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## Following Jesus in the Kingdom of God: Leadership in the Synoptic Gospels

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**Following Jesus in the Kingdom of God: Leadership in the Synoptic Gospels**  
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**Introduction**

When I counsel my students about how to approach a research topic, the *first* thing I tell them to do is to read a good general article on the subject in one of the several standard scholarly Bible dictionaries. Such a strategy does several things: (1) it provides an overview of, and “feel” for, the subject; (2) it offers insight as to how one might organize their research; and (3) it suggests bibliographic resources with which to move deeper into the subject. That is usually sound advice; however, when it comes to the study of leadership in the Bible, that advice is not all that helpful. You will look in vain for an article on “leadership” in the major Bible dictionaries. You may find an article on “lead,” but that refers to the heavy metal, not the process, skills, and characteristics involved in managing people. There are, perhaps, lots of reasons for that, not least the fact that in English the term “leadership” connotes the act of one person exercising power and/or control over others. Here are some synonyms listed in an online English thesaurus for “leader”: chief, head, principal, boss, CEO, commander, master, manager, captain, ruler, authority, and the like.<sup>1</sup> The Bible, it seems, is not very interested in this subject.

Moreover, the study of leadership in the Synoptic Gospels (the task of this chapter), is further complicated by two additional limitations. First, the Synoptic Gospels have surprisingly little to say about the subject of leadership *per se*. Paul, on the other hand, addresses the subject explicitly in both 1 Timothy (3:1ff.) and Titus (1:5ff; 2:1ff.), even identifying specific qualifications (or at least desired qualities) for church leaders such as bishop (*episkopos*), deacon (*diakonos*), elder, both men and women (*presbuteros, presbutera*). Moreover, Paul has much to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.

say about spiritual gifts (which he calls “grace gifts,” *charismata*, in 1 Cor. 12:4) as the chief grounds and provocation for exercising leadership in the church (see, for example, Eph. 4:11ff.). However, the Gospels in general, and the Synoptic Gospels in particular, have almost nothing to say about leadership *as a subject in and of itself*. No doubt, part of the reason is that the subject of the Gospels is Jesus, not leadership or any other subject apart from him. Indeed, the Gospels are biographies, of sorts, of Jesus, the focus never straying from his story. Paul’s letters, on the other hand, are both occasional (that is, they are “occasioned” by the needs of the congregation addressed) and pastoral (that is, the subjects arise from issues in the congregation, rather than Paul’s agenda). We do not know who the congregations were being addressed by the Gospels or what issues they might have had.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the Gospels are *narratives*, not letters. Narratives, unlike letters, approach subjects indirectly, obliquely, subtly, rather than overtly and directly. When Paul wants to address the subject of leadership in the church, he does so directly by addressing the subject specifically and overtly: “The word is faithful: If someone aspires [to be] a bishop, he desires a good work. It is necessary, therefore, for a bishop to be irreproachable, a one-woman man, sober-minded, wise, dignified, hospitable, a natural teacher, no drunkard, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, and materialistic” (1 Tim 3:1-2).<sup>3</sup> The same is true with paranses (proverbs arranged without a general, unifying theme), such as the Epistle of James in the New Testament. When James wants to address the topic of leadership, just as with Paul, he does so directly: “Let not many of you become teachers, my brothers, knowing that you shall receive a greater (that is,

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<sup>2</sup> We can make educated guesses, based on clues and hints in the Gospels, but they are nonetheless guesses. At no time do the Synoptic Evangelists ever address the audiences directly and say, “Now, my subject is....” It is possible that the author of the Fourth Gospel does so (cf. John 20:31), but even that is debated. See D. A. Carson, “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* vol. 106 (1987), pp. 639-51.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Scripture are the writer’s own.

more severe) judgment” (James 3:1). However, when the Synoptics address leadership, they do so through the *characters in the story*, leaving it to the reader to navigate the nuances and, thereby, get the point. To be sure, there *is* a point the Gospels want to make about leadership, but it will not be as easily ascertained as it would be in more “direct” genres where author and audience communicate directly and immediately with one another, rather than indirectly through the medium of story.

What that means, practically speaking, is that in our study of leadership in the Gospels we must employ an interpretive method sensitive to, and congenial with, the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of narrative as opposed to less subtle genres. That is, we must not look for information about leadership where it will not be found. It is not as simple as looking up passages that overtly talk about “leadership” as a subject; rather, we must “read between the lines,” as it were, and listen to the story tell its tale, a tale that has implications for our study of leadership. To paraphrase Hamlet, “The *story’s* the thing.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, to be sure there is a degree of subjectivity here, but as modern critical methods such as literary criticism, narrative criticism, composition criticism, reader-response criticism, et al. have shown, not as much as one might think. In narrative, the author employs widely-recognized communicative strategies – plot, character development, setting, scene, juxtaposition, irony, humor, and authoritative speakers/actors (what we might call the story’s “hero” or “protagonist”) – to guide the reader toward the message the author wishes to impart with his story, and the point, or points, he wishes to score with them.<sup>5</sup> Knowing these strategies, the interpretation of

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2.

<sup>5</sup> As Ben Witherington correctly points out: “Recent literary criticism of the Gospels has stressed the importance of determining point of view. This may be seen as a key to deciphering an author’s purposes in writing a Gospel. From a literary critical standpoint, an author tries to place the reader in the shoes of one or another character in the story so that the reader views matters from that character’s point of view...For example, it is hard for the reader to really identify (sic) with the disciples when the central character Jesus says to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’ (4:40). Such remarks, if accepted at face value, put a distance between the reader and the

narrative becomes a case of listening to the “voice” of the author in the story *as a whole*. The story has its own internal integrity which, if observed, will guide us to the *message of the story as a whole*, as well as to the supporting “mini messages” in the individual scenes.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the Synoptic Gospels we are aided in our discovery of the story’s message by the fact that we have *multiple* accounts of the same story. Though the individual narratives of Matthew, Mark, and Luke differ somewhat, both in detail and emphases, the storyline and message are surprisingly consistent across the three narratives.<sup>7</sup> This gives us confidence that our reading of the author’s essential message is valid and trustworthy. The *three* Synoptic Gospels tell *one* story, not three different stories.

Moreover, because we have *multiple* accounts of the same story, our task is actually easier in that we can “read across” the Synoptic Gospels listening to the single story being told, thus reinforcing our findings. In the case of the Synoptic Gospels, there is, largely, a single plot,

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disciples and at the same time bind the reader even more firmly to Jesus’ point of view, which, not incidentally, is the author’s.” *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 59. See also Robert H. Stein, *Luke, The New American Commentary*, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 57; David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Mitchie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2012), *passim*; and R. Alan Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Literary criticism (sometimes called the “new literary criticism” to distinguish it from an older method that focused on the transmission of the text) is a broad category of text-centered approaches that includes everything from redaction criticism to deconstructionism to structuralism to reader-response criticism to narrative criticism, etc. While structuralism tends to locate the “truth” of the text in the “deep structures” latent within the text that (according to structuralists) transcend context and situation, not all literary critics are willing to ignore the historical context of the text. Deconstructionists attempt to “deconstruct” the text by stripping away the social, political, and moral “constructs” (as they call them) of the original authors, believing that these constructs are not “portable” and should not be brought into and imposed upon a contemporary, postmodern mindset. Literary critics are interested primarily in the text as “literature” but, to varying degrees, may also take seriously the historicity of the text. An example of literary criticism is reader-response criticism which is interested in listening to the original author and trying to hear the “signals” they believe he has set up and sent to his readers, believing that there is an on-going communication between writer and reader (who share a perspective that differs from that of any character in the story) that must be mastered if we are going to “hear” the text as it was meant to be heard. For a summary of the use of literary methods of interpretation when interpreting Gospels (and Mark in particular), see Pheme Perkins, “The Gospel of Mark, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. VIII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 509-513. For a helpful discussion, and critique, of literary criticism, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 57-69.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the storyline of the Synoptic Gospels is so “surprisingly consistent” that most scholars believe some form of interdependence is likely. Cf. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 85ff.

a consistent “cast of characters,” a common setting and scenes in which the action occurs, and a reasonably consistent array of issues, themes, and emphases that come through. Plotting that across the Synoptic Gospels will take us a long way toward understanding the role of leadership in that common story.

To be sure, each individual Gospel also manifests themes, emphases, and concerns peculiar to that particular Gospel. As we look at leadership across the Synoptics, we will also need to take notice of each Gospel’s individual “take” on leadership as it comes through the common narrative.

### **The Narrative Context of the Synoptic Gospels: The Kingdom of God**

If the Gospels are, as we have suggested, narratives about Jesus, then the metanarrative both behind and beneath those narratives is the kingdom of God. About that there is rare scholarly consensus.<sup>8</sup> Practically speaking, that means that our study of leadership in the Synoptic Gospels will have to be conducted against the backdrop, and in the context, of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup> Jesus had no interest in “leadership” *per se*, addressing the

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<sup>8</sup> “Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus,” George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 54. For the definitive summary of both Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God and the scholarly literature on the subject, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in a real sense the study of *any* subject in the Synoptic Gospels will have to take into account Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God as *the* narrative context for such a study. That is because the key idea at the core of the first-century Jewish worldview (of which the New Testament was a product) was a fundamental eschatological dualism referred to as the doctrine of the Two Ages: the belief that the world as it is (the “Present Evil Age”) is given over to the dominion of Satan who has usurped God’s rightful sovereignty over God’s creation, but that the “Age to Come,” which is just over the horizon, *is the world of the kingdom of God* in which God’s legitimate sovereignty (i.e., God’s “kingdom”) will be finally and fully reestablished over all the world bringing with it redemption, peace, and justice. The phrase “kingdom of God,” then, is the “Synoptic shorthand” for this belief. When the Synoptic Gospels say “kingdom of God,” this is what they mean (see Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*). Moreover, it is not merely so for the Synoptic Gospels. One can make the case that this essential eschatological dualism of the “Present Evil Age” and the “Age to Come” is *the* hermeneutical matrix for the entire New Testament. In the Gospel of John, for example, the “Age to Come” or the “kingdom of God” is translated into the phrase “life of the Age,” or as it is frequently mistranslated, “eternal life” (Greek, *zoe aionion*). Paul clearly believed in the doctrine of the Two Ages: “[Jesus] who gave himself for our sins *so that he might*

subject as such only in one place in the Synoptic tradition.<sup>10</sup> What he *does* do is to speak incessantly about the kingdom of God, the fulfillment of Israel's hope, which he believed to have been realized fully, if not finally, in his own life, ministry, and, supremely, death and resurrection. Consequently, if we are to study leadership in the Gospels, we are first going to have to understand Jesus' message of the kingdom of God.

### The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus

The New Testament is thoroughly eschatological, New Testament people believing that they were living between the coming of Christ and the coming of Christ; the latter they referred to as his *Parousia*.<sup>11</sup> They apparently acquired this perspective from Jesus himself, having been convinced that in his life and ministry, and ultimately in his death and resurrection, the kingdom of God had broken through to this world, pressing its claim upon people, and establishing in its behalf a new, alternative community of people who had caught sight of "another world" in which God is sovereign and his will and way hold sway.

Jesus was a Jew and his mission was chiefly among the Jewish people who looked for, and longed for, the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>12</sup> After centuries of subjugation, the Jewish

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*deliver us from this present evil age*" (Gal 1:4). It is also the heuristic backstory of the General Epistles, as illustrated in 1 Peter 5:10 and 2 Peter 1:11, although the doctrine of the Two Ages is typically obscured by the translations that insist on translating the Greek word "age" (*aionion*) by the English word "eternal," thus severing it from its etymological, historical, and hermeneutical context. And, of course, the dualism of the Two Ages is everywhere assumed as the interpretive framework for the Apocalypse. See G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 42ff., who comments: "Whatever be the origin of the specific idiom [the Two Ages], the idea expressed by it goes back to the Old Testament contrast between the present world and the future redeemed order. It provides the framework for Jesus' entire message and ministry as reported by the Synoptic Gospels," p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the Request of James and John, Mark 10:35ff. and par. See discussion below.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matt 24:3. While the term eschatology literally means "study of last things," New Testament scholars use the term to refer to the consistent emphasis in the New Testament on the fact that the *eschaton* (End) broke in and broke through in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. With the events surrounding the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus (beginning with the proclamation of John the Baptist), the *eschaton* and the advent of God's kingdom decisively, if not fully, broke into our world effectively ending the world "as we know it." For a fuller treatment of this theme and its central significance in the New Testament, see G. E. Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament*, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Matt 15:24.

people read the Prophets hopefully and expectantly about the advent of the Day of the LORD, a day when YHWH would reassert and reestablish his sovereignty over the nations.<sup>13</sup> The hope was an eschatological one in that the Day would usher in the end of history, which is what “eschatological” means, and the advent of God’s sovereign rule, which is what “kingdom of God” means. On that day, two things would happen: Jews, God’s people, would be vindicated, and the nations of the earth, which had rejected God’s sovereignty, would be vanquished.<sup>14</sup> There were differences of opinion among the Jewish people about when the Day would come – some believed it would come only after Israel kept the Law for a full day; others believed that it would come only after certain “signs” had been fulfilled; still others believed that it would come only after the Messiah, or in the case of the Qumraneers, *two* Messiahs, had been manifest – but most believed that the Day of the LORD would vindicate God’s people, the Jews, vanquish the enemies of God’s people, and establish God’s sovereign rule, God’s kingdom, over the earth.<sup>15</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus’ proclamation met with initial receptivity, for the imminent in-breaking of the kingdom of God was his central message.<sup>16</sup> Thanks to the Prophets,

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Isa 2; 25:6-27:13; 34-35; Joel 2:28ff.; Amos 5:18ff.; etc.

<sup>14</sup> As Beasley-Murray states: “...among the Hebrews the Day of the Lord connoted above all the overthrow of the enemies of the Lord as in a day of battle. And this points to the origin of the concept: it rose to prominence in Israel’s early history when the nation entered the promised land and sought to subdue its peoples under the Lord’s leadership...The implication is plain: the prophet’s contemporaries understood that the Day of the Lord would be a day of calamity for the earth, but they were assured that its desolation would meet other nations and that it would issue in the elect people being made lords of the world;” *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>15</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 37ff. According to Jewish expectation of the time, the Messiah’s primary role was to effect the Day of the LORD by delivering Israel and shattering Israel’s oppressors; cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 58. The fact that Jesus did not function as expected gave rise to confusion and controversy both among disciples and detractors; cf. John the Baptist’s question to Jesus: “Are you the Coming One (i.e. Messiah), or should we seek another?” (Luke 7:20). See also J. Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p. 310.

