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The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel

Submitted to Dr. Daryl Rodriguez

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research is to clear up the misunderstanding that exists in Matthew's Gospel. This project focuses on clarifying how a better understanding of the differences between the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" in Matthew's Gospel which in turn will impact the lives of Christians today. As this study will reveal, each phrase has a unique usage that was important to the original audience. Matthew's aim in writing his Gospel were, not only to strengthen the spiritual disposition of his church, but also to assist his readers in rediscovering their true identity. The Jewish setting of Matthew also explains his preference for the term "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God," while in the other synoptic Gospels, Jesus regularly employed the phrase "the kingdom of God" addressing their Gentile audience. The usage of the two phrases has implications for those who seek to live out the teachings of Matthew's Gospel today. This project focuses on developing this area of research within a group of participants from Word Warriors Ministries to gain insight into the importance of evangelism, seeking the kingdom of heaven, and deepening one's relationship with Christ.

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“absent in the body is to be present with the Lord.” I love and miss you all, and I will see you again.

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Abbreviations

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

M.O.F.A.T Men of Faith and Truth

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Introduction

The thesis project's design is to clear up the misconceptions of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Many people misunderstand what Jesus meant when He speaks of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Although both phrases, the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God," are used in the Gospels, one should not treat these two terms as a reverential circumlocution for God. On the contrary, these two phrases are unique and very important. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom is understood better along the lines of inaugurated eschatology; the appearance of Christ on Earth, this kingdom though not yet consummated, is inaugurated.¹ The pivotal part of the biblical foundation is the "happening" of the kingdom in the person and history of Jesus. The coming of Christ is the event that gives faith confidence because here, God proves Himself faithful to His promise for the whole world in one person, with the death and Resurrection of Jesus.² Consequently, the eschatological orientation is how the kingdom's appearance in Jesus opens the whole world to its future in the kingdom. Jesus, the center, is the anticipation of the future that awaits the world, of the kingdom that will extend to the whole world.³

Proleptic eschatology is an expression J. A. T. Robinson uses to relate the ministry of Jesus to the events that led to His death. As a result of Jesus' death, the kingdom comes in power the hour in which the Son of Man arrives. However, the signs of the messianic age are seen

¹ Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2012), 36.

² Poul F. Guttesen, *Leaning into the Future: The Kingdom of God in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann and in the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co, 2011), 23.

³ Ibid.

already in anticipation, “before the time” (Matthew 8:29)⁴, in His words and deeds.⁵ The expression inaugurated eschatology relates the coming of the kingdom in the death of Jesus. It relates to the final consummation of God’s purposes, such that at the death of Jesus, all is inaugurated, yet only inaugurated. While only inaugurated, this event brought humanity into the presence of an eschatological event.⁶ Jesus proclaimed the kingdom to the poor, sick, and sinners. The kingdom begins with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and overcoming death’s power by His Resurrection. In Jesus, the kingdom achieved its goal: the pivotal victory over transience and its consequences. Although an actual instantiation of the kingdom, the Resurrection of Jesus is not its consummation.⁷ Instead, as the first among many, He has entered the future resurrection that awaits all believers. The resurrection is the first realization of the kingdom in the world. Because of the rising of the Crucified One, this appearing is possible, which is the first fruit of the kingdom He proclaimed in His ministry. This appearance of the kingdom in Jesus relates to the world that is not yet the kingdom.⁸ As they live in the interim between the already and the not yet, Matthew’s readers are far from clueless about the kingdom. Matthew’s readers are far from clueless because Jesus has revealed its mysteries to them through His parables (Matthew 13:11).⁹ Matthew’s readers know what the kingdom of

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁵ Ben Cooper, “Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 1 (August 2010): 61.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Guttesen, *Leaning into the Future*, 77.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Carl R. Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament: Reference Edition* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 219.

heaven is like. The kingdom springs up in surprising places (Matthew 13:1-23). The kingdom must compete with powerful, demonic forces (Matthew 13:19; 12:22-32). The kingdom is often an invisible presence in the world yet has phenomenal transforming power (Matthew 13:31-33). The kingdom is worth pursuing at all costs (Matthew 13:44-46), and it attracts all sorts of folks and every kind of fish, but in the end, it is God who does the final sorting (Matthew 13:38, 41, 43, 47-50). One gets into the kingdom of heaven by becoming a child (Matthew 18:1-4), and one remains by being childlike (Matthew 19:14). When they angle for position and power, they are rebuked (Matthew 20:21), some people try to block another's entry (Matthew 23:13), and riches can keep one out (Matthew 19:23-24).¹⁰ So, there is both an "already" and a "not yet" aspect of the kingdom of God. The expressions "already" and "not yet" capture the two phases of the coming of the kingdom. It is already happening in the person and ministry of Jesus when He says: "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20). "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning (Luke 10:18), and the kingdom of God is among you (Luke 17:21)."

The kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history and consummation at the end of history.¹¹ Jesus emphasizes both to people and leaders that the kingdom of God is happening right there and then in His own words and deeds. He teaches that with Him, the promised kingdom has broken into this world already.¹² In Matthew's "kingdom of heaven," the kingdom of heaven is for a future promise and consummation. In the Beatitudes, to share in the kingdom of heaven appears to refer to an assured promise of an inheritance, not a

¹⁰ Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 219.

¹¹ Brian Gleeson, "The Mission of the Kingdom of God: Ultimate Source of Meaning, Value and Energy for Jesus," *Australasian Catholic Record* 93: 3 (July 2016): 333.

¹² *Ibid.*

present possession. When Jesus began His ministry, Mark characterizes the preaching of Jesus not as an assured promise of inheritance but a present possession for all that accept the good news of God. Jesus often spoke of the kingdom being near (spatially) to those around Him.

When a Pharisee questioned Jesus about the kingdom in Luke 17, He responded by saying, “The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable; no one will say, ‘See here!’ or ‘There!’ For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20–21).¹³ If God’s kingdom is not coming with things observed, one must discern its arrival differently. Jesus denied the apprehension by sensory observation of the kind involved with pointing: “Here it is.” In that respect, it is hidden, subtle, and elusive and not a commodity for casual inspection or spectator access. In Jesus’ parable of the leaven, He featured the hiddenness of the kingdom. He told them another parable.¹⁴ The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened (Matthew 13:33, RSV; Luke 13:21). In His parable of the hidden treasure, one finds a similar theme.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (Matthew 13:44). The hiddenness of the arriving kingdom is a key feature of what Mark’s Gospel calls the mystery of the kingdom of God.¹⁵ The audience would have deduced that a King was among them for a kingdom to be present. Jesus is exclaiming, “I am here! Your long-awaited King has arrived. The one you have longed for is on the scene. Referring to the kingdom in this manner is always

¹³ Robby Gallaty, *Here and Now: Thriving in the Kingdom of Heaven Today* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 55.

¹⁴ Paul K. Moser, “Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker: Gatekeeper for a Co-Owned Dual Kingdom,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 50: 4 (November 2020): 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

indicative of a King’s arrival.”¹⁶ Jesus preached the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.

This research aims to clear up this misconception by providing a clearer understanding of the gospel through teaching and cultivating an awareness of the different aspects of the kingdom. There is a need for clarity to understand the gospel. There is a way of balancing present reality and future expectation, between present grace and demand and future promise and consummation. Matthew appears to have struck such a balance around the word “kingdom,” using the kingdom of God for present grace and the kingdom of heaven for future promise and consummation. Researching the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel and sharing the results will provide a clearer understanding of the gospel.

Ministry Context

Word Warriors Ministries is a Pentecostal church under the umbrella of the Church of God in Christ. Word Warriors Ministries is a family-oriented church. The ministry is a work that exposes individual believers to biblical teaching and truths. This ministry is a part of Coweta County, located on the west end of Newnan, Georgia. West Coweta County has a population of 141,554, consisting of 100% urban and 0% rural. 47.1% of the population are males (18,330), and 52.9% are females (20,579).¹⁷ Coweta County ranks as the 17th largest county out of 159 counties in population in Georgia. The median resident age is 34.9 years, while Georgia’s median age is 36.8 years. Coweta County is 73% white, African Americans are 18.0% of the

¹⁶ Gallaty, *Here and Now*, 55.

¹⁷ Coweta County Development Authority, “Coweta County Development Authority,” last modified 2017, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.newnancowetachamber.org/list/member/coweta-county-development-authority-1532>, 1.

population, the Hispanic or Latino population is 6.9%, and the Asian population is 1.9%.¹⁸ The estimated median household income for West Coweta County in 2017 was \$57,800; for Newnan, it was \$57,800, and for Georgia, it is \$56,183. The estimated per capita income in 2017 is \$31,656 (it was \$19,081 in 2000).¹⁹

Jerome McDowell is the pastor of Word Warriors Ministries located in Newnan, Georgia, on the West side of Coweta County. In 2001 pastor McDowell established Word Warriors Ministries. Pastor McDowell stretched out in faith and began the ministry that God called him to do with just a few members. His vision for the ministry comes from Ephesians 4: 11-13. Pastor McDowell encourages and motivates believers to put God's truth into operation. Word Warriors produces workers through cultivation, equipping them to engage in spiritual warfare and accomplish The Great Commission's goal (Matthew 28:19-20). Ever since the pastor acknowledged his call to ministry, he has been heavily engaged in community service. As the ministry grew with over seventy-five members, the pastor looked at larger venues to accommodate the membership. When the Lord blessed him to find a larger building that would seat over two hundred congregants, he moved, and the Lord continued to add souls to the ministry.

The staff of Word Warriors Ministries that serve the pastor consists of three elders, three ministers, two evangelists, four missionaries, and two church mothers. The researcher serves as one of the elders in the church. No staff member receives a salary; they serve because they love the Lord and the ministry. Word Warriors is engaged in several ministries designed to draw

¹⁸ Coweta County Development Authority, "Coweta County Development Authority," last modified 2017, accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.newnancowetachamber.org/list/member/coweta-county-development-authority-1532>, 1.

¹⁹ County, Coweta. "Home." *Homefacts*. Last modified 2020. Accessed January 10, 2021. <https://globalcitydata.com/>. 1.

unbelievers to the ministry and strengthen the believers' walk with Christ. One very successful ministry pastor McDowell established was the Agape Walk. The Agape Walk is one of the evangelistic programs aimed at drawing the lost to Christ. The Agape Walk is an evangelistic outreach ministry that targets communities within the neighborhood that need the church's resources. The Agape Walk is a ministry in which people are fed and witnessed to. The church fellowships with the community and shares God's Word as they break bread together; thus, people are more open and receptive to hear and receive God's Word. There is much planning that goes into this quarterly event. Over the past few years, through this ministry, the church has impacted the community through servant-evangelism. As a result of this ministry, many people that were witnessed to have attended the church services the following Sunday morning. While some of those witnessed to visit to get a feel of the church, others have given their lives to Christ and have come back several times. When visitors testify as to why they attended the services and have decided to give their lives to Christ, their primary reason is that they felt the love and the fact that someone took the time to share the word of God with them.

The members of Word Warriors are very excited to participate in this evangelistic ministry because they look forward to serving the community through "servant-evangelism." Pastor McDowell focuses on the spiritual growth of believers as he engages them through Scripture. Every Wednesday the pastor teaches an engaging Bible study. Pastor McDowell teaches that the Word of God reveals and manifests his anointing and power through the Holy Spirit. Under his teaching, believers comprehend God's Word, which is absorbed and utilized by the listener.

M.O.F.A.T (Men of Faith and Truth) is a ministry within the church. Pastor McDowell established this ministry to draw young men to the church. Through this ministry, young men are

taught by the elders how to become men of character. This ministry has drawn much interest among the brothers. This ministry is not the typical men's ministry where the brothers gather at the church and have a meeting and talk about God's Word. Instead, the brothers are challenged by one another to live out their relationship with Christ and share their experiences. The men meet once a month at a local restaurant, which is chosen weeks in advance. There are about seven different restaurants in rotation, which the men can choose from month to month; this encourages participation. One of the main reasons the pastor has chosen this path is that men are more comfortable talking and sharing testimonies over meals. The fellowship and breaking bread together are essential because it fosters an atmosphere of unity. The brothers are a community of believers working together for a common goal: strengthening and encouraging one another in the faith. The men's ministry objective is to expose the brotherhood to biblical teaching and instructions in an environment conducive for godly development. Through this ministry, leaders teach the brothers what it means to have character and faith in Jesus Christ. Scripture exposes individuals who had significant events in their lives, which produced dynamic principles that contributed to victorious living. Ministry leaders draw lessons from the life of David, a man after God's own heart. This ministry teaches the brothers that none of the experiences in their lives are isolated events. They are all interrelated, just as it was in David's life. As the brothers reflect on their lives, they can see the ebb and flow in their experiences, the ups and downs, the victories, and the failures.

Most importantly, the perspective gained from self-reflection gives them insights into why they do certain things. Ministry leaders teach the brothers that faith is a significant component that is essential in pleasing God. As they focus on a life that pleases God, they will enjoy perpetual freedom, which will be reflective as they live out their lives as husbands, fathers,

and sons. Through this ministry, they teach the brothers to function as God’s “men of faith and truth.” These programs and ministries are designed to draw people to the church and have proven to be very useful. The church is growing, and families and individuals have found a place of worship that caters to personal needs and focuses on spiritual maturity. However, there are misunderstandings when interpreting Jesus’ message related to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel.

The kingdom of heaven that Matthew is speaking about in Matthew 19:23 is not the same as the kingdom of God he references in Matthew 19:24, although he references both kingdoms in the same passage. Jesus in Matthew 19:23 tells His disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, yet in Matthew 19:24, Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. There are differences between the two kingdoms, such as how one enters each of them. The prerequisites for entering the kingdom of heaven are different than those for entering the kingdom of God. How can these two kingdoms be synonymous yet have different ways to enter? This misunderstanding has prompted this action research project. This project intends to bring clarity through teaching and cultivation. Providing instructions will offer a different perspective, which will provide a deeper understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel.

Problem Presented

The problem is that it appears to be a misunderstanding about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries. Heaven in Matthew is a frequently used term and part of a critical literary and theological theme in the first Gospel. The expression “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” appears thirty-two times in Matthew’s Gospel, and

βασιλεία τῶν θεοῦ is mentioned five times with seventy other occurrences throughout the New Testament. Some regard these two terms as identical because of similarities between them. Similarities such as the kingdom of heaven and God’s kingdom are established on the Earth (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15). Mysteries are associated with both kingdoms (Matthew 13:11; Luke 8:10). Christ associated the parable of the leaven with the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:21). As a result of these similarities, most scholars argue that the two kingdoms are synonymous. They hold the position that the kingdom of heaven is simply a periphrasis for the kingdom of God that Matthew uses.

Some scholars seem to reject that idea that these two phrases are the same. When carefully looking at Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew tended to insert heaven language into his account whenever he could,²⁰ whereas Mark reported Jesus’ preaching, “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). Matthew’s rendition says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”²¹ (Matthew 4:17). Luke reports Jesus saying that “the poor are blessed because theirs is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20), whereas Matthew says that theirs is the “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). These types of differences occur twenty-four times in Matthew, clearly indicating a deliberate effort to direct attention toward heaven.²² Matthew broadly conveyed heaven as the place where things are right. Heaven represents for Matthew the full authority of God, the complete execution of His will, the full expression of His desires, and His values’ full implementation.²³ Matthew’s central emphasis is found in what is designated the “gospel of the

²⁰ David A. Clark, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Lord's Prayer from Jewish Prayer to Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 63.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ Ibid.

kingdom” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13). The good news is that the reign or rule of God is realized in history through the presence of Jesus Christ. Matthew prefers to refer to the reign or the rule of God as the kingdom of heaven. The importance of the kingdom for Matthew is evident in that he uses the word much more frequently than does any one of the other Gospels.²⁴ There are differences between the two that make it clear that the expressions are not the same. The kingdom of heaven is the rule of heaven over the Earth by Christ when He establishes His kingdom on Earth, while the kingdom of God is His sovereign rule in the universe and the hearts of His people (Psalms 103:19). In Matthew’s kingdom, kingdom citizenship is limited to those who follow the King.

In contrast, God is the providential King over the Earth: “Heaven is My throne, and Earth is My footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). Only those who enter and submit to His rule experience His rewards.²⁵ Believers enter the kingdom upon salvation. In John 5:24, D. A. Carson suggests that when John says, “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.”²⁶ Carson believes this passage provides the most robust affirmation of inaugurated eschatology (the present kingdom) in the fourth Gospel. Because of this strong affirmation, believers do not have to wait until the last day to experience resurrection life.²⁷ Eternal life in John’s Gospel refers not primarily to some postmortem reality (after temporal life is over), but rather to a new quality of life in the here and

²⁴ Donald Alfred Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 201.

²⁵ Gallaty, *Here and Now*, 53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

now (which is why it is called abundant life in John 10:10).²⁸ Eternal life is John's preferred way of referring to the kingdom of God, which itself is both future and present in the Synoptics.

Matthew speaks about ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (the kingdom of heaven) uniquely and significantly.²⁹

Mark's "good news" or "gospel" (*euangelion*) is the message that, in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, God's kingdom has drawn near (Mark 1:14-15). That is, the message of Mark's Gospel frames its story about Jesus the Christ within the broader landscape of God's impinging rule on the Earth.³⁰ This claim offers a subtle but significant challenge to the tendency to read Mark mainly as narrative Christology focused on Jesus' identity and saving death. In this view, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God, but Mark's concern is to proclaim Jesus. Mark's opening chapter equates the "gospel" not with Jesus' identity in an ontological sense but with His disclosure of God's coming kingdom.³¹ On the other hand, Matthew presents a richly painted story ripe with literary allusions and bold teachings. Some of the most essential and succinct elements of the Christian faith and liturgy stem directly from Matthew: The Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, The Great Commission, and scores of parables about life in God's kingdom.³² Some of the more critical theological emphases identified include the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; the righteousness of God; the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven;

²⁸ Richard J. Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 246.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Suzanne Watts Henderson, "The 'Good News' of God's Coming Reign: Occupation at a Crossroads," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 70, no. 2 (March 2016): 147.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 1.

discipleship; the Son of Man; Gentiles' relationship with Jews, and the people of God in salvation-history.³³ No single theme can encompass all the intentions, purposes, and nuances found in the first Gospel. These two essential uses of heaven language in Matthew highlight the centrality of the theme in his record of the life and teachings of Jesus.³⁴ When discussing Matthew's kingdom, most scholars fail to begin with the kingdom's most critical aspects; they fail to begin with the most unique and most important way Matthew speaks about the kingdom. They conclude that the kingdom of heaven is merely a periphrasis for the kingdom of God.³⁵ The argument in Matthew's case typically is made in this way: A comparison of Matthew's kingdom of heaven with the Synoptics' kingdom of God reveals that the two have the same referent. Therefore, Matthew must have inserted the kingdom of heaven for the kingdom of God found in his sources. Why did he do this? Considering Matthew's apparent Jewishness, he must have been motivated by a shared Jewish aversion to using the name of God.³⁶ Therefore, heaven is simply a periphrasis to avoid the name of God.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry action research is to clear up the misunderstanding that exists in Matthew's Gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries. The kingdom of heaven described in Matthew is the focus of Jesus' teaching. Jesus is only one among several Jewish messianic figures of the first century who claimed to inaugurate

³³ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

God's kingdom. Given this background of expectation, one can almost sense the electricity in the air when Jesus begins His ministry with a public announcement in Galilee that the kingdom of God has come near or is close at hand (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15).³⁷ In Matthew 10, the King authorizes messengers to preach the gospel of the kingdom when the establishment of the kingdom of heaven in terms of the Davidic covenant is near (Matthew 10:5b-42). They postponed the first mission and new instructions may be needed for a new mission because they rejected Christ.³⁸ In the second mission, the Lord commands the church to make disciples out of all the nations (Israel included), preaching the gospel of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection from Pentecost onwards (Matthew 16:21; 28:16-20). When the Great Commission completes, the first mission will resume, and the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom will resume.³⁹ Jesus does not simply initiate His ministry with this opening declaration. The kingdom of God is the defining theological theme of His entire ministry, permeating His teaching from beginning to end. Anyone who wants to see or enter the kingdom of God, says Jesus to Nicodemus a pious teacher of the law, must undergo new birth (John 3:3, 5).⁴⁰ Human life that is corrupted by sin requires an infusion of new life from above radically transform one's priorities and allegiances, to align humanity with God's coming reign. This new life, in the Synoptic Gospels, is the life of the kingdom or life lived under God's reign.⁴¹

³⁷ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 245.

