire passage is quite negative (vv. 7–19), followed by declarations of woe (vv. 20–14), many interpret this verse as something positive. It is maintained that Jesus is declaring the spiritual realization of Jewish eschatology, which is attained by a spiritually aggressive (i.e., “violent”) way of life.⁵⁶

Though Dodd admitted that the meaning of this passage was “exceedingly difficult to determine,”⁵⁷ he nonetheless maintained (leaning on the questionable parallel in Luke 16:16) that it clearly reveals that Jesus “proclaimed that the Kingdom of God, the hope of many generations, had at last come.”⁵⁸ Concerning such a radical declaration, should we not take a more prudent approach? If the meaning of a passage is “exceedingly difficult to determine,” should we not err on the more conservative and traditional side? The burden of proof rests on realized eschatology to evidence its revolutionary claims, and if Jesus did indeed proclaim such a radical reinterpretation of the Law and Prophets, then we should expect *an elaborate exposition*. Without such an expounding, we should assume—by default—the Jewish understanding of the kingdom.

⁵⁵ In 2 Thess. it seems that Paul calls realized eschatology “a strong delusion” (v. 11), sent by God to those who “refused to love the truth” (v. 10). The relationship between v. 2 (“a spoken word, a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come”) and v. 15 (“stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter”) is straightforward. Thus vv. 10–12 are bracketed by statements concerning the perversion of the apostolic witness, identified in v. 2 as the realization of apocalyptic eschatology, i.e., *tō pseudei* (“what is false,” or “the lie,” NIV). Moreover, the refusal to love “the truth” (vv. 10,12) echoes other Pauline references to Gnosticism and realized eschatology (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3; 6:21; 2 Tim. 2:15–18; 4:4).

⁵⁶ As argued by Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 158–64. So the NIV translates: “The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.” Note also the NLT: “The Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.” The NIV views “the violent” as those who advance the spiritual kingdom, while the NLT views “the violent” as those who persecute the advancement of the spiritual kingdom. On the latter, see D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew-Mark*, vol. 9, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 309–10.

⁵⁷ *Parables of the Kingdom*, 48.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

Though this passage does contain many difficulties, it is not too difficult to determine its basic meaning: *Before the day of the Lord, the righteous will suffer and be persecuted* (as was the common apocalyptic expectation). In the context of the previous warning about the coming persecution (Matt. 10:16–39) and the current imprisonment of John the Baptist (11:2), Jesus affirms his own messianic identity (vv. 2–6). Then he turns to the crowds and exalts the greatness of John’s prophetic identity (vv. 7–11). And just like all the prophets before them, both Jesus and John will suffer persecution at the hands of violent men (v. 12), for John fully embodied the prophetic calling (vv. 13–15). Moreover, just as in previous generations, the generation of Jesus and John is hostile because of its rebellious attitudes, akin to “childish brats” in the marketplace (vv. 16–19).⁵⁹ Therefore the basic meaning of the passage concerns the relationship between Jesus and John and their shared persecution.

When we focus on verses 11–12, we are confronted with a number of issues. There are two variables for interpretation in verse 11 (kingdom now vs. future and the identity of least vs. greater), and there are two variables in verse 12 (positive vs. negative violence statement and positive vs. negative violence response). Thus there are four options of interpretation for each verse (a mind-boggling sixteen interpretive possibilities in all!).⁶⁰ It is no wonder that interpretation of this passage commonly devolves into confusion and conflict.

Concerning verse 11, it seems clear that we must identify “*the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven*” as Jesus himself.⁶¹ Assumedly based on Daniel 4:17 (“The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men”), Jesus elsewhere identifies himself as the least in this world, sent as the servant of all.⁶² The world views the servant as the least; God views the servant as the greatest. Hence, “Whoever *humbles himself* like this child is *the greatest* in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4), and “He who is *least* among

⁵⁹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 296.

⁶⁰ An entire monograph has been written on the four options in v. 12 alone; see Peter S. Cameron, *Violence and the Kingdom: The Interpretation of Matthew 11:12* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984).

⁶¹ Note that this position was the common patristic view; see B. T. Viviano, “The Least in the Kingdom: Matthew 11:11, Its Parallel in Luke 7:28 (Q), and Daniel 4:14,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 41–54.

⁶² “In agreement with Franz Dibelius and the older Church Fathers, and in grammatical accordance with the text itself, I translate Matt. 11.11: ‘He who is least (i.e., Jesus as a disciple of John) is greater than he (i.e., John) in the kingdom of heaven’” (Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. S. C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963], 32).

you all is the one who is *great*” (Luke 9:48). Similarly, after the mother of the two sons of Zebedee asked that her sons be given the highest positions in the coming kingdom (Matt. 20:20–21), Jesus explained to his disciples,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their *great ones* exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be *great* among you must be your *servant*, and whoever would be *first* among you must be your *slave*, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (vv. 25–28)

The Lukan parallel adds, “Let *the greatest* among you become as *the youngest* [“lowest rank,” NLT], and the leader as one who serves” (22:26), thus concluding with the eschatological exaltation: “that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and *sit on thrones* judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (v. 30). In this way, we have abundant evidence for the use of “least” and “greatest” in light of the eschatological judgment, which will result in a radical reversal of the hierarchies of the earth (cf. “many who are first will be last, and the last first”; Matt. 19:30).⁶³

Therefore Matthew 11:11 is simply saying that John the Baptist is indeed the greatest born among women (i.e., the greatest of the prophets and the culmination of the prophetic witness; cf. vv. 13–15),⁶⁴ yet Jesus is even greater than he, because Jesus humbled himself like a submissive child (i.e., became least) even more than did John (unlike the rebellious children of his generation; cf. vv. 16–19).⁶⁵ The common inaugurational interpretation of this verse is nonsensical,⁶⁶ since the beginning of a spiritually realized kingdom is impossible

⁶³ Though concerning a different issue (keeping of the law), Matt. 5:19–20 also supports such an approach, since it is based on the two-age apocalyptic framework: “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the *least* of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called *least* in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

⁶⁴ “Born of women” is a Hebraic idiom (cf. Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4) and simply refers to the common descendants of Adam. However, Jesus sets himself apart from all other descendants of Adam as “the Son of Adam” (v. 19) who is least in the sight of this world, yet greater than all (even John the Baptist) in the sight of God.