<sup>16</sup> Mark 1:15 summarizes the essence of Jesus’ proclamation as “The time (*kairos* in the Greek, indicating time in its qualitative, rather than quantitative, sense; hence, a reference to the Day of the LORD) has been fulfilled (*peplerotai*), and the kingdom of God has arrived (*engiken*); repent and trust the good news.” In his book, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, C. H. Dodd made the case for translating Mark’s Greek term *engiken* as “arrived” or “has come,” rather than “drawn near.” He based that translation on the Hebrew and Aramaic words that likely lie beneath Mark’s Greek translation; namely, *naga* and *meta*, respectively; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), p. 44. Some scholars subsequently accused Dodd of rejecting *any* notion of a *future* kingdom of God; however, that is a misreading of Dodd, as Dodd’s own writings clearly attest (see discussion



Jews who read their Bible (though the Old Testament was still in flux at this time, the Prophets had already been recognized as authoritative) had a fairly clear picture of what the Day of the LORD would entail when it finally came; and when Jesus emerged up in the Galilee proclaiming that the long-awaited Day of the LORD, with its corollary of the kingdom of God, had finally arrived, the enthusiasm and excitement was palpable. However, there were four aspects of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom that ran afoul of contemporary expectation and, consequently, startled his hearers: (1) the kingdom is here *now*; (2) the kingdom is present *personally* in Jesus' life and ministry; (3) the kingdom comes in surprising ways (for example, through sacrifice rather than subjugation, and through cross rather than crown); and (4) the kingdom, frustrating as it does the expectations of many, is hidden from all except those who see with faith's eyes.<sup>17</sup>

#### Discipleship and the Kingdom of God

The fact that Jesus' understanding and proclamation of the kingdom of God ran counter to the expectations of many first-century Jews, and was rejected by most, necessitated something of a "Plan B" in which Jesus called out from among unbelieving Israel a new, "remnant Israel." He created it by calling to himself the nucleus of this "new Israel" in the form of a group of disciples who symbolically replaced unbelieving Israel - "the Twelve."<sup>18</sup> While the concept of calling disciples was not new in first-century Judaism, what Jesus did with it was completely without precedent. Rabbis bound their disciples to the Torah, not themselves. The rabbi was merely the "Torah guide," not the embodiment of the Torah itself. But Jesus bound his disciples

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below). Interestingly, scholarly consensus has large vindicated Dodd in that most New Testament scholars would agree that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in Mark 1:15 emphasizes *presence* over prospect, though, of course, the latter is not excluded. Beasley-Murray voices the consensus: "*If the time before the kingdom is finished, the time of the kingdom has begun*" (emphasis his), *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Aloysius Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom: A Redaction-Critical Study of the References to the Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1972), *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. E. Ladd says, "By the acted parable of choosing Twelve, Jesus taught that he was raising up a new congregation to displace the nation that was rejecting his message;" *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 107.

to himself, audaciously asserting that he was not only the kingdom's herald, but its *embodiment*. God's sovereign rule was present in Jesus' person and message in a way unprecedented in Judaism of that period. Disciples, therefore, had to be committed not only to Jesus' message, but to Jesus.<sup>19</sup> This new group of "the Twelve" who had caught sight of the kingdom both in Jesus' message and person, therefore, became representatives of the new, true Israel, the faithful remnant, the core of the new community of the kingdom Jesus had come to create. The number, being symbolic and representative, would change, but the requirements for discipleship would remain constant, as Luke records in Acts.<sup>20</sup>

While the Twelve served both as symbolic representation and leadership nucleus, the larger group of disciples (of which the Twelve were a part) formed the "new Israel," the new *qahal* (community) of the kingdom of God.<sup>21</sup> This new community (*qahal*), which Matthew translates as "church" (Greek *ekklesia*), was comprised of "disciples" (then and now) who by their faith have become the true people of God, the "new Israel," having replaced the rebellious and recalcitrant nation of Israel.<sup>22</sup> This new community (*qahal*) of disciples both lives in the kingdom (that is, under the sovereign reign of God) and bears witness to it. It is the *kingdom* that informs both who they are and what they do, including their understandings of leadership (cf. Mark 10:35ff.). It is *eschatological* in that it is the mission of this community and its leaders to display in *this* world (referred to in the biblical tradition as the "present evil age;" cf. Gal 1:4) the

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), has argued that Jesus' call was more prophetic than rabbinic. That likely accounts for the disciples' response to Jesus' question about his identity in Mark 8:28, "And they answered him saying, 'John the Baptist, and others Elijah, and others one of the prophets.'"

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Acts 1:15ff.

<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew word, *qahal*, ("community") is the standard Old Testament designation for the people of Israel understood communally and congregationally (that is, gathered and assembled) rather than individually.

<sup>22</sup> The English word "church," if it is intended to render what Jesus meant when he established the new *qahal* of the true Israel (see Matt 16:16ff.), refers to a *community*, not an institution or an organization, still less a building.

vision and values of *that* world (referred to in the biblical tradition as “the age to come;” cf. Mark 10:30), where God is sovereign. As such, there is always a *counter*-cultural character to the kingdom and its leadership, the kingdom’s disciples being *in* the world but not *of* it.

#### The Eschatology of the Kingdom: The Kingdom of God as “Alternative Reality”

To be sure, this concept of the kingdom of God as a counter-cultural, alternative reality, both in the world but not of it, is a challenging one to grasp. Perhaps an illustration will help. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that the room in which you are reading this chapter is the only room in the whole world, and the people with whom you occupy this room the only people in the world. There are no windows or doors in your room; hence, you have no concept of anything outside your little “world.” Indeed, the word “outside” does not exist in your language. You would be forgiven in such a situation for believing that your room and the people with whom you occupy it were the entire universe. However, completely unknown to you, there exists another floor above your room where other people are living other lives and doing other things. You are not aware of their existence because you have never been outside your own little “world,” but they are there nonetheless. Now, suppose a hole were torn in the ceiling of your “world” (the floor of the “world” above) so that for the first time you were aware of this “other world” just above you. And suppose some in your “world” began to call up to the people in the room above, interacting with them, learning about all sorts of strange and wondrous things, things utterly inconceivable in your “world.” Indeed, you discover to your amazement that the people in the room above live their lives according to entirely different “rules” than those which govern life in your “world.” In the room above, the poor are not regarded as a drain on the system, but are precious and prized; the old and the sick are honored and valued rather than warehoused and discarded; in this “world,” if one makes a promise, one keeps it, even when

inconvenient or difficult; and in this “world,” it is okay to suffer for doing the right thing. Some in the “world” below find themselves strangely drawn toward this “world” above and its customs and culture. Indeed, a few are so captured by this new “world” and its new way of living, that even though they still live in the “world” below, they start to think of themselves as really belonging to the “world” above. Though they are still *in* your “world,” they are no longer *of* your “world,” the knowledge of the room above having broken through into their “world,” changing them forever.<sup>23</sup> That is what Jesus meant when he described the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in his life and ministry, an eschatological event, indeed, a *world-defining* event so radical and revolutionary that it created a whole new community (*qahal*, *ekklesia*) of people who, having caught sight of it, could never go back to what they once were.

While the eschatological nature of the kingdom of God as a wholly new world breaking through in the midst of this present, broken, and evil world has many implications, perhaps the most important has to do with the mission of the kingdom *qahal* Jesus called and created. Specifically, the new *qahal* of the kingdom of God (the *ekklesia*, the church) is not here to “fix” this world; rather, it is here to announce the *end* of this world (cf. “eschatological”) and the advent of a whole new world only visible through the eyes of faith.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the church does not have a social agenda (as though the purpose of the church is merely to come up with a new and better strategy to address the ills of society); rather, it *is* a social agenda; namely, to invite others into the *qahal* so that they too might catch sight of the kingdom and be captured and claimed by it.<sup>25</sup> To be sure, that does not mean that disciples care nothing for social justice and

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<sup>23</sup> This illustration was previously published in R. Wayne Stacy, “Introduction to the Thessalonian Correspondences,” *Review & Expositor* vol. 96, No 2 (Spring 1999), 175-194.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), *passim*; see esp. pp. 86ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Resident Aliens*, pp. 43ff.

altruism. Rather, it means that disciples of the kingdom do not engage in social justice and altruistic activities with the view that doing these things will somehow transform *this* world into the kingdom of God. Disciples engage in social justice and altruism *because they are citizens of the kingdom of God* where social justice and self-abnegating service *are normative*. Disciples do these things because that is simply what “kingdom persons” do in that they are persons caught up in, and captured by, the vision and values of a world where injustice and self-interest are alien and inimical to the very nature and character of the new reality in which they now live.<sup>26</sup>

### Leadership and Discipleship in the Kingdom of God

Disciples, then, are those who have “caught sight” of this other world called the kingdom of God, and who give their witness to what they have seen and experienced.<sup>27</sup> Leaders in this community are “first followers,” that is, they are first *followers* in that they have no *independent* authority or power; rather, their authority is *delegated* authority, a reality made necessary by the fact of Jesus’ departure.<sup>28</sup> Disciples, therefore, become his presence in the absence, continuing his kingdom ministrations. They are Jesus’ *followers*, his surrogates, his representatives, his proxies, if you will. They are not “leaders” in their own right or by their own power. Indeed, they are *followers*, not “leaders.” Jesus never called “leaders;” he called “followers.” But they are also *first* followers in that what authority they do exercise in the community derives from, and reflects, their place “in the cue,” not from any qualities or characteristic or traits they either possess or acquire.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, in the kingdom of God, as opposed to how leadership is

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<sup>26</sup> This is the meaning of Jesus’ Beatitudes in Matt 5:3ff. In *this* world, the poor are most certainly *not* “blessed.” But he is not talking about *this* world; rather, he is describing a new world in which the poor are blessed, the grieving comforted, the hungry sated, the merciful granted mercy, and where it is both expected and altogether appropriate to suffer for doing the right thing. There is no “revision” (social, political, economic) that will transform *this* world into a place where these things obtain.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Note the various “commissioning” narratives in the Gospels.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), pp. 19ff.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Matt 16:16ff. Peter’s role as the “rock” on which the church will be built does not derive from any qualities he inherently possesses that make him uniquely suitable for such a role. Quite the contrary, Peter’s

conceived of and defined in this world, leadership is not *ontological* (having to do with the traits, skills, or qualities of the leader), nor is it merely *methodological* (merely a matter of having a better plan or a new “bag of tricks”); rather, leadership in the kingdom of God is *teleological* (focusing on the goal or “end” toward which the leader leads), always pointing proleptically to that reality where God is sovereign and, consequently, everything and everyone functions as designed and intended.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, in the kingdom of God, leaders’ leadership is more indicative than substantive. They have been entrusted with the “mystery of the kingdom,” whereas “those outside” must try to make sense of shadowy adumbrations and faint whispers.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, having caught sight of the “other world” of the kingdom of God, they point others to it and then trust the kingdom of God to do its work.<sup>32</sup> To quote George Eldon Ladd, “If Jesus’ disciples are those who have received the life and fellowship of the Kingdom, and if this life is in fact an anticipation of the eschatological Kingdom, then it follows that one of the main tasks of the church is to display in this present evil age the life and fellowship of the Age to Come.”<sup>33</sup> Leadership in the kingdom of God provides proleptic anticipation of the way the world was meant to be and indeed will be when God’s sovereignty is fully realized and the Age to Come has finally and fully supplanted this present evil age. Leaders, therefore, are living, breathing

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personality would most likely *disqualify* him for a leadership role as the modern world understands it. Rather, Peter is simply the “first follower,” his name always appearing first in the cue of disciples. His role is merely representative and prototypical.

<sup>30</sup> On these three basic approaches to leadership theory, see Michale Ayers, “Toward a Theology of Leadership,” in *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, vol 1. no. 1 (Fall 2006), pp. 3-27. Most discussions of leadership today focus either on the ontology of leadership (analysis of the qualities, skills, or traits required of a leader) or the methodology of leadership (analysis of the program, agenda, or strategy involved in leadership), with little, if any, attention paid to the teleology of leadership (the goal or end toward which the leader leads). Yet, in the biblical perspective, leadership is almost entirely a matter of teleology, with little, if any, interest in the ontology and methodology of leadership.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Mark 4:11 and par.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. in the Parable of the Sower (Jesus’ paradigmatic parable of the kingdom of God), the farmer merely plants the seed and then trusts sun and soil and seed to do the rest.

<sup>33</sup> Ladd, p. 113.

intimations of the kingdom, foreshadowing in this world the vision and values of that world. They are “kingdom guides,” and as such express “leadership” appropriate to the new reality in which they live.

### **Discipleship Language in the Synoptic Gospels**

Having clarified the context in which Jesus preaches and teaches in the Synoptic Gospels, namely, the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, and having identified the seminal role discipleship plays in terms of leadership in the kingdom, before we explore particular stories in the Synoptic Gospels illustrative of the character of discipleship and, therefore, of leadership, we must turn our attention first to an examination of the language of discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels.

#### *Akoloutheo* (follow)

Jesus’ command, indeed *demand*, to his would-be disciples was “follow me.”<sup>34</sup> As we have already seen, Jesus’ command was without precedent among his contemporaries in that he bid them to follow *him*, not merely to follow the Torah.<sup>35</sup> The Greek verb *akoloutheo* is employed some sixty times in the Synoptic Gospels, twenty-five times by Matthew, eighteen times by Mark, and seventeen times by Luke.<sup>36</sup> The term is used both in the literal and metaphorical senses, or as Kohlenberger and Goodrick describe, both transitively (that is, with an object following) and intransitively (no object following).<sup>37</sup> In the metaphorical (intransitive or

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Mark 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Matt 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23, 59; 18:22.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Karl Rengstorf, μαθητής, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 447.

<sup>36</sup> Matt 4:20, 22, 25; 8:1, 10, 19, 22, 23; 9:9, 19, 27; 10:38; 12:15; 14:13; 16:24; 19:2, 21, 27-28; 20:29, 34; 21:9; 26:58; 27:55; Mark 1:18; 2:14, 15; 3:7; 5:24; 6:1; 8:34; 9:38; 10:21, 32, 52; 11:9; 14:13, 54; 15:41; Luke 5:11, 27; 7:9; 9:11, 23, 49, 57, 59, 61; 18:22, 28, 43; 22:10, 39, 54; 23:27.

<sup>37</sup> John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward Goodrick, James A Swanson, *The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 35.

absolute) sense, it is akin to the Semitic idiom (*halak*) of “walking” as metaphorically referring to one’s conduct rather than simple ambulation.<sup>38</sup> Note, for example, how in the Lukan infancy narrative, widely recognized as having a pronounced Semitic cast, Luke describes the parents of John the Baptist as being righteous, “...walking (*poreuomenoi*),” he says, “in all the commandments and righteous ordinances of the Lord (Luke 1:6)”<sup>39</sup> The idiom survives still in contemporary English when we say, “Don’t just talk the talk, walk the walk.” In the same way, “follow” in the metaphorical sense means to “sign on,” to embrace in full commitment the man, the message, and the mission.<sup>40</sup>

M. J. Wilkins in his article on “Disciples,” in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, suggests that the verb “following” (*akoloutheo*) was used of disciples who “followed” Jesus, whether literally, such as the Twelve who “...physically followed Jesus in his itinerant ministry,” or just figuratively, such as Joseph of Arimathea, who “followed” Jesus in the sense that he “bought in” to the cause, but did not *physically* “follow” as did the Twelve.<sup>41</sup> However, according to the usage of *akoloutheo* in the Synoptic Gospels, the crowds “followed” Jesus too (in the literal sense), but they were never “disciples.”