³⁸ Jacob J Scholtz, "The Kingdom of Heaven and Matthew 10," *In die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (April 2014): 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 246.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

There are many occurrences of heaven in Matthew that are unique to his Gospel. There are more than a dozen exact conjunctions of heaven and Earth in the first Gospel. There are also many thematic “heavenly versus earthly” contrasts throughout Matthew. In comparison, Mark has only two instances of the heaven and Earth pair, and Luke has four. Throughout the various uses of heaven or the theme of heaven and Earth, little attention has been given to the heaven and Earth language. The only use of heaven that receives regular mention is the uniquely Matthean idiom, “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.” Almost without exception, the kingdom of heaven is explained away as a mere periphrasis in Matthew to avoid saying the name of God. Scholars and commentators alike have followed this same line of thinking. They believe that Matthew’s kingdom of heaven, compared with Mark and Luke’s kingdom of God, reveals that the two have the same referent.⁴² Heaven is a periphrasis for God, and Jews, out of reverence, tended to use substitutes for God; Matthew, as a Jewish Christian, used the kingdom of heaven instead of the kingdom of God because he was being a reverential Jew. There is a better solution with more explanatory power in understanding the kingdom of heaven than just accepting it as mere periphrasis for God. Matthew’s frequent use of heaven is part of a rubric of heaven and Earth language woven richly throughout his Gospel account.⁴³ For Matthew, the kingdom of heaven’s ultimate meaning resides in its function in the heaven and Earth theme.

When Matthew speaks of the kingdom, he references the prophet Isaiah and wants his audience to conceptualize the realm of God’s kingdom from Isaiah’s perspective. When viewing the kingdom from Isaiah’s perspective, one can see the realm of God’s kingdom from both universal and individual perspectives. On the one hand, God’s kingdom is universal; all of

⁴² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

heaven and Earth is the realm of God's kingdom. On the other hand, God's kingdom Zion is its center point.⁴⁴ The recognition that God is the Creator of heaven and Earth provides a basis for grasping that the realm of God's kingdom is everywhere. Isaiah's prayer in Isaiah 37 captures the essence of this Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim: "You are the God, you, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth (Isaiah 37:16)."⁴⁵ The throne symbolizes royal power. The throne reminds us of Isaiah 6, where Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon the throne. As for "footstool," this term usually refers to Zion as the place from where God exercises His rule (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Lamentations 2:1). In Isaiah 66:1, God's footstool is the entire Earth. God is indeed the King of all the kingdoms of the Earth for all times, but as we have seen, Isaiah is looking for a time when God will come in His divine glory when the faith shall become sight, when what Isaiah professes about God's universal kingship will be realized (Isaiah 24:23; 59:15b – 63:6; 66:18–24).⁴⁶ Perhaps this kind of tension led him to pray to the Father in heaven that His already existing kingdom would come.

Basic Assumptions

The researcher assumes that all the individuals involved in this project are born-again believers that believe the Bible is inspired and is the only infallible written Word of God. They believe that there is one God eternally existent in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The members of Word Warriors Ministries believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 2:4, is given to believers that ask for it. They also believe in

⁴⁴Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 172.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 174.

the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power by who's indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy and separated life in this present world. Another assumption is that the pastor will allow a forum where the researcher will present questions to the congregation and collect data used for this project. The facilitator assumes that each member would be willing to participate. Participation includes hosting four interventions, and a post interview that will be audio and video recorded. Through teaching, believers could cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel, which would result in clearing any misunderstanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel.

Definitions

The kingdom of heaven: The kingdom of heaven is the rule of heaven over the Earth by Christ when He establishes His kingdom on Earth.

The kingdom of God: The kingdom of God is His sovereign rule in the universe, and the hearts of His people.

Jonathan Pennington uses the phrase "Reverential Circumlocution in his writings."⁴⁷ He states that reverential circumlocution refers to both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God as having the same referent. Many scholars believe that Matthew refuses explicitly to use the name "God," avoiding offense to his Jewish audience. It appears that the unspoken understanding is that the τῶν οὐρανῶν is a subjective genitive, such that the "heavens" is the subject of the verbal idea inherent in βασιλεία; hence, in effect, "God rules."⁴⁸ Pennington bases

⁴⁷ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 293.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

this thought on two key assumptions: that βασιλεία exclusively means “rule” or “reign,” and that heaven is merely a direct periphrasis reference to God.⁴⁹

Craig Bloomberg uses the phrase “metonymy” in his writings.⁵⁰ He states that the kingdom of heaven is a metonymy (one thing standing for a part of the larger reality of heaven).⁵¹ In Matthew 25:21 Jesus gives an example of entering into an action where the faithful servants are invited to “enter into the joy of their master.”⁵² The phrase “enter into the joy of their master” is best understood as a metonymy, joy being part of the benefits of being with the master.⁵³ It seems that entering here usually includes both a place and an action.

Robert Foster uses the phrase “Kingdom of heaven in his writings.”⁵⁴ He says that the kingdom of heaven exclusively designates God’s reign over those who become His family through faith in Jesus.⁵⁵ Although spatial metaphors can be used in referring to the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom is to be thought of not as a place but rather as the experience of an era in which a new relationship with God, based on the new saving activity of God in Jesus, is made possible. At the heart of the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is the idea of the restoration of the

⁴⁹ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 293.

⁵⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 367.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Patrick Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus: A Spatial Analysis of the Kingdom in Matthew* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 31.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Robert Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven’?: Matthew's Terminology Revisited,” *New Testament Studies* 48, no. 4 (October 2002): 494.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

perfect rule or reign of God. The restoration God has in mind is the recovery of what was lost through the sin of the garden of Eden.⁵⁶

Witness Lee uses the phrase “Kingdom of the heavens.”⁵⁷ He describes the kingdom as a realm where authority is exercised. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority. Daniel 4:25-26 shows that the heavens rule; the Most High is the ruler. This means God rules and exercises authority from the heavens as His dwelling place (1 Kings 8:39).⁵⁸ To enter the kingdom of the heavens is to participate in the heavenly reality of God’s goal so that one can enter its heavenly manifestation in the millennial kingdom and enjoy God’s authority and glory.⁵⁹

Lee uses the phrase “Kingdom of God.”⁶⁰ He states that the kingdom of God is the realm where God exercises His authority on Earth which has passed from the Jews, the Israelites, and the church.⁶¹ The kingdom of God refers to God’s rule over both the obedient and the disobedient.⁶² The kingdom of God is a dynamic concept indicating God’s active reign. The rule of God and righteousness, as its human correlate, are the key motifs in the Sermon on the Mount. Although the kingdom in Matthew involves a critical decision and the acceptance of strict entry requirements, it is not an entirely ethical concept, as is shown by the first beatitude.

⁵⁶ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 68.

⁵⁷ Witness Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” *Affirmation & Critique* 16, no. 2 (October 2011): 81.

⁵⁸ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 81.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Witness Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” *Affirmation & Critique* 16, no. 2 (October 2011): 79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven,’” 494.

Limitations

Limitations are hindrances that the researcher will experience which are out of his control. Several uncontrolled variables will restrict the researcher. The pastor of Word Warriors Ministries is the only one over the congregation. He is responsible for putting together weekly Bible study lessons every Wednesday and the weekly sermons he preaches Sunday morning. Among the other activities that are going on besides teaching and preaching, the pastor is busy attending to those activities as well. The church has just acquired a new building large enough to hold the growing congregation. However, the building requires renovations before the pastor can occupy the facility and begin transitioning into the new building. In addition, there are large oak trees all over the property that the pastor plans to remove. This project is time-consuming for the pastor, limiting the amount of time he can spend with the researcher.

Another limitation that will hinder action research is COVID-19. COVID-19 is an issue because it is still widespread, effecting involvement. The status of the pandemic questions the effectiveness of this research. Word Warriors Ministries has not physically met due to the present danger of exposure for the people, which means a re-evaluation of the researcher's current plans is due. Another area of concern would be the effectiveness of the Zoom conference meeting. The ability to actively engage with participants may hamper the effectiveness. As a facilitator, it is essential to interact with participants and communicate effectively and engage with them as topics are discussed. As this pandemic continues to spread with no end in sight, it will not be easy to communicate between the facilitator, the pastor, and the participants. The congregation has not physically met since March of 2020. All activities, except for Bible study and Sunday morning services, have been canceled. Bible study and the Sunday morning preaching have all been done through zoom as the pastor takes steps to keep the congregation

safe. While physical interaction is always preferred, an exception will be necessary to complete the action research project.

Delimitations

This project will only include members of Word Warriors Ministry who profess a saving knowledge of Jesus and have accepted Him as Lord and Savior. This project is open to both males and females; however, no one under eighteen can participate. Approximately twenty people will participate in this project.

Thesis Statement

Instructions are essential in the understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. When the Synoptic Gospels speak of Christ's preaching and provide His doctrine concerning the work He came to accomplish, there is a striking difference of expression. Mark and Luke use the expression "kingdom of God," Matthew uses the "kingdom of heaven." There are several instances where Matthew does use the phrase "kingdom of God." When Matthew retells the Markan parable of the wicked tenants, he reports Jesus saying to the temple leadership, the "kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (ἔθνος) that produces the fruits of the kingdom (Matthew 21:43)."⁶³ There can be little doubt that Matthew's readers would see themselves as these people through whom God's rule has been redirected towards.⁶⁴ And why is that? They are now the community over whom Jesus the Messianic King presides and with whom He resides. God's rule should be seen as a redirection of God's reign

⁶³ Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 218.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

rather than supersession because these new people consist of Jews who retained their Jewish identity and Gentiles who saw themselves as stemming from the same family tree.⁶⁵ As the readers of Matthew's Gospel read their foundation narrative, they see how early Israel's resistance to Jesus set in, how continuous it was, and finally, how complete it became.

The people to whom the kingdom of God has been given live to enact Jesus' prayer that God's kingdom will come and God's will be done (Matthew 6:9-10). These believers become the "salt of the Earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16) as they seek to transform the Earth into a place where God's desires are carried out.⁶⁶ Although Matthew addresses the religious leaders, he uses God's kingdom because he speaks to Jews in authority. Even in this instance, there is a slight difference between the two expressions because of whom Jesus is addressing. Matthew's expression is according to Hebrew usage and possibly alludes to some such passage as Daniel 2:44. Simultaneously, as used by Mark and Luke, the phrase was more readily intelligible to the non-Jewish readers they had in view. In Matthew's Gospel, entering the kingdom of heaven is based on righteous living and doing the will of God. Entering the kingdom of God is based on allegiance to God.

Since allegiance to God is a requirement for entrance into the kingdom of God, the rich younger ruler is forbidden from entering the kingdom because he adheres to money, not God. As Jesus walks away, He turns to His disciples and says, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:24-25).⁶⁷ Jesus is not excluding rich

⁶⁵ Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 218.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gallaty, *Here and Now*, 58.

people from entering heaven after they die; He is warning against missing out on the blessings and the benefits of the kingdom of heaven today because of the distraction of serving money. “You cannot serve both God and money” (Luke 16:13). Divided loyalties are non-existent in His kingdom. To be a subject in the kingdom of heaven demands militant loyalty to the King. Therefore, the young man withdraws his name from the roster in the movement of King Jesus.⁶⁸

The kingdom of God is the realm where God exercises His authority on Earth. The Gospel of Luke identifies the kind of kingship for which Jesus trained His disciples. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. Not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves (Luke 22:25–26).”⁶⁹ Here, Jesus used kingship as a standard for His disciples, which confirms the interpretation of His kingdom’s role, which develops here. He did not, however, have in mind the kingship typical for the world’s kings. Instead, as indicated, Jesus suggested for His disciples a shared moral-kingship, with moral authority and responsibility, oriented toward serving others. He offered what He had, His moral-kingship under God’s moral authority in His serving as self-giving for others.⁷⁰ The disciples’ moral-kingship and authority would arise from their sharing in the moral-kingship and authority of God and Jesus. The “kingdom of the heavens” is the realm where the heavens exercise authority: God rules and exercises authority from the heavens as His dwelling place. If ministry leaders at Word Warriors Ministries provide the essential teaching on the kingdom of heaven, then believers could not only cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel but

⁶⁸ Gallaty, *Here and Now*, 58.

⁶⁹ Moser, “Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker,” 221.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

also gain insight as to the importance of evangelism, seeking the kingdom of heaven and deepening one's relationship with Christ.

CHAPTER 2: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Introduction

The kingdom of heaven is a significant phrase because of the centrality of the kingdom message in Jesus' ministry. In many ways, Pennington believes that Matthew's heaven and Earth theme find its consummation in the kingdom of heaven.⁷¹ When discussing the meaning of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, scholars rarely if ever begin with what is the most unique and most important way that Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν). Pennington states that neglecting to begin with the most unique and most important way Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven is a consequence of too quickly assuming that heaven is merely a periphrasis for God and no more needs to be said.⁷² In light of Pennington's position, scholars continue to argue that the kingdom of heaven is simply a circumlocution for the kingdom of God that Matthew used for the sake of his and his audience's conscience.

Scholars believe that Matthew's use of the kingdom of heaven is simply a stylistic variation similar to the use of "kingdom," "kingdom of the Father," and "kingdom of God" to refer to the same reality in Matthew and the other Gospels.⁷³ This literature review addresses the misconceptions about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. The topics covered are: 1) The purpose of Matthew using the kingdom of heaven; 2) The meaning of the kingdom of heaven; 3) The kingdom of heaven synonymous with the kingdom of God; 4) The kingdom of

⁷¹ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 279.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 293.

⁷³ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 488.

heaven: A present reality; 5) Jesus preaches the kingdom of heaven, and 6) The dynamic nature of the kingdom.

The Purpose of Matthew Using the Kingdom of Heaven

Matthew writes as a Jew who found the fulfillment of all that is precious in his Jewish heritage in Jesus. “Fulfillment” is a central theme of the Gospel. Matthew’s aims in writing his Gospel were to strengthen his church’s spiritual disposition and help his readers rediscover their true identity. A. B. Du Toit says that Matthew’s Jewish setting also explains his preference for the term “kingdom of heaven” rather than the “kingdom of God.” At the same time, according to A. B. Du Toit, Margaret Pamment thinks that Matthew uses the term “kingdom of God,” in contrast to the “kingdom of heaven,” whenever he refers to the kingdom’s presence and not for the sake of his Jewish audience.⁷⁴ Elmer Townes and Ben Gutierrez hold the same position as Du Toit. Scholars say that, according to Papias, Matthew initially oriented his Gospel to the Hebrew people. Also, Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius explicitly state that Matthew first wrote in the Hebrew language (or in Aramaic, another Semitic language often referred to as Hebrew) for the Hebrews to whom he ministered.⁷⁵ Ben Cooper has a different perspective on the kingdom of heaven; his perspective is eschatological. He says that with the eschatological expectations of John the Baptist, believers are waiting for the kingdom of heaven to come.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ A. B. Du Toit, “The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 21, no. 3 (August 2000): 548.

⁷⁵ Elmer L. Towns and Ben Gutierrez, *The Essence of the New Testament: A Survey* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 58.

⁷⁶ Ben Cooper, “Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 1 (August 2010): 60.

Matthew presents John the Baptist as one expectantly waiting for the kingdom of heaven, which he declares to be near (Matthew 3:2) and that he must be preparing the way for the coming of the Lord (Matthew 3:3).⁷⁷ John is expecting wrath (John 3:8). He is already classifying people based on their repentance, not based on their ancestry (John 3:8-9). John expects the judgment and destruction of those who do not show evidence of repentance, an expectation he expresses using the image of cutting down and burning a fruitless tree (John 3:10). John expresses expectation concerning the nearness of the judgment and destruction that is coming. He says: “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.”⁷⁸ Moreover, one is coming after John, who is mightier and more worthy, to enact this judgment. The one coming after will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (John 3:11).⁷⁹

As a devout Jew, Jesus shared the hopes and longings of His people. He drew on this rich theme of the kingdom as a way of understanding His vocation and mission. Brian Gleeson’s understanding of the kingdom favors Townes and Gutierrez’s understanding: that Matthew’s use of the kingdom is rooted in Jewish history. Gleeson says, although the kingdom was a theme deeply embedded in Jewish history, it was not as prominent in Jewish thought at the time of Jesus as it had once been. Jesus promoted it from a secondary to a primary and dominant theme.⁸⁰ Pennington weighs in the significance of Matthew’s use of heaven when he references the kingdom of heaven.⁸¹ Pennington says that the significance of Jesus’ promotion highlighted

⁷⁷ Ben Cooper, “Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 1 (August 2010): 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Gleeson, “The Mission of the Kingdom of God,” 333.

⁸¹ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 291

that while other ancient Jewish and Christian works occasionally manifest these themes, no theme is manifested more to Matthew's degree.