⁶⁵ “The Jewish background of the question for the great or little one could support this interpretation. The texts distinguish between this and the future world (*Midr. Ruth* 1.17 [128a]; *b. B. Mes.* 85b; *Pesiq. R.* 83 [198b] in Str-B 1.598)” (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 139, n. 33).

⁶⁶ And quite gnostic, cf. *Gospel of Thomas* 46: “Jesus said, ‘Among those born of women, from Adam until John the Baptist, there is no one so superior to John the Baptist that his eyes should not be

to determine, and John the Baptist would be logically excluded from the kingdom, or denigrated at best (cf. “greatest born among women”).⁶⁷

Concerning verse 12, there are four options in regard to the kingdom of heaven and the realities of “inflicting violence” (Gk. *biazō*), “violent men” (Gk. *biastēs*), and “forceful seizure” (Gk. *harpazō*). Either both parts of the verse are positive (NIV), both are negative (KJV, NKJV, NAB, NASB, NRSV, ESV), one is positive and the other is negative (NLT), or vice versa.⁶⁸ Since the idea of “violence” is almost universally negative in the Scriptures (cf. Gen. 6:11; Ps. 58:2; 140:1–5; Ezek. 22:26; etc.), I interpret the verse as a double negative, wherein the second part of the verse explicates the first: “The kingdom of heaven *suffers violence*, and violent people *attack it*.”⁶⁹ We can see that this is a simple statement concerning the bold prophetic proclamation of John and Jesus and the violent response of their enemies.⁷⁰

I interpret the parable of the children in the marketplace (vv. 16–19) similarly. Those who see verse 12 as a positive statement generally interpret the

lowered (before him). Yet I have said, whichever one of you comes to be a child will be acquainted with the kingdom and will become superior to John” (*NHLE*, 131).

⁶⁷ For example, “In effect, so glorious is the new reality dawning through the ministry of Jesus that the greatest of the era preceding him is yet inferior to the least in the new order of the kingdom” (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1993], 306) I doubt many will be so bold as to say such things to John’s face on the last day.

⁶⁸ Hagner explains:

Those who take both clauses positively (e.g., Zahn; Ladd, *Presence*) thus find here a statement about the forceful coming of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus and a coordinate description of the hard way of discipleship. Those who take both clauses negatively (e.g., Hill, Fenton, Green, Schweizer, Patte, Gundry, Gaechter, Maier, France, Mounce, Luz, Davies-Allison) understand the verse to refer to the persecution and difficulty faced by those who represent the kingdom. The violent people who plunder the kingdom are regarded variously as the Pharisees, Zealots, evil spirits, or even Herod Antipas. Among those who divide the clauses, the majority favor understanding the first negatively (the kingdom suffers violence) and the second positively (e.g., Dahl, Schlatter, Schniewind). A few argue for the first to be understood positively (the kingdom comes forcefully) and the second negatively (e.g., Carson, Pamment). (*Matthew 1–13*, 307)

⁶⁹ “This combination of translations would then lead the verse to be rendered something like ‘from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent people attack it’” (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992], 187–88).

⁷⁰ Cf. the alternate rendering of Luke 16:16: “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is strongly urged to enter it” (HCSB). Thus there is correspondence with the Lukan parallel, though the saying is applied in a different context for different reasons.

singing children as John and Jesus, while those who view verse 12 negatively generally associate the children with “this generation” (v. 16).⁷¹ The latter is clearly what Jesus meant, for it is *the accusations of this generation* which are highlighted in verses 18–19. Moreover, statements concerning “this generation” are elsewhere generally negative (cf. Matt. 12:39–45; 16:4; 17:17).

Thus the parable falls in line with the preceding passage concerning the persecution of John and Jesus and sets up the following passage concerning the condemnation of unrepentant cities (vv. 20–24).⁷² Far from a proclamation of realized eschatology, the kingdom suffering violence is simply a declaration concerning persecution of John and Jesus, assuming the apocalyptic destruction of their enemies “on the day of judgment” (vv. 22,24).⁷³ In this way, Jesus’ saying accords with the common Jewish apocalyptic expectation that the righteous will suffer before the day of the Lord.⁷⁴

The Kingdom Is Mysterious and Parabolic

If realized eschatology were pictured as a tent, its poles would be the individual sayings of Jesus (discussed above), and its covering would be Jesus’ parables. According to Dodd and those who have followed him, the revealing of

⁷¹ See an adept handling of this parable in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 259–65.

⁷² “Therefore Jesus’ statement here goes back to ch. 10 and refers to the persecution that characterizes the age of mission. John the Baptist is a prime example, imprisoned and soon to be killed at the hands of Herod Antipas. ‘From the days of John the Baptist until the present’ thus refers to the arrest of John and the opposition Jesus and his disciples have already experienced” (Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 422).

⁷³ Some claim proof of realized eschatology based on the kingdom being the subject of the violence in v. 12. However, the future reality is simply being spoken of as being directly affected by present events. Similarly, Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces.* For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Matt. 23:13). Jesus clearly had in mind a future reality, as is evidenced by his following references to Gehenna (vv. 15,33). Jesus spoke this way because all present actions will be rehearsed on the day of judgment (i.e., the books are opened). Hence present actions directly affect people’s outcomes on the last day, and in this way the future kingdom (composed of saints) suffers violence by present acts of violence against the saints.

⁷⁴ “To sum up, then: for Jesus and for Matthew, as for the apocalyptic literature in general, the great redemption must be preceded by a conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil (cf. 1 En. 91:5–6). Further, this conflict has already been joined, from the days of John the Baptist until now” (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 256).

realized eschatology is the primary purpose of the parables. Hence the core element of “the mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11, KJV) is believed to be realized eschatology.⁷⁵ As Dodd summarized:

This is the “mystery of the Kingdom of God”; not only that the *eschaton*, that which belongs properly to the realm of the “wholly other,” is now a matter of actual experience, but that it is experienced in the paradoxical form of the suffering and death of God’s representative.⁷⁶

Therefore the Jewish messianic kingdom is transformed into a nebulous spiritualistic reality somehow expressed through the crucifixion of the Messiah. Moreover, the implication is that the Jews of Jesus’ day had a false hope in the commonly hoped-for messianic kingdom, and as such Jesus had to tell them rudimentary parables to help them see the spiritualistic nature of the kingdom. In light of a common-sense reading of the parables, however, I find this approach both absurd and offensive.