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<sup>38</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *a'kolouqe√w*, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. I (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 41.11. Luke’s Semitisms in the Infancy Narrative include such constructions as the “absolute” use of *egeneto* to translate the Hebrew *waw*-consecutive (1:5, 8); *poreuomai* used metaphorically to translate the Hebrew *halak*; and the use of the Greek verb *poieo* (e.g. 1:25, 49, 51; see esp. v. 68, *epoiesen lutrosin*) to translate the Hebrew causative, *hiphil*. On the Semitisms in the Gospel of Luke, especially in the Infancy Narrative, see James R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), pp. 125ff.; esp. Appendix II, pp. 292ff. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 13ff., refers to Luke’s intentional intertextual interplay with Old Testament stories as a kind of “echo chamber” in which Luke summons up in the reader’s imagination Old Testament figures, patterns, and stories which then serve as an interpretive matrix for Luke’s story.

<sup>40</sup> Kittel suggests that *akoloutheo* in the metaphorical sense is “...strictly limited to discipleship of Christ.” He continues, “All other occurrences of *a'k.* in the NT speak of a following which has no religious significance,” Kittel, *a'kolouqe√w*, p. 213. However, see below.

<sup>41</sup> *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (The IVP Bible Dictionary Series) (Kindle Locations 7718-7720). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.



Indeed, when *akoloutheo* is used in the Synoptic Gospels in the literal sense of “following” Jesus, but *not* in terms of becoming his “disciple,” it is almost *always* used of “the crowd(s).” For example:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Passage</b>
Matt 4:25	Crowds	And great crowds followed him from Galilee
Matt 8:1	Crowds	great crowds followed him;
Matt 12:15 (?)	Many/Crowds	Jesus...withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all,
Matt 19:2	Crowds	and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.
Matt 20:29	Crowd	a great crowd followed him.
Matt 21:9	Crowds	And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”
Matt 26:58(!)	Peter	But Peter followed him at a distance
Mark 3:7	Crowds	Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed
Mark 5:24	Crowd	Jesus departed with him, and a great crowd followed after him and thronged him
Mark 9:38 (!)	Disciples	“Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.”
Mark 11:9	Crowd (Implicit)	And those who went before and those who followed cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
Luke 7:9	Crowd	When Jesus heard this he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”
Luke 9:11	Crowd	When the crowds learned it, they followed him; and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and cured those who had need of healing.
Luke 23:27	Crowd	And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him.

Three passages above are noteworthy. In Matt 12:15, Jesus withdrew from the crowd when their fever for favors grew fatiguing (a pattern seen frequently in the Synoptics), but like a stray cat taken in and fed by a stranger, they “followed” him seeking further favors. There is no real commitment here, either to Jesus or the kingdom, just an appetite seeking to be sated. Matt

26:58 preserves the only place in the Synoptics where a *disciple* is described as “following” in a literal sense, and, perhaps, in a pejorative metaphorical sense as well. Provocatively, it is used of Simon Peter who, shadowing (imagery intentional) Jesus at his arraignment before Caiaphas at the high priest’s residence on Mt. Zion, is described by Matthew as “following” Jesus, but, provocatively, *at a distance*. Finally, and intriguingly, Mark 9:38 uses the word “follow” in a metaphorical sense of the disciples who condemn an exorcist because he was not, tellingly, “following *us*.” It is clear from the evidence that when the Synoptics use “follow” of the crowd, they mean it in the non-metaphorical, that is, literal, sense of those who physically “follow” without being committed to the person or the cause. If discipleship is leadership in the Synoptics, then leadership is *not* “following the crowd.”

#### *Mathetes/Matheteuo* (Disciple)

As already noted, Jesus called out disciples to form the nucleus of a “new Israel,” a “remnant Israel,” a “true Israel” comprised of those who embraced his kingdom message and ministry. They would constitute the new *qahal* (“community” or “congregation” which Matthew translates as the “church,” *ekklesia*) Jesus was creating of those who had caught sight of this “other world,” latent in, but largely hidden from view in, this world, in which God is sovereign and his will and way are embraced. The kingdom is the rule of God; the church is the community (*qahal* or *ekklesia*) of disciples who have both caught sight of it and have chosen to live under it. It was a community of followers who were at one and the same time *in* the world but no longer *of* it, having become convinced that the long-prophesied and long-awaited Day of the LORD had broken in and broken through in Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection. In calling out disciples, Jesus did not create a new model; rather, he employed a pattern already present both in the Jewish and Greek worlds of calling out “disciples,” followers, adherents, believers

committed to a cause and the one who led it.<sup>42</sup> What made Jesus' use of the concept distinctive was both its association with the "new Israel," and the unique vision of the kingdom of God he espoused and required his followers to embrace.

The Greek words *mathetes* and its related verb *matheteuo* occur 158 times in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>43</sup> The word in its most literal usage means "learner," "student," or "pupil." Because teachers were peripatetic in the ancient world, the word by extension took on the meaning of "follower." Analysis of the usage of the term yields the following:

- the most common usage is of one who not only follows Jesus physically but who is, to varying degrees, also committed to the cause;
- the term can also be used of one who physically "follows" Jesus but who is not fully committed to the cause (see, for example, Matt 8:21);
- the term is used of followers of persons other than Jesus as, for example, John the Baptist (cf. Matt 9:14; Luke 5:33; 11:1), or the Pharisees (cf. Matt 22:16);
- when associated with the number "twelve," it refers to that special group of "disciples" (the Twelve) who form the symbolic nucleus of the "new Israel"<sup>44</sup>
- disciples are distinguished from "the crowd" (see Mark 8:34);<sup>45</sup>
- whereas Jesus taught everyone who would listen about the kingdom of God, his "disciples" came in for special kingdom instruction;<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Wilkins, *Kindle Locations 7669-7677*. "maqthvß always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as maqthvß, and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power," Rengstorf, p. 441.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew (75X), Mark (46X), Luke (37X). In the New Testament *mathetes* occurs only in the Gospels and Acts; cf. Rengstorf, p. 441.

<sup>44</sup> See Matt 11:1; see especially Luke 6:13 where the term is also associated with "apostles."

<sup>45</sup> However, see Luke 6:17.

<sup>46</sup> This is a particular interest of the Gospel of Mark.

- the term is also used as a verb (*matheteuo*) exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>47</sup>

All three Synoptic Gospels indicate that Jesus called disciples, summoning them to his message, his mission, and his person.<sup>48</sup> The calling involved embracing a world (kingdom of God) so radically discontinuous with the world they had known and in which they had lived that disciples were enjoined to abandon everything they had formerly known (family, job, home, commitments, associations) in order to follow Jesus and to live in this “new world.” It is for that reason that Jesus routinely and regularly enjoins disciples to “count the cost” of life in this new world of the kingdom of God, a world that, while a treasure to be desired, will nonetheless cost you *everything* you have to possess.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, the call appears to have been largely one of proximity, rather than preference.<sup>50</sup> Jesus’ first followers were apparently chosen because they were nearby to where Jesus launched his kingdom mission; namely, the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first disciples were relatives, business partners, neighbors, and family members, not carefully chosen and thoroughly sifted “recruits” from a select list of “candidates.”<sup>51</sup> Their availability appears to have been their only required quality. More to the point, there does not appear to have been anything “special” about these persons that commended them to Jesus, other than their availability, which is to say that from a biblical perspective, discipleship, and therefore leadership, studies that focus on the leader’s inherent ability or talent or qualities or skills that

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<sup>47</sup> 13:52, of a scribe “discipled” in the kingdom of God; 27:57, of Joseph of Arimathea who was “discipled” in Jesus; and 28:19, in the Great Commission, of the disciples who are sent to “disciple” all nations.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Matt 10:1ff.; Mark 3:13ff.; Luke 6:12ff.

<sup>49</sup> Matt 13:45ff. See also Matt 8:18ff. and par, and especially Luke 14:25ff.

<sup>50</sup> “Decisive here is the fact that He [Jesus] calls to Himself disciples who do not seem to enjoy the necessary qualifications for fellowship with Him, e.g., the tax-gatherer Levi (Mk. 2:13ff.), for by their calling tax-gatherers were regarded as sinners and were thus shunned by the pious (Lk. 15:1f.),” Rengstorf, p. 444.

<sup>51</sup> Wilkins, Kindle Location 7688.

specially suit him or her to the role are wrong-headed. If the call of the disciples is instructive, leadership is about God, not us.

Relative to their role as leaders in Jesus' new kingdom *qahal*, the disciples are portrayed with mixed reviews:

- Jesus commissions them as his representatives and they return with stories of great success “in his name” (Luke 10:1-20);<sup>52</sup>
- having witnessed Jesus' miracles, they fail to grasp that he is capable of feeding the gathered crowd with meager rations (Matt 15:32);
- they witness the theophany of the Transfiguration in which Jesus is revealed as the revelation of God on par with the Law and the Prophets (Matt 17:1ff.);
- but despite having been commissioned to continue Jesus' kingdom mission of healing they are unable to heal an epileptic boy brought to them (Matt 17:14ff.);

Most telling of all, despite the fact that Jesus regularly gives them private instruction on the character and nature of life in this “other world,” specifically the fact that, contrary to popular Jewish expectation, God's kingdom is accomplished through suffering and self-denial, rather than domination and power, the disciples still resist Jesus' cross-centered vision of the kingdom of God. How can you lead to where you yourself are unwilling to go?

So, disciples were followers who, having caught sight of the kingdom of God in Jesus' message and person, became the core, the nucleus, of Jesus' new Israel, his new society, his new *qahal* of believers who, though still being in the world, were no longer of it. To be sure, the

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<sup>52</sup> While Luke describes a group of 70 “others” not otherwise identified in the Synoptics (this is “L” material), that they are “disciples” also is clear from Luke 10:23. As to who is likely intended by this group of “70 others,” see below.

Synoptic Gospels candidly document that there remained much of “the world” in the disciples, but they nonetheless formed the nucleus of the new Israel Jesus called out and created.

*Apostolos, apostello* (Apostle, Sent Ones)

The word, both as noun and verb, is used 77 times in the Synoptic Gospels, Many of those uses, however, are non-technical.<sup>53</sup> The technical uses of the word are as follows:

- Matt 10:2, 5, 16, 40 – The Commissioning of the Twelve. Note especially 10:40 in which Jesus is an “apostle” of God (cp. Matt 15:24);
- Matt 20:2 – Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard
- Matt 21:1, 3 – Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (cp. Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29, 32);
- Matt 21:36 - Parable of the Vineyard and the Son (cp. Mark 12:2ff.; Luke 20:10, 20);
- Matt 22:3 – Parable of the Marriage Feast (cp. Luke 14:17, 32);
- Matt 22:16 – Disciples of Pharisees “sent” on mission to entrap Jesus;
- Matt 23:34, 37 – Jesus’ condemnation of Jewish establishment for rejecting those “sent” to them; that is, God’s “apostles” (cp. Luke 13:34);
- Mark 3:14 – “The twelve, whom he also named apostles”<sup>54</sup> See also Luke 6:13;
- Mark 6:7 – The twelve “sent” (*apostello*) two-by-two on mission; cp. Luke 9:2, 10,<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Matt 2:16 in which Herod the Great “sends” (*apostello*) representatives to kill the baby Jesus.

<sup>54</sup> There is a textual variant here, the best manuscript evidence of the Gospel of Mark omitting the exegetical phrase, “whom he also named apostles,” assuming it to be an assimilation to Luke 6:13. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Jesus gives the Twelve “authority” (Luke – “power and authority”) over “unclean spirits” (Mark), “demons and to cure diseases” (Luke). Two things are noteworthy: (1) their power and authority is *delegated* to them by Jesus (“he [Jesus] was giving (Greek, *edidiou*) to them [the Twelve] authority...”); it is not their own to exercise; (2) their authority is *over the demonic world* (which was also thought to be the cause of illness and disease in the ancient world). That is, their authority is to *effect God’s sovereign rule* (kingdom of God) by displacing and dispatching Satan’s illegitimate usurpation of God’s world.

- Mark 6:30 – Apostles return and report on their representative mission;
- Mark 8:26 – blind man, healed by Jesus, is “sent” (*apostello*) back home, as a “disciple”?<sup>56</sup>
- Mark 9:37 – Jesus is God’s “apostle;” cp. Luke 4:18, 43, as well as Luke 1:19, 26 where Gabriel is God’s “apostle;”
- Mark 14:13 – Disciples are “sent” (*apostello*) on a mission to prepare Passover for Jesus and his *qahal*; cp. Luke 22: 8, 14, 35;
- Luke 7:20 – Apostles of John the Baptist;
- Luke 9:52 – Disciples “sent” (*apostello*) ahead of Jesus to prepare for his ministry in a Samaritan village; early hint in Luke’s Gospel that this new *qahal* is broader than just ethnic Israel;<sup>57</sup>
- Luke 10:1, 3, 16, 49 – Mission of the Seventy (unique to Luke); again, early hint that Jesus’ new kingdom *qahal* is wider than the nation of Israel;<sup>58</sup>
- Luke 17:5 – “The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’”
- Luke 24:10 – The women who witnessed the resurrection told “the apostles;”
- Luke 24:49 – “I send (*apostello*) the promise of my Father upon you.”

From this survey of Synoptic usage several conclusions can be drawn: (1) the word “apostle” is closely associated with “the Twelve;” (2) “apostles” are “disciples” in that, just as with the latter, they are those who have caught sight of the kingdom (however imperfectly) and

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<sup>56</sup> Mark has a tendency to highlight the Twelve’s shortcomings by using minor characters in the story to suggest that these minor characters may be more “disciples” than the disciples! In this case, Mark paints in bold relief the fact that a *blind* man sees Jesus more clearly than do Jesus’ closest “followers.”

<sup>57</sup> Jewish tradition held that the “nations” (non-Jewish people not under the sovereign rule of the kingdom of God; see, for example, Psalm 2) were seventy in number (symbolic for the “totality” of nations not the people of God). Hence, the sending of the “Seventy” (some Greek manuscripts read seventy-two), as Ladd explains, “...is an implicit claim that Jesus’ message must be heard not only by Israel but by all people.” Ladd, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> Ladd, *ibid.*

are seeking to live under its claim; (3) apostles are “sent disciples;” that is, they are commissioned and dispatched to bear witness to what they themselves have witnessed; namely, this “other world” of the kingdom of God that has captured and claimed them. The kingdom may be “hidden” in this evil, wicked world, but those who have witnessed it cannot be.

### The Twelve

We need not linger long over the Twelve; we have already discussed them elsewhere. It is the number that is significant, not the names.<sup>59</sup> They are the core, the nucleus of the “new Israel,” the kingdom *qahal* Jesus came both to announce and create. The most significant thing to observe about “the Twelve” is the fact that they were called out by Jesus *to be with him* – “And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, so that they *might be with him* and so that he might send (*apostello*) them to preach and to have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14). Jesus is not only “witness” to the in-breaking of this other world called the “kingdom of God,” he is its *portal*, its *presence*, its *personification*. To enter the kingdom is to be *with Jesus*, not merely in the sense of “hanging out” with Jesus as we have seen, or memorizing his teaching, as disciples of the rabbis did; rather, it had the sense of being fully committed to Jesus himself. It is not nomenclature that makes one a “disciple;” it is the reality of “being with Jesus.”