When considering both τῶν οὐρανῶν (of the heavens) or ἐν τοῖς οὐρανός (in the heavens), it made perfect sense for Matthew to emphasize the heavenly nature of the one when stating the same for the other. Pennington says that Matthew emphasizes that God the Father is heavenly or in heaven; it is appropriate to depict God's kingdom as a heavenly kingdom from heaven. Also, when looking at the phrase “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” it is a fact that ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν inevitably uses the plural form of οὐρανός. These forms point to a reference to the divine realm as distinct from the Earth.⁸² David Clark agrees with Pennington that the divine realm is distinct from Earth. He goes further and adds that Matthew presents heaven and Earth as existing in contrast and tension.⁸³ These realms are not at war with one another as Matthew envisions a final union of the two realms.⁸⁴ Paul Moser has a different perspective than both Clark and Pennington; he believes that Matthew's Gospel introduces John as: “In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”⁸⁵ (Matthew 3:1–2). The Gospel of Matthew leaves no doubt that God's kingdom arrives with divine judgment. It, along with Luke's Gospel, as John proclaim to his audience: “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Even now, the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the

⁸² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 297.

⁸³ David A. Clark, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Lord's Prayer from Jewish Prayer to Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Moser, “Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker,” 217.

fire”⁸⁶ (Matthew 3:7, 10; Luke 3:7, 9). The wrath to come announced by John brings divine judgment to people who are at odds with God’s arriving kingdom. Also, John claimed that this wrath was coming in his day, already lying at the root of the trees.⁸⁷ Lee emphasizes another aspect of the kingdom of the heavens, which is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. To know the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, one must know what the kingdom of the heavens is. A kingdom is a realm where the king exercises authority. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority.⁸⁸

Karen Wenell agrees with Lee regarding the kingdom in Matthew’s Gospel. Wenell says the kingdom belongs to God, and Matthew emphasizes the heavenly realm in his distinctive use of heaven’s terminology. If one interprets the heavenly realm as sacred space, the very terminology of the kingdom, spoken of by Jesus, establishes a connection to the divine realm. Wenell adds that the divine realm’s connection shows that the kingdom is not secular but sacred. Wenell believes the divine realm is connected to a group of people God gives the mystery of the kingdom (Mark 4:11) and to whom the kingdom “belongs.”⁸⁹

The Meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven

Gleeson believes the word “kingdom” has everything to do with power and authority. To speak of God’s kingdom is to speak of God’s power, authority, reign, and rule over the material

⁸⁶ Moser, “Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker,” 217.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” 81.

⁸⁹ Karen J. Wenell, “Kingdom, Not Kingly Rule: Assessing the Kingdom of God as Sacred Space,” *Biblical Interpretation* 25, no. 2 (October 11, 2017): 213.

universe and everything and everyone, including the community of human beings.⁹⁰ The coming of the kingdom of God is the central theme and program that Jesus takes up. Jesus consistently, unflinchingly, indefatigably, and courageously shows His unrelenting commitment to that cause.⁹¹ Pennington's view is different from Gleeson's view. Pennington believes the ultimate meaning of "kingdom" in Matthew resides in its function in the heaven and Earth theme. He believes that the semantic range of βασιλεία in the Gospels has a variety of meanings; it cannot be limited only to "rule" or "reign."⁹² Craig Blomberg's view of the kingdom is different from Pennington's. Blomberg says that Pennington has somewhat imitated and inverted an older dispensational perspective."⁹³

Blomberg argued that the kingdom of heaven in Matthew stresses that God's kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world but something more transcendent, thereby critiquing the ancient Roman and all human empires.⁹⁴ Pennington holds the position that the kingdom of heaven is not a periphrasis for the kingdom of God and that there is a difference between the two expressions. Blomberg's position is that the kingdom of heaven is a metonymy (one thing standing for a part of heaven's larger reality). Behind all of Matthew's rich and varied language for heaven (not just in this one expression) lies an intentional focus on the theme of heaven and Earth, explicitly highlighting the current contrast or tense relationship between the two realms,

⁹⁰ Gleeson, "The Mission of the Kingdom of God," 327.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 293.

⁹³ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 367.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

between God and humanity.⁹⁵ Richard Middleton holds the same position as Blomberg. He says, “during the present age, God’s kingdom is in tension with all earthly kingdoms.”⁹⁶ Heaven and Earth are not intrinsically antithetical; however, presently out of whack, they will be in harmony once again when God’s heavenly kingdom (in the sense that its origin is not from Earth, but from heaven, the seat of God’s rule) finally extended to Earth. The point is that “heaven” in the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is a metonym, a figure of speech in which one thing stands for another.⁹⁷ Robert Foster states that in Robert Gundry commentary on Matthew, he tries to show that Matthew used the kingdom of heaven to emphasize one of the Gospel’s central themes, the sovereignty of God.⁹⁸ He also thinks that the kingdom of heaven highlights Jesus’ co-regency with the Father. Foster believes it is difficult to comprehend how the kingdom of heaven communicates God’s sovereignty more clearly than the kingdom of God. Both phrases, the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God,” communicate that God reigns over a kingdom.⁹⁹ In light of these phrases, the use of the kingdom of heaven must function in Matthew’s Gospel as more than merely a different symbol of God’s rule.

Foster notes, the kingdom of heaven is used almost exclusively in speeches to the disciples and the crowds (thirty-one of thirty-two times). On the other hand, when Jesus speaks to the religious leaders about the kingdom, He uses the phrase the kingdom of God (three of four times). Also, Foster says that using the phrase, the “kingdom of God” indicates that the Gospel

⁹⁵ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 367.

⁹⁶ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 248.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven,’” 489.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

that both Jesus and John the Baptist used the noun θεός (God) mostly in their speeches to their religious opponents (thirty-two of fifty times).¹⁰⁰ These statistics indicate that both Foster and Gleeson hold the same position that the kingdom of God refers to God's rule. The kingdom of heaven, which differs from God's kingdom, exclusively designates His reign over those who become His family through faith in Jesus.

Daniel Patte offers a unique understanding according to Pennington. He says that the kingdom of God refers to an aggressive manifestation of the power of God, which asserts itself against satanic and demonic powers, while the kingdom of heaven refers to the authority of God. At present, God is not imposing His authority upon people through power, but people should recognize and acknowledge the meekness and mercy of the Father and the Son.¹⁰¹ Pennington states that Harry Manhoff's view of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God favors Foster's view. According to Pennington, Manhoff has argued that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, which are found exclusively in either the Targums (kingdom of God) or the rabbinic literature (kingdom of heaven), have distinct meanings.¹⁰² The kingdom of God was an Aramaic Jewish idiom for God's perfect eschatological world. The kingdom of heaven was a different Hebrew idiom referring to the obligation to perform God's commandments.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 305.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The Kingdom of Heaven Synonymous with the Kingdom of God

Patrick Schreiner holds the position that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are interchangeable. Patrick Schreiner states that Pennington, draws a sharp contrast between the two kingdoms, and that Pennington holds the position that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are distinct.¹⁰⁴ Schreiner says the kingdom of God was certainly central in the teachings of Jesus, and Matthew is no exception. The noun βασιλεία in Matthew implies a spatial understanding of the concept. Matthew uses βασιλεία fifty-five times in a variety of phrases. He uses the term more often than any other Gospel and more frequently than the New Testament combined.¹⁰⁵ Jesus starts His public ministry with the declaration “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). Mark titles his narrative as “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” and characterizes the preaching of Jesus as “the good news of God” (Mark 1:14).¹⁰⁶ He follows this with a representative overview of Jesus’ message, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news (Matthew 1:15).

Bradley Trout’s view is the same as Schreiner’s: the two phrases are synonymous. He says that God’s kingdom is in view at the beginning of the first discourse (Matthew 5:3, 10) and the last discourse (Matthew 25:34). Central to Matthew’s purpose is to show that God’s kingdom has been inaugurated in Jesus the Messiah.¹⁰⁷ The kingdom of heaven is exclusive to Matthew,

¹⁰⁴ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁷ Bradley M. Trout, “Matthew 5:17 and Matthew’s Community,” *Hervormde teologiese studies* 72, no. 3 (January 2016): 4.

while the other Synoptic Gospels use the kingdom of God. Is it possible that the two expressions mean the same thing? Blomberg notes that particularly instructive is the one passage in Matthew where both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God appear together.¹⁰⁸ Matthew 19:23-24 says, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I tell you; it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God.’” The two back-to-back sentences’ overall synonymous parallelism strongly suggests that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God remain synonyms.¹⁰⁹ Lee holds the same position as Bloomberg. Some scholars believe that God’s original intention was to make the kingdom of the heavens, God’s kingdom, and the church the same in scope during the church’s dispensation.¹¹⁰ The church is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 16:18-19). Everyone in the church should be in the kingdom of God.

Lee believes everyone in the kingdom of God should be in the kingdom of the heavens because of the overall synonymous parallelism of the two phrases.¹¹¹ Scholars have typically assumed that kingdom of heaven was merely Matthew’s Jewish roundabout way for the kingdom of God since overusing God’s name for many Jews was equivalent to taking it in vain and thus, transgressing the third of the Ten Commandments.¹¹² Michael Green has also sided with scholars who believe both the kingdom of God is synonymous with the kingdom of heaven. Green says

¹⁰⁸ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 368.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” 87.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 367.

that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (literally, the “heavens”) is a significant concern in Matthew and is peculiar to him.¹¹³ It shows how deeply rooted his Judaism was, for orthodox Jews used periphrases like “heaven” to avoid using the sacred divine name. It means the same as the kingdom of God in the other Gospels and is a specifically rabbinic trait. Donald Alfred Hagner states his position, agreeing that both “kingdom” phrases are synonymous. He says that Matthew’s central emphasis is found in what is designated (uniquely in the Gospels) as the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13), the good news that the reign or rule of God has begun to be realized in history through the presence of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁴ History realizes the good news of God’s reign or His rule through the presence of Jesus Christ. Hagner holds the position that Matthew prefers to refer to the kingdom of heaven or of the heavens, which is a periphrasis for the kingdom of God (which Matthew does use in 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43).¹¹⁵

J. C. Thomas and Robert Mowery weigh in on the subject and offer their analysis. Thomas suggests that the most plausible explanation for the substitution of God’s kingdom for the kingdom of heaven is that for Matthew, the kingdom of God is a literary device used to draw the reader’s attention to passages of particular significance.¹¹⁶ Mowery analyzes the various occurrences of the kingdom in Matthew and suggests that God’s kingdom occasionally occurs because it is part of a pattern of different terms for different audiences. Matthew tends to use

¹¹³ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 33.

¹¹⁴ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 201.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 307.

“God” (including the kingdom of God) when Jesus is addressing His opponents but reserves Father and the kingdom of heaven for His disciples and the crowds.¹¹⁷ Towns and Gutierrez are aligned with Mowery and believe that Matthew’s Gospel regularly avoids the phrase “kingdom of God” (used in five verses) and primarily uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (thirty-three verses) instead.¹¹⁸ This pattern supports the ancient theory that Matthew’s Gospel, initially written for Christians who were still affected by a Jewish culture that refrained from speaking the word “God” for fear of breaking the third commandment. Luke’s gospel, traditionally believed to be written for Gentiles, never uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” but uses “kingdom of God” (thirty-two verses).¹¹⁹ These scholars have put forth some powerful arguments supporting their position. Despite these powerful arguments that support this thinking, it still makes it difficult for other scholars to accept the kingdom of God as synonymous with the kingdom of heaven when both kingdoms have different prerequisites for entry.

Lee differentiates the two kingdoms by explaining their differences. In John’s Gospel, he says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36; 5:24; 3:16; 6:47; 20:31); compare with Matthew’s language “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3).¹²⁰ All the verses from the Gospel of John speak of eternal life as obtained through faith. Obtaining eternal life is a matter of faith alone. Lee believes that entering the kingdom of the heavens is different. The verses from the Gospel of Matthew speak of entering the kingdom of

¹¹⁷ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 307.

¹¹⁸ Towns and Gutierrez, *The Essence of the New Testament*, 45.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” 87.

the heavens based on righteous acts, doing the will of God, and having changed one's lifestyle. These verses show that entering the kingdom of the heavens is a matter of works, righteousness, and a change in living.¹²¹ For a person to enter the kingdom of the heavens, his righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and the Pharisees; he must also do the will of God and must change his lifestyle. John says that "unless one is born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5); compare with "unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matthew 18:3).¹²² Marcus uses John 4:38b to support the "entering a state" view where Jesus remarks, "others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."¹²³ Marcus asserts that the disciples have entered into the labor. In John 3:3; 5, the Lord showed that entering the kingdom of God is based on regeneration. It is on that basis that entering the kingdom of God is a matter of life. Believer's entrance into the kingdom of God depends on whether they are regenerated. In Matthew 18:3, the Lord said that one must turn and become like little children to enter the kingdom of the heavens.¹²⁴ For Lee, the meaning here is different from what He said in John 3. There, Jesus said that anyone who is regenerated could enter the kingdom of God. Here, Jesus said that only those who turn and become like little children could enter the kingdom of the heavens. Considering Jesus' teachings, entering into the kingdom of God is a matter related to "life," and entering into the kingdom of the heavens is a matter related to "living."¹²⁵ The kingdom of God is the whole realm of God's reign, whereas the

¹²¹ Lee, "Entering the Kingdom of Heaven," 88.

¹²² Ibid., 90.

¹²³ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 31.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 90.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

kingdom of the heavens is a part of that realm. As stated earlier by Blomberg, he says that the kingdom of heaven is a metonymy (one thing standing for a part of the larger reality of heaven).¹²⁶

The Kingdom of Heaven: A Present Reality

Matt Woodley describes God's reign as loving; he says that the Old Testament tells the big, beautiful, hope-filled story of a God who would one day lovingly reign over His people and the peoples of the Earth. A peaceful rightness would mark God's reign. Everything would be in its proper place globally, and every relationship would be on its correct terms.¹²⁷ Hagner's view of God's reign is similar to Woodley's. Hagner says that the kingdom's reality connects the Old Testament scriptures' promises and expectations within God's reign.¹²⁸ Schreiner agrees with both Woodley and Hagner. He describes God's covenant among His people by saying the idea of the rule or reign of God is shared.

In principle, God has always remained the ruler of all creation. Under God's creation, He is identified as "King." In the fallen world, God's rule is compromised, even among His covenant people, Israel. In principle, God presently rules as King, but in the Old Testament, there is the idea of God's future reign as King (Isaiah 24:23; Zechariah 14:9). The Earth is tilled and turned over because of the incarnation.¹²⁹ Through Jesus' body, He contests the space of Earth, installing the kingdom of heaven to Earth. Matthew forges a bond between heaven and Earth

¹²⁶ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 368.

¹²⁷ Matt Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew: God with Us* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 51.

¹²⁸ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 69.

¹²⁹ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 37.

through the presence of Jesus. Schreiner further explains the link between heaven and Earth; he says that the presence of Jesus becomes heaven's link with the earthly gathering.¹³⁰ The paragraph begins, "the birth of Jesus was thus" (Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν), (Matthew 2:1). Jesus' birth and God's presence are tied together. Matthew couples the coming of Jesus in the flesh with the presence of God. The meaning and significance of these two names Ἰησοῦς (Jesus) and Ἐμμανουήλ (Immanuel) are interdependent.¹³¹ The physical body of Jesus introduces, inaugurates, and fulfills a new phase of presence.

Lee says Jesus speaks of God's heavenly rule that is already here; it is within us. Jesus walked all over Galilee, claiming that God's reign of love and rightness was there.¹³² The Lord's teachings on the mountain show that the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is seen in how one lives life. Believers are to live according to the heavenly rule within them. Lee's view of Jesus' teaching expresses God's reign. He says Jesus' teachings cause believers to leave sin, overcome their temper, deny their flesh and themselves, reject the world, oppose Satan, and submit to the heavenly authority.¹³³ Jesus' teaching was in direct opposition to the religious leaders. Bauckham observes, from the perspective of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom, the Jewish theocracy, the chief priests who ran the temple and claimed to represent God's rule over His people, grossly misrepresented the nature of God's rule.¹³⁴ Instead of differing from the way the kings of the Gentiles ruled, they imitated it. Because the chief priest misrepresented the nature of God's rule,

¹³⁰ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 37.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³² Lee, "Entering the Kingdom of Heaven," 84.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 327.

Matthew warns the Jewish leaders that the kingdom they are hoping will be taken away from them (Matthew 8:11–12; 21:43); they will be judged and rejected (Matthew 23:13–39).¹³⁵

The Scribes and Pharisees had a misconception about the present reality of the kingdom that Jesus was teaching. Hagner says that Luke 17:20–21 provides an exciting and essential confirmation of the fulfillment brought by Jesus.¹³⁶ Jesus, being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, answered them, “You will not be able to observed signs when the kingdom of God comes; nor will they say, Lo, here it is! Or There! For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you (Luke 17:20-23).”¹³⁷ When Jesus sends out His disciples on their mission, He tells them to heal the sick and to say, “The kingdom of God has come near to you” (Luke 10:9; Matthew 10:7).¹³⁸ Hagner also believes that God’s rule was already here because Jesus proclaimed it. He says that Jesus, too, believed that the rule of God was coming in the Earth, that there would be a new world without evil and oppression and wrong. He proclaimed the good news that this rule was near at hand.

Bradley Trout holds the same view as Hagner and believes that God’s rule was already here as a result of Jesus’ ministry. He says the Scribes and Pharisees were well-versed in Jewish scriptures; in fact, the prophets and the law pointed towards something that has arrived in John the Baptist’s ministry. The sense in Matthew 5:17 is like that of John; the law and prophets pointed towards (prophesied) the fuller revelation of God’s will that came with the time of

¹³⁵ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 237.

¹³⁶ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 74.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

fulfillment in Jesus' ministry.¹³⁹ Thus, both prophets and the law point towards the coming of Jesus. O'Neil has made several attempts to undermine the "near" of the kingdom. The statements about the kingdom using various tenses of the verb "to come" or speaking about the imminent appearance of the kingdom are, of course, those that could bring this discussion back to the focus on time. Mark's Gospel opening makes a distinction between time and spatial proximity concerning the kingdom. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (Mark 1:15).¹⁴⁰ Oddly, O'Neill appears to turn this completely on its head when he says the kingdom itself is not near, but the time when the established kingdom is near. Wenell has a different perspective; he believes the sense of fulfilled time does not take away from the kingdom's nearness. Whether the kingdom is coming or coming near does not appear to be a distinction that bothers the Gospel authors.¹⁴¹

On the other hand, Bruce Benson describes the nearness of the kingdom by Jesus' use of parables. As He went about teaching the kingdom of heaven, He tells one parable after the next about the Kingdom of heaven.¹⁴² In Matthew's Gospel, there is a series of such parables. There is the parable of the mustard seed that seems so insignificantly small but grows into something enormous beyond expectation. The kingdom of heaven is likened both to a great treasure and a great pearl; when one comes to understand its infinite worth compared to everything else, one focuses solely on it.¹⁴³ Schreiner talks about the nearness of the kingdom by referencing Jesus'

¹³⁹ Trout, "Matthew 5:17 and Matthew's Community," 3.

¹⁴⁰ Wenell, "Kingdom, Not Kingly Rule," 226.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Bruce Ellis Benson, "The Kingdom of Heaven as Endless Hermeneutic: A Phenomenology of the Way," *Sophia* 56, no. 1 (April 2017): 64.