The foreign interpolation of realized eschatology into Jesus’ parables confounds their basic purpose: *the concealing of truth from the unrepentant*. The parables are not primarily meant to reveal some kind of new truth, but rather to conceal the plain truth from the ungodly. Jesus thus explains the context of the mystery/secret of the kingdom: “And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, *but for those outside everything is in parables*, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven”” (Mark 4:11–12). Again, though Jesus speaks to his disciples plainly (cf. Matt. 5–7; 10:5–42; 18:1–9; etc.), he speaks to the unrepentant (those who will not “turn and be forgiven”) in parables — “This is why I speak *to them* in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matt. 13:13).

⁷⁵ So Ladd introduced his magnum opus: “The distinctive characteristic about Jesus’ teaching is that in some real sense, the Kingdom of God has come in his person and mission (Matt. 12:28). The mystery of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11) is the secret of its unexpected irruption in history” (*Presence of the Future*, xi).

Also, “The very core of his message about the kingdom of God is that the powers of the future eschatological reign have entered into history in advance of their apocalyptic manifestation and are at work now in the world in a hidden form within and among men. This is the ‘mystery of the kingdom” (G. E. Ladd, “Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?” *JBL* 76, no. 3 [1957]: 199).

⁷⁶ *Parables of the Kingdom*, 79–80.

In this way, the parables are not designed to impart new knowledge to believers concerning God and redemptive history. Rather, they are spoken *polemically against unbelievers* as a condemnation of their sin, pride, and hardheartedness. Of course, believers can receive instruction and encouragement from the parables, but we must not lose sight of their overall orientation (something that happens quite often, especially in relation to the disputed parables). Most of the parables make a simple contrast of good versus bad responses to God, and as such we must always be mindful that Jesus primarily spoke the parables *as an indictment of the bad response*.

For example, the first major parable found in the Gospels is the wise versus foolish builders (Matt. 7:24–27). This parable certainly includes an encouragement to believers to build their metaphorical houses upon the rock. But the overall orientation and purpose of the parable is toward unbelieving Jews and their leaders, who are repeatedly highlighted in the previous chapters (cf. 5:20; 6:2,5, 16; 7:5,15). Consequently, “on that day” (7:22)—that is, the day of the Lord—divine judgment will come upon the world like a storm. Those who have walked out their repentance will endure the day, while those who have lived for the age to come *in pretense* (cf. “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name . . .”; v. 22) will fall “with a great crash” (v. 27, NIV). The parable of the builders is thus primary spoken as an indictment of foolish builders and secondarily as an encouragement to wise builders.

Similarly, the major parables of Matthew 13 (the shorter, debatable parables will be discussed at the end of this section) are aimed at “this wicked generation” (12:45), especially “the Pharisees and teachers of the law” (12:38), who “plotted how they might kill Jesus” (12:14). The parable of the sower and the seeds (13:3–9) is primarily aimed at those who hear the message of the kingdom (i.e., eternal life) yet reject it or receive it halfheartedly, choosing to live mostly for “this life” (v. 22, NIV). The parable of the wheat and tares (vv. 24–30) is similarly spoken to “the sons of the evil one” (v. 38), those who will be “gathered and burned with fire . . . at the end of the age” (v. 40). Likewise, the parable of the good and bad fish (vv. 47–50) is meant to be a warning to “the wicked” (v. 49, NIV), who are in danger of being thrown into “the fiery furnace” (v. 50) at the end of the age. Again, the parables were spoken “to them” (v. 13), because “they look, but they don’t really see” (v. 13, NLT). The parables concern people’s response to the message of the day of the Lord, not a realization of the day of the Lord.

The parables of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23–35), the vineyard workers (Matt. 20:1–16), the two sons (Matt. 21:28–32), the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33–41), and the wedding banquet (Matt. 22:1–14) were all spoken publicly, so as to highlight and delineate righteous versus wicked behavior in light of the final judgment. Far from communicating any kind of realized eschatology, the aim of these parables is simply to communicate that “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (19:30; cf. 20:16). That is to say, many who were commonly thought to be righteous (thus inheriting a first place of glory in the age to come) were actually wicked (thus inheriting a last place of punishment with the pagans), while many who were commonly thought to be wicked (i.e., the sinners and tax collectors; cf. 9:11; 11:19) would actually inherit the greatest glory in the coming kingdom (cf. “The tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you”; 21:31, NASB).⁷⁷ So all of these parables culminate with the denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, summarized by the statement: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 12).⁷⁸

Those parables which involve or highlight only one thing, person, or group (often righteous) are no less designed “for those outside.” The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8) is aimed at the Pharisees who had become sympathetic to the Zealots (cf. 17:20–37), and as such they had stopped praying

⁷⁷ Based on a tense-based translation of the verb “go before” (Gk. *proagō*), this verse is often cited as evidence of realized eschatology (cf. Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, 123, 174, 197–98; and Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1995], 614). Osborne summarizes, “προάγουσιν could be a durative present (‘are entering,’ thus an inaugurated eschatology) or a futuristic present (‘are going to enter,’ thus a final eschatology)” (*Matthew*, 781, n. 9).

However, the use of *proagō* is not meant to communicate time, but rather *imperfective aspect*, highlighting the dramatic unfolding of the tax collectors and prostitutes entering into eternal life on the last day before the Pharisees and teachers of the law. The context of this saying is clearly eschatological (cf. vv. 9,15,34,40); and in Matthew’s other uses, entry into the kingdom is always future (5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23,24). Therefore, “The imagery here would seem to be best taken as of being well along the path that leads into the kingdom rather than of having already entered the kingdom” (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 863).