### On the Way

Related both to the idea of disciples “following Jesus” and “being with Jesus” is the phrase “on the way.” While the Greek word *hodos* can be used in a literal sense to mean “way,” “path,” “road,” or anything similar, there is a metaphorical usage of the word that can be observed in the Synoptics that has important implications for our understanding of discipleship

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<sup>59</sup> There are four lists of “the Twelve” in the New Testament (Matt 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). While there is significant agreement (not surprisingly, the lists in Luke and Acts agree), a biblical consensus regarding the identity of the Twelve is not possible.



and, therefore, leadership.<sup>60</sup> When used as a metaphor in the Synoptics, “on the way” means on the way *to Jerusalem* and to the cross that awaits Jesus there. To “follow” Jesus means that one must follow him to Jerusalem and the cross. There is no detour, no alternative route, that a disciple might take. Following Jesus means following him in the *via crucis*, the way of the cross. A survey of this metaphorical usage of *hodos* produces the following:

- Matt 7:13 – the “way” that leads to destruction is broad, but the “way” that leads to life is difficult; Sermon on the Mount. (While the usage here *may* just refer to a *literal* “path,” given the context, it is unlikely.);
- Matt 20:17 (cp. Mark 10:32; Luke 18:31) – “and *on the way* [to Jerusalem] he said to them...”
- Matt 20:30 (cp. Matt 9:27ff.; Mark 10:46ff.) – “two blind men sitting *by the way* [to Jerusalem];
- Mark 6:8 (cp. Matt 10:5; Luke 9:2; however, see Luke 10:4) – “He instructed them that they should take nothing *on the way* but a staff;”
- Mark 8:27 (cp. Matt 16:13; Luke 9:18) – “And Jesus and his disciples went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and *on the way* he asked his disciples, ‘Who do men say that I am?’”
- Mark 9:33 – “And they came to Capernaum; and when he was *in the house* he asked them...” This is a special Markan usage in which he juxtaposes the phrases “on the way” and “in the house.” In Mark, Jesus leads the disciples “on the way”

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<sup>60</sup> I first noticed this metaphorical usage back in the late 1970’s when working on my doctoral dissertation on the Gospel of Mark. See R. Wayne Stacy, “Fear in the Gospel of Mark,” PhD Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, p. 75.

to Jerusalem, but “in the house” he gives them private instruction about the nature of the kingdom of God and the cost of following him.

- Mark 10:17 – “And while he was going *on the way*...”
- Mark 10:32 – “And they were *on the way*, ascending to Jerusalem” (Jesus’ third and final passion prediction);
- Mark 10:46, 52 (cp. Luke 18:35) – “Bartimaeus...was sitting *on the way*;”  
“‘Depart; your faith has saved you.’ And immediately saw again and *followed* him *on the way*.”
- Luke 9:57 – “And as they were going *on the way*...”
- Luke 24:32, 35 – “did not our hearts burn within us while he spoke to us *on the way*?” “And he explained the things [that had taken place] *on the way*.”

To “follow” Jesus, therefore, means to follow him *on the way*, and that means the way of *the cross*.<sup>61</sup> There is no discipleship, no leadership, in the kingdom *qahal* that eschews or evades this “way.” It is both counter-intuitive and counter-cultural, but such is the character of the kingdom of God where saving means forfeiting, holding on means letting go, winning means losing, and living means dying.<sup>62</sup>

### Flock/Shepherd

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. “...entry into His fellowship as His *maq̄hthvß* carries with it the obligation to suffer. The tradition is unanimous that in fact Jesus left His disciples in no doubt that they were committing themselves to suffering if they followed him,” Rengstorf, p. 449.

<sup>62</sup> The Old Testament sage put it like this: “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it is the way of death;” Prov 16:25.

An important Old Testament metaphor for the people of God and its leaders is the pastoral metaphor of “flock and shepherd.”<sup>63</sup> This imagery is taken up by John in the Fourth Gospel and echoed extensively in a heuristic conceit on Jesus as “the Good Shepherd.”<sup>64</sup>

While the Synoptic Gospels do not exploit the imagery to the degree John does, they nonetheless demonstrate their familiarity with it and take it up in two places: Matt 26:31 and Luke 12:32. In Matt 26:31, Jesus echoes another shepherd oracle (Zech 13:7-9) as he predicts the disciples’ flight following his betrayal and arrest: “You all will be scandalized by me on this very night, for it stands written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” What makes this intertextual echo all the more interesting for our discussion is the fact that in Zechariah the context is that of the king (Messiah) being killed and the flock, consequently, being scattered. However, the oracle goes on to prophesy about a remnant of the flock being thereby purged and saved, reconstituting the flock:

In the whole land, says the LORD,  
two thirds shall be cut off and  
perish,  
and one third shall be left alive.  
And I will put this third into the fire,  
and refine them as one refines  
silver,  
and test them as gold is tested.  
They will call on my name,  
and I will answer them.  
I will say, ‘They are my people’;

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<sup>63</sup> As Jeremias comments: “In the OT the description of Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel is ancient usage.... This may be seen from the great number of passages which use the rich shepherd vocabulary for Yahweh and depict God in new and vivid developments of the metaphor as the Shepherd who goes before His flock, who guides it, who protects it with His staff, who whistles to the dispersed and gathers them, who carries the lambs in His bosom and leads the mother-sheep (Is. 40:11),” Joachim Jeremias, *poimhvn, ktl. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VI (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 487. Moreover, “shepherd” is a common Old Testament term for political and military leaders; cf. 1 Sam 21:8; 2 Sam 7:7; 1 Chron 17:6; Jer 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 23:1-4; 25:34-36; 50:6; Ezek 34:2-10; Isa 56:1; Mic 5:4; Zech 10:3; 11:5f., 16f. See, especially, the “Shepherd Oracle” of Ezek 34 in which Israel’s kings are portrayed as derelict shepherds who have failed in their primary responsibility of caring for the people of God, God’s “flock.” Cf. Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), *passim*.

<sup>64</sup> See John 10.

and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'<sup>65</sup>

Jesus, reaching back into Israel's Scripture for the twin imagery of the stricken shepherd (Messiah) and the scattered flock, calls on his disciples to form a remnant *qahal* of the kingdom of God on the far side of the cross: "But after I am raised, I will go before you into the Galilee" (Matt 26:32). Once again, discipleship, and, therefore, leadership, is inextricably linked to the cross, both for Jesus and his disciples.

Luke 12:32 also picks up the "remnant Israel" idea with the imagery of the "little flock": "Fear not, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give to you the kingdom."<sup>66</sup> The associations, both with the Old Testament conceit of Israel as YHWH's "flock" and true Israel as a "remnant people," lie close to the surface. Jesus obviously gravitated to these texts and images because they captured for him his belief that Israel's rejection of his kingdom message and mission did not mean that it was ultimately repudiated; rather, he took encouragement by the fact that God always has a remnant of people who defy the "consensus," "swim against the stream," and see what others cannot. God doesn't require a majority; he doesn't even require a plurality; he only requires a "few good men and women" who are willing to risk everything on the holy hunch that the misty, vague vision of a world in which God is sovereign just might be the real world.<sup>67</sup>

### **Stories/Passages Illustrative of Leadership**

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<sup>65</sup> Zech 13:8-9 (RSV).

<sup>66</sup> "For the most part... Jesus uses the image of God's flock for His band of disciples as the eschatological people of God, Mk. 14:27f. par Matt 26:31f; Matt 10:16 par. Luke 10:3; Luke 12:32; John 10:1-29 cf. 16:32.... In the originally isolated saying in Lk. 12:32, which goes back to Aramaic tradition, Jesus addresses His own as a 'little flock.' He combines the image of God's flock with the motif of the eschatological reversal of relations when, on the basis of Da 7:27, He tells His disciples that in spite of their fewness in number they may contemplate threatened persecution without fear because a kingdom, dominion and power over all kingdoms is promised to them as the people of the saints of the Most High, Da 7:27," Jeremias, *poimhvn*, ktl, p. 501.

<sup>67</sup> This is the message of Jesus' Parable of the Sower. Even though only one quarter of the seed germinated, it produced a harvest so bountiful that it vindicated the entire sowing enterprise; cf. Mark 4:1ff.

Because the Synoptic Gospels are *narratives*, that is, *stories*, much of what is said about the character of discipleship and leadership is said “between the words.” If we just content ourselves with exploring leadership language and, thereby, assume we have exhausted what the Synoptics have to say about leadership, we will miss key stories and insights that are borne more by plot than parlance.

Employing Mark’s sequence as our base (see the discussion of Markan priority below), in what follows we will explore stories and passages in the triple tradition (save one, The Great Commission) which, in the context of Jesus’ proclamation of, and inauguration of, the kingdom of God, have much to tell us about the nature of leadership in such a kingdom. While not an exhaustive analysis of stories and episodes that speak to this subject, these passages are particularly representative, illustrative, and indicative of leadership in the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>68</sup>

#### Wine and Skins (Matt 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39)

In Matthew’s account of this episode, the question of why Jesus’ disciples fail to fast is put to him by the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt 9:14), whereas in Mark and Luke the interlocutors are simply identified by the generic “people” in Mark (2:18) and “they” in Luke (5:33). The other major difference in the story is Luke’s ending: “For no one drinking old wine wishes new; for he says, ‘The old is better’” (5:39).

In Mark’s Gospel, this story is a controversy story set in a collection of controversy stories precipitated by the fact that Jesus’ kingdom proclamation and action threaten the ensconced religious establishment, which is to say their “kingdom.” It has long been recognized that the sequence of these five stories in Mark’s Gospel has been arranged chiastically.<sup>69</sup> Our

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<sup>68</sup> Either because they clarify the context in which leadership occurs; namely, the kingdom of God, or because they elucidate the character and responsibilities of disciples, that is, kingdom “leaders.”

<sup>69</sup> Note that the sequence of stories in the narrative is as follows: A. Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12); B. Eating with Sinners (Mark 2:15-17); C. Question about Fasting (Mark 2:18-22); B’. Eating on the Sabbath (Mark

story (the fasting story, together with the clarifying comparison of the wine and skins) functions in the collection as the fulcrum on which the entire sequence turns, making it something of a cipher for the whole structure.

The context of the saying of the wine and the skins is Jesus' defense and rationale for the fact that his disciples, unlike the disciples of John and the Pharisees, do not fast. In Jesus' day, it was widely held that piety on the inside was reflected on the outside; therefore, the more pious one was (fasting was one of the three pillars of Jewish piety, the other two being prayer and almsgiving), the more drawn, dour, and emaciated one's countenance would appear.<sup>70</sup> Jesus' disciples, while not foregoing fasting altogether (note that in Matt 6:16ff., Jesus does not say "if you fast," but "when (Greek *hotan*) you fast"), nonetheless did not observe all the voluntary fasts enjoined of observant Pharisees.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, Jesus' disciples did not display the pious pallor expected of the devout. Jesus' rationale for this was, "Wedding guests don't fast while the bridegroom is with them! Days will come, however, when the bridegroom is taken away; *then*

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2:23-28); A'. Healing Man with Withered Hand (Mark 3:1-6). When arranged graphically, according to their sequence in the narrative structure, the stories form the letter X, the Greek letter chi, the fasting story occupying the intersection of the X. The most likely explanation for this arrangement is that it reflects the earliest stages of the oral tradition, before the Gospels as we now have them were composed, the arrangement obviously facilitating memory and transmission: "Let me tell you about the time Jesus confronted his critics." See Joanna Dewey, "The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1-3:6," *JBL*, 92 (1973), 401ff. See also Stacy, "Fear in the Gospel of Mark," p. 85.

<sup>70</sup> It is for this reason that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, takes up in order the qualitatively different kind of piety appropriate to the new, kingdom *qahal* he was establishing among his disciples: almsgiving (Matt 6:1-4); prayer (Matt 6:5-15); and fasting (Matt 6:16-18). Note especially that in Matt 6:16ff. Jesus says, "And when you should fast, do not be dour (*skuthropoi*) as [are] the hypocrites, for they make their faces invisible (*aphanizousin*) so that they might be visible (*phanosin*) fasting among people. Amen I say to you, they have been paid in full. Rather, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you might not be visible (*phanes*) fasting among people; rather, [be visible, *phanizo*] to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." There is a word play in Greek between *aphanizo* (invisible) and *phanizo* (visible) in the text that is difficult to render in English; however, the point is clear: If all you care about is *appearances*, then you may fool people (who see only the "visible"), but you will never fool God (who sees the "invisible"). For more on this practice of making oneself appear to be fasting so that people would admire one's piety, see Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1995), pp. 420-21.

<sup>71</sup> William Lane suggests that by the time of Jesus, it was customary for Pharisees to observe a voluntary fast two days a week, on Monday and Thursday (cf. Luke 18:12); *The Gospel of Mark, NICNT* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 109.

they will fast” (cf. Mark 2:20). He means by that that he himself is the very presence of the in-breaking kingdom of God, causing celebration for those who see it and embrace it. However, he also knows that the majority of Israel will reject his mission and message and that, likely, he himself will be “taken away” (read “the cross”). To explain Israel’s rejection of its Messiah, Jesus employs the metaphor of using wineskins as a vessel for transporting wine. Says he, “You don’t put new wine into old wineskins; if you do, the wine (expanding) will burst the skins, and the wine will be lost. Rather, new wine calls for new skins” (cf. Mark 2:22). He means that it is altogether unsurprising that Israel rejected him and his kingdom message when he came; they were expecting someone else; they were expecting something else. They wanted to vanquish their enemies, not heal them. They wanted a crown, not a cross. They wanted sovereignty, not servanthood. Therefore, a wholly new community, a new *qahal*, would be demanded to contain this new “wine” of the kingdom of God.

The implications of this little parable both for discipleship and leadership are obvious. The kingdom of God will always be experienced in *this* world as intrusive, unexpected, ill-fitting, odd, and *counter*-cultural. While its disciples are yet *in* the world, they are not *of* it. Consequently, attempts to “package” this intrusive, invasive, counter-cultural kingdom in culturally acceptable vessels are doomed to ruin. The kingdom of God is not merely “this world to the *n*<sup>th</sup> power,” it is a whole new world that creates the people it calls.