¹⁴³ Benson, "The Kingdom of Heaven as Endless Hermeneutic," 64.

parable of the net and the merchant. He says that Matthew talks about the mustard seed's parable, but he also refers to Jesus' parable concerning a net thrown into the sea or a merchant in search of fine pearls. In one sense, the good news of the kingdom is what the Jews were expecting. It fulfilled the promises that their enemies would be vanquished, a temple would be rebuilt, and they would occupy their land.¹⁴⁴ Jacob Neusner says that the parables that Jesus gave articulate an image, a reality discerned, encountered, and responded to amid life.¹⁴⁵ Compared to the mysterious process of growth, the kingdom calls for decisive human action at the critical moment. The kingdom is otherwise independent of human activity (Mark 4:26-9), or to the fantastic product of the tiny mustard seed (Mark 4:30) or the fate of a seed sown in a field (Mark 4:3-9), or to the leavening process (Matthew 13:33, Luke 3:20), or the budding fig tree (Mark 13:28).¹⁴⁶

Jesus Preaches the Kingdom of Heaven

When the King's public ministry starts, Jacob Scholtz says that Jesus preaches the Gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17), and the King's public ministry is summarized (Matthew 4:23–25).¹⁴⁷ Du Toit believed that Jesus preached the Gospel because of man's desperate need for salvation. He says the coming of the kingdom signified a crisis. It challenged people to make an existential decision. The kingdom's crisis is clear from the preaching of John the Baptist and

¹⁴⁴ Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Jacob Neusner, "The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems Judaic and Christian," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (January 2005): 283.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 283.

¹⁴⁷ Jacob J. Scholtz, "The Kingdom of Heaven and Matthew 10," *In die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (April 2014): 3.

that of Jesus (John 3:1-12; 4:17).¹⁴⁸ Woodley and Du Toit have the same view of the coming kingdom. Woodley says that it was the remedy for the crises that existed between God and man. He says that the kingdom has come in Jesus, and God is reigning over and restoring His broken creation.¹⁴⁹ Pennington also holds to both Woodley and Du Toit's position and says that God's kingdom or reign is the central message of Jesus' ministry because the kingdom crisis exists.¹⁵⁰ Pennington goes on to say that in the Beatitudes, framed with references to the kingdom of heaven, Matthew makes the kingdom focus clear (Matthew 5:3, 10); entering the kingdom is what Jesus regularly exhorts people to do.¹⁵¹ In the Beatitudes, Jesus says those persecuted for righteousness's sake are blessed; theirs is the kingdom of heaven (include the Scripture reference). Foster says the statement was likely meant to encourage the readers of the Gospel who were persecuted for their faith as Jesus turns this attempt at social control into a sign of divine favor.¹⁵² The kingdom of heaven's sayings urges the disciples to continue to do what pleases the Father to enter the kingdom of heaven. Foster adds that in pleasing the Father, the disciples must continue to teach and practice the commandments (Matthew 5:19) and do the Father's will in heaven (Matthew 7:21).¹⁵³

Blomberg speaks of Matthew's kingdom language and the effects Jesus' ministry had on His audience. He says that Matthew's collection of parables in chapter thirteen shows signs of

¹⁴⁸ Du Toit, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew," 554.

¹⁴⁹ Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 114.

¹⁵⁰ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 279.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁵² Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 496.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

careful theological composition. The entire segment seems to have a chiasmic structure to highlight the significant shift from Jesus teaching the crowds outdoors (Matthew 13:3-35) to teaching and explaining His teaching to His disciples indoors (Matthew 13:36-52).¹⁵⁴ Verses 1-52 can be seen as the turning point of the entire Gospel, as it becomes clear that Jesus' ministry, and especially His parables, polarize His audiences.¹⁵⁵ Towns and Gutierrez agree with Blomberg and say that one contributing factor for His ministry becoming so polarizing to His audience is that when He preached about the kingdom of heaven, His emphasis was not geographical but relational. This emphasis is crucial for a proper understanding of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁵⁶ Pennington says that throughout Matthew, the kingdom appears crucial at points in the story. Such as at the introduction of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:17). In both cases, the message preached is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.¹⁵⁷ Gleeson and Pennington agree about the nearness of the coming kingdom. Gleeson says that when Jesus teaches, the promised kingdom has broken into this world already in His person and His message to the poor and marginalized Jewish society. Also, His healing and liberating actions for all sorts of needy persons. Jesus was saying in effect, "Look, God has now stepped into this world and has begun to reign as King forever."¹⁵⁸ Lee's view of the kingdom's nearness is the same as Gleeson's. He says that Matthew 5:3, 10 speak of the heavens ruling in a person, in reality, today, which means they both

¹⁵⁴ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 369.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Towns and Gutierrez, *The Essence of the New Testament*, 61.

¹⁵⁷ Pennington, "The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew," 45.

¹⁵⁸ Gleeson, "The Mission of the Kingdom of God," 333.

speak of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.¹⁵⁹ Lee further states that these verses are not the only verses in Matthew's Gospel that speak of this reality. All of Jesus' teachings on the mountain in Matthew 5-7 relate to the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and reveal the situation of those under the heavenly ruling.¹⁶⁰

Andrew Abernethy has a slightly different viewpoint on the kingdom; he believes more focus should be on the nation's participation. He says that exercising careful thought is necessary to avoid overlooking how nations become participants in God's kingdom.¹⁶¹ It is upon witnessing a spectacular display of God's saving and holy kingship. Abernethy goes on to say that when God judges all that is evil and saves and restores Israel and Zion (Isaiah 40:5; 52:10; 60:1; 66:18), the nations align themselves with the King in Zion, which are members of His kingdom community (Isaiah 2:2-4; 25:6-9; 60).¹⁶² God's kingdom people will consist of the faithful from Israel and all nations. Green and Abernethy share the same view. Green says that God's kingdom people will be from all nations in Isaiah, though the nations will become part of God's kingdom in the wake of His salvation and restoration of Zion.¹⁶³ Since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, God's remarkable, saving intervention shines like a spotlight both in and upon Israel.

¹⁵⁹ Lee, "Entering the Kingdom of Heaven," 82.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 196.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 197.

The Dynamic Nature of the Kingdom

Du Toit affirms that the nature of the kingdom is a place where God has established His rule. He says that the meaning of the phrase “kingdom of God” in the New Testament involves not a specific place or special period but the fact of a ruling. An expression such as “to enter the kingdom of God” thus does not refer to going to heaven but should be understood as accepting God’s rule or welcoming God to rule.¹⁶⁴ Lee says, to enter the kingdom of the heavens is to participate in the heavenly reality of God’s goal so that we can enter its heavenly manifestation.¹⁶⁵ Du Toit’s view of the kingdom parallels Lee’s view. Du Toit says that the kingdom is the reign of God or God’s kingly rule. Referencing the kingdom is a preposition of locality preceding such as in the kingdom (Matthew 5:19; 8:11; 13:43) and “to enter into the kingdom.”¹⁶⁶ Both of these references have some notion of locality. So, the prepositions refer to “being in” or “entering into” the sphere where God reigns. God’s reigning activity is always dynamic, and even the sphere of this activity is never static.¹⁶⁷ Carl Holladay expresses the same ideas as Du Toit; he believes that the kingdom of heaven is dynamic in nature and has a dynamic reality. He says that as people to whom the “kingdom of God” has been given and who offer the prospect of producing the “fruits of the kingdom,” they can now see themselves as the primary locus of God’s kingly rule.¹⁶⁸ Like their founder Jesus and His predecessor John, their message can be summed up in a few words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”

¹⁶⁴ Du Toit, “The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew,”: 550.

¹⁶⁵ Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” 81.

¹⁶⁶ Du Toit, “The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew,” 550.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 218.

(Matthew 3:2; 4:17). From their foundation narrative, they know how often Jesus spoke of the “kingdom of heaven” (thirty-two times), or, because he respected the divine name, the less preferred “kingdom of God” (four times), sometimes in the same breath (Matthew 19:23-24). From Jesus’ many pronouncements, they know the kingdom of heaven as a dynamic reality already breaking in (Matthew 10:7), dramatically visible in His own powerful words and miracles.¹⁶⁹

The kingdom of God indicates God’s active reign. Some scholars suggest that God’s kingdom is not like the kingdom of this world. Neusner says that God’s kingdom, unlike the kingdoms of this world and age, is not locative, and it is also not tangible. It is a kingdom that one enters by right attitude, through accepting the government and laws of that King and undertaking to obey His rules, the commandments.¹⁷⁰ Green and Neusner agree that there are requirements for entering the kingdom. Green says that there are at least two demands for entry; one demand is that a person must first enter the kingdom (Matthew 7:13, 21), and another demand for entering the kingdom is possessing the right attitude.¹⁷¹ Green goes on further to say that entering the kingdom happens when one relates to the King. That is why Jesus called people to Himself (Matthew 11:28), for He is the embodiment of the kingdom (Matthew 11:11). The Old Testament asserted God’s kingly rule over His people Israel.¹⁷²

Pennington states that there was some real sense in which heaven is distinct from the Earth for most ancient people. The kingdom is the strong semantic overlap between the invisible

¹⁶⁹ Holladay, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 218.

¹⁷⁰ Neusner, “The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems Judaic and Christian,” 293.

¹⁷¹ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 34.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

heavens (God's dwelling) and the visible heavens above.¹⁷³ Pennington views the kingdom as God's throne in which He executes judgment. He says that the Old Testament and Second Temple literature understood and testified that heaven was the place of God's throne (a symbol of his kingdom), God's angels, and the place from which God spoke and issued help and judgment.¹⁷⁴ Pennington adds that his view aligns with the New Testament. He says that the New Testament shares this worldview, referencing Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew 6:1, Matthew is no exception. When Matthew refers to the Father as ἐν τοῖς οὐρανόσ, (in the heavens), this must have some sense of a dwelling place distinct from the Earth.¹⁷⁵ Wenell agrees with Pennington and states that the kingdom of God is bounded space. Although it is not a necessary aspect of group identity to include a boundary, language about the kingdom employs boundary imagery.¹⁷⁶ There is a definite "inside" to the Kingdom (Mark 4:11; Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 14:25; Matthew 5:19; 8:11-12; 11:11; 13:43; Luke 14:15), as well as the possibility of entering it (Mark 9:47; 10:15; 10:23-25; Matthew 5:20, 7:21, 21:31, 23:13; Luke 16:16, 23:42).¹⁷⁷

Foster holds the position that the kingdom of God pertains to a realm or reign. He says that both phrases, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, communicate that God reigns over a kingdom.¹⁷⁸ Hagner has a different perspective on the kingdom of God. He believes the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are equivalent; a spatial metaphor can refer to both

¹⁷³ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 297.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Wenell, "Kingdom, Not Kingly Rule," 216.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 489.

the kingdom phrases. Hagner says that, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus regularly employed the phrase the “kingdom of God” (βασιλεία τῶν θεοῦ) or, as predominantly in Matthew, the equivalent expression “the kingdom of heaven” (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν).¹⁷⁹ Although Hagner uses spatial metaphors referring to the kingdom, one should not think of the kingdom as a place but rather as the experience of an era in which a new relationship with God, based on God’s new saving activity in Jesus, is made possible.¹⁸⁰ Hagner’s position is somewhat confusing because he says that at its heart is the idea of the restoration of the perfect rule or reign (hence “kingdom”) of God, the recovery of what He lost through the sin of the garden of Eden. Hagner is referencing John’s vision (Revelation 21) of the future utopia, which turns to Isaiah’s promise of the new heavens and Earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22); in Isaiah as in Revelation, the context also speaks of a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18). The previous Earth and heaven had fled from God’s face, and He now replaces the old creation with a new one able to endure the revelation of His glory (Revelation 21:23). Abernethy frames it like this: “adopting the same bifocal vision from Isaiah, Revelation 21, conceptualizes the realm of God’s kingdom from a universal and particular vantage point.”¹⁸¹ God reigns over the entire cosmos now (Revelation 4 – 5); although His reign, not realized now, will be in a new heaven and new Earth (Revelation 21:1). The New Jerusalem will be the center point of the new creation.¹⁸² The revelation that John saw was the new Zion come down from heaven, which, as Hagner previously stated, the restoration of the perfect rule or reign of God would recover what He lost through the sin of the

¹⁷⁹ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 68.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 180.

¹⁸² Ibid.

garden of Eden.¹⁸³ If Hagner holds this position, then this restoration of God's kingdom would have to be a physical place and not just an experience. The Bible clearly describes that the new kingdom that comes down from heaven has twelve guarded gates, so nothing evil or anything that can defile the kingdom will be allowed to enter. The guarded gates suggest that there is a spatial element to the kingdom of God.

Blomberg makes a fascinating point that suggests that God's kingdom is a place that can be taken away from some individuals and given to others. He references Jesus' parable in Matthew 21:43. He states that the parable of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:43 is Matthew's most distinctive and detailed addition to the wicked tenants' parable. The parable addresses the Jewish leaders: "Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."¹⁸⁴ What sounds near the outset of Jesus' ministry is like the most ethnocentric perspective found anywhere in the Gospels.

Another point that Matthews makes is that the kingdom of God is about community. Paul consistently speaks of unity within the body of believers (1 Corinthians 1:10). In the Synoptic Gospels, as Jesus begins His ministry, He calls His disciples. Woodley observes how Jesus calls His disciples; he says the kingdom of God was radically communal. Initially, Jesus called a couple of brothers, Peter and Andrew, who ran a small fishing business. Then He included James and John, another set of brothers. Peter had issues with control and impulsivity.¹⁸⁵ James and John were nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder" because they had anger and volatility issues. By calling these four men and then Matthew the tax collector, Mary, and Martha, and the whole

¹⁸³ Hagner, *The New Testament*, 68.

¹⁸⁴ Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 376.

¹⁸⁵ Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 55.

motley crew, Jesus was making a clear statement about His kingdom movement: “it cannot exist without community.”¹⁸⁶ Forging a community is part of kingdom living, which makes this kingdom dynamic in nature.

Conclusion

This literature review has shown a clear-cut differentiation in Matthew’s Gospel between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. Scholars believe that Matthew’s use of the kingdom of heaven is simply a stylistic variation similar to the use of “kingdom,” “kingdom of the Father,” and “kingdom of God” to refer to the same reality in Matthew and the other Gospels. According to Matthew, one of the better-known characteristics of the Gospel is its extensive use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven.” Some scholars believe that Matthew uses the kingdom of heaven as a synonym for the synoptic kingdom of God. Schreiner holds the position that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are interchangeable. Pennington, on the other hand, draws a sharp contrast between the two kingdoms. He holds the position that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are distinct. Pennington holds the position that the kingdom of heaven is not a periphrasis for the kingdom of God and that there is a difference between the two expressions. Blomberg’s position is that the kingdom of heaven is a metonymy. Behind all of Matthew’s rich and varied language for heaven lies an intentional focus on the theme of heaven and Earth, explicitly highlighting the current contrast or tense relationship between the two realms, between God and humanity.

Schreiner says the kingdom of God was certainly central in the teachings of Jesus, and Matthew is no exception. Pennington also says that Matthew emphasizes that God the Father is

¹⁸⁶ Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 55.

heavenly or in heaven; it is appropriate to depict God's kingdom as a heavenly kingdom from heaven. When looking at the phrase "ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν," it is clear that ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν inevitably uses the plural form of οὐρανός. These forms point to a reference to the divine realm as distinct from the Earth. Clark and Pennington both agree that the divine realm is distinct from Earth. Lee emphasizes another aspect of the kingdom of the heavens, which is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. He states that a kingdom is a realm where the king exercises authority. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority. Gleeson believes the word "kingdom" has everything to do with power and authority. To speak of God's kingdom is to speak of God's power, authority, reign, and rule over the material universe and everything and everyone, including the community of human beings. Patte offers a unique understanding. He says that the kingdom of God refers to an aggressive manifestation of the power of God, which asserts itself against satanic and demonic powers, while the kingdom of heaven refers to the authority of God. At present, God is not imposing His authority upon people through power, but people should recognize and acknowledge the meekness and mercy of the Father and the Son. Lee says Jesus speaks of God's heavenly rule that is already here; it is within believers. Jesus walked all over Galilee, claiming that God's reign of love and rightness was here. The Lord's teachings on the mountain show that the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is a believer living according to the heavenly rule within them. Lee's view of Jesus's teaching expresses God's reign. He says Jesus' teachings cause believers to leave sin, overcome their temper, deny their flesh and themselves, reject the world, oppose Satan, and submit to the heavenly authority. When the King's public ministry starts, Scholtz says that Jesus preaches the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17), and the King's public ministry is summarized. Du Toit believed that Jesus preached the Gospel because of man's desperate need

for salvation. He says the coming of the kingdom signified a crisis. It challenged people to make an existential decision. Woodley and Du Toit have the same view of the coming kingdom.

Woodley says that it was the remedy for the crises that existed between God and man. He says that the kingdom has come in Jesus, and God is reigning over and restoring His broken creation. In Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of heaven continues to be a topic of debate within the Christian community. Is the kingdom of heaven a reverential circumlocution for God?

D. A. Carson supports the reverential circumlocution theory. He states that he is unwilling to overturn the circumlocution theory completely, even though there seems to be more to Matthew's choice than merely avoiding the divine name. Scholars will continue to differ on this point; however, with careful exegesis of Matthew's passages on the kingdom of heaven, one can understand Matthew's intent for using the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps Matthew intentionally avoided the kingdom of God to leave open the possibility of Jesus also being King. If one concludes that the reverential circumlocution theory stands in question, then the same could be said for the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God being synonymous. Instead, as stated earlier from Blomberg, the two phrases should be seen as metonymy, one thing standing in the place of the other.

When interacting with other scholars, Blomberg's works or his position support this research more than other scholarly works. Blomberg says that the kingdom of heaven is a metonymy for the kingdom of God, which is in line with the researcher's view. The kingdom of heaven is the rule of heaven over the Earth by Christ when He establishes His kingdom on Earth. In Revelation, the Bible clearly states that the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will come down from God out of heaven. Both God and Christ will rule the Holy City. Jesus Christ will rule the heavens over the Earth, and God will rule the universe and the hearts of man, which is the

meaning of the kingdom of God. God's ruling over the universe encapsulates the heavens where Christ rules. Therefore, it can be stated that the kingdom of heaven is a metonym for the kingdom of God.

Many of the gaps the researcher found in the works that were reviewed were that most scholars failed to begin with what was the most unique and essential way that Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven. Matthew intentionally used the kingdom of heaven as part of a larger 'heavenly' discourse in his Gospel. He used this 'heavenly' speech to support his strategy of reaffirming the disciples of Jesus as the time chosen people of God. Rather than focusing on Matthew's use of heavenly language, scholars decided to focus on merely a reverential circumlocution and held the position that no more needs to be said. However, more research should be done to clarify the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel.