⁷⁸ Though the Olivet parables (Matt. 24:42–25:30) were spoken privately, they are obviously apocalyptic, and their purpose is to instill the fear of God concerning the coming judgment. In this way, they were spoken to the disciples as would-be apostates (in light of Judas’ betrayal). They were in very real danger of becoming the wicked servant (23:48), the foolish virgin (25:3), and the lazy manager (25:18). Thus, they were warned, “Stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (24:42). Dodd’s attempt to marginalize these parables as an invention of the early church is farcical (cf. *Parables of the Kingdom*, 154–74).

and lost heart in the day of the Lord (18:1). The parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1–13) is designed to mock the Pharisees, “who were lovers of money” (v. 14), because “the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light” (v. 8, NASB). In light of the coming judgment, unbelievers often use their wealth to love people more than those who supposedly live for eternal life! Similarly, the parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7) and the lost coin (vv. 8–10) are aimed at the lack of joy on the part of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who “muttered” (v. 2) about Jesus’ welcoming of the tax collectors and sinners. The parable of the lost son (vv. 11–32) delineates multiple players, but communicates the same thing. These parables about the kindness and mercy of God were primarily spoken to expose the judgmental arrogance of the Jewish leaders.⁷⁹

The more controversial parables of Matthew 13 should also be understood in this light. Akin to the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin (Luke 15:3–10), the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl (Matt. 13:44–46) were meant to expose the greedy and unwise way of life created by the Jewish leaders of the time (cf. Matt. 6:1–18; 23:5–28). Though outwardly they claimed to live for the age to come, inwardly they were actually “full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matt. 23:25). Though the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl exemplify righteousness, they are still spoken concerning “those outside,”⁸⁰ and never for a moment would they have been understood as realizing or overturning the common apocalyptic expectations concerning the inheritance of eternal life.

Likewise, the parables of the mustard seed and leaven (Matt. 13:31–33) would have been understood *negatively*, spoken “to them” (v. 13), and interpreted apocalyptically, in light of “the end of the age” (v. 40). These two terse parables are simply negative teaching devices with a single player, akin to the parables of the rich fool (Luke 12:16–21), the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6–9), and the counting of the costs (Luke 14:28–33). Leaven was commonly understood as a bad thing, Old Testament and New (cf. Ex. 12:15–20; 34:25; Lev. 2:11; Matt. 16:6,11–12; 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:9); and the allusion to Daniel 4:12 concerning the

⁷⁹ A similar design is seen in the parables of the two debtors (Luke 7:41–43), the wedding host (Luke 14:7–14), the dutiful servant (Luke 17:7–10), and the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:10–14). All of these were spoken against the prideful, entitlement attitude of the Jewish leaders.

⁸⁰ Though Jesus speaks to his disciples in Matt. 13:37–52, the parables in these verses are still aimed at the blindness of unbelievers, since they are an explanation (v. 36) of the previous parables.

mustard seed (Matt. 13:32) probably would not have been heard by Jesus' hearers in a positive light. Thus the leaven and the mustard seed most likely would have been associated with the preceding and following "weeds" (vv. 25,38), which were destined to be "burned" (vv. 30,40)—especially since the mustard seed and leaven parables are given no explanation (a point rarely appreciated). In this way, they simply communicate that God, in his great mercy, will allow the wickedness to grow to its full measure (an idea seen throughout the Scriptures; cf. Gen. 15:16; Dan. 8:23; Zech. 5:5; Matt. 23:32; 1 Thess. 2:16) until the judgment at the end of the age. Again, if the mustard seed and leaven parables are bookended by a parable concerning God allowing evil to continue to maturity, then should we not assume the unexplained parables in the middle to communicate the same message?

To justify interpreting the mustard seed and leaven as positive parables elaborating a realized eschatology, you have to 1) go against the prevailing Jewish understanding; 2) go against the common apocalyptic theme of Jesus' preaching; 3) go against the overall context of the chapter; 4) go against the immediately adjacent verses; and 5) go against the passages and elements that are referenced in the parables themselves.⁸¹ Of course, this never seems to stop proponents of realized eschatology, who treat the sayings addressed above in like manner.⁸² The interpretation of Jesus' parables in a non-apocalyptic manner,

⁸¹ Though Dodd recognized this, he forcefully rejected reason:

"Leaven" is, in general, a symbol from evil influences carrying infection. In this sense Jesus used it when He spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees (Mk. viii. 15 and parallels). By analogy, it should be used here as a symbol for a wholesome influence, propagating itself similarly by a kind of infection. In that case we should be obliged to suppose that when the Kingdom of God is compared to leaven, the suggestion is that the ministry of Jesus is itself such an influence. . . . The picture, I think, is true to history. The ministry of Jesus was like that. There was in it no element of external coercion, but in it the power of God's Kingdom worked from within, mightily permeating the dead lump of religious Judaism in His time. (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 192-93)

⁸² Unfortunately the modern academy has largely followed Dodd in his quest to save Jesus from the embarrassment of Jewish apocalypticism: "C. H. Dodd so emphasized the crisis nature of Jesus' own ministry that he interpreted judgment Day to be present whenever people responded to Jesus. Traditional Christianity has often gone to the other extreme and linked judgment exclusively with the Second Coming of Christ. Probably both poles need to be embraced" (Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 301).

Such sentiment is simply ludicrous. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever made reference to the judgment of the living and the dead prior to the day of judgment. The statement above expresses the true sentiment of modern scholarship: *that the day of the Lord has already come* (spiritually, of course), which is in clear opposition to the apostolic declaration in 2 Thess. 2:2. "Traditional Christianity"

exalting the strength of the flesh (and ultimately justifying Constantinian Christianity), is completely *anathema* to the message and ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

THE SAYINGS OF PAUL

Inaugurationists look to Paul as the primary successor of Jesus' teachings on realized eschatology. If Jesus was the Lone Ranger of second-temple Judaism, then surely Paul was his Tonto. A systematic study of Paul's writings, though, reveals a consistent apocalyptic emphasis.⁸³ Conversely, Dodd and his followers maintain that Paul and the apostles "reflected upon" the outpouring of the Spirit and progressively preached the realization of Jewish eschatology.⁸⁴ In this way, the church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, became the new and true Israel, realizing the blessings foretold by the Prophets in the "here and now."⁸⁵

Some look to Paul's relative lack of reference to "kingdom" and his emphasis on "righteousness" and the Spirit as a sign that "God's eschatological rule was already being manifested in the present."⁸⁶ Nonsense! *If Paul was redefining the*

(though often clouded by a Platonic, heavenly destiny) has linked judgment to the second coming of Christ based on a common-sense reading of the Scriptures. Though inaugurationism mitigates things with a future reality, it still declares that the day of the Lord has already come.

⁸³ J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); and Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

⁸⁴ "The primitive Church, while it enjoyed the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and appealed to the manifest work of the Spirit (somewhat naïvely conceived) as evidence of the dawn of the new Age, did not reflect upon it. Nor did it embody any clear doctrine of the fellowship in its preaching. Such a doctrine first appears in the epistles of Paul" (Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching*, 59).