#### Choosing of the Twelve (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 9:1-2)

Both Matthew and Luke refer to these twelve disciples as also being “apostles.” Mark employs the term “apostle” only once (6:30), in its technical sense of “emissary” or “envoy.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> “The Twelve” is Mark’s special designation for the disciples, employing the term ten times (3:14; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10, 17, 20, 43). After the initial formulation in which Mark refers to “the Twelve, whom he also named apostles,” Mark never again uses a qualifier for “the Twelve.” Indeed, there is a textual variant at 3:14 which omits the qualifier, “whom he also named apostles,” on the assumption that it is a textual assimilation to

All three Synoptic Gospels suggest that the Twelve were called out from an existing group of disciples.<sup>73</sup> Jesus clearly intends to form from among his followers a symbolic group representing the “new Israel,” the faithful remnant, the “little flock” that embraced what the larger nation had repudiated and rejected. This representative group will form the kingdom *qahal*, the eschatological community of the true Israel.<sup>74</sup>

The implications of this symbolic choosing lie close to the surface. Clearly, Jesus was forming a remnant Israel based on whether or not they had recognized and accepted his kingdom message and ministry. The new “people of God” would be comprised of those who *saw it*, who caught a glimpse of it in what Jesus had said and done, and were willing to stake their lives on the desperate hope that this new world that Jesus had shown them, with its odd ways and peculiar values and strange fealties, was, in fact, the *real* world. In a real sense, they were a self-selecting group. If the kingdom of God is, indeed, that alternative reality, that “other room” to which we have referred, then this group of leaders, kingdom guides, were they who dared to risk everything on what may have been merely a mirage.<sup>75</sup> Not everyone looking up at the hole in the ceiling with “get it.” In a sense, then, the kingdom *qahal* is *always* a “minority community,” a

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Luke 6:13. However, the inclusion of the qualifying phrase is supported both by the strength of the manuscript witnesses (Western), as well as the text critical canon that the more difficult reading is to be preferred, cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, p. 80. For the definitive treatment of “the Twelve” in the Gospel of Mark, see Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), esp. pp. 88-191.

<sup>73</sup> Jesus already has “disciples” following him prior to these twelve being identified and chosen. Moreover, the language employed for the “calling” of the Twelve suggests that Jesus is calling out the Twelve from an existing group: Matthew – (he “called to” his twelve disciples,” *proskalesamenos*; Mark – he “made/appointed twelve...that they might be with him,” *epoiesen*; Luke – “he called to his disciples and chose *from them* twelve,” *eklexamenos*; *contra* Lane, *Mark*, p. 132.

<sup>74</sup> As R. T. France correctly comments, “So from an early point in his ministry Jesus was apparently thinking in terms of an alternative ‘Israel’ with its own leadership based now not on tribal origin but on the Messiah’s call,” *The Gospel of Matthew, NICNT* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 377.

<sup>75</sup> This is the essential meaning of the Synoptic tradition of the Transfiguration (see Mark 9:2ff.; Matt 17:1ff.; Luke 9:28ff). Luke particularly draws this out when he says that the kingdom revelation of Jesus’ Messiahship occurred when Peter and the others “were heavy with sleep.” Did they *really* see it, or was it all just a dream?



faithful (that is, those who *believe* what they see) remnant. The Twelve, and the kingdom community they embodied, were no “group think groupies;” they were “true believers” committed to the holy hope that, all appearances to the contrary, the world Jesus had shown them was, in fact, the *real* world.

Moreover, because the Twelve were Jesus’ *representatives*, his surrogates, their authority was delegated authority, not absolute authority. Mark says that he appointed Twelve “to be with him” (*hina osin met’autou*). They acted with authority *only* when they acted in his behalf, in his name.<sup>76</sup> They were his *apostles*, “sent out” to be his presence in his absence: “And he appointed twelve, who he also named apostles, that they might be with him, and that he might send (*apostello*) them to preach, to have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:13).

Note also that the work of the Twelve was kingdom work, that is, work with an *eschatological* agenda: to preach (the good news of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God), and to cast out demons (to participate in the “mopping up action” of eliminating the last vestiges of Satan’s illegitimate usurpation of God’s legitimate sovereign rule). This is not merely social improvement, repairing the existing structures so as to operate more efficiently. This is radical, eschatological, world-shaking work. The Twelve are not social workers, and they do not have a social agenda. They are heralds of a wholly new world called the kingdom of God, which is not only their proclamation but their program. Their message was to be, “We’re not here to fix this world; we’re here to announce the *end* of this world and the advent of a whole new world that

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<sup>76</sup> While the theological significance of the phrase “to be with him” seems apparent in Mark’s usage, it may also have a more personal intimation in that Jesus desired their company and companionship (quite literally, in that the word “companion” means “sharing the bread”). The kingdom *qahal* Jesus had come to create was a *community*, in the real sense of the word. He apparently needed, and wanted, their fellowship. Cf. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 151.

can only be glimpsed through the eyes of faith.” That their message was met both with acclaim and acrimony is hardly surprising.

#### The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8)

Assuming Markan priority as the most defensible solution to the Synoptic Problem, Mark’s order of events appears to inform, to varying degrees, both Matthew’s and Luke’s arrangement of scenes in the narrative; to be sure Matthew’s more so than Luke’s.<sup>77</sup> The narrative structure of the Gospel story can be parsed in various ways, as the multiplicity of “outlines” of Mark attests; however, the structural arrangement that is most defensible *from the story itself* is geographical. Jesus begins his ministry up in the Galilee and inexorably moves south toward Jerusalem and the cross that awaits him there.<sup>78</sup> Hence, the Gospel story unfolds in a two-act drama (Galilee and Jerusalem), with the journey between serving as something of a “crash course” in “leadership lessons” for the disciples in advance of the time when they will have to go it alone without Jesus to guide them. The journey motif in the “between Galilee and

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<sup>77</sup> Luke’s three noteworthy departures from the Markan arrangement are so striking that they have been described by scholars as the “greater interpolation” (Luke’s unique travel narrative in 9:51-18:14), the “lesser interpolation” (6:20-8:3), and “the great omission” (cp. Mark 6:45-8:26 in which Mark, followed by Matthew, includes a series of healing and controversy stories that have no parallel in Luke). Regarding Markan priority, it continues to be the solution best supported by scholars. While the Griesbach or Two-Gospel hypothesis (Matthew wrote first, followed by Luke who used Matthew, and then Mark who abbreviated both Matthew and Luke) still finds some scholarly support (notably W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (Dillsboro, NC: Western North Carolina Press, 1964), the assumption that Mark was a source common to both Matthew and Luke remains the dominant view. The Two-Source hypothesis (that two sources, namely, Mark and a collection of sayings scholars refer to as “Q,” were both used by Matthew and Luke) has recently been dislodged, however, from its privileged perch having been challenged by the Farrer hypothesis. The Farrer hypothesis (further refined by Michael Goulder and Mark Goodacre) retains all the strengths of the Two-Source hypothesis (Markan priority) while eliminating the primary weakness; namely, the need for a hypothetical source common to both Matthew and Luke, but not used by Mark, that is, “Q.” The Farrer hypothesis eliminates the need for “Q” by arguing that Matthew used Mark, and then Luke used both Mark and Matthew. Mark is, therefore, the source for the triple tradition, and Luke’s use of Matthew explains the double tradition without the need for “Q.” It has in its favor both that it affirms Markan priority, for which there is compelling evidence, and Occam’s Razor, in that by doing away with the need for a hypothetical source common to Matthew and Luke (Q), the Farrer hypothesis is the simplest solution, requiring only Mark as a common source. See Austin M. Farrer, “On Dispensing with Q” in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), pp. 55–88. For a detailed defense of Markan priority, see R. H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), pp. 45-88.

<sup>78</sup> The geographical arrangement of the structure of the Gospel of Mark was first proposed by Ernest Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1936).

Jerusalem” storyline tends to gather around the theme “on the way” (see above). One of the major differences between Mark, on the one hand, and Matthew and Luke, on the other, is the way they unfold this journey narrative. Matthew, who tends to gather material in one place for easy reference, collects Jesus’ teaching “on the way” in chapter 13. Moreover, Matthew includes Jesus’ “inaugural sermon” on the counter-cultural character of “life in the kingdom of God,” which we call “The Sermon on the Mount.” Luke expands and draws out this “on the way” section into an extended journey narrative (Luke 9:51-18:14), and, consequently, includes a significant amount of teaching found nowhere else.<sup>79</sup>

In the two-act drama described above (Galilee and Jerusalem), Jesus pauses in the middle of a hectic ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing to offer his disciples (his representatives and surrogates in the time of his absence) two discourses intended to help them understand what is happening, or is about to happen, around them: The Paradox of the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:1-34) and The End of the Old Order (Mark 13:1-35).<sup>80</sup> We will explore the second of these later.

The first explanatory discourse (The Paradox of the Kingdom) is given primarily in parables, the most important of which is the first, the Parable of the Sower. Before we attempt an

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<sup>79</sup> Luke likes the “travel log,” employing it both in the Gospel and in Acts. Moreover, in the Gospel of Luke, the “journey to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51-18:14) builds the suspense of the story in that the reader already knows when Jesus sets out on the journey what awaits him there, but, as Luke says, echoing the prophet, Isaiah, Jesus’ face was “set” like a flint toward Jerusalem (cf. Isa 50:7). Indeed, the “journey to Jerusalem” in Luke serves as an enacted parable, a prophetic symbolic act, on the nature of the kingdom of God and the need for a “remnant Israel.” Jesus, God’s Messiah sent to announce and inaugurate his sovereign rule, is rejected and murdered, just as Israel had done with the prophets of old. See Luke 13:33-34: “Nevertheless, it is necessary for me, today and tomorrow and the coming day to go [to Jerusalem], for it is not appropriate to kill a prophet outside Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her, how I would have gathered your children as a hen [gathers] her own brood under her wings, and you wouldn’t” (note how the poignancy is punctuated in the syntax by the wordplay in verse 34: “I would (*ethelesa*)...you wouldn’t (*ouk ethelesate*).”

<sup>80</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 13-14. See also Lane, *Mark*, p. 149.

interpretation of this key parable, however, a word about the nature of Jesus' parables is in order.<sup>81</sup>

It is often said that the parables are “earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” That is true enough as far as it goes, but it does not go quite far enough. Parables are analogies - a way of talking about one thing in terms of something else. We usually do that because the thing we *really* want to talk about is too complex or difficult to discuss directly, and so we resort to analogies to try to help the listener grasp our real subject.

Therein lies the dilemma. In the case of the parables of Jesus, the “thing” about which the analogy is being made is the kingdom of God. However, what *in this world* can one point to and say, “Now, *that* is the kingdom of God”? The kingdom is so eschatological and counter-cultural that any attempt to point to anything in this world and thereby say, “The kingdom is like this,” would be fraught with misunderstanding and unintended associations. Knowing this, Jesus

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<sup>81</sup> While the parables of Jesus have come in for protracted, and often contentious, debate over the last century, the discussion of how best to interpret Jesus' parables has largely settled into two camps: analogy and allegory. The former asserts that irrespective of how complex and polyvalent parables may appear to be, they essentially have one meaning; namely, the author's. The latter asserts that the meanings (plural intentional) of parables do not rest exclusively with the author, but rather also reside with the text (which they regard, to a greater or lesser degree, as being independent of the author) and/or the audience. Craig Blomberg has written what is arguably the most thorough, recent *Forschungsberichte* of Jesus' parables in his *Interpreting the Parables*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Blomberg asserts that, based on his review of both rabbinic parables and recent contemporary literary criticism, the older, analogical approach (Jülicher as further clarified by Dodd and Jeremias) is no longer serviceable, preferring instead an allegorical approach to interpreting parables (cf. p. 192.) However, rabbinic parables, even those deriving from the earliest stratum, the tannaitic literature, still date to approximately AD 200 when the Mishnah was collated and, consequently, do not necessarily shed light on the parables of Jesus composed more than a century earlier (cf. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL*, vol. 81, no. 1 (Mar., 1962), pp. 1-13). Moreover, it is not at all surprising that modern secular literary criticism prefers allegory to analogy in that these methods tend to be dismissive of historical concerns (such as authorial intention) and instead shift the emphasis away from author to text and audience. The better correspondence (rather than rabbinic parallels) is the Old Testament parable of the prophet Nathan to David in which the prophet, confronting the king with his adulterous and murderous dalliance with Bathsheba, tells the king a story that invites him to enter a world he already knows, maneuvers him into lowering his defenses, and then, when the king is sufficiently exposed, pulls the rug out from beneath him: “Thou art the man” (2 Sam 12:1ff., KJV). As is seen in the discussion below, this is precisely how Jesus' parables function. That is not to say that New Testament parables should *never* be interpreted allegorically; indeed, there is an allegorical interpretation of one parable in the Gospels (cf. Mark 4:13-20 and par.)! Rather, it is to say that allegorical interpretations of the parables do not reflect how parables functioned in the ministry of Jesus and, therefore, should not be regarded as the “normative” way to interpret his parables.

resorts to a special kind of analogy called “parable” (Greek, *parabole*, literally, something “cast alongside” the thing one wishes to explain), the purpose of which is to invite the listener into a world that only *appears* familiar, safe, natural, normal, and comfortable. Then, when the listener’s defenses are down and he/she is beginning to feel “at home,” Jesus turns the whole thing upside down and inside out. Suddenly, everything you thought you knew, you realize you do not know, creating an epistemological crisis that is not just cognitive, but experiential. It, therefore, becomes a teachable moment, a discovery moment. Hence, a parable is indeed “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning,” but it is not *simply* that. It is a story with a “hook” in it – something not right, something out of place, something so shocking, so unsettling, so disturbing that it causes one to re-think everything one thought he or she knew about God and his kingdom. So radically different from this world, so competitive with it, so counter to it, so at cross-purposes with it (pun intended) is the kingdom of God, that Jesus must resort to these special kinds of analogies to describe it.<sup>82</sup>

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus tells a story about the kingdom of God in which he likens it to a farmer going out to plant his fields. “Listen!” he says.<sup>83</sup> “A sower went a-sowing. And while he was sowing, some (of the seed) fell along the path (*hodos*), and the birds came and devoured it. But other (seed) fell upon the rocky soil (*petrodes*, literally “rocky path”) where

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<sup>82</sup> Parables, as with all analogies, are a way of talking about one thing in terms of something else: “My love is like a red, red rose.” However, the parable is not merely a “vehicle” for the message; rather, as Marshall McLuhan said, “The medium is the message.” The point of a parable is not just a portable “truth” that can be extracted, re-clothed, and repurposed as one sees fit. The point of the parable *is* the parable. As Isadora Duncan was reputed to have said when someone asked her to explain a dance, “No, I can’t explain the dance to you; if I could have said it, I wouldn’t have danced it!”