This research is distinct from other research because the reverential circumlocution theory was not assumed. The researcher did not approach the project with a presupposition that the kingdom of heaven was synonymous with the kingdom of God. Most scholars hold the position that both phrases are interchangeable. However, as the research progressed, it became clear to the researcher that there was a possible difference, so the researcher pursued a path to clarify the misunderstanding about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. As a result of this research, one can question scholars' theories regarding the validity of the reverential circumlocution theory.

Theological Foundations

Introduction

This section of chapter two provides a theological foundation for this thesis project. The biblical principles are the principles that govern and support this project. This research project is

guided by these principles that serve as the foundation of this thesis. The Bible is the final authority for all things and how God provides principles for living. Authority also has an application to words spoken or written whose accuracy has been established and whose information can consequently be trusted.¹⁸⁷ The authority of the Bible is established by its own claims. It is the word of God. Such declarations as, "This is what the Lord says," or its equivalent, occur so frequently in the Old Testament that it can confidently be asserted that the claim dominates the whole account. The New Testament writers also refer to these Scriptures as having God for their source.¹⁸⁸ In the New Testament itself, both Christ and the gospel are spoken of as "the word of God" and demonstrate that the tie between the two is a vital and necessary one.

The kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel is a phrase that Matthew uses, while the other writers of the Synoptic Gospels use the kingdom of God. Why did Matthew use "kingdom of heaven" as opposed to using "kingdom of God?" The literature review of chapter two addressed these two phrases, and scholars have shared their views as to why they hold a particular position. This portion of chapter two will provide the biblical argument undergirded with scholarly Bible commentaries and theological works. This theological reflection will be free of previously adopted assumptions and directly address this research project's purpose. This theological reflection will be biblically based and will be a well-reasoned theological reflection on how Christian teaching informs the project's presuppositions and operating principles.

¹⁸⁷ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 154.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Jesus' Message of the Kingdom

The kingdom or reign of God is the central message of Jesus' ministry.¹⁸⁹ Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God as an event. Jesus' proclamation is evident from the many temporal references associated with the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. There are statements in which the expectation of the coming kingdom of God will take place in the future (Matthew 6:10; Mark 14:25; Luke 6:20-21), where a summarizing formula appears the "kingdom of God has come near" (Luke 10:11).¹⁹⁰ God's kingdom or reign, as seen in Matthew 3:2; 4:17, 23, can refer to that aspect of God's sovereignty under which there is life.¹⁹¹ That kingdom is breaking in under Christ's ministry, but its consummation will not occur until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

In Matthew 4:17, Jesus begins His public ministry by preaching repentance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom appears at crucial points in the story, such as at the introduction of John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In both cases, the message preached is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When Jesus subsequently sends His disciples out, He commands them to preach the same message, the kingdom of heaven is near (Matthew 10:7). The disciples' message is the same as both John the Baptist and Jesus' message; the kingdom of heaven is near.¹⁹² John the Baptist is the first to preach about the arrival of the kingdom of God (Matthew 3:2). John preaches a message of judgment and repentance. The kingdom was so near that Jesus claims that there are some with

¹⁸⁹ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 279.

¹⁹⁰ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 202.

¹⁹¹ Frank E. Gaebelien, "Matthew," in *Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. 8, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 170.

¹⁹² Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 390.

Him who would not die before witnessing its power (Mark 9:1). While Jesus' message of the kingdom included elements of judgment and repentance, it also entailed the good news of salvation. Thus, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom.¹⁹³ As Jesus commands His disciples to preach, they also go with the same authority as Jesus (Matthew 10:1). The disciples were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, and drive out demons. The twelve disciples' power is an extension of Jesus' power, exercised in the same manner. In John 3:2, John proclaimed, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. Now his ministry has come to an end (John 4:12), and he has passed the baton to Jesus, who takes up the same message but with a new depth, for the great light has dawned, and the kingdom age is here.¹⁹⁴ The meaning of "has come near" or is "near" (ἤγγικεν) has both "already" and "not yet" aspects attached to them, just as "here" and "yet coming" continues in this context as well. Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom events, for the kingdom is already present.¹⁹⁵ In Luke's Gospel, the kingdom of God is the central aspect of Jesus' ministry. Luke 4:43, 8:1, 9:2, 11, 16:16, and 18:29 indicate that preaching the kingdom of God epitomizes Jesus' ministry.¹⁹⁶ Along the lines of inaugurated eschatology, Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God is best understood as fulfillment without consummation.¹⁹⁷ There is both an "already" and a "not yet" aspect to the kingdom. Thus, in keeping with Old Testament expectations, Jesus expected a future consummation of the

¹⁹³ David Seal, *Kingdom of God: The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 1.

¹⁹⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 144.

¹⁹⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 143.

¹⁹⁶ David G. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 39.

¹⁹⁷ Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom*, 36.

kingdom. The more striking element of Jesus' teaching in the gospels is that He did not just announce a future kingdom; He announced the present arrival of that kingdom in His ministry.¹⁹⁸ Luke, in his Gospel, emphasized the kingdom's presence. In Luke 10:9, 11; 11:20; and 17:21, Luke's concern was more focused upon bridging and structuring than upon achieving a precision of thought. Matthew, in his book, has given more precision to the healing activity's scope with his impressive insight into Jesus' healing the sick, raising the dead, cleanse lepers, and casting out demons.¹⁹⁹ Within the healing activity in Luke's narrative, one can see the effects of the arriving kingdom of God. While they bring their immediate benefit to the afflicted, one can appreciate their true significance in connection with the kingdom of God. The argument over the sense of ἤγγικεν ("has drawn near"), turns on whether the kingdom of God is said to be very near (and so soon to come; or that it is as near as Jesus is, who is on His way to these towns), or whether the kingdom of God is said to be here (it has done its drawing near and has thus, arrived).²⁰⁰ Jesus summarizes the message and ministry of His disciples. The acts of healing performed by Jesus and the disciples are signs of the in-breaking of the kingdom (Luke 11:14–23). Given the power to heal, the disciples heal those who receive them as a tangible example of God's blessing coming on those who respond. The disciples heal and declare the kingdom's nearness (Luke 9:60). Such healing recalls Elijah's ministry (1 Kings 17:17–24).²⁰¹ This key passage in Luke's kingdom theology demonstrates the nearness of the kingdom by Jesus

¹⁹⁸ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 39.

¹⁹⁹ John Nolland, *Luke*, vol. 35b, *Word Biblical Commentary New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 554.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 1000.

commissioning His followers. John the Baptist had declared the approach of a decisive time, and now that time has come upon them (Luke 3:1–18). The perfect tense ἤγγικεν (ēngiken, is come) stresses the lingering effect of its coming. The demonstration of healing power shows that things have changed significantly.²⁰² The healings performed by Jesus signal the start of a new divine age. Matthew makes the kingdom focus clear.²⁰³ Matthew used his parallel material early in his mission charge (Matthew 10:7–8). The content of the disciples’ message was very much like that in Matthew 3:2 and 4:17: repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The long-awaited kingdom was now near enough to be attested by miracles directed at demonism and malady.²⁰⁴ The authority in Matthew 10:1 cannot be limited to the list of powers mentioned in that verse, for here, in Matthew 10:8, two more items are added to the list: raising the dead and cleansing lepers (Matthew 9:18–26; 8:1–4). Jesus expected the disciples to be supported by those to whom they were to minister (Matthew 10:9–13; 1 Corinthians 9:14). However, they needed to understand that they had received the good news of the kingdom, along with Jesus’ authority, and this commission.²⁰⁵

Matthew frames the Beatitudes, which concerns the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3, 10). In Matthew 5:3, Jesus regularly exhorts people to enter the kingdom.²⁰⁶ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Jesus in Matthew 5:3 declares those who are blessed. The poor have encountered

²⁰² Bock, Luke, 1000.

²⁰³ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 41.

²⁰⁴ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 8, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 245.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁰⁶ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 280.

unfortunate circumstances from an economic point of view. The poor are spiritually and emotionally oppressed people, which have been disillusioned and require God's help.²⁰⁷ Those who have experienced the harsh side of life in which deprivation and hunger are their regular lot have no resources to make anything of their lives. Those who recognize that they can produce no spiritual or religious self-help before God are also included with the poor, for they are spiritually bankrupt.²⁰⁸ This attitude of humility in the harsh realities of life makes a person open to receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God belongs to those who know they have no resources, material or spiritual, to help themselves before God.²⁰⁹ The "poor in spirit" are the ones who are blessed. Since Luke speaks simply of "the poor," many have concluded that he preserves the true teaching of the historical Jesus' concern for the economically destitute. In contrast, Matthew has spiritualized it by adding "in spirit." The issue of the economically destitute is not simple.²¹⁰ Already in the Old Testament, "the poor" has religious overtones. The word *πτωχοί* ("poor") has a different force in the LXX and the New Testament. It translates several Hebrew words, most importantly *אֲנִיִּים* ("the poor"), who have confidence only in God because of sustained economic privation and social distress. Thus, it joins with passages affirming God's favor on the lowly and contrite in spirit (Isaiah 57:15; 66:2). God's favor on the lowly and contrite in spirit does not mean there is a lack of concern for the materially poor but that poverty itself is not the chief thing. Far from conferring spiritual advantage, wealth and privilege entail great spiritual peril. Though poverty is neither a blessing nor a guarantee of

²⁰⁷ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 205.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

²¹⁰ Carson, "Matthew," 131.

spiritual rewards, it can be turned to advantage if it fosters humility before God.²¹¹ These are the poor to whom Jesus has come to announce the good news (Matthew 11:5) and to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs. The phrase “poor in spirit” should be considered a virtue and must refer not to poor quality of faith but to acknowledging one’s spiritual powerlessness and bankruptcy apart from Christ. Blessing the spiritually poor provides an important qualification of Luke’s more absolute use of “poor” (Luke 6:20).²¹² Thus, no contradiction appears here because an important strand of Jewish thought had developed a close equation between poverty and piety in using the Hebrew term *anawim* (Isaiah 61:1).²¹³ Both Matthew and Luke picture those who have confidence only in God because of sustained economic privation and social distress. As Jesus authorizes His disciples, His theme remains consistent with earlier passages in Matthew, which was to preach this message, “The kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 10:7). God’s reign, His transformation of broken human lives and pain-filled human institutions, has started now.²¹⁴ Its purpose was spelled out with the specification of those to be reached by the mission. The fundamental object of the mission is the proclamation of the dawning of the kingdom of heaven.²¹⁵ The disciples are to go and κηρύσσετε, “preach,” a verb that has thus far been used only in connection with the kingdom. For the content of the proclamation, (Matthew 3:2 and 4:17), where the same words, ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, “the kingdom of the heavens is

²¹¹ Carson, “Matthew,” 131.

²¹² Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 97.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 114.

²¹⁵ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33a, *Word Biblical Commentary New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2014), 271.

at hand,” are found verbatim.²¹⁶ John the Baptist made an immediate announcement of the approaching kingdom. His preaching aroused the expectancy of everyone who heard. Everyone came for baptism: the Pharisees, Sadducees (Matthew 3:7), publicans, and soldiers (Luke 3:12,14). John sees the kingdom on the very threshold. The kingdom was to be a gift to man; even at the very time of its approach, the appointed fulness of time was also a gift; therefore, the announcement of its arrival is a glad tiding. It is not easy to understand the story of the kingdom until one understands the big picture. The kingdom of heaven did not start when Jesus showed up by the shores of Lake Galilee; God told us about the kingdom way back in Old Testament times.²¹⁷ The Old Testament tells the big, beautiful, hope-filled story of a God who would one day lovingly reign over His people and the peoples of the Earth, God’s reign is marked by a peaceful “rightness” to the world. Everything would be in its right place, and every relationship would be on its right terms.²¹⁸ The notion of God’s kingly rule over Israel and all creation is well attested throughout the Israelite scriptures, indicating the prominence of this idea in Israel’s ancient past and well into the exilic and postexilic periods, when many of its sacred traditions were being redacted and codified.²¹⁹ Despite the ubiquity of the phrase “Kingdom of God” throughout the New Testament, the phrase lacks a clear precedent in Israel’s scriptural traditions. The closest parallel occurs in 1 Chronicles 28:5, which reads “Yahweh’s kingdom.”²²⁰ The phrase “kingdom of Yahweh” appears only fifteen times in the Old Testament in Psalm 22:28;

²¹⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 271.

²¹⁷ Woodley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 53.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

²¹⁹ Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapid, MI: Baker Book House, 2015), 26.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

103:19; 145:11–13; Obadiah 21; Daniel 2:44; 4:3; 4:31; 6:26; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Chronicles 17:14; 28:5; 29:11 and 2 Chronicles 13:8. The occasion of the covenant is David’s desire to build the temple. David is concerned about the things of God, and Nathan encourages him in his plans. However, God rejects David as the one to build the temple. Even so, He brings His covenant word to David (1 Chronicles 17:1–15).²²¹ The project had already waited many years and can wait longer. The basis for the covenant is God’s past and future works for David and the nation. The themes presented here will recur throughout the remainder of Chronicles: (1) God will make David great (1 Chronicles. 17:8); (2) God will give security to His people in their land (1 Chronicles 17:9–10); and (3) God’s legitimate house, the temple, will be built (1 Chronicles 17:12). 1 Chronicles 17:14 sets in motion the events culminating in the temple building; it shows that the temple was not important. David wanted to build a house for God, but God Himself would do something far greater in building a house for David. This house, the Davidic dynasty with its eternal and messianic implications, was of far greater importance than any building.²²² 1 Chronicles 17 reminds the reader that the house God builds surpasses any human house no matter how grand it may be, and however honorable the motivations were behind its building.²²³ The building of God’s house should once again remind us that it is superficial to think of the Chronicler as someone who could not see beyond legal and ceremonial religion. The place where the temple stood was of paramount importance, for it was the point of contact between two worlds: the city-state and the cosmic state. The city-state was the property of and under the

²²¹ Andrew C. Bowling, *1-2 Chronicles*, vol. 3, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 273.

²²² J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, vol. 9, *New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 142.

²²³ Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, 142.

control of the deity.²²⁴ In Psalm 22:28, the Psalmist declares the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations. Along with all the nations, the whole world will realize the power of Yahweh and will bow down before Him as their God. This bold flight of the Psalmist's thought, inspired by his faith, cannot be accounted for by saying that he merely copies a type of style well known from Babylonian and Egyptian hymns. Nor can it be accounted for by saying that he expected the conversion of the pagan nations to take place as an immediate result of his deliverance.²²⁵ On the contrary, determined by his thoughts lies his conception of God, to whose dominion and power there are no limits. God's kingship is the ultimate reason for the nations' conversion. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations. The word translated as "dominion" is literally "the kingdom."²²⁶ The scope of the psalmist's world broadens from his very personal interrogation of Psalms 22:1 to this recognition that, while he may have felt abandoned, the world of nations was the much wider range of God's sovereign concern.²²⁷ The psalmist's feelings of abandonment were not to diminish his state of dereliction but to put it in perspective, much like the Lord reminds Job that He, the Creator of the universe (Job 38:4–24), is concerned about the whole world (Job 38:25–27). In effect, the psalmist's personal question modulates from the minor key of Psalms 22:1 to the rhapsody of God's sovereign rule over the world (Psalms 22:27–31). The psalmist's voice blends with the congregation's (Psalms 22:25), unites with the voices of the poor (Psalms 22:26), and merges

²²⁴ Thompson, 1, 2 Chronicles, 142.

²²⁵ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms, A Commentary: Old Testament and New Testament Library Series* (New York, NY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 225.

²²⁶ C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms, vol. 2, Teach the Text Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 161.

²²⁷ Bullock, *Psalms*, 161.

into the universal song of God's sovereign rule (Psalms 22:27–31).²²⁸ In Daniel 2:31-45, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the "Great Rock." His dream revealed the coming kingdom of God symbolized by the great rock (Daniel 2:45; 7:13–14, 18, 27). The revealed kingdom will be established "in the time of those kings."²²⁹ The meaning of the rock is the establishment of Christ's rule at His second advent during the time of these Kings, striking the statue upon its feet and toes. The kingdom of God will be of divine origin. God, Himself will establish it.²³⁰ Daniel 2:34 also emphasizes the kingdom's supernatural origin, and the kingdom will be eternal. The kingdom not being "left to another people" (Daniel 2:44) refers to the four empires that were destroyed and absorbed by other nations. By way of contrast, no one will ever conquer the coming kingdom of God and possess it. It is the indestructible and eternal kingdom of Christ. His kingdom is best understood to be an earthly reign of Christ inaugurated at His second advent.²³¹ It is best to follow an earthly, future (millennial) kingdom of Christ that will continue into the eternal state for several reasons. In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel saw the glorified Son of Man (Daniel 7:13). The New Testament quotes that make references to the kingdom of Christ most frequently come from Daniel 7:13. The personage who now appears before God in the form of a human being is of heavenly origin. He has come to this place of coronation accompanied by the clouds of heaven and is no mere human being in essence. The expression "like a son of man" identifies this final ruler of the world as a man in contrast to the beasts and as

²²⁸ Bullock, Psalms, 161.

²²⁹ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, *New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 98.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Miller, *Daniel*, 99.

the heavenly Sovereign incarnate. During His earthly ministry, Jesus maintained this same emphasis on His incarnate nature, that He was a true man as well as a true God.²³² He constantly referred to Himself as “the Son of Man.” Since Jesus had this passage in mind, He spoke of Himself as the Son of Man. Daniel 7:13 is the only place in the Old Testament where Son of Man is used as a divine personage rather than a human being. Christ emphasized His return to Earth “in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26), or “on the clouds of the sky” (Matthew 24:30), or the Son of Man “sitting at the right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64).²³³ Nothing could be clearer than that Jesus Himself regarded Daniel 7:13 as predictive of Himself and that the two elements “like a son of man” and “with the clouds of heaven” combined to constitute a messianic title.²³⁴ There exists a close relationship between Daniel’s eschatological vision of the kingdom and Jesus’ proclamation. This connection certainly applies to Matthew and is even highlighted by texts like Matthew 16:28, where the other Gospels read “kingdom of God,” Matthew refers to the “kingdom of the Son of Man” (Daniel 7:13–14). There is a range of possible meanings for expressing “the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom.”²³⁵ Both Mark and Luke offer some encouragement as one ponders these phrases because Mark and Luke offer parallel expressions, namely, the “kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 9:1) and simply the “kingdom of God” (Mark 1:15) respectively. It is obvious that whereas Matthew has made Mark’s clause more specific, Luke has made it more general.

²³² Frank E. Gaebelien, *Daniel*, vol. 7, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publ. House, 1985), 90.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, vol. 33b, *Word Biblical Commentary New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 486.