⁸⁵ Dodd continues,

It is noteworthy that as his interest in the speedy advent of Christ declines, as it demonstrably does after the time when he wrote 1 Corinthians, the "futurist eschatology" of his earlier phase is replaced by this "Christ-mysticism." The hope of glory yet to come remains as a background of thought, but the foreground is more and more occupied by the contemplation of all the riches of divine grace enjoyed here and now by those who are in Christ Jesus. . . .

This was the true solution of the problem presented to the Church by the disappointment of its naïve expectation that the Lord would immediately appear; not the restless and impatient straining after signs of His coming which turned faith into fantasy and enthusiasm into fanaticism; but a fuller realization of all the depths and heights of the supernatural life here and now. (Ibid., 63)

⁸⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 822. See Dunn's chart on Jesus' and Paul's use of βασιλεία, δικαιοσύνη, and πνεῦμα (Ibid.).

kingdom and Jewish eschatology, then he would have focused his language on the Jewish eschatological terms and expounded upon them, so as to fill them with new meaning.

Rather, he simply assumed the common Jewish eschatology and focused on the means of inheriting the kingdom (righteousness before God by faith in Christ's sacrifice) and the confirmation of that means (in the deposit of the Spirit).⁸⁷

Paul's lack of emphasis on the kingdom is made up by his consistent emphasis on the day of the Lord (cf. Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:13; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Tim. 4:8), the resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:42; 2 Cor. 5:4; Phil. 3:11), and the return of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2 Tim. 4:1; Titus 2:13). Moreover, *most of his references to the kingdom are clearly eschatological* (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:24,50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1,18). Only a few references—namely Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 4:20, and Colossians 1:13—are debatable, and we will examine them next.⁸⁸ On the whole, Paul's message is simple and clear: Put faith in the cross, so as to be accounted righteous before God on the last day, thus inheriting the kingdom, resurrection, and eternal life.

The Kingdom Is Righteousness, Peace, and Joy in the Holy Spirit

Concerning the supposed apostolic belief in realized eschatology, Romans 14:17 is commonly quoted as the clearest example: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Outlining the history of modern interpretation subsequent to Schweitzer and Dodd, George Ladd concluded emphatically, "The Word of God *does* say that the Kingdom of God is a present spiritual reality. 'For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). Righteousness and peace and joy are fruits of the Spirit which God bestows now upon those who yield their lives to the rule of the Spirit.

⁸⁷ Like Jesus and John the Baptist, Paul's omission of any lengthy redefinition of the kingdom strongly supports the idea that Paul took the Jewish eschatology of his day for granted. The attempt by the New Perspective on Paul (see chapter 8) to redefine the sacrificial language of Paul, so as to communicate realized eschatology, is foul.

⁸⁸ Beyond a broad theological deduction based on the new covenant and the gift of the Holy Spirit, these three verses are quoted almost exclusively as proof of Pauline realized eschatology. Few are bold enough to say Paul interjected realized eschatology into the other eschatological phrases, such as "resurrection," "day of the Lord," "appearing," "wrath of God," etc.

They have to do with the deepest springs of the spiritual life, and this, says the inspired apostle, is the Kingdom of God.”⁸⁹

Many modern interpreters would agree with Ladd, but is this really Paul’s point in Romans 14? I do not think so. Nothing about Romans 14:17 communicates the timing of the kingdom. The verb (*eimi*) is simply referring to the Jewish messianic kingdom, which is understood as a future reality (as evidenced by the numerous eschatological references surrounding the verse).⁹⁰ We often do the same thing today when we speak of a future reality: “Your inheritance *is* a serious matter,” or “The future *is* unknown,” or “His death *is* imminent.” Paul is speaking the same way in Romans 14:17, using the verb “to be” to describe the future Jewish kingdom, rather than describing a present spiritualized reality.⁹¹

To understand Romans 14, we need to see that Paul is expounding upon the end of Romans 13. In light of our salvation being nearer now than when we first believed (13:11), Paul is arguing that “the day is at hand” (v. 12) and the night of this age is almost over. How then should we live, and what holds *eternal significance*? Paul answers,

So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly *as in the daytime*, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (vv. 12–14)

⁸⁹ *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 16–17.

⁹⁰ The verb (*eimi*) is also aspectually vague, as Porter explains: “A very small number of verbs in Greek (all verbs of the -μι conjugation) never developed a full set of tense-forms, and hence do not participate in the aspectual system. . . . The result is that these verbs offer no meaningful choice between one aspect and another. These verbs, of which εἶμι is the primary example, are called aspectually vague. *Aspectually vague verbs may be used in any verbal context since they do not carry the semantic weight of perfective, imperfective or stative verbal aspect.* Consequently, one must be cautious in giving interpretative significance to use of one of these verbs” (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 24–25; italics in the original).

⁹¹ Akin to Jesus’ statement, “And this is eternal life [αὐτή δέ ἐστιν ἡ αἰώνιος ζωή], that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Moreover, Paul’s following exhortation in Romans 15:4–13 of harmony between Jew and Gentile assumes a Jewish messianic kingdom—“in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs” (v. 8)—culminating in verse 12 with the quotation of Isaiah 11:10.

Romans 14 is simply an exposition of the phrase “as in the daytime.” The age to come will not involve drunkenness, immorality, or strife. Thus we should not engage in those things, because we are not *destined* for those things. Moreover, we were not *designed* for those things in the beginning. They are fruitless and hold no eternal value.

Similarly, arguments between Jewish and Gentile believers concerning dietary laws (14:2–4,14–16,20–21) and calendar observance (14:5–9) are fruitless and hold no value when we all “stand before the judgment seat of God” (v. 10). Though we may “pass judgment” (vv. 3,4,10,13,22) on each other in this age concerning these things, they will hold little weight on the last day, when “each of us will give an account of himself to God” (v. 12).

In essence, “the kingdom of God” (v. 17) and “the judgment seat of God” (v. 10) are *functionally synonymous*.⁹² What we eat and drink in this age will be of little consequence on the day of the Lord and in the kingdom of God. The age to come will consist of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, and the judgment seat of God will not be a matter of eating and drinking. Therefore, in this age “let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (v. 19). In this way, “strong” believers will not be dragged into the meaningless toils of “weak” believers, who in turn will not divide the body of Christ by their vain judgments.