<sup>83</sup> In typical Markan fashion, the Parable of the Sower is framed in Mark 4:3, 9 with an admonition to “listen” and “let him hear” (*akouete/akoueto*). The framing (*inclusio*) is intended both to draw attention to the importance of the teaching, as well as to suggest interpretation and application of the material within. “Listen!” (Greek *akouete*) echoes and recalls the *Shema* of Deut 6 (Israel’s creed), and suggests that what follows should be understood as authoritative teaching coming from the authoritative teacher. It also suggests that active listening will be needed to understand and assimilate this teaching. Parables, unlike more obvious and transparent forms of communication, make demands of the hearer. With a parable, the hearer, not just the speaker, must bring something to the communicative enterprise.

there was not much soil (*ge*, literally “earth” or “land”), and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil (*ge*). But when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered. And still other (seed) fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it gave no fruit. But still other (seed) fell on good soil (*ge*), and it gave fruit growing and increasing, producing thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:3-9).<sup>84</sup>

There is the parable.<sup>85</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the subject of this parable is the kingdom of God. Jesus told this parable in the context of his ministry of preaching about the kingdom of God, a ministry that, though it had experienced early success, had lately fallen on hard times and deaf ears. The crowds were enormous at first, when following Jesus meant that their needs were being met (for food, for healing, for restoration of various sorts), but when Jesus started speaking of the demand of the kingdom of God – that it is a priceless pearl...that will cost you *everything* you have – the fickle crowds faded. Jesus’ disciples, discouraged by the lack of response, sought further clarification. As a result, Jesus, sensing that the disciples needed some

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<sup>84</sup> It is not insignificant that the word “seed” (*sperma*) does not appear in the parable, yet is indirectly and obliquely referenced throughout (“some,” “others,” “still other,” etc.), the parable withholding the subject until the critical moment when the point of the parable becomes clear, startling the hearer: “...and it gave fruit growing and increasing, producing thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:8). Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 150, having lived in Israel, suggests that the scope of the harvest, especially the “hundredfold harvest,” wildly exceeds expectations in that setting and, consequently, “symbolizes the eschatological overflowing of the divine goodness, surpassing all human measure.” However, see France, *Mark*, p. 192. Witherington, citing Jeremias favorably, says: “A tenfold harvest would be considered a very good one, but most scholars have suggested that a thirty-, sixty-, or hundredfold one would be nothing short of miraculous. As Jeremias points out, this suggests that the *eschatological* (emphasis mine) harvest is in mind,” *Mark*, pp. 165-66. This assumption has been disputed by Gustaf Dalman, “Vierlie Acker,” *PJ* 22 (1926), pp. 120-36, who, based on contemporary agricultural practices of the day in which individual grains of corn were known to produce on average thirty-five kernels, argues that while the harvest may have been impressive, it was not miraculous. However, one is not likely to capture the counter-cultural message of parables by counting corn kernels. Witherington is closer to the mark when he notes: “...Jesus’ parables frequently use hyperbole or exaggeration precisely at the point where they want to say something about God or the dominion or grace,” *Mark*, p. 165-66, n. 81.

<sup>85</sup> While this parable is traditional known as “The Parable of the Sower, as the translation makes clear, it is really about the *seed* and would more appropriately be described as “The Parable of the Seed.” Cf. France, *Mark*, p. 188.

explanation for what was happening, or perhaps more to the point, what was *not* happening, paused the ministry, pulled them aside, and told them this story to encourage them.<sup>86</sup>

However, it does not take much of a Bible scholar to pick up that this story was not very “encouraging.” Three out of four of the seeds the farmer had planted so hopefully failed to produce a thing, not one little seedling. Do the math! That is a 75% *failure* rate! Jesus’ disciples, hearing his little story, must have thought, “So, let us get this straight: The point of your little story is, ‘Most of what we do is going to *fail*?’ Well, that’s encouraging. Got any more stories, Jesus?”

But Jesus said: “You didn’t listen. I told you to listen. Yes, three out of the four seeds you planted with such hope failed to produce a thing...*but one did*, and that one produced a harvest so bounteous that it made the whole planting process worthwhile. Because this is *God’s* seed, and it is really good seed! So stop your whining and counting and fretting over results, and just sow, and then leave the rest to God.” That is, I believe, what Jesus intended with the summary statement: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Because this is *God’s* kingdom and not ours, attempts to control outcome are destined to disappoint. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD (Isa 55:8, RSV).

The implications of this parable for leadership are as encouraging as they are unsettling. They are encouraging in that God has the means to win and God means to win. They are unsettling in that God does not require our “help” to do it. Leadership in the kingdom of God, as with everything in the kingdom of God, is about *God*, not us. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

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<sup>86</sup> “The issue or exigence that the parable seems to be dealing with is the discouragement a sower (read proclaimer or persuader) faces when so many do not, or do not for long, respond positively to the message implanted in their mind,” Witherington, *Mark*, p. 162.

The Confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13-28; Mark 8:27-38; Luke 9:18-27)

Most scholars agree that the story of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi is the turning point in the Synoptic narrative, the hinge, if you will, on which the story pivots. The entire first half of the Gospel of Mark leads up to the question which is asked and answered here. Everything after this story moves straightway and inexorably to the cross, which constitutes the answer to the question asked here, and from which the disciples recoil.

Caesarea Philippi, formerly Paneas (Banyas today, which is the Arabic pronunciation of Paneas), represents Jesus' northernmost journey in the Galilee. Everything after this episode is "downhill," both literally and figuratively, as Jesus and the disciples make their way unalterably south to Jerusalem and the cross that awaits him there. Moreover, this story contains the first of three predictions of Jesus' death (passion predictions), the other two occurring at Mark 9:30-32 and Mark 10:32-34. Finally, a major theme of the first half of Mark's Gospel, the so-called "Messianic Secret," is brought to an appropriate conclusion in this central scene.<sup>87</sup>

The setting itself is significant. Banyas (Caesarea Philippi) is today, as it was then, a beautiful spring-fed, stream-traversed oasis at the foot of the majestic Mount Hermon which rises some 9,000 feet above sea level. Shaded with evergreens and sycamore figs, the city in Jesus'

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. William, Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. By J. C. G. Grieg (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1971). Wrede, and scholars since, have largely debated the origin of the so-called "Messianic Secret;" that is, was it Jesus' or Mark's? But the more important question is not whose? but why? Why keep Jesus' Messiahship a secret? Throughout the first half of Mark's Gospel, Jesus enjoins the witnesses to his miraculous activity to silence and, as it were, secrecy (hence, the Messianic Secret). It seems that Jesus does not want rumors that he may be Israel's long-awaited Messiah to circulate as long as the only "evidence" for such a conclusion are his miracles. That was, apparently, not the kind of "Messiah" he had come to be. However, after Peter's climactic confession that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus, for the first time, begins to teach the disciples what *kind* of Messiah he had come to be, namely, a suffering servant Messiah who would be betrayed, rejected, and ultimately killed. Mark, intriguingly, says, "And he said this plainly (*parresia*), whereas prior to revealing his destiny, he had only spoken about who he was "in parables" (*parabole*). It is a pun in Greek (*parresia/parabole*). Apparently, now that the truth is out, it is no longer necessary to enjoin silence and secrecy; if anyone, seeing *this* suffering, rejected, crucified Messiah chooses to follow him, he is welcome!



day had been enlarged by Herod Philip in part to rival his father's and brother's more impressive seaside port city, Caesarea Maritima (Philip changing the name from Paneas to Caesarea Philippi to honor both Augustus, and himself). The vestige of the former, pagan city in which locals worshipped the Greek satyr (half goat, half man and god of the flock and music), the flute-playing Pan, can still be seen today.<sup>88</sup> Carved into the mountainside rising above Paneas are three niches, presumably in Jesus' day containing statues dedicated to the worship of Pan, the statue to the satyr likely occupying the central, largest niche. It was a strange place to speak of a Jewish Messiah, but in such a setting Jesus could rely on the disciples' candor and honesty insulated from the dominate Jewish eschatological expectations that no doubt swirled in the Evangelical Triangle.<sup>89</sup>

The question Jesus posed for his disciples was the question of identity: "Who do men say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:27, 29). The answer to the first question was "prophet" (John the Baptist, Elijah, or some "other" prophet). That was not an insignificant confession in that Israel believed a prophet would be raised up to give witness to, and prepare the people of God for, the Day of the LORD. But Jesus was obviously hoping for more when he posed the question to the disciples: "*You*, who do you say that I am?"<sup>90</sup> Peter answers for the group and says, "You are the Christ (Messiah)," no doubt smuggling in his own assumptions and definitions of that term, being himself a Galilean. The term "Messiah" (*christos* in Greek), though used infrequently in that sense in the Old Testament, had become in first century Jewish

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. from *paein*, meaning "to pasture."

<sup>89</sup> "On the northwestern shore of the lake known in the Bible as the Sea of Galilee is a region, triangular in shape, that was anchored by three cities in Jesus' time: Capernaum, Korazin, and Bethsaida...the Evangelical Triangle," R. Wayne Stacy, *Where Jesus Walked: A Spiritual Journey through the Holy Land* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2001), p. 51. In Jesus' time, the Evangelical Triangle was a hotbed of observant Jewish life swirling in speculation about the Day of the LORD and the hoped-for Messianic deliverance. Cf. Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus through Galilee* (Rosh Pina, Israel: Corazin Publishing, 1992), pp. 34f.

<sup>90</sup> Mark 8:29, *humeis de tina me legete einai?* The Greek personal pronoun *humeis* is in the emphatic position, emphasizing it.

eschatological expectation a technical term for a coming deliverer who would fulfill the hopes of the Old Testament Day of the LORD and facilitate the realization of Israel's national hope for a restored Davidic kingdom. That is to say, in the first century Messiah was largely a political term.<sup>91</sup>

Jesus immediately moves to correct this popular misconception by teaching his disciples precisely what *kind* of Messiah he will be: "It is necessary (Greek, *dei* connoting *moral*, rather than mere circumstantial, necessity) for the Son of Man to suffer many things and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and to be killed and after three days to rise" (Mark 8:33).<sup>92</sup> Peter, apparently believing that Jesus needs a lesson on Jewish Messianic expectation, takes him aside and "rebukes" him.<sup>93</sup> But Jesus, in turn "rebukes" Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not thinking the things of God, but the things of man" (Mark 8:33). Peter, and the rest of the disciples (as will become apparent at Mark 10:35ff.) are locked into a vision of the kingdom of God rooted in, and reliant upon, the values and vision of *this* world, where "winning" is coming out on top. It was inconceivable to them that God could "win" in any other way. Jesus makes it clear, both to Peter and the others, that any attempt to understand the Messiah that eschews the cross misunderstands Messiah.

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<sup>91</sup> Both the Sanhedrin and Pilate recognize this fact at Jesus' trial so that his confession that he is Messiah is sufficient to charge him with sedition.

<sup>92</sup> There is little, if any, evidence that pre-Christian Judaism accorded any place to a *suffering* Messiah. Despite claims to the contrary, e.g., W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SPCK, 1955), p. 283, and Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), the verdict of T. W. Manson way back in 1953, that virtually no Jew in the first century would have interpreted Isaiah 53 *messianically* because they were not expecting a *suffering* Messiah, remains largely sustained; *The Servant-Messiah*, rpt. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977).

<sup>93</sup> The Greek word is *epitiman*. "Rebuke" is too polite a translation for this word, with the perfective *epi* on the front. It, rather, connotes a *screaming* rebuke. Note that this is the same word Mark used of Jesus in Mark 4:39 when Jesus, screaming at the violent sea to subdue it, "rebuked the wind." The word derives from the language of exorcism and, as such, is well-suited for the context in which Peter "screams" at Jesus, and Jesus, in turn, "screams" at Peter, in an attempt to exorcize the satanic spirit from him: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Jesus then calls the crowd with his disciples (it is safe to speak openly to the crowd about his identity and mission since his destination is now clear) and, as it were, drops the other shoe: “Not only are you wrong, Peter, about me; you are wrong about you! The cross is not just the Messiah’s, it also belongs to all who would follow him (that is, to be his disciples). There is no path to the kingdom of God that bypasses the cross” (my paraphrase of Mark 8:34). Furthermore, Jesus asserts that the cross is neither arbitrary nor optional: “Whoever wishes to save his life must lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel’s shall save it” (Mark 8:35). The cross is not merely the consequence of being a disciple; it is constitutive to it.<sup>94</sup>

Functionally speaking, the cross, this counter-intuitive disposition to self-denial rather than self-aggrandizement, has to do with losing control and the fundamental decision to give up trying to run the universe and allow God to do it instead. It means coming into proper relationship with God, with yourself, with others, and with the universe, and that means chiefly coming to the realization that you are not “in charge.”

For example, imagine a situation in which Hamlet, in William Shakespeare’s play, were to say to the author: “All right, Will. I get the idea. I see where this whole thing is going. Why don’t you take the day off; I’ll take it from here.” Of course, that could never happen because there is no “Hamlet” apart from the creative imagination of William Shakespeare. Hamlet is a character in Shakespeare’s story. Shakespeare as Hamlet’s author “thought him up,” so to speak, and if Hamlet tries to be “Hamlet” without being Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” he will not thereby “save himself” or discover his true self, he will only self-destruct. Which is to say, “self-determination” is finally a fraud. In the same way, you and I were made for God. He is the author

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<sup>94</sup> “Here is a whole new scenario for the disciples to absorb. Their natural human repugnance in the face of what appears to be defeat and disaster must give way to the divine logic which turns human valuation upside down,” France, *Mark*, p. 333.

of our lives; He “thought us up” like characters in a play, and apart from His will and plan and purpose for our lives, we do not “self-determine,” we “self-destruct.” This is what Jesus meant when he said, “To save your life, you must *lose* it.” For the disciple, for the leader, following Jesus means giving up any pretense that we are “in charge.”

Before leaving this story, however, we must turn our attention to Matthew’s unique telling of this episode (Matt 16:13ff.). If we only had Mark and Luke and not Matthew, the meaning of this story would be as described above; namely, that any attempt to deny or evade the cross, either for Jesus or his disciples, is a misunderstanding of the fundamental nature both of the kingdom of God and of ourselves. However, three verses in Matthew’s version of the story (Matt 16:17-19) change both the tone and significance of the episode. Matthew’s version of the story pretty much tracks Mark’s until the climactic confession: “You are the Christ!” (Matt 16:16). But instead of moving straightway to the first passion prediction and rebuke of Peter, as in Mark’s Gospel, Matthew inserts a saying from Jesus to Peter that is as hermeneutically striking as it is difficult: “And having answered, Jesus said, ‘Blessed are you Simon, son of John, for flesh and blood have not revealed [this] to you, rather, my Father who is in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not withstand it. I shall give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you should bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven’” (Matt 16:17-19).

The key hermeneutical question in this passage is: What is the role of Peter envisioned by Jesus? The answer to that question obviously has implications for our understanding of leadership in the church. More specifically, the question is: Is Peter the “rock” on which the church was to be built? The simplest and most straightforward reading of the passage would

answer “yes.” The language of verse 18 appears to demand it: “You are *Peter*, and upon *this rock* I will build my church.” As is well known, there is a word play in Greek: “You are Rock (*Petros*), and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build my church.” On the face of it, Jesus appears to be saying that Peter is the “rock” on which Jesus will build his church. Moreover, the context seems to demand it as well. We already know from reading Matthew that Jesus has given Simon, son of John, a nickname, *Kepha* in Aramaic, *Petros* in Greek, both translating into English as “Rock.”<sup>95</sup> The fact that one of the key functions of rock in the ancient world was to serve as the foundation for buildings (not all buildings in the ancient world were erected fully from stone, but even those that were not required a rock foundation), suggests that Simon’s nickname was neither haphazard nor impulsive.<sup>96</sup> And so, the plain meaning of the text is clear: Peter is to be the foundation stone (*petra*) on which Jesus’ new kingdom *qahal* (*ekklesia*) is to be built.