Looking for an event within the lifetime of at least some who were present, which could correspond to the powerful coming of the kingdom, and perhaps even the Son of Man's coming in Matthew's Gospel.²³⁶

The word kingdom is essential in Matthew's Gospel. Over one-third of the New Testament uses the word kingdom. The word kingdom appears in Matthew's Gospel (fifty-five out of one hundred sixty-two times). Kingdoms today are thought of in terms of the land over which a king reigns. In the Bible, and especially in Matthew, the focus is not on land but the king's authority.²³⁷ "All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to Me" (Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) (Matthew 28:18). The address itself could be called a Jewish midrash on the "All-ness of Yahweh" applied to the church's mission since "all" (πᾶς) is found in every section of the speech. Jesus comes to the disciples and establishes the basis for His command here, His absolute all-embracing authority as the risen Lord.²³⁸ The divine passive given (ἐδόθη) shows that this authority/power comes from God Himself, and it has been called the enthronement of the Messiah as eschatological ruler and judge. The Messiah's enthronement is an allusion to Daniel 7:13–14, where the "one like a son of man" is given authority, glory, and sovereign power.²³⁹ His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom will never be destroyed. The "authority" (ἐξουσία) continues the astonishing statement of Matthew 11:27, "all things have been given to me by my Father." Jesus' authority, often emphasized and seen in Matthew 4:23–24 and 9:35 speaks of Jesus' authority to heal all. In

²³⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 486.

²³⁷ Lee, "Entering the Kingdom of Heaven," 81.

²³⁸ Osborne, *Matthew*, 1078.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Matthew 7:29, Jesus teaches with authority; Matthew 8:9 demonstrates the authority to command, while Matthew 8:29–32; 12:22; and 17:18 expresses Jesus' authority over demons. In Matthew 9:6, 8, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins; in Matthew 10:1, Jesus passes His authority on to His disciples. In Matthew 13:41, Jesus has the authority to judge; and in Matthew 21:23–27, Jesus receives authority from God to perform His deeds.²⁴⁰ The kingdom of heaven is already present in Christ, and thus, His assertion of authority provides the foundation for the ecclesiastical command found in Matthew 28:19–20a.

One aspect of the kingdom of the heavens is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. To know the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, one must know what the kingdom of the heavens entails. A kingdom is a realm where a king exercises authority. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority. God's throne is in the heavens and His kingdom rules over all the universe. God's throne and kingdom are similar terms referring to God's rule over the world. To rule means that Yahweh is sovereign and reigns over humanity.²⁴¹ In the strict sense, the fundamental biblical notion is that Yahweh is the ruler, as Job 25:2 states that Yahweh rules humanity.²⁴² Here the participle is used abstractly. This fundamental principle applies in a unique way to Israel, which in the earliest pre-monarchic period considered itself a theocracy and recognized Yahweh as its true King even in the sphere of earthly politics, as Judges 8:23 illustrates. Hand in hand with this understanding is the conviction that Yahweh is the ruler of the universe under His act of creation.

²⁴⁰ Osborne, *Matthew*, 1078.

²⁴¹ Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 69.

²⁴² Botterweck, Ringgren, and Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 69.

The throne of God’s authority is also in the heavens (Psalms 103:19). Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is the reign of the heavens where God dwells. God’s “throne” and “kingdom” are similar terms referring to God’s rule over the world.²⁴³ The word “all” is prefixed by the definite article, giving the phrase definiteness, His kingdom rules over the universe (1 Chronicles 29:12).²⁴⁴ The compassionate Father who keeps covenant with Israel is also the sovereign King who rules over “all” of the universe (1 Kings 8:27–28; Isaiah 66:1). Nothing lies outside the scope of the Lord’s rule (Psalms 145:11–13; Daniel 2:44), and He has established His throne securely against the threats of all potential rivals (1 Kings 2:12; Psalms 93:1). Always and everywhere, the Lord is reigning over “all,” so all humans are obliged to submit obediently to His authority over them.²⁴⁵

The kingdom of God denotes the believers’ life, which is of God and capable of living within His realm. All those who are in the kingdom of God are born of God (John 3:3, 5).²⁴⁶ Conversion is a new birth produced by the spirit (John 3:5-6); individuals are reborn from above through the conversion process. In John 3:31 ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενος is parallel to ὁ ἄνωθεν ἐρχόμενος. Sometimes a convert to Judaism (a proselyte) who assumed the yoke of the kingdom of heaven was described as a newborn child. Jesus says that everyone, Jew or Gentile, including Nicodemus, needs rebirth from above.²⁴⁷ God’s kingdom is the eternal and universal sovereignty

²⁴³ Bullock, *Psalms*, 231.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms*, vol. 13, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 267.

²⁴⁶ Lee, “Entering the Kingdom of Heaven,” 87.

²⁴⁷ Murray J. Harris, *John: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2015), 85.

that God exercises; before it is the realm or sphere, He governs. The heavens' kingdom denotes the life of believers who are submitting to the heavenly ruling and receiving heavenly discipline. The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling of the heavens.

In Matthew 3:2, Matthew states that the kingdom has drawn near (ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) which has a spatial sense. The reason for this (γάρ) is the dawning of a new age, the kingdom of heaven.²⁴⁸ Matthew says, “again, the devil took Jesus on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Satan now proceeds to offer Jesus the greatest temptation of all, a shortcut to power and glory (Matthew 4:8).” “On a mountain” (εἰς ὄρος) is spatial but shades over to the function of “to” (πρός) or “in” (ἐν), or “onto.”²⁴⁹ The “very high mountain” may recall Moses on Mount Nebo surveying the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:1–4, which has linguistic parallels with this passage).²⁵⁰ Matthew contrasts the kingdom of heaven with the kingdoms of the world, again implying a spatial sense. In the clause εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, “will enter into the kingdom of heaven,” (Matthew 7: 21) the future tense of the verb points to eschatological salvation at the last judgment.²⁵¹ In the final reckoning, words by themselves will not be sufficient, not even the critical words κύριε, κύριε, “Lord, Lord.” The repeated formula “Lord, Lord” here and in Matthew 7:22 occurs only once again in the New Testament, namely, in Matthew 25:11, where Matthew uses “Lord, Lord” in connection with eschatological judgment. Matthew’s community can hardly have failed to think here of the primary Christian confession, that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9; Philippians

²⁴⁸ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 298.

²⁴⁹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 134.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 186.

2:11; 1 Corinthians 12:3). Of the futility of empty profession, the emphasis on “doing” what is righteous in Romans 2:13, Matthew noted constant stress on righteousness in the sermons in Matthew 5:16, 20, 48; 7:12, 20.²⁵²

The locative understanding of εἰς (into), is found in Matthew 7:21 when Jesus says: “not everyone who says to Him, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven” (εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν) has a spatial element to it. Matthew’s use of εἰς here can be described as an extension that involves a place. Matthew’s consistent use of ἐν and εἰς concerning βασιλεία implies a spatial understanding of the kingdom.²⁵³ Matthew parallels the kingdom, which is also revealing in terms of a spatial argument. These images refer to the kingdom both in likeness to persons and objects. The kingdom is like people, usually a king or master, but the king has a place to reign.²⁵⁴ Matthew’s similes and images parallel the kingdom, revealing in terms of a spatial argument. Matthew says the kingdom is like (ὁμοιόω, ὁμοιος) a man who sowed good seed (Matthew 13:24); a king who wished to settle accounts (Matthew 18:23); a master of a house who brings out treasures old and new (Matthew 13:52); a merchant in search of fine pearls (Matthew 13:45); a master of the house who hired servants early to work his field (Matthew 20:1); a king who gave a wedding feast (Matthew 22:2), and ten virgins who were waiting for the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1).²⁵⁵ These parables are all images comparing the kingdom to people. These metaphors are capable of diverse usages and meanings. Matthew 13 indicates that Jesus intended His parables to reveal the kingdom’s truths to His disciples and

²⁵² Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 186.

²⁵³ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 28.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁵⁵ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 28.

conceal them from others (Matthew 13:10-16). The primary focus of these parables is the varied responses to the kingdom message (Matthew 13:19). Thus, the primary background for the parables of Matthew 13 is the increasing opposition, narrated in Matthew 11-12, to Jesus and His message.²⁵⁶

Throughout the early part of Jesus' ministry, He used some extensive teaching and healing episodes to give hints at what His kingdom looked, felt, and sounded like.²⁵⁷ Jesus slowly unraveled the mysteries of the kingdom and inviting others to enter it. He even started showing how some of those regarded religious leaders opposed the work of God's kingdom by their narrow self-righteousness and the control they attempted to force on people from their respective theological camps.²⁵⁸ Matthew 13 shows a seismic shift in Jesus' teaching method. His kingdom mysteries were about to become a whole lot clearer, but not to everyone. That is because Jesus did not spell out the kingdom in dictionary definitions. Although Jesus was almost obsessed with the kingdom, He never broke open the dictionary or encyclopedia and read out, "Here is how I define the kingdom."²⁵⁹ Jesus had a reason for not giving the definition, time, and place for the kingdom. Had Jesus revealed the time and place for the kingdom, then everyone would have been expecting it. Instead, He gave real-world descriptions of the kingdom by employing parables.²⁶⁰ The parables initially helped Jesus' disciples understand the opposition to

²⁵⁶ David L. Turner, *Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 334.

²⁵⁷ Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishers, 2012), 21.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom*, 21.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

themselves and later, as narrated by Matthew, similarly enabled his community to grasp its own identity and struggles. Classical dispensationalism is mistaken in its attempt to understand the parables as referring primarily to the future millennium or teaching the “mystery” of the offered, rejected, and postponed kingdom. Matthew's already inaugurated kingdom and the parables are about its present progress and future glories (Matthew 13:43).²⁶¹ The application must draw from this historical context to modern contexts where the message of the kingdom is proclaimed. The disciples continue the mission of Jesus (Matthew 24:14; 28:19), and their ministry continues until the end of the age.

Conclusion

As Jesus began His ministry, He preached repentance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom appears at crucial points in Matthew's story. The message preached is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Jesus commands the disciples to preach the kingdom's message, and they were to preach about the nearness of the kingdom. This key passage in Luke's kingdom theology demonstrates the nearness of the kingdom through the followers that Jesus commissioned. John the Baptist had declared the approach of a decisive time, and now that time has come upon them. One aspect of the kingdom of the heavens can be found in its reality. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens can only be realized when one comes to know what the kingdom of the heavens is. A kingdom is a realm where a king exercises authority. God rules and exercises authority from the heavens as His dwelling place. God's throne and kingdom refer to God's rule over the world; therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is the reign of the heavens where God dwells. God's throne and kingdom also refer to God's rule over all the universe.

²⁶¹ Turner, *Matthew*, 334.

Matthew contrasts the kingdom of heaven with the kingdoms of the world, again implying a spatial sense. The “kingdom of heaven has drawn near” (Matthew 3:2) has a spatial sense, especially compared to Matthew’s voyage in Mark 1:15, which has a temporal aspect missing in Matthew. In Matthew 4:8, Matthew contrasts the kingdom of heaven with the kingdoms of the world, again implying a spatial sense. In Matthew 7:21, believers will enter the kingdom of heaven, the future tense of the verb points to eschatological salvation at the last judgment. The language that Matthew uses implies a spatial understanding of the kingdom.

The parables Jesus taught about the kingdom are parables comparing the kingdom to people. These metaphors are capable of diverse usages and meanings. Matthew 13 indicates that Jesus intended His parables to reveal truths of the kingdom to His disciples. The primary focus of these parables is the varied responses to the kingdom message. The already inaugurated kingdom in Matthew and the parables are about its present progress and its future glories. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on Earth (Matthew 28:18). He will return on the clouds of heaven to take His royal throne. The battle is already over, and those aligned with God’s kingdom await the future victory.

Theoretical Foundations

Introduction

The kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel remains to be the most widely contested subject. Matthew used heavenly language in conjunction with other languages to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah in ways the leaders of formative Judaism did not understand. Matthew’s heavenly language also reaffirmed to Jesus’ disciples that their identities, affirmations, and goals were in heaven and not on Earth. There has been much research on why Matthew uses the kingdom of heaven while the other Synoptic Gospels used the kingdom of

God. Many scholars have accepted the fact that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are synonymous, and therefore, nothing else needs to be said. Scholars continue to argue that Matthew's use of the "kingdom of heaven" rather than the "kingdom of God" was intentional; his goal was to avoid offending his Jewish audience. There may be some truth to this due to the "Jewish" character of Matthew's Gospel that has often drawn attention among scholars. The attention is evident from "*inter alia*," the many quotations and allusions from the Old Testament, as well as the Hebrew/Aramaic expressions which were left untranslated (ῥακά in Matthew 5:22; κορβᾶν in Mark 7:11, where a translation is provided).²⁶² Matthew's writings have displayed a positive attitude towards the law (Matthew 5:17-18), he emphasizes righteousness (Matthew 3:15; 5:6,10,20; 6:1,33), he pays special attention to Israel (Matthew 10:5-6; 27:25), he portrays Jesus as the expected Messiah (Matthew 1:1-17), and he has respect for Jewish sensitivities (Matthew 5:4,6,7,9).²⁶³ These and many more features indicate that the writer is a Jewish Christian, writing to mainly Jewish Christians.

Scholars have stated that Matthew's use of the "kingdom of heaven" is simply a stylistic variation (similar to the use of the "kingdom," the "kingdom of the Father," and the "kingdom of God") used to refer to the same reality in Matthew and the other Gospels.²⁶⁴ In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, K. L. Schmidt believes that the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven" have the same meaning in Matthew's Gospel. Since heaven can be substituted for God by later Jewish usage, what is true of βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is also true of βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. The same holds good also of βασιλεία τοῦ πατρός ("kingdom of the Father").

²⁶² Du Toit, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew," 546.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 488.

Therefore, the phrases “kingdom of the Father,” “kingdom of heaven,” and “kingdom of God” can all be used interchangeably.”²⁶⁵ Likewise, Floyd V. Filson, in his commentary on Matthew, says of these and other uses of the “kingdom” in Matthew are all synonymous; there is no real difference between these varied expressions.²⁶⁶ C. T. Craig gives the same verdict in *The Interpreter's Bible*. In the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, O. E. Evans similarly specifies that there is no difference of meaning between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven.²⁶⁷ Pennington credits Dalman, a well-known late 19th-century scholar, as the origin for the circumlocution argument. Dalman’s work has dramatically influenced scholars as well as commentaries who supported the reverential circumlocution theory.²⁶⁸ The theoretical section of chapter two will look at what other scholars have said and written about this subject. This section will also cover kingdom concepts from various scholars drawn from their theological perspectives on the meaning of Matthew’s kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

The meaning of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel is a topic that has brought controversy by several scholars. Some scholars continue to argue that the kingdom of heaven is a circumlocution for the kingdom of God that Matthew used for the sake of his Jewish audience’s

²⁶⁵ Kittel Gerhard and Friedrich Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W B Eerdmans Publications, 2013), 582.

²⁶⁶ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 13.

²⁶⁷ O. E. Evans, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 17.

²⁶⁸ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 19.

conscience.²⁶⁹ Benedict Thomas Viviano says that Matthew's Gospel presents one with several dilemmas on how one should study God. If one decides to study God, they will have to add the periphrases for God that are frequent in Matthew and the Judaism of his period (85-95C.E), especially in the Aramaic Targumim.²⁷⁰ The most common of these periphrases is the "heavens," the most important is "the Father" or a combination, the "heavenly Father," or "Father in heaven." God is often hidden behind the divine passives found throughout Matthew's Gospel. In this case, Matthew uses a verb in the passive voice, which would have God for the subject if it were unscrambled or turned into an active voice.²⁷¹ Blomberg states that there is one passage in Matthew where both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God appear together. Matthew 19: 23-24 says: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Truly I tell you; it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'"²⁷² Blomberg holds the position that the overall synonymous parallelism of the two back-to-back sentences strongly suggests that the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God" remain synonymous. Others have typically assumed that the kingdom of heaven was merely Matthew's Jewish periphrasis for the "kingdom of God," since overusing God's name for many Jews was equivalent to taking it in vain and thus, transgressing the third of the Ten Commandments.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 488.

²⁷⁰ Benedict Thomas Viviano, "God in the Gospel According to Matthew," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 64, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 341.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology*, 368.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Middleton says that from ancient Jewish backgrounds of the kingdom of God, Jesus' use of the kingdom of God draws upon a long and ancient tradition stretching far back into the Old Testament. Indeed, God is only rarely called "King" or said to "rule" in the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the former prophets (Joshua through Kings).²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, God's underlying idea as ruler and judge of Israel, indeed of all creation, is a basic background assumption of the entire Old Testament. Psalm 22:28 affirms that dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations. Likewise, Psalm 103:19 claims the Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.²⁷⁵ Middleton believes that this claim is sometimes even tied to the stability of the created order. The Psalmist states: "Say among the nations; The Lord is King! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved" (Psalm 96:10a).²⁷⁶ Jesus constantly reminded the Jews that His kingdom was not of this world. A biblical text found in John 18:36 is often cited in support of Jesus' kingdom not being of this world.

Furthermore, John 18:36 is the only other place in John's Gospel, besides chapter three, that mentions the kingdom. Here, Jesus tells Pilate, at His trial, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here (John 18:36)." A careful reading of this passage suggests that Jesus is not identifying His kingdom with heaven; instead, He is locating the origin of His power.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 243.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 247.

Many scholars have put forth some powerful arguments that support their theories regarding the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Pennington contends that this theme of heaven and Earth has been unduly overlooked in Matthew and that many of the standard explanations concerning heaven language in Matthew are wrong. In the case of heaven as a periphrasis, Pennington argues that it rests on weak historical evidence despite the widespread acceptance of this view.²⁷⁸ Heaven, as a periphrasis notion, stems from a singular modern source (Gustaf Dalman) and is teeming with methodological flaws. Dalman's influence on the scholarly understanding of βασιλεία likewise proves unfounded for Matthew. Dalman spearheaded the view that βασιλεία always means "rule" or "reign" and not a territorial kingdom.²⁷⁹

In Matthew, close attention to the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and other heaven language reveals that the qualifying genitive reference to heaven indicates that a spatial understanding is central to Matthew's usage, even though this does not preclude a connotation of reign as well.²⁸⁰ Perhaps Matthew had something different in mind when he talks about the kingdom of heaven. Some scholars believe that Matthew is operating with two different notions of the kingdom and intentionally uses the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven to communicate these respective senses.²⁸¹ One such proponent is W. C. Allen. In his 1912 commentary on Matthew, Pennington states that he argues that the kingdom of heaven was the kingdom's message that he announced is at hand and inaugurated at the *parousia*. In distinction, Allen understands the kingdom of God as something different. He believes it to be a general

²⁷⁸ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 7.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 304.

phrase used “to sum up that whole revelation of God to the Jewish people, which was to be transferred to others.”²⁸² Pennington references Margaret Pamment’s 1981 article and states that she argues that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven have different referents in Matthew.²⁸³ She suggests that the kingdom of heaven refers to a wholly future reality that is imminent but otherworldly. In contrast, the kingdom of God instead refers to God’s sovereignty, actualized and recognized in the past and present here on Earth. Pamment, whose theories are not widely accepted, tries to distinguish between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. She asserts that in Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is a totally future, though imminent, reality.²⁸⁴

In contrast, the kingdom of God refers to the present reality of the kingdom experienced in the lives of Jesus and His disciples. There are several problems with Pamment’s thesis.²⁸⁵ First, Matthew speaks of the kingdom of heaven as a present reality as “forceful” people have been taking it since the days of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:12). Second, in Matthew’s Gospel, the kingdom of heaven is parallel to the kingdom of God, which indicates these phrases represent the same reality (Matthew 19:23-24).²⁸⁶ Several of the parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 point to its present reality. The predicted harvest will be at the end of the age, and it will be a harvest out of the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom already exists when the harvest occurs. It follows that if the harvest will be part of the kingdom, the kingdom includes a duality of two

²⁸² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 304.