Far from redefining the common Jewish eschatology, Paul is simply describing its future reality, hence reinforcing the sobriety and eternal perspective inherent in Jewish apocalypticism.⁹³ Thus, to summarize: “Let us walk properly as in the daytime,” and not “quarrel over opinions” which hold little eternal significance, since the age to come “is not a matter of eating and

⁹² The connection between v. 10 and v. 17 seems universally lacking; cf. Cranfield (ICC), Dunn (WBC), Wright (NIB), Moo (NICNT), Schreiner (BECNT), Fitzmyer (AB), Jewett (Hermeneia), Mounce (NAC), Harrison and Hagner (EBC), Bruce (TNTC), etc. Ben Witherington’s translation of βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as “Dominion of God” (reflecting his realized eschatology) seems particularly inappropriate (*Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 340).

⁹³ Here William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam are to be commended for their restraint. “The phrase is used normally in St. Paul of that Messianic kingdom which is to be the reward and goal of the Christian life. . . . The term is, of course, derived through the words of Christ from the current Jewish conceptions of an actual earthly kingdom; how far exactly such conceptions have been spiritualized in St. Paul it may be difficult to say” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of the Romans*, 3rd ed., ICC [New York: Scribner’s, 1897], 391).

drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” This futurist approach squares with both the passage as a whole and with common expectations of the kingdom.⁹⁴ Interposing realized eschatology into Romans 14 is both illogical and counterproductive to Paul’s argument that eschatology (cf. “salvation,” “the day,” “judgment seat,” “kingdom”) is the primary driver of Christian discipleship.⁹⁵

The Kingdom Is Not a Matter of Talk but of Power

Similar to Romans 14:17, Paul also describes the coming kingdom in 1 Corinthians 4:20: “The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (NIV).⁹⁶ Many interpreters understand this statement to be a clear declaration of realized eschatology. As with Romans 14, however, the context does not even come close to supporting this interpretation. Eschatological references abound, both preceding (cf. 1:8,29; 2:6; 3:13; 4:5) and following (cf. 5:5; 6:2–3,14; 7:29; etc.) the statement. Moreover, Paul’s use of “kingdom of God” elsewhere in the letter is clearly eschatological (cf. 6:9–10; 15:24, 50). His “very casual” use of the phrase also indicates that it was a commonly understood term to both Paul and his readers.⁹⁷ If realized eschatology had become so commonly associated with the

⁹⁴ Heinrich A. W. Meyer is a notable exception to common sentiment:

And so [the kingdom of God] is not here, anything else than the *Messiah’s kingdom*, the erection of which begins with the *Parousia*, belonging not to the αἰὼν οὗτος, but to the αἰὼν μέλλων (1 Cor. 6:9,10, 15:24,50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5); not therefore the (invisible) *church*, the *regnum gratiae*, or the earthly *ethical kingdom of God* (Reiche, de Wette, Philippi, Lipsius, following older expositors), *res Christiana* (Baumgarten-Crusius), and the like. “*The Messianic kingdom is not eating and drinking;*” i.e., the essential characteristic of this kingdom does not consist in the principle that a man, in order to become a member of it, should eat and drink this or that or everything without distinction, but in the principle that one should be upright, etc. (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, ed. William P. Dickson, trans. John C. Moore and Edwin Johnson [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1874], 316; italics in the original)

⁹⁵ This, of course, was a common apostolic presupposition, as evidenced by Peter: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Peter 3:11–12, NIV; cf. 1 Peter 1:13–16).

⁹⁶ The verbal similarities between the two verses are also commonly referenced (e.g., Dunn, *Romans* 9–16, 822).

⁹⁷ Though Gordon Fee strangely comes to the opposite conclusion:

What Paul is concerned about is “the kingdom of God.” This is one of the rare occurrences in Paul of this term that dominates the ministry and teaching of Jesus. But the very casual

phrase, where is the evidence (i.e., long discourses and elaborations) that its meaning had been so radically redefined *and* commonly accepted?

Rather, Paul had in mind the Jewish messianic kingdom, and the coming of this kingdom does not consist of talk but of power. As I once heard it preached, “Jesus will not cleanse the earth of wickedness by striking it *with footnotes!*” He will come, instead, *with a rod* (cf. Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4; Rev. 19:15) and punish the wicked for their evil words and deeds. This is the kind of “power” Paul is speaking of in reference to the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 5:13; 6:9–10). Similarly, Paul threatens to execute a temporal judgment by coming “with a rod” (4:21). As such, *Paul understands that temporal judgments within the church are meant to bring sobriety concerning God’s eternal judgment.*

This pattern is repeated in the following verses concerning the excommunication of the sexually immoral man, to be done with the hope “that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (5:5). As Paul justifies, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’” (vv. 12–13, NIV).

Paul reiterates this approach again in relation to lawsuits among believers (6:1–8). Because believers will “judge the world” (v. 2) in the age to come, they ought to be able to judge within the church in matters “pertaining to this life” (v. 3). Moreover, the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34) is also designed to maintain repentance “until he comes” (v. 26). Anyone who partakes of communion without repentance “eats and drinks judgment on himself” (v. 29). Such temporal judgments (e.g., being “weak and ill”; v. 30) are meant to shake us, “so that we may not be condemned along with the world” (v. 32).

This pattern of temporal judgment awakening the unrepentant to eternal judgment is what Paul has in mind when he says that “the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (4:20). Consequently, Paul follows with the question, “What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?” (v. 21). Paul is here implicitly contrasting God’s gentleness

way in which it here appears indicates that it was a regular part of his own understanding of the gospel. In most instances in Paul the term refers to the consummation of the kingdom at the coming of Christ (cf., e.g., 6:9–10; 15:50); but this passage, along with Rom. 14:17, makes it certain that for him the kingdom was “now” as well as “not yet.” (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 192)

in this age with his severity at the day of the Lord. The “power” of the “arrogant people” (v. 19) simply refers to their judging and administrating within the church, which may indeed involve a public display of the Spirit’s judgment (cf. Ananias and Sapphira; Acts 5:1–10).