Of course, the plain meaning of the text has precipitated a debate, chiefly between Roman Catholics and Protestants, over the so-called primacy of Peter and his successors. Consequently, attempts to circumvent the plain meaning of the text proliferate. The most widely-known exegetical evasion is the one that points out the two different genders used in Matt 16:18, *Petros* and *petra*, the interpretation being that Jesus could not have intended Simon by the second reference to “rock” (*petra*) because it is *feminine*, not masculine. But that is surely a canard in that this conversation would have occurred in Aramaic, not Greek, and in Aramaic the distinction disappears. The other most popular attempt at exegetical evasion is that Jesus meant by “rock” (*petra*) not Simon but Simon’s *confession* of Jesus as Messiah.<sup>97</sup> But as R. T. France notes, this

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Matt 4:18.

<sup>96</sup> “Many houses in Palestine were constructed from stone because it was cheap and readily available,” Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black, *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, C. C. Caragounis, *Peter and the Rock* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), *passim*.

is surely “exegesis of desperation” in that had Jesus wished to *distinguish* Simon (*Petros*) from Simon’s *confession* (*petra*), he would have used the adversative “but” (Greek, *alla*), rather than the connective “and” (Greek, *kai*).<sup>98</sup>

No, by the “rock” (*petra*) on which the church is to be built, Jesus appears to mean Peter, but not Peter *alone*, nor Peter *personally*, as though he possesses some unique qualification or attributes that make him ideally suited for the role.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the Gospel record points to the opposite!<sup>100</sup> It is significant that Matthew 18:18 takes up the same “binding and loosing” language used of Peter in 16:19, but in 18:18 the “whatever *you* bind” language is plural (*desete*), rather than singular (*deses*) as in Matthew 16:19; hence, the implication is that the authority to bind and loose does not lie with Peter *singularly*, but rather with all the disciples.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Peter is not the “foundation rock” on which the church is to be built *personally*. He is the leader and foundation stone of the church only in the *historical* sense that he was first; first to be named among the disciples and having held the first leadership role among the earliest Christians, as the first ten chapters of Acts attests.

But what of the “keys to the kingdom of God” that are entrusted to Peter? Does that mean that, as the Roman Catholic Church contends, Peter and his successors control entrance to the kingdom? First of all, there is not a hint anywhere in this passage of leadership succession.

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<sup>98</sup> France, *Matthew*, p. 622.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew, The New American Commentary*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 252.

<sup>100</sup> Peter’s demeanor, personality, and attributes reveal him to be unreliable, mercurial, impetuous, arrogant and rash. In the Gospel narrative he is anything but “rock solid,” leading some to speculate that Jesus’ nickname for Simon bar Jonah contained a tinge of irony. However, see Floyd Filson, “Peter,” *IDB*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 751, who suggests that, given Peter’s personality penchant for instability, Jesus’ naming of Simon as “Rock” perhaps suggests that Jesus believes in Simon, despite his personal shortcomings. Or, perhaps Jesus is picking up on a leadership theme prevalent in the Old Testament (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Saul, David, et al.), where God chooses deeply flawed persons through whom to lead his people, the leadership principle apparently being, “God writes straight with crooked lines.”

<sup>101</sup> As Blomberg correctly points out: “Peter is the disciples’ spokesman, but as their representative and not just their leader...Peter’s primacy is more chronological, in the unfolding events of early Christianity, than hierarchical,” p. 255.

Again, Peter is the “foundation rock” on which the church is built only in a historical sense (he was *literally* “first follower”), not in a formal or official sense. Moreover, the authority related to holding the “keys to the kingdom” does not mean authority to grant access or admission; it is rather the role of the leader to support, sustain, and supply the community, the kingdom *qahal*.

There is an intertextual echo in this passage that picks up both the backstory and imagery of Isaiah 22:20-22 and the role of Eliakim as the steward (*ebed*) of God’s house.<sup>102</sup> First of all, it is important to remember that, as France reminds us, “The steward is not the owner. He has both authority (over the rest of the household) and responsibility (to his master to administer the affairs of the house properly). The keys are those of the storehouses, to enable him to make appropriate provision for the household, not those of the outer gate, to control admission.”<sup>103</sup>

The backstory is that of Eliakim (Hebrew, “God raises up”) who was the steward of the house of Hezekiah who replaced the unfaithful and arrogant prior steward, Shebna, who arrogated to himself more power and authority than was appropriate. Shebna saw leadership residing in his *person* rather than his role as servant (cf. *ebed*). Consequently, YHWH judged him unfit for leadership and replaced him with Eliakim to whom was given the *delegated* authority of the key to the king’s house. Intriguingly, Isa 22:15 employs the conceit of the arrogant leader who forgot that he was but the king’s steward (servant) and not the one with *real* authority. The story suggests (though does not make explicit) that Shebna got so caught up in himself that he apparently had hewn for himself a rock niche (in which to display a statue of himself?) to commemorate, in self-congratulatory fashion, his work and authority in the king’s house. With not a little irony, Isaiah suggests that Shebna’s niche will become a *tomb* for

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<sup>102</sup> The Hebrew word *ebed* can be translated into English variously as “son,” “servant,” or “steward,” as it is here. The Eliakim story is also echoed in Rev 3:7ff. So also, Blomberg, pp. 254f.

<sup>103</sup> France, *Matthew*, p. 625.

himself: “What have you to do here and whom have you here, that you have hewn here a tomb for yourself, you who hew a tomb on the height, and carve a habitation for yourself in rock?” (Isa 22:16, RSV). The text goes on to suggest that YHWH will cast him down and replace him with a more suitable steward, Eliakim.<sup>104</sup> The parallels with the niche of Pan at Banyas are striking. Standing in that place, Jesus reaches back into the prophecy of Isaiah and effectively says that Israel’s leaders, like the arrogant steward, Shebna, have become pagan, like Pan, and, consequently, will be thrown down and replaced when God “raises up” a new “Eliakim” (Peter), who will now “shoulder the key of the [new] house of David” (Isa 22:22), that is, the church, the kingdom *qahal*, the *ekklesia*. Shebna’s niche, however, has become his tomb, a sobering warning to those who forget that leadership in the kingdom of God is about *God*, not us.

The Request of James and John (Matt 20:20ff.; Mark 10:35ff.; Luke 22:24ff)

This story is significant for our study in that it is the only place in the entire Synoptic tradition where Jesus discusses leadership *as a subject*. The setting of the story in the Gospel of Mark (10:32ff.) is heavy with meaning. Jesus is “on the way” to Jerusalem with the cross before him and his disciples struggling to keep up, both literally and figuratively. Since Caesarea Philippi Jesus had been speaking openly of the cross, both his and theirs, but his disciples were having difficulty fitting Jesus’ conception of the kingdom of God into their own assumptions and expectations. For the third and final time Jesus predicts his coming passion to the disciples. Mark’s Gospel tends to treat the disciples as foils for Jesus and his understanding of the kingdom of God. They want to follow and understand, but they just cannot bring themselves to “buy in” to

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<sup>104</sup> In 1870 an inscription was discovered in Silwan, an Arab village south of Jerusalem, which was only deciphered in 1953. Intriguingly, it reads: “This is the tomb of Shebaniah who is over the house [i.e., the king’s house]. There is no silver or gold here, just his bones and the bones of his maidservant with him. Cursed is the name who opens this.” Is this Isaiah’s Shebna? Cf. Walter Kaiser, gen. ed., *The NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 1094.



his vision. Mark depicts this resistance and recalcitrance dramatically with a pattern that gathers around the three passion predictions in the Gospel: Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32. The pattern is as follows: (1) Jesus predicts his passion to his disciples; (2) the disciples typically fail to “get it” and misunderstand Jesus’ meaning; and (3) Jesus provides the disciples with “remedial instructions,” as it were, on the nature of life in the kingdom of God, the character of his Messiahship, and the disposition of discipleship.<sup>105</sup> The story of the Request of James and John (Mark 10:35ff.) functions in this narrative structure as the second component of this tripartite pattern, namely, the misunderstanding of the disciples.

The disciples’ misunderstanding, which Mark depicts as “blindness,” is highlighted by two provocative narrative juxtapositions: (1) Jesus’ prediction of his suffering and death is immediately juxtaposed by the request of James and John for the “power chairs” in the kingdom (Mark 10:37); and (2) James’ and John’s “blindness” is made to stand in bold relief by the fact that the story of their request is immediately followed by the story of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46ff.) who, as a blind man, “sees” better than they and, in fact, becomes a true disciple, willingly and freely “following [Jesus] on the way” (Mark 10:52).<sup>106</sup> The request of James and John, then, offers a “teachable moment” about the nature of leadership in the kingdom of God.

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<sup>105</sup> Joseph B. Tyson, “The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” *JBL*, 80 (1961), 261-268. Mark emphasizes the disciples’ misunderstanding through their reaction to Jesus’ teaching, which typically takes the form of fear, astonishment, or amazement. Mark depicts the disciples as fearful, obdurate, and confused in the face of Jesus’ increasingly straightforward instruction about the nature of his Messiahship, their discipleship, and the kingdom of God. For the role that the fear motif plays in Mark’s Gospel, especially in terms of his portrayal of the disciples, see Stacy, “Fear in the Gospel of Mark,” *passim*.

<sup>106</sup> Twice in his story Mark portrays the disciples as “blind” to the true character of the kingdom by juxtaposing their obdurate ignorance with the willing acceptance of blind men who, in the ways that matter, “see” what the disciples cannot: Mark 8:22ff. and Mark 10:46ff. Indeed, the central section of the Gospel in which Jesus openly reveals his suffering Messiahship to the disciples in three passion predictions, only to be met with fear and misunderstanding by the disciples, is framed by these two stories of blind men who “see” what the disciples cannot or will not, the two stories forming an “inclusion” in which the “bookend” stories of the blind men receiving their sight interpret the passion prediction stories within. Mark’s point is obvious: The disciples are “blind” when it comes to the true nature of the kingdom of God, Jesus’ Messiahship, and their own discipleship.

The story falls into two sections. The first (10:35-40) depicts the request of James and John to occupy the places of power (right and left of the throne) in the coming kingdom of God. Presumably, they sense an opening for themselves to gain the ascendancy over Peter following Jesus' put down of Peter in the previous scene in which Peter reminds Jesus of what they have left behind for the kingdom and, consequently, wants to know, "What's in it for us?" (10:28). Jesus responds by saying that the kingdom of God is not about "coming out on top": "But many of those who are first will be last, and the last first" (10:31). The second section (10:41-45) is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus overtly addresses the idea of leadership. In so doing, Jesus stands the world's notion of leadership on its head: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, rather, to serve and to give his life a ransom (*lutron*) for the sake of many" (Mark 10:45).

The revolutionary character of the kingdom of God as an "alternative society," another world, the "room above," is evident in the dismissive reply with which Jesus dispatches the request of James and John for leadership as power: *ouch outos de estin en humin*, "but it is not so among you."<sup>107</sup> Indeed, there is a fundamental disconnect between life in the kingdom and life in this world, Jesus asserting that the former, not the latter, is the *real* world: "You know that those who *seem* (Greek, *dokeo*) to rule among the pagans (Greek, *ethnon*) dominate (lord it over) them, their leaders [Greek, *hoi megaloi*, "great ones"] like to push their weight around" (my paraphrase).<sup>108</sup> There is no escaping Jesus' point: By calling the will to power *pagan* (Greek, *ethnon*), Jesus asserts that it is antithetical to the kingdom of God. Moreover, his point is that, as a leadership principle, the will to power *cannot* be redeemed; it must be abandoned. We sometimes think that if we could just get the "right people" into power, we could "fix things."

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. France, *Mark*, p. 415.

<sup>108</sup> The use of the Greek word *dokeo* ("seem") is telling and indicative: There is that which *seems* to be so, and there is that which is so. Only those with a kingdom perspective can discern the difference.

Jesus, however, asserts that *there are no “right people.”* It is the will to power *itself* that is pagan and anti-kingdom and cannot be redeemed irrespective of who wields it.<sup>109</sup>

Jesus makes two other points in this story that impinge on the topic of leadership in the kingdom of God. The first is that service (Greek, *diakonos*) is *inherent* to the kingdom of God, not an optional accessory to it. By extension, one could extrapolate that Jesus meant to suggest that ministry, or service, is somehow inherent to discipleship (and, consequently, to salvation itself!), not an “option” beyond it.<sup>110</sup> Second, leaders in the kingdom of God are not leaders who also happen to serve (as an act of either deigned or feigned humility); rather, in the kingdom of God leaders are *servants* who also happen to *lead*. Indeed, in an alternative reality where the metric for “greatness” is service, servants will *have* to lead.

#### The Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:9-14; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19)

The second of Mark’s explanatory discourses, which interrupts the narrative to provide the disciples (and, because we are overhearing the conversation, the readers) with insight and further clarification, is the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1-35), which R. T. France appropriately labels “the End of the Old Order.”<sup>111</sup> The setting of the discourse is that Jesus, disciples in tow, has departed the temple to the Mount of Olives after a contentious day of teaching and fielding questions from his critics meant to ensnare and embarrass him before the gathered worshippers. As Jesus and his disciples crest the Mount of Olives, they peer across the Kidron Valley and behold the splendor of Herod’s temple gleaming in the distance. Admiring the gilded witness to the leadership of their age (Herod “the Great”), the disciples fall into a snare of their own: “Teacher, just look at the impressive stonework and construction [of Herod’s temple]!” (Mark

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<sup>109</sup> As attributed to Lord Acton, “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

<sup>110</sup> While there may be “worker bees” and “drones” in an apiary, in the kingdom of God there are, apparently, no “drones.”

<sup>111</sup> France, *Mark*, pp. 13f.

13:1, my paraphrase). Jesus responds by sitting down and delivering to the disciples a jeremiad of eschatological destruction that caught the disciples off guard: “See these great buildings? There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be utterly destroyed!” (Mark 13:2).<sup>112</sup> The disciples (Mark identifies the interlocutors as Peter, James, and John, the inner three) then press him for details, “Tell us, when shall these things be, and what [will be] the sign when the consummation (*sunteleisthai*) of all things is about to occur?” (Mark 13:4). There were actually two questions being asked here, though the disciples, assuming nothing could conceivably occur after the destruction of the temple, believed they had asked only one.<sup>113</sup>

In the sayings that follow these questions, Jesus interweaves the two events (the destruction of the temple and the “consummation of all things”) into a single discourse. Sometimes he is talking about the former, sometimes the latter.<sup>114</sup> But the discourse as a whole is intended to describe the cataclysmic event anticipated in everything Jesus taught about the kingdom of God; namely, that with his entrance into this world to announce the advent of the kingdom of God in his life and ministry, the world *as we have known it* is history. In Jesus, a whole new world, in which God is sovereign and “different rules apply,” has broken in and broken through. R. T. France, when commenting on this passage in Matthew, rightly calls it, “The End of the Old Order.”<sup>115</sup> Joel Green makes the same point when he titles Luke’s version of

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<sup>112</sup> It is not insignificant that in Mark’s Gospel, this is one of only two times that Jesus *sits down* (the posture of the rabbi when he delivers an authoritative teaching) to teach the disciples, the other one being the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1-9.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew (24:3), apparently sensing the difficulty with the disciples’ question as reported by Mark, divided the question into *two* parts: “When shall these things be, and what [will be] the sign of your *Parousia* and the consummation (*sunteleias*) of the age?” Now, the question appropriately asks about *two* events, instead of just one, as in Mark 13:4, one of many arguments for Markan priority.