²⁸³ Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven,’” 489.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 488.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

phases. The first phase occurs before the harvest, and the second phase includes the harvest and its aftermath.²⁸⁷ The parable of the weeds puts the harvest judgment in the future, describing how the situation will be at the end of the age. It is Moser's opinion that the visible kingdom-phase of harvest judgment is postponed, according to Jesus, for the sake of extending the invisible phase of God's redemptive reign, so that the wheat of the kingdom can "grow" (συναυξάνεσθαι), along with the weeds (Matthew 13:30). Similarly, according to the parable of the seed growing secretly, the harvest awaits the grain becoming "ripe" enough to permit (παραδοῖ) harvest (Mark 4:29).²⁸⁸ Scholars who focus on the parable's depiction of the outcome of the harvest read the parable as evidence that Jesus' proclamation and understanding of the kingdom were eschatological in content and character. Taking eschatology as a cue, Dodd typifies the sower as a parable of growth.²⁸⁹ The parable illustrates the coming of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus under the figure of harvest. In the same vein, Schweitzer understands that the parable illustrates the kingdom's constant and gradual unfolding. Weiss identifies the sower's message as the hope of the coming kingdom of God, which its fulfillment was at hand in the ministry of Jesus.²⁹⁰ Jeremias's well-known interpretation of the parable also takes as a cue the supposed eschatological content of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.²⁹¹ Pennington notes that the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:1-13 points to a future consummation of the kingdom while at the same time hinting at its present reality in germinal

²⁸⁷ Moser, "Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker," 218.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ernest Van Eck, "The Harvest and the Kingdom: An Interpretation of the Sower (Mk 4:3b-8) as a Parable of Jesus the Galilean," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (November 2014): 2.

²⁹⁰ Van Eck, "The Harvest and the Kingdom," 2.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

form.²⁹² The most extended argument for a difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven is found in Albright and Mann's *Anchor Bible Commentary*. Pennington references this commentary and states that it debunks Pannett's theory and provides a most extensive argument.²⁹³ Albright and Mann argue for a temporal distinction between the two terms: "'kingdom of God' in the Matthean tradition is applied to the Father's reign after the judgment of the End, and the 'kingdom of heaven' is applied to the continuing community of Jesus, lasting up to the time of the judgment (judgment seat of Christ)."²⁹⁴ Instead of a temporal difference, Patte offers a unique understanding that differs from Albright and Mann. Pennington states that he suggests that the kingdom of God refers to an aggressive manifestation of the power of God, which asserts itself against satanic and demonic powers.²⁹⁵ The kingdom of heaven refers to God's authority, an authority which, at present, is not imposed upon people with power but which people should recognize and acknowledge in the meekness and mercy of the Father and the Son. Pennington references a detailed study by Armin Kretzer which he attempts to distinguish the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. He argues that there is not just a formal distinction but also a material difference between the two terms.²⁹⁶ In particular, the unique expression of the "kingdom of heaven" emphasizes the in-breaking of God's rule from heaven to Earth. In contrast, the narrower term, the "kingdom of God," refers to God's reign over

²⁹² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 288.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 304.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

His people.²⁹⁷ While most scholars hold the position that the kingdom of heaven is a periphrasis, Pennington believes that the kingdom of heaven is not a periphrasis but rather a metonymy. While circumlocutionary techniques were undoubtedly in use in the first century, there is no evidence that “heaven” was being used for this purpose during that time.²⁹⁸ One finds the answer when recognizing that Matthew’s kingdom of heaven language is a part of an elaborate theme of heaven and Earth are woven throughout the first Gospel.²⁹⁹ Recognizing this theme sheds light on Matthew’s choice to speak of the kingdom in this unique way. Wenell in her article states that Sverre Aalen agrees with Kretzer, who suggested that one should understand the kingdom as designating “a realm, a community, something very near to the new concept of a house, and no longer kingship or reign of God.”³⁰⁰ Wenell also makes reference to J. C. O’Neill’s article in *Novum Testamentum* which suggested that if “rule” was understood to be part of the meaning of the Kingdom of God, that rule was always over a territory.³⁰¹

Despite these dissenting voices, most scholars do not understand the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven as having different referents. Instead, they offer assorted explanations for why the kingdom of God does appear even though the two expressions are interchangeable in referent.³⁰² For some scholars, the answer is that Matthew found the kingdom of God in his

²⁹⁷ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 306.

²⁹⁸ Jonathan T. Pennington, “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (March 2008): 45.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰⁰ Karen Wenell, “A Markan ‘Context’ Kingdom? Examining Biblical and Social Models in Spatial Interpretation,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (August 2014): 124.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 306.

source and, for whatever reason, failed to change it, maybe even as the result of editorial error or fatigue. For others, the occurrences of the kingdom of God reflect stylistic variation on Matthew's part. Evaluating these assorted options is not difficult. None of the proposals can sustain a referential difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Pennington notes that W. C. Allen's suggestions are too thinly supported to be convincing, however, Pamment offers slightly more evidence but must resort to a very contorted explanation of Matthew 19:23–24. Albright and Mann according to Pennington provides the most extensive argumentation but must acknowledge a probable exception.³⁰³

The kingdom of heaven is also distinguished from the kingdom of God in that the kingdom of heaven seems to include not only saved individuals but some unsaved people who profess salvation.³⁰⁴ By contrast, God's kingdom includes only saved men and elect angels when used as a spiritual kingdom. In support of God's kingdom, including only saved men and elect angels, John 3:3–5 states that one cannot enter the kingdom of God without being born again or born from above.³⁰⁵ In this passage, it is clear that only those born again may enter the kingdom of God. Paul in Romans 14 supports this position which states, "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The experience of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit could never be true of one who merely professed salvation.

In Matthew's Gospel, he lists the prerequisites of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus taught through parables. Jesus says that those who repent and live accordingly will receive the bliss of

³⁰³ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, 307.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

³⁰⁵ Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 246.

the kingdom (Matthew 5:3- 12).³⁰⁶ However, the choice for the kingdom is not easy. The man, who finds the treasure in the field, must sell everything he has to obtain the treasure (Matthew 13:44). The merchant who wanted to make the "pearl of great value" his own was also required to sell all his possessions to purchase it (Matthew 13:45-46). The choice for the kingdom requires entering the narrow gate and walking on a difficult path (Matthew 7: 13-14); the choice for the kingdom in Matthew 8:18-22 and 10:34-39 includes paying the price of discipleship.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, the choice for the kingdom requires becoming a servant to others (Matthew 20:25-28).

A pivot point of Jesus' escalating conflict with the religious leaders is found in Matthew 21:46. For the second time in Matthew's narrative, the religious leaders have explicitly expressed their desire to kill Jesus.³⁰⁸ Immediately leading up to this section is the double use of the phrase kingdom of God as Jesus tells two parables which show that those who reject His coming reject the initiative of God to bring them into His kingdom (Matthew 21:23, 45). Incredibly, the chief priests and Pharisees seemingly prove they reject God's purposes by immediately looking for a way to arrest Jesus.³⁰⁹ The other instance of the kingdom of God is linked to the rejection of Jesus when the rich young man refuses to follow Jesus because the demand of discipleship is too great (Matthew 19:16-22). Here the shock value of the kingdom of God is most evident as the disciples are greatly astonished that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God

³⁰⁶ Du Toit, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew," 554.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 494.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

(Matthew 19:23-4).³¹⁰ It seems Matthew retained this instance of the kingdom of God on purpose. Matthew intended to demonstrate to the disciples, who gave up everything to follow Jesus, that they must continue sacrificing to maintain their honored position and not lose it by rejecting God (Matthew 19:27).³¹¹ Jesus did not limit Himself to just teaching; He demonstrated the power of the coming kingdom, which transformed lives. Those that were outcasts experienced Jesus' acceptance. The desperately sick were healed. The sin-sick souls found forgiveness. All these transformed lives pointed back to Jesus' mission to preach the good news of the kingdom and heal those that were sick (Matthew 4:23; 9:35).

Jesus often dropped plenty of uncomfortable words. Jesus used words like "follow Me" when He called His disciples (Matthew 4:19); He told His disciples to "obey Me" and "listen to Me" when He gave them the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Jesus dropped these uncomfortable words even though He knew that it might cost one to lose his life (Luke 17:33).³¹² According to all three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew was collecting taxes near Capernaum when he answered Jesus' call, "Follow Me!" (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-31). All three Gospels say that Matthew immediately began to follow Jesus.³¹³ Many New Testament writers' striking claim is that Jesus was not only Lord during His ministry, but He is still Lord under God, even after His death. Before His death, Jesus impacted His disciples, which led to their calling Him "Lord."³¹⁴ Jesus' impact on Peter led to his confession at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was

³¹⁰ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 494.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Towns and Gutierrez, *The Essence of the New Testament*, 52.

³¹³ Ibid., 54.

³¹⁴ Moser, "Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker," 223.

the Christ (Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20, Matthew 16:16; John 6:68–69). Jesus’ impact on Peter also led to his statement that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28, Matthew 19:27; Luke 18:28).³¹⁵ One finds a general indication of the uniqueness of Jesus’ impact on the disciples who were amazed at the miracle He performed at sea when He calmed the storm. This miracle had such an impact on the disciples that it caused them to question, “what manner of man is this?” (Matthew 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25). Another general indication of Jesus’ uniqueness can be found in His critics’ response to Him regarding His forgiving sins (Mark 2:7, Luke 5:21). According to Luke and Matthew's Gospels, the disciples came to a better understanding of the intended impact of Jesus after His death.³¹⁶

Conclusion

The kingdom of heaven is not merely periphrasis for God. While circumlocutionary techniques were undoubtedly in use in the first century, there is no evidence that "heaven" was being used for this purpose during that time. When studying the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel, one finds the answer when recognizing that Matthew's kingdom of heaven language is but one part of an elaborate theme of heaven and Earth. This theme can be found all throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Recognizing this theme sheds light on Matthew's choice to speak of the kingdom in this unique way. It also reveals a deep and powerful theological point: the apocalyptic and eschatological contrast between heaven and Earth. The most common of these periphrases is the “heavens;” the most important is the “Father” or a combination, the “heavenly

³¹⁵ Moser, “Jesus as Moral-Kingmaker,” 223.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Father,” or the “Father in heaven.” Heaven is a periphrasis notion that stems from a singular modern source and is teeming with methodological flaws.

Dalman’s influence on the scholarly understanding of βασιλεία likewise proves unfounded for Matthew. Dalman was responsible for some scholars and most commentaries accepting the view that βασιλεία always means “rule” or “reign” and not a territorial kingdom. The words attendant with the kingdom in Matthew implies a spatial understanding of the concept. Matthew uses βασιλεία fifty-five times in a variety of phrases. He uses the term more often than any other Gospel and more frequently than the New Testament combined. Matthew parallels the kingdom, which is revealing in terms of a spatial argument. These images refer to the kingdom both in likeness to persons and objects. The kingdom is like people, usually a king or master, but the king has a place to reign. The king and master have a field, a house, or a wedding hall.³¹⁷ The similes and images Matthew parallels the kingdom with are also revealing in terms of a spatial argument. These images refer to the kingdom both in likeness to persons and objects.³¹⁸ Matthew says the kingdom is like a man who sowed good seed (Matthew 13:24), a king who wished to settle accounts (Matthew 18:23), a master of a house who brings out treasures old and new (Matthew 13:52), a merchant in search of fine pearls (Matthew 13:45), a master of the house who hired servants early to work his field (Matthew 20:1), a king who gave a wedding feast (Matthew 22:2), and ten virgins who were waiting for the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1). These are all images comparing the kingdom to people.³¹⁹ The other instance of the kingdom of God is linked to the rejection of Jesus when the rich young man refuses to follow

³¹⁷ Schreiner, *The Body of Jesus*, 28.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

Him because the demand of discipleship is too great (Matthew 19:16-22). The kingdom of God is most evident as the disciples are greatly astonished at how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:23-4).³²⁰ The kingdom of heaven refers to God's authority, an authority which, at present, is not imposed upon people with power but which people should recognize and acknowledge in the meekness and mercy of the Father and the Son.

When comparing the researcher's thesis with previous theories, the researcher holds a different position. The contrast between the researcher's view and the ideas of other scholars is polarized. The theories from most scholars accept that the two phrases "the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God" are synonymous, and when Matthew speaks of the kingdom of heaven, it is merely a periphrasis for God. The researcher rejects this theory because if the kingdom of heaven is the same as the kingdom of God, then why are there two distinct ways of entering into each kingdom? Furthermore, why are the requirements for both kingdoms different? For example, in John's Gospel, he speaks of eternal life in John 3:36 and John 5:24. John says that one who believes the Son has everlasting life. Yet, Matthew says in Matthew 5:20 that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. All the verses from the Gospel of John speak of eternal life being obtained through faith. Therefore, obtaining eternal life is a matter of faith alone.

Entering the kingdom of the heavens, however, is different. The verses from the Gospel of Matthew speak of entering the kingdom of the heavens based on righteous acts, doing the will of God, and having a changed living. John says that we obtain eternal life by faith, and Matthew says that we must do God's will to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. John says that he who believes has passed out of death into life, and Matthew says that we must turn and become as

³²⁰ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven,'" 495.

little children to enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Based on these two dynamics of entry that contrast a difference between the two kingdoms, it is difficult to hold the position that the two kingdoms are synonymous. The researcher explored one concept from Pennington, which undergirds this research: Pennington's theory of the ultimate meaning of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew resides in its function in the heaven and earth theme. Pennington argues that the kingdom of heaven may not always mean "rule" or "reign," and heaven is a metonymical reference to the realm of God above and only indirectly to God himself. Pennington believes that the kingdom of heaven may have spatial or territorial connotations associated with it; therefore, a kingdom may not necessarily mean a rule or a reign.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This intervention aims to possess a comprehensive perspective on the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. The researcher believed that cultivating an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel would foster a deeper understanding of Jesus' mission on Earth and the purpose of that mission. Chapter three will describe in detail the intervention and the implementation of the thesis project. The intervention will require the researcher to examine works written by scholars, interact with the academic writings on the subject and provide an in-depth theological reflection on the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. The researcher will use Matthew's Gospel as the biblical foundation for the intervention. The interventions are intended to serve several purposes that will be addressed below.

When Jesus began His ministry, He called His disciples, and He commissioned them to go out and spread the gospel. Evangelism was at the heart of Jesus' ministry; His purpose and His mission were to reach those that were lost. One of the main goals of this intervention is to stress the importance of evangelism as it relates to our everyday life. We are called to be witnesses for Christ and to share our story of salvation with others. Another goal of this intervention is that participants would cultivate a deeper understanding of the kingdom of heaven in such a way that their walk with Christ is impacted. Matthew's Gospel teaches that entering the kingdom of the heavens is based on righteous acts, doing the will of God, and changing one's lifestyle from Christ-lessness to Christlikeness. As believers imitate Christ, His reflection should shine and His pattern should display a Christ-like resemblance. Believers conduct must be becoming of Christ if they are to be the mirror image of Christ. Another area of focus for this intervention will be that as believers engage in the biblical teaching of Matthew involving the kingdom of heaven, it would cause one to reflect on their relationship with Christ. The reality of

the kingdom of the heavens consists of believers living according to the heavenly rule within them. The heavenly rule causes them to forsake sin, overcome their temper, deny their flesh as well as themselves.

The heavenly rule within believers causes them to reject the world, oppose Satan, and submit to the heavenly authority. When Matthew speaks of entering the kingdom of heaven, it is based on changing one's lifestyle. Jesus is interested in how believers live, and He strives to have a relationship with the believer. Another focus will be that because of this intervention, participants would be challenged to seek the kingdom of heaven with the understanding that the kingdom of heaven is near; one would repent and turn from sin.

Intervention Design

The intervention design consists of a study group from Word Warriors Ministries that will discuss ten questions derived from the literature review and will be followed up with four post-intervention questions to assess what was gained from the intervention. The researcher will create a word document containing the ten intervention questions, the problem statement from chapter one, and several scriptures from Matthew's Gospel. The facilitator will use this throughout the discussion. The intervention will take place over four consecutive weeks. Once participants receive the handouts, they will receive instructions to research the topic, study the associated scriptures, and come prepared to engage in meaningful dialogue. This document will be made available and emailed to participants immediately following regular Bible study one week before the study group begins. The study group's focus will attempt to clear up the misunderstanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. One critical step that will aid in clearing up the misunderstanding would be biblical interpretation and word study. The study

group will also look at all aspects of scripture and critically analyze passages to derive their proper meaning. The end goal of the study group serves several purposes: (1) The goal is to cultivate an understanding of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven in Mathew's Gospel, (2) participants would understand the importance of evangelism, (3) participants will understand the impact the kingdom of heaven has on their personal walk with Christ, and (4) participants will understand what is required to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The researcher will sit down with the pastor and begin planning the intervention. The researcher will develop a schedule as to when the intervention will commence as well as the location. IRB approval will not be required for this thesis project; therefore, the researcher will inform the pastor, and the intervention project will be added to the church calendar. Directly after Wednesday night Bible study, the pastor will announce when the intervention will begin. The pastor will inform the congregation that the intervention will begin two weeks from the time of this announcement and will continue for approximately the next four consecutive weeks. Thus, the planned intervention will take place for four consecutive weeks. Depending on how the study group progresses, the pastor has given the authorization to extend the study group an additional week if necessary. All four interventions will take place at 7:30 PM on Wednesday in place of regular Bible study. Wednesday night Bible study will resume directly after the last study group. At the end of the regular Bible study, two weeks before the intervention is scheduled to begin, the pastor will announce that those who wish to participate in the study group should stick around to receive further detailed information regarding the intervention. The intervention project will be explained in full detail, providing all participants with the documents

containing procedures and guidelines to govern the research. Some of the documents the participants will receive that night will contain materials they will need to read and study before the study group meets. The other documentation contains consent forms that require the participants to sign. Once these signature forms are collected, the study group will begin.