Paul’s reference to the eschatological kingdom coming in power (and the implied divine judgment therein) makes much more sense than a present realized kingdom.⁹⁸ (If that were the case, it seems Paul would refer to handing the sexually immoral man over to a present realization of the day of the Lord in 5:5 and to believers exercising a present judgment of the world and the angels in 6:2–3!) Thus, the reading of realized eschatology into Paul’s reference to the kingdom of God in 4:20 is completely out of line with 1) commonly held expectations of the kingdom; 2) the rest of Paul’s uses of “kingdom” in the letter; and 3) the immediate context of chapters 4–6, which highlight temporal judgment in light of eternal judgment.⁹⁹

We Have Been Transferred into the Kingdom

The last of the verses commonly quoted as proof of Paul’s belief in a realized eschatology is Colossians 1:13: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, we have here another example of simplistic reliance upon a tense-based translation of the Greek verb to prove realized eschatology. The verbs “deliver” and “transfer” are primarily understood as aorist tense instead of

⁹⁸ Robert L. Saucy well notes, “The apostle has just chided the Corinthians for their boasting as if they had already attained the kingdom and were reigning as kings (cf. 4:8). He would hardly talk of a present kingdom just a few verses later” (*The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 107).

⁹⁹ Again, Heinrich A. W. Meyer is notably reasonable in his approach to this passage: “The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, again, is not here, as it never is elsewhere (see on Matt. 3:2, 6:10), and in particular never in Paul’s writings (neither in this passage nor in Rom. 14:7; Col. 1:13, 4:11; see on these verses), the church, or the kingdom of God in the ethical sense (Neander: ‘the fellowship of the divine life, which is brought about by fellowship with the Redeemer’), but the Messianic kingdom, in which, at its expected (speedy) manifestation, those only can become members who are truly believing and truly sanctified (Col. 3:3 f.; Phil. 4:18–21; Eph. 5:5, al.)” (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, vol. 1, ed. William P. Dickson, trans. D. Douglas Bannerman [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1879], 135).

¹⁰⁰ As F. F. Bruce so boldly declared, “In the affirmation that believers have already been brought into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son we have an example of truly realized eschatology” (*The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 52).

perfective aspect.¹⁰¹ Some even go so far as to claim that Paul has no future reality in mind at all!¹⁰²

The surrounding context of Paul's thought, however, is clearly eschatological, for in the previous verse the Colossians have been qualified "to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." Everywhere else in Paul's letters the inheritance of the saints is understood as eschatological (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 3:18; 5:21; Eph. 1:11,14,18; 5:5; Col. 3:24).¹⁰³ Moreover, Paul's use of "light" (v. 12) and "darkness" (v. 13) is elsewhere in line with the Jewish apocalyptic understanding of this age and the age to come (cf. Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:5).¹⁰⁴ Thus Paul would understand "the forgiveness of

¹⁰¹ "The aorist tenses point to an eschatology that is truly realized (i.e. God had *already* qualified [ἰκανώσαντι] the Colossians to share in the inheritance, he had *already* delivered [ἔρρύσατο] them from this alien power and had *already* transferred [μετέστησεν] them to his Son's kingdom), while by contrast, the present tense of verse 14, "we have" (ἔχομεν), stresses the continued results of the redemption wrought in the past" (Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC [Dallas: Word, 1998], 26).

¹⁰² "The aorist forms ἔρρύσατο (delivered) and μετέστησεν (transferred) point to baptism as the event through which the change from one dominion to another has taken place, in that we have been wrested from the power of darkness and placed in the 'kingdom' of the beloved Son of God. . . . There is no mention of an enthusiastic anticipation of the consummation. Rather, just as darkness designates those who are lost, light characterizes the rule of Christ, which here and now shapes the life and conduct of those who are baptized" (Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 38).

Of course, Lohse does not believe Paul wrote Colossians, because "Wherever Paul mentions the 'rule of God' (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) in his letters, the futuristic meaning of the concept is presupposed, just as throughout primitive Christian proclamation" (Ibid., 37–38). "Therefore, Paul cannot be considered to be the direct or indirect author of Colossians" (Ibid., 181). If realized eschatology is not present in the letter to the Colossians, then the theological differences are insubstantial, and the differences of expression can be simply attributed to Paul's aging and "specific circumstances" (Ibid., 180).

¹⁰³ So James Dunn argues against common sense:

The note of realized eschatology becomes even stronger in the next two clauses, for what is described here would elsewhere be thought of as reserved for the end of history/time. . . . More striking still is the fact that elsewhere in the Pauline corpus talk of full sharing in the kingdom of God is always future (1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Thes. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1,18; the formulaic phrase "inherit the kingdom of God" in 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; cf. Eph. 5:5). There is nothing quite like this claim that believers in Christ Jesus have already (aorist tense) been transferred into the kingdom, like a whole people transported from their traditional territory to settle in a new region. (*The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 77)

¹⁰⁴ Assumedly derived from the Prophets (cf. Isa. 9:1–2, 42:6–7,16, 58:8–10, 60:1–3; Amos 5:18–20; cf. 1 Enoch 92:4–5; 108:11–14; 2 Baruch 18:1–2). Some give too much weight to the influence of Qumran (cf.

sins” (v. 14) in light of “the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:3–4).

Because of the striking similarity of language, Acts 26:15–18 is helpful when discussing Colossians 1:12–14. Paul describes when Jesus appeared and commissioned him by saying,

I have appeared to you for this purpose . . . delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to *open their eyes*, so that they may *turn from darkness to light* and from *the power of Satan to God*, that they may receive *forgiveness of sins* and *a place* among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:16–18)

Both passages contain the same basic elements. The opening of the eyes of the Gentiles is echoed in the prayer of Colossians 1:9–12. The turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God is the main point of verses 13–14.¹⁰⁵ And the receiving of forgiveness of sins and “a place” (cf. “*the inheritance* among all those who are sanctified”; Acts 20:32) is the result of such repentance. No one would read realized eschatology into Acts 26 (cf. “my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers”; v. 6), yet it is so confidently and forcefully interjected into Colossians 1.

Paul’s point in Colossians 1:12–14 is simply that of Acts 26:16–18. Because we have been qualified to share in the eternal inheritance by the sacrifice of Christ, *we will most certainly be delivered* (perfective aspect) from this present evil age and brought into the coming kingdom of Christ.¹⁰⁶ This eschatological approach

Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 36–38) and/or the exodus motif (cf. N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986], 64–66).