<sup>114</sup> My beloved teacher, the late George Raymond Beasley-Murray, skillfully unraveled this narrative in his masterful book, the published version of his doctoral dissertation, *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13* (London: Macmillan, 1954).

<sup>115</sup> France, *Matthew*, p. 889. See also France, *Mark*, p. 14, where he titled the Olivet Discourse in Mark the same way: “The End of the Old Order.”

this discourse, “The Coming of the End.”<sup>116</sup> The discourse is truly “eschatological,” not just in the sense that it speaks of the “end” of the world, but in the theological sense of the consistent emphasis in the New Testament that the *telos* (End) broke in and broke through in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. To be sure, the *telos* yet awaits final consummation at the *Parousia* of the Son of Man (cf. Mark 13:26), but already in the message, ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the “End” has come.<sup>117</sup>

The primary message of this discourse to Jesus’ followers is that, living as they do *in* this world but no longer *of* it, they had better be prepared for some opposition, ostracism, and even outright opprobrium: “But watch out (*Blepete*, a key word in the narrative) for yourselves; for they shall deliver you up to the Sanhedrin and you will be beaten in the synagogues; and before governors and kings you will be made to stand for my sake as a witness (Greek, *martyr*) to them”

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<sup>116</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, NICNT* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 729.

<sup>117</sup> New Testament scholars call this “realized eschatology,” referring to the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of events at the *telos* of history. The term was coined by C. H. Dodd in a series of lectures given at King’s College, London in 1935, and later published as *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936). His use of the term is frequently misinterpreted and misrepresented to suggest that he denied any future aspect of eschatology, affirming that the *eschaton* had been completely and fully “realized” in Jesus’ life and ministry. However, in the appendix titled “Eschatology and History” in *The Apostolic Preaching*, Dodd makes it clear that he did believe in a future aspect of eschatology, that the kingdom of God in the New Testament manifested both an “already” and a “not yet.” His principal point in the lectures is that what early Christian preaching (*kerygma*) had at first understood and described as a *singular* event (cf. Mark 13:4), was later recognized as two events. Dodd makes that clear in the lectures: “The new age is here, of which Christ, again by virtue of His death and resurrection, is Lord. *He will come to exercise His Lordship both as Judge and as Saviour at the consummation of the Age* (emphasis mine).”

The term “realized eschatology” attempts to capture the truth that realities are both latent and actual; that is, there are some things that are *eternally* and *timelessly* true, even before history vindicates them and recognizes them as such. History sometimes takes time to “catch up” to reality. For example, as I write this the world is commemorating the D-Day Invasion of June 6, 1944. On that day, the Allies landed at Normandy, France and began the push to liberate Europe from the Nazis. Subsequent history discloses what was true but hidden until historical perspective revealed it; namely, that for all intents and purposes, the war was over on that day. Germany was effectively (and latently) defeated when the Allies landed, even though there would be many horrific battles yet to be waged, including the Battle of the Bulge; and Germany’s actual surrender would not come for nearly a year. But in a latent sense (that is, in the sense that history had not yet “caught up” with reality), the war for Europe ended on June 6, 1944, even though it did not *actually* end until May 7, 1945, when Germany officially surrendered to the Allies. In the same way, the Day of the LORD (the kingdom of God) is *already here*, having broken in and broken through in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but still awaits its final and full consummation at the *Parousia* of the Christ.

(Mark 13:9). The context is Jewish (Sanhedrin, synagogue), but the message is clear irrespective of context: Leadership in the kingdom of God, in which you are *in* the world but not *of* it, and in which you give voice and vocation to a vision and values essentially competitive with the vision and values of this world, will both threaten the power structures invested in this world (“governors and kings”) and exact from you a heavy toll (“they will deliver you up and beat you”). The character of leadership in the kingdom of God, Jesus says, is *counter-cultural*. Kingdom values are not just different; they are *essentially* different. The world affirms a *sui generis* and autonomous “Nature;” but in the kingdom of God we affirm “creation,” the work of a loving God. The world affirms blind “luck” (the Greeks called her *Tyche*, the Romans *Fortuna*, today we call her “Lady Luck”), but in the kingdom of God we affirm “providence” and the belief that nothing ever catches God by surprise. The world affirms “mistakes” or “pathology” or “dysfunction,” but in the kingdom of God we affirm “sin,” open rebellion not only against the Creator, but against our own very natures, our most essential selves. The world affirms “human improvement” and “self-actualization,” but in the kingdom of God we affirm “salvation” which is both “outer” (that is, not originating *within* us) and “other” (that is, not *our* doing). If that which calls itself the church can only offer warmed-over popular culture in an attempt to curry favor with the power brokers of this world, it will, thereby, forfeit any credible claim to being the kingdom *qahal* Jesus came to call and create. Moreover, as this discourse demonstrates, to give witness to the kingdom of God *means* that one will be misunderstood, despised, ostracized, hated, and ultimately rejected by those who correctly and rightly see the kingdom as the threat it is to their “world.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Luke advances this theme powerfully in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, where he describes the inevitable result of the proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom in this world; namely, baptisms and beatings. When the Gospel of the kingdom is preached, some people catch sight of it and are baptized; conversely, the preacher is typically beaten and/or jailed, the power brokers of this world rightly sensing the threat such a vision is

## The Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20)

The final episode in the Gospel narrative with implications for leadership is the Great Commission. The narrative of the so-called “Great Commission,” unique to Matthew’s Gospel, gathers together and brings to an appropriate completion several important themes of the Synoptic story. As already noted, the Synoptic story employs a geographical structure of Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus begins his ministry up in the Galilee and inexorably moves southward toward Jerusalem where he is rejected, murdered, and ultimately vindicated by God. The Great Commission completes this structure by having Jesus and his disciples return to where it all began; the best stories being those that come “full circle.”

Moreover, the mission narrative (see above on Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 9:1-2), in which Jesus commissions his disciples to be his representatives to proclaim the good news of the sovereign rule of God to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” at least in Matthew’s telling, is satisfied in the narrative of the Great Commission. The earlier mission had ended badly with Jesus’ disciples abandoning both him and the mission (cf. Matt 26:56), but in the Great Commission, the disciples are re-gathered, re-constituted as the kingdom *qahal*, restored, and recommissioned, only this time not just to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” but to “all nations” (Matt 28:19). Jewish tradition expected a mission to the nations as a prelude to the Day of the LORD, and Jesus had adumbrated this development earlier in his ministry (cf. Matt 24:14). Now, that prophecy is fulfilled.<sup>119</sup>

Additionally, the major Christological emphasis of the Gospel finds its fulfillment in this story. Throughout the Synoptic story, Jesus had been portrayed as the proclaimer of the “good

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to their “order.” See William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 161ff.

<sup>119</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, “Studies in Biblical Theology” (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1958), pp. 22-23.

news” that the sovereign rule of God (kingdom of God) had broken in and broken through in the events surrounding his life and ministry. However, on the other side of Jesus’ death and resurrection, something new happens: Jesus the proclaimer becomes Jesus the proclaimed: “All authority, both in heaven and earth, is given *to me*” (Matt 28:18). This represents a seismic shift Christologically. Jesus is no longer just the one who *announces* God’s sovereign rule; he *is* the “sovereign” who rules. Note that the injunction to baptize disciples is made in the *name* (singular!) “of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” signifying a divine solidarity that, while typical of the Gospel of John (cf. “I and the Father are one,” John 10:30), is new for the Synoptic tradition.<sup>120</sup> Paul, picking up on this seismic Christological shift, largely abandons the language of “kingdom of God” (he uses the phrase a mere fourteen times compared to fifty-three times in the Gospels) and replaces it with “Jesus Christ,” the two being tautological for him. Moreover, as has often been noted, Matthew concludes his Gospel echoing its beginning wherein he quotes the prophecy of Isa 7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is translated ‘God with us’” (Matt 1:24). Matthew picks up this imagery from chapter one and employs the literary device of *inclusio*, ending his Gospel by spelling out Jesus’ name, Immanuel (Hebrew for “with us is God”), for the reader: *kai idou ego meth humon eimi*, “And behold, *I am with you.*”<sup>121</sup> Hence, both at the beginning of Matthew’s story and at the end Jesus is identified as Emmanuel, “God with us.” In between the *inclusio*, the case for that claim is completed.

The implications of the Great Commission for discipleship and, therefore, leadership, are not difficult to discover. Consistent with Matthew’s emphasis on connecting Israel’s story with

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. France, *Matthew*, p. 1108.

<sup>121</sup> *Inclusio*, also called “sandwiching” or intercalation, is a literary device, employed with some frequency by Mark, in which stories, or imagery, are combined or “sandwiched” together so as to allow them to interpret one another. Cf. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 36.



the church's story, the Great Commission hearkens back to call and commissioning stories in the Old Testament in which over-matched and under-equipped leaders are sent out to be God's representatives, assured only of God's abiding presence as they go.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the closest parallel is the call and commissioning of Jeremiah (Jer 1:1-19).<sup>123</sup> YHWH calls Jeremiah and commissions him to be a "prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). After the requisite demurring by the prophet ("I do not know how to speak," etc.), YHWH reassures him with the words, "Fear not, for *I am with you* to deliver you, says YHWH" (Jer 1:8). The parallels with Matt 28:16ff. are striking. Even the protestations of the commissioned, so typical of Old Testament call narratives, may be present in Matthew's story. Matthew introduces the Commission with the intriguing and provocative statement: "And having seen him, they worshipped, *but some doubted*" (Matt 28:17). The Greek word translated "doubted" is *edistasan*, deriving from two Greek words: *histemi*, to stand, and *dis* (cf. *duo*) meaning "two." Hence, the word means to "stand in two places;" that is, to be "double minded," "confused," "irresolute," *not* "doubt" in the sense of "unbelief." As with Jeremiah, these disciples doubted *themselves*, not Jesus.

The mandate of the mission is to "make disciples" (Greek *matheteusate*). It is unfortunate, and purely an accident of English, that this Greek word is translated "make disciples." In point of fact, *matheteusate* is a transitive verb, "to disciple." However, there is no such verb in English, and so the circumlocution is to "make disciples." But this translation of *matheteusate* is misleading, making it seem as though disciples "make" other disciples. That is surely not what Jesus meant. The power and authority to *make* disciples belongs to him alone; it

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. France, *Matthew*, p. 1109.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew quotes and/or alludes to Jeremiah far more than do the other Synoptics: Matthew=12X; Mark=2X; Luke=6X. Of course, Matthew quotes the Old Testament more than do his fellow evangelists because of his fulfillment formula. Nevertheless, the number of quotations of and/or allusions to Jeremiah in the Gospel of Matthew is noteworthy.

does not reside in his disciples. Disciples only “disciple” those who respond to the claim of God’s sovereign rule (the kingdom of God), they do not “replicate” them.

Moreover, “discipling” is further defined by two exegetical participles: *baptizontes* (baptizing) and *didaskontes* (teaching). The implication of the Greek syntax is clear: You have not “discipled” people until you have *both* baptized them (“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) and taught them (“to keep everything I have commanded you”), the former being an act of enrolling as a disciple in the new *qahal* Jesus established, and the latter signifying that the enrollee has become a life-long learner (i.e., a “disciple”), learning to become “acclimated” to the new, alternative reality of the kingdom of God.

Jesus’ promise to these kingdom leaders is not success; that was never theirs to achieve. Rather, he promises his abiding presence (“I am with you”), right up until the consummation of the age (*eos tes suntelias tou aionos*), when his *Parousia* will bring the *end* of the End (as opposed to the *beginning* of the End that occurred in his life and ministry), making their leadership no longer necessary; and when, in the words of the Apocalypse, “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our LORD and of his Christ, and *he* shall reign forever” (Rev 11:15).

### **Towards a Synoptic Theology of Leadership**

So, what have we learned about discipleship, and, therefore, leadership, in our Synoptic survey? I would suggest the following are indicative of leadership in the Synoptic tradition:

- Leadership, just as with everything else in the Synoptics, must be understood in the context of the kingdom of God. The Synoptics have no interest in leadership *per se*.

- The kingdom of God in the Synoptics is a thoroughly *eschatological* concept. In the kingdom of God, another world, an “alternative reality,” has broken in and broken through. Consequently, when the Synoptics describe life in the kingdom of God, they are not describing life in “this world” (cf. Jesus’ parables of the kingdom). This produces a creative tension for Jesus’ followers (including leaders) who yet living *in* this world are never to think of themselves as *of* this world.
- Leadership in the Synoptics is chiefly about discipleship, variously described as “the Twelve,” “disciples,” and “apostles,” those who have caught sight of the alternative reality Jesus called the kingdom of God and, consequently, have chosen to live in *this* world as citizens of *that* world.
- Disciples as leaders function as “first followers;” that is, they exercise no *independent* authority. Rather, their leadership derives exclusively from their role as kingdom guides.
- Because the kingdom of God is an eschatological concept (i.e., the phrase always refers to *another* world, not this one), there is always a counter-cultural component both to discipleship and leadership.
- The cross is not merely a consequence of discipleship, it is constitutive to it. Because disciples are *in* this world but not *of* it, they can expect to be misunderstood, ostracized, rejected, and even persecuted. The leader not only understands this, he or she expects it. There is no discipleship, or leadership, in the kingdom of God that eschews the way of the cross.

- Communally speaking, the community of this new world (the kingdom *qahal* or *ekklesia* or the church) is not here to “fix” this world; rather, it is here to announce the *end* of this world and the advent of a whole new world (the kingdom of God) only visible through the eyes of faith.
- In the kingdom community, leadership is *not* about the exercise of power and authority over others. Indeed, the will to power is inimical to kingdom leadership.
- As the call stories in the Synoptic Gospels make clear (cf. the calling of the Twelve and the selection of Peter as the “rock” on which the church is built), leadership in the kingdom of God is about *calling* not requisite characteristics or traits or skills or qualities; that is, leadership originates with *God* not us. From a biblical perspective, discipleship, and therefore leadership, studies that focus on the leader’s inherent ability or talent or qualities or skills that specially suit him or her to the role are wrong-headed. The only qualities required of a leader in the kingdom of God are *availability* and the *faith*, however halting or inadequate, to trust that this “new world” one has glimpsed in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the *real* world.
- Leaders in the kingdom of God are not leaders who also happen to serve (as an act of either deigned or feigned humility); rather, in the kingdom of God, where the will to power has been renounced and repudiated as irredeemable and inimical to kingdom values, leaders are *servants* who also happen to *lead*.
- Jesus does not promise that kingdom leaders will succeed; rather, he promises that God has *already* succeeded and that along the way (to the full and final consummation of the kingdom age), they can be assured of his abiding presence.