¹⁰⁵ The translation of *methistēmi* (“transfer, remove, turn away”) is also debatable. Occurring only five times in the NT (Luke 16:4; Acts 13:22; 19:26; 1 Cor. 13:2; Col. 1:13), three of those simply mean “remove” (Luke 16:4; Acts 13:22; 1 Cor. 13:2), leaving only Acts 19:26 for comparison: “This Paul has persuaded and turned away [*methistēmi*] a great many people.” Justification for “transferred” in Col. 1:13 is extrabiblical—i.e., Josephus (BDAG, 625). Paul’s point seems to be akin to Acts 19:26—we have been turned away from the power of darkness toward the *parousia* and the kingdom of the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 1:10).

¹⁰⁶ Heinrich A. W. Meyer here argued for the proleptic aorist:

The matter is to be conceived *locally* (εἰς ἕτερον τόπον, Plat. *Legg.* vi. p. 762 B), so that the deliverance from the power of darkness appears to be united with the *removing away* into the kingdom . . . that is, *into the kingdom of the Messiah*, Eph. 5:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; for this and nothing else is meant by ἡ βασιλεία Χριστοῦ (τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῶν οὐρανῶν) in all passages of the N. T. Comp. 4:11; and see on Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Matt. 3:2, 6:10. The aorist μετέστ. is to be explained by the matter being conceived proleptically (τῇ γὰρ ἐλπιδὶ ἐσώθημεν, Rom.

accords with the rest of the letter (cf. 1:5,22,27; 3:4,6,24) and the rest of Paul's writings. The interposing of realized eschatology into Colossians 1:13 runs perfectly counter to Paul's thought and his later exhortation:

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For *you have died*, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (3:2–4)

Those who lay down their lives in this age and put no confidence in the flesh will inherit the coming kingdom. Realized eschatology shuts the kingdom of God in people's faces *by telling them they have something to live for in this age*. This is a deathtrap which will only "lead people into more and more ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:16) and ultimately destroy their faith.

Conclusion

The vast majority of Jewish eschatological references in the New Testament clearly remain as such. The few verses discussed above are commonly cited as proof that Jesus and the apostles reinterpreted and transformed the Jewish eschatology of their day. But as we have seen, these verses—read in the context of their surrounding passages—are actually forceful affirmations of the plain reading of the Law and Prophets. If realized eschatology (i.e., the "already" of inaugurationalism) is nonexistent in the New Testament, what then are we left with? Precisely—*Jewish apocalypticism*, which must be augmented with a *cruciform theology*. Such a worldview lies behind Jesus' rhetorical question, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah [Jewish] should suffer these things [cruciform] and then enter into his glory [apocalyptic]?" (Luke 24:26, NRSV).

Why then speak so forcefully against realized eschatology? It is often claimed that believers will not engage the world and act apart from the motivation of realized eschatology. However, I find this logic to be both flawed and lethal. It is *flawed* in that motivation is driven by conviction of truth and falsehood, love and hate, reward and punishment, etc. Such conviction can apply equally to things of this age (realized eschatology) or things of the age to come (Jewish eschatology). Motivation derived from eternal realities creates holy ambition; motivation derived from temporal realities creates vain ambition.

8:24), as something already *consummated* (comp. on ἐδόξασε, Rom. 8:30). (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians*, ed. William P. Dickson, trans. John C. Moore [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1875], 270–71; italics in the original)

As such, realized eschatology is *lethal*, primarily for three reasons. First, it destroys believers' joy in the blessed hope by setting their minds and hearts on an inheritance in this age, while simultaneously mitigating their urgency concerning the imminence of the day of the Lord. This approach erodes an eternal perspective and creates a fundamental worldliness within the church. Second, it disqualifies believers from the eternal inheritance by changing the standard of discipleship in this age from the cross to a spiritually realized kingdom (i.e., the cross is no longer the embodiment of the will of God in this age but rather a historical event which only enabled the present kingdom). This approach inevitably leads to believers laying down their crosses, so to speak, and rejecting a theology of suffering. Third, it deludes believers into supersessionist beliefs concerning the spiritualization of Israel and the jettisoning of the unique calling of the Jews in redemptive history. The church becomes the "new Israel," and Jews are too often held in contempt. Again, realized eschatology irreparably damages the biblical timeline, particularly concerning 1) the day of the Lord, 2) the cross, and 3) Jewish election. Thus, at every turn realized eschatology contradicts the Jewish cruciform-apocalyptic nature of the Bible.

For this reason, Paul described the realized eschatology of his day as "irreverent babble" (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16). It is *babble* because it usually goes on and on, with little or no correspondence with reality. For centuries Orthodox Jews have consistently pointed out that Gentile Christians are fundamentally out of touch with reality: The wicked still rule the earth, the nations still surround Israel with raging hatred, Jerusalem has not been glorified, the messianic temple has not been built, the Messiah is not sitting on the Davidic throne, the light of God's day has not dawned, the dead have not been raised, the earth has not been restored, etc. Nor does such a realized vision line up with the Old Testament. Where do we find such a spiritualization of these things in the Law and the Prophets? Common sense (the basic ability of reason and deduction given by God) should lead us to the simple conclusion that the resurrection, kingdom, and day of the Lord are a future reality anchored in the parousia of Christ.

Moreover, realized eschatology is *irreverent* because it treats trivially that which God deems most holy. God spoke and revealed himself to the prophets, and as such his self-revelation is bound to his vision for the future. His mantric self-declaration as "the God of Israel" is likewise inextricably tied to "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). The restoration of Israel (Acts 1:6), the redemption of

Jerusalem (Luke 2:38), the coming Davidic kingdom (Mark 11:10)—these are not small things to be reimagined, minimized, and marginalized. Rather, Jesus taught his disciples to pray with a holy fear: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:9–10). The messianic kingdom is God’s kingdom. It is God’s will. *It is holy*. Realized eschatology is the product of Gentile arrogance (Rom. 11:17–25). It disrespects the God of Israel. *It is unholy*.

Thus Paul declared that Hymenaeus and those who embraced the realized eschatology of their day had “made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Tim. 1:19), and as such they ought to be “handed over to Satan that they may learn not to *blaspheme*” (v. 20). The trivialization of Jewish eschatology through various techniques of reinterpretation under the banner of realized eschatology is tantamount to blasphemy. Therefore Paul likened the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus to “gangrene” (2 Tim. 2:17), which quite literally “overturns” (Gk. *anatrepō*) people’s faith (v. 18). So Paul declared concerning such teaching: “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” (v. 19, NIV).