One week before this intervention, the pastor will announce to the congregation directly after Bible study reminding them of the intervention that will replace Bible study over the next four weeks. All participants who wish to be a part of the study group should let him know because there are requirements and documentation to study in preparation for the intervention and consent forms, they will be required to sign. Participants will not be allowed to participate unless they sign the provided consent form. The researcher will inform participants that this study group will have a central topic that will be the focus of discussion for the next four weeks. The pastor will first get the participant's verbal consent the night he makes the announcement. However, the next day the researcher will send out emails to all participants with a word document attached. The researcher will instruct participants to download the documents, print them out, sign them and return the signed document to the pastor authorizing the use of recording devices (audio/video) for each intervention. The researcher will also send an email with a word document stating the problem statement and scriptures to study.

Method

Merriam describes five characteristics that all qualitative research has in common, namely, "the goal of eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to

analysis, and richly descriptive findings.”³²¹ Furthermore, qualitative research systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings.³²² The purpose of qualitative research is to gather depth of insight about the particulars of a setting. The more one knows their project's intimate details, the more the possibility of recognizing those details in another context.³²³ The purpose of action research is to apply a specific solution to a particular problem. The more one understands how the intervention addressed the issue at hand, the more the possibility of applying that intervention to a new context increases.³²⁴ Since this phase of the research project is qualitative, action research would be the best method for collecting data. One week before the intervention, the researcher will explain their thesis project to the participants and provide details for each intervention. The participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and voice any concerns about the study group's objective. The researcher will inform the participants that the information obtained from the intervention will be used for the sole purposes of action research for this thesis project. In the planning phase, the researcher and the facilitator will meet with significant stakeholders to devise actions to be taken as stakeholders devise a course of action that makes sense to them and engages in activities they see as purposeful and productive.³²⁵ The pastor and researcher have discussed the intervention plan in detail. One week before the first study group, the researcher

³²¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 56.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid., 216.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Aragon Alfredo Stringer and Ernest T. Ortiz, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 168.

will pass out a draft containing the thesis problem statement and ten questions derived from the literature review found in chapter two. The researcher will become actively engaged with participants as they work out the details of the intervention. The researcher will meet with the participants in this phase, allowing them to devise a plan they all can agree to.

Qualitative research is the researcher's method to collect data; it will consist of field notes and recording devices, audio, and video. Field notes and recording devices are tools utilized to collect qualitative data from participants. The researcher asked the pastor if he would be willing to record the interventions as a backup for a second source, ensuring the accuracy of the participant's statements included in the report. The researcher will ask two participants to take field notes as another means of collecting data. The pastor agreed to record each intervention as long as participants signed the consent form agreeing to be recorded. One week before the intervention, the researcher will confirm that each participant received a copy of the consent form by email, signed the document, and returned it to the pastor. The pastor will turn over the signed documents to the researcher to verify that all participants agree to participate in the intervention and agree to be recorded for audio and video. The purpose of recording each session is designed to capture the content discussed accurately.

Planning the Intervention

Hosting the study group will be a significant challenge. The group will have to meet via Zoom because the pastor does not want the group to meet in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic and rising infections. This situation is very concerning because it poses a problem that affects the interaction between the researcher and participants. Since March of 2020, Word Warriors Ministries has not held a face-to-face meeting in any fashion. Every Bible study, as

well as Sunday morning sermons, has been hosted on Zoom, YouTube and Facebook. The pastor has followed CDC guidelines since the beginning of the outbreak. Recently, a few services were held at the church consisting of ten to twelve members designed to limit the risk of exposure to maintain some sense of connectedness within the congregation. When engaging with people, it is essential to look at them face-to-face. It is crucial to see facial expressions when engaged in conversation to gauge the participant's involvement. The face-to-face interaction establishes a connection between participants and the researcher, allowing them to feel the passion as they express their feelings or opinions. Unfortunately, one loses the opportunity to interact face-to-face with the group when the only available option to meet is by webinar. Therefore, the researcher may experience limitations that may impact the intervention.

The researcher will also create a Word document and write out the ground rules that all participants must follow. These designed rules govern participants behavior within the study group, ensuring each participant has equal time expressing their views and encouraging timid individuals to feel free to express their views. Therefore, the facilitator must know how to tone down the talkative person and draw out the silent one because study groups are notorious for getting off-topic.³²⁶ Once participants receive the handouts, they will receive instructions to research the topic, study the associated scriptures, and prepare to interact with each other. The researcher encourages the participants to come prepared to discuss this topic in detail and share their thoughts and views.

The scheduled intervention sessions will take place for four consecutive weeks. The pastor suggested that he would be willing to extend this discussion an extra week, if necessary, which was an excellent idea if any issues arise like Zoom connectivity issues or more time is

³²⁶ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 121.

needed to further the discussion. Throughout the study group sessions, every participant will have the opportunity to voice their views. Participants are encouraged to listen and build existing thoughts and ideas, further elaborating to expand those thoughts. Tim Sensing agrees that participants often feed off one another's thoughts. He says: "that the group's synergy will often provide richer data than being interviewed separately. One person's response may prompt or modify another person's memory of an event and its details."³²⁷ Because not everyone will have the same views and experiences, participants tend to influence and feed off one another. After each session, the facilitator shall provide feedback before the next session and share it with the participants. The facilitator will also suggest that participants address any concerns about how the sessions are going and if they would like to see any changes. The researcher will inform the pastor that since these interventions will take some time planning them, the researcher would need his assistance. The facilitator will inform the pastor of any additional things he may need that may enhance the outcome of the interventions before they begin.

Participants

Participants of the intervention will be members of Word Warriors Ministries. They must be eighteen years of age and have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. One week before the intervention, the researcher will explain the thesis project to the participants and everything discussed during each study group. The information obtained will be used for the sole purpose of action research for the thesis project. Therefore, the researcher will need each participant's authorization before moving forward with the intervention. The facilitator will read the problem statement and provide some foundational Scriptures to get the participants started.

³²⁷ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 120.

The researcher will inform the participants that there will be ten questions discussed during these four-study sessions. The researcher will also hand out the documentation that consists of an approval form for participants to sign and a document that will explain the ground rules. The researcher expects every participant to govern themselves accordingly and treat each other with respect. One week before the intervention, the researcher will explain the thesis project to the participants, and everything discussed during each study group. The researcher will read the problem statement, provide foundational scriptures, and present one of the ten questions to get the discussion started. The researcher will inform the participants that there will be at least three questions presented per session for a total of ten questions. In each session, there will be three different sets of questions that will be discussed. Depending on how the discussion progresses, there may be one session where four questions will be presented and discussed. The researcher will ask one question at a time and allow the group to address that question in detail before moving to the next question. Each participant is encouraged to research the topic and read the scriptures to be informed of the topic, which will allow them to bring substantive answers to the questions.

Research Questions

Listed below are the research questions that will address the study:

1. Why does Matthew refer to both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in his Gospel?
2. What is your position on Matthew's use of heaven?
3. What are the differences between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God?
4. How does one enter the kingdom of heaven? (Matthew 5:20; 7:21)
5. How does one enter the kingdom of God? (Mark 1:15; John 3:36, 5:24)

6. How would you define the phrase “kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 13:31; 47)
7. How would you define the phrase “kingdom of God?” (Matthew 12:28)
8. How would you describe the “already but not yet” aspects of the coming kingdom in Matthew?
9. In what present reality is the kingdom of heaven seen?
10. How would you describe the dynamic nature of the kingdom of heaven?

Post Interview Questions

1. What impact has this study group had on how you view your relationship with Christ?
2. How does having this knowledge of the kingdom of heaven change your view about evangelism?
3. How has this study group impacted your walk with Christ?
4. In what way has this study group challenged you to seek the kingdom of heaven?

Process for Gathering Data

When gathering data, the primary objective of the look phase of the process is to gather the information that enables researchers to extend their understanding of stakeholders' experience and perspective, those mainly affected by or having an influence on the issue investigated.³²⁸ The process for gathering data begins with collecting, reviewing, and analyzing the data collected from sources. The researcher's tools will consist of a recording device, audio and video recordings, and field notes. The use of a tape recorder has the advantage of allowing the researcher to record accounts that are both detailed and accurate. With the group's permission,

³²⁸ Stringer and Ortiz, *Action Research*, 101.

the researcher will audio and video record each session to capture accurate accounts of what was said. After each intervention, the researcher will playback the recordings several times to ensure the notes' accuracy, then transcribe the audio and interpret the transcription. Transcribing the audio will take some time; however, it is necessary because recordings will be more accurate than just field notes alone. Triangulation is a method that the researcher will use for gathering data. Triangulation allows the researcher to cross-check the accuracy of the data.³²⁹ The researcher will collect data using the triangulation method. The data collected from the field notes will be cross-checked against the audio and video recording data. Sensing states that field notes provide a concise description of what selectively took place.³³⁰ The researcher's notes will be triangulated with the other two evaluation angles, providing the requisite checks and balances in the interpretive process.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process.³³¹ When the data collection phase is complete, the facilitator will compile the data collected from the notes after each intervention and analyze it to ensure the interpretation is accurate. The researcher will also compile the data collected from the notes after each intervention and analyze it to ensure accurate interpretation. All analysis is an act of interpretation, but the analysis's primary aim is to

³²⁹ Stringer and Ortiz, *Action Research*, 53.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

identify information representing the perspective and experience of the stake holding participants. Those involved in data analysis must “bracket” their understandings, intuitions, or interpretations as much as possible and focus on the meanings inherent in the world of the participants.³³² The researcher will transcribe the data from the recording devices, and from the transcriptions, the researcher will create the notes. The purpose of the thinking phase is to sift through the accumulating body of information that emerges from the look phase, identifying significant features and elements that seem to significantly influence events.³³³ The researcher and one participant will keep a reflective journal during the entire project to bracket out any biases they may have. During each intervention, the researcher and the facilitator will also take field notes. As the facilitator observes the interaction between participants, they will record and capture critical insights shared within the group and compare their notes to the researcher’s initial interpretations. The facilitator's notes will contain descriptive information that will allow them to review everything during analysis. At the end of every intervention, the researcher will review the notes taken, transcribe the recorded data, and add the notes to the reflective journal. The journal contains data collected during each study group, which the researcher will take that information from the journal and reflect on it. Reviewing the written and recorded data will ensure the researcher’s bias is bracketed, mitigating any possibility of inserting their bias into the report. The pastor (facilitator) will also take notes and record each intervention, along with another participant. Once each intervention is complete, the researcher will ask those that have taken field notes to summarize what they have observed and send over a copy for the researcher to review. After receiving feedback, the researcher will compile and analyze the data.

³³² Stringer and Ortiz, *Action Research*, 139.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 135.

Effectiveness of the Intervention

The group's effectiveness is measured by contrasting it with the bottom line. Therefore, at the beginning of the intervention, the researcher will establish a bottom line, which would be that: 1) each participant would have a clear understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel; 2) each participant will understand the importance of evangelism in their personal lives; 3) each participant understands the impact the kingdom of heaven has on their personal walk with Christ; 4) each participant would be challenged to seek the kingdom of heaven, and 5) each participant's relationship with Christ would be impacted as a result of this study.

The researcher will also measure the intervention's effects by gauging the group's level of enthusiasm throughout the intervention. A few questions come to mind as self-reflection on the intervention's effectiveness: Are participants building on and learning from one another? Has their level of engagement increased or diminished? How much communication is going on between participants outside the group setting? Are participants knowingly engaged in seeking to develop understandings and solutions? The answer to these questions is reflective of how participants are influencing the issue. The pastor believes participants of this study group will benefit from this intervention because of the importance of the kingdom of heaven and its impact on personal evangelism. As stated earlier in the ministry context, the AGAPE outreach is a ministry at Word Warriors, which is performed quarterly. The pastor has placed high importance on this outreach ministry because of his burden for lost souls. The pastor has addressed this ministry several times and has built sermons around evangelism. He presses upon the Great Commission's importance and how Jesus trained His disciples to go out and bring souls into the

kingdom. Some of the challenging lessons that the pastor believes this study group will press upon the participants are as follows:

- Believers should become obsessed with the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission was for the disciples to go and make more disciples. They were to go out into the world and bring souls into the kingdom.
- The ministry of believers is the same as Jesus' was, which was to preach "repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand" (Matthew 4:17). All other work and ministries are essential, but the primary ministry of all believers is to preach and proclaim the gospel.

Another area that the pastor believes participants will benefit from this study group revolves around their relationship with Christ. The impact of understanding the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel will affect their walk with Christ. The results will reflect in everyday ministry. This study group aims to stir a desire, a passion for seeking the Lord, causing one to repent and diligently seek the kingdom of heaven. The intervention's success is hinged on each participant's experiences as they work toward a viable solution in which participants will invest their time and energies.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this action research project was to clear up the misunderstanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. This study's design addressed the misunderstanding considering Word Warriors Ministries' membership and provided teaching to better understand the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel.

The intervention plan used the research method of study sessions to collect data from several participants for the research. Fifteen people from Word Warriors Ministries agreed to participate in the research project. The researcher posed a question and opened the floor for discussion; participants views were recorded as they responded to each question. The recordings were used to obtain data. The participants were encouraged to speak freely and share their thoughts. The age of participants ranged from twenty to sixty-five. Because Word Warriors Ministries is a relatively small church, all participants, male and female, were all placed in one group.

Each participant that took part in this research intervention filled out a consent form and received documentation that described in detail the intervention and the purpose in which it was taken. All participants were informed to be honest in sharing their views because the goal was to clear up the misunderstanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel as understood by Word Warrior Ministries. Interview questions were tailored in such a way as to probe the minds of the participants to find out what they knew about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel as well as understanding why they held that position.

Intervention Week 1

One week before the study sessions had begun, the pastor announced that this would be the last Bible study for the next five weeks. He announced that five intervention study sessions would take place and that Bible study would resume after that. The documentation was sent out to the participants to read and study before the first intervention. If anyone had questions, they would have had the opportunity to ask at the first session. As people gathered on the Zoom conference call, those present were excited about the study and expressed how they were looking forward to being a part of the study. The researcher took about fifteen minutes to set the stage with some background teaching on the book of Matthew, especially explaining why Matthew used the kingdom of heaven. The researcher said Matthew's use of "the kingdom of heaven" reflected his conviction that the restoration of God's reign over all has begun in the ministry of Jesus. These first words of Jesus in Matthew are identical to those of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2. In both cases, Matthew provides the center point of the messages of John and Jesus: "the arrival of God's kingdom or reign in this world and the call to respond in repentance, that is, returning to God and God's ways." Christ preached repentance. Repentance is a total change of mind and heart that involves a new lifestyle and a new allegiance to God and Christ. Repentance means to change; to turn; to change one's mind; to turn one's life. It is a turning away from sin and turning toward God. It is a change of mind and a forsaking of sin. It is putting sin out of one's thoughts and behavior. It is resolving never to think or do a thing again (Matthew 3:2; Luke 13:2-3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 26:20.). The change is turning away from lying, stealing, cheating, immorality, cursing, drunkenness, and the other so-called glaring sins of the flesh. Repentance is the heart of the message of the New Testament as a whole, for without mourning

for sin and a complete turning from sin to God, there can be no new life in Him. The researcher's opening remarks and conclusion set the stage for the first question that started the intervention.

The researcher asked, "What are the differences between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God?" One participant responded, "The kingdom of heaven is a place opposite Earth, and that heaven is a realm where God exists, and He rules the universe and everything in the universe." Another participant explained that "the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same despite the different ways one enters them." The participant also said that "to enter the kingdom of heaven, one has to become a child and to stay in the kingdom, one must be child-like." As the participant alluded to, entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires a person to do the Father's will, do righteous acts, and change one's lifestyle. The researcher added, in contrast to the kingdom of heaven, entrance into the kingdom of God requires regeneration. The researcher interjected and added that if a person confesses with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, then according to Romans 10:9-10, a person is saved and has entered the kingdom of God. Therefore, obtaining eternal life is a matter of faith alone. If one wants eternal life, they do not need to do anything but belief because faith is the only requirement for obtaining eternal life. Another participant said, "The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same and that they can be different depending on the context in which they are used." The researcher pointed to Matthew's Gospel and said that in Matthew 19:23-24 Jesus uses both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God to describe how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, which seems to appear that both kingdoms are the same. While most participants believed that the two phrases were the same, figure 1 of the graph below shows each participant's view.

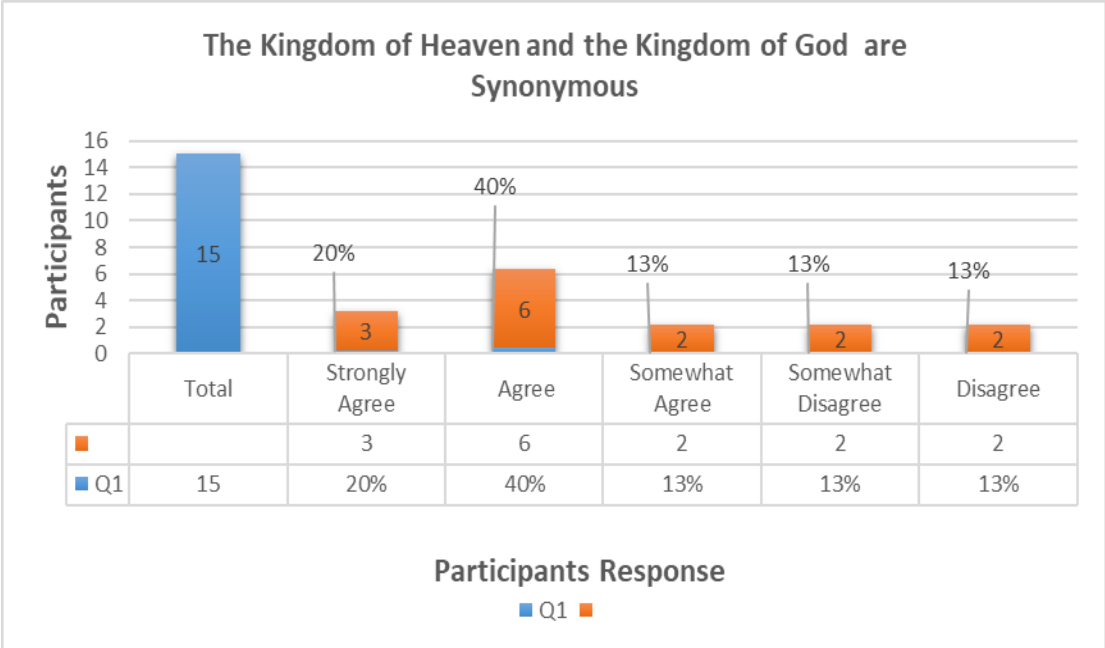


Figure 1. Participants view the synonymous nature of both phrases

Looking at the results from the graph, it seems evident how the participants viewed the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. Most participants believed that there was no difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. However, the results beg the question, why does Matthew address the two kingdoms differently? So, the researcher asked the participants another question. Matthew 19:23-24 refers to the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. The next question asked was, “If both kingdoms are the same, why does Matthew address them differently?” Many participants were silent when the researcher asked this question because it made them think about why these two phrases are back-to-back in the same sentence. One participant believed that “since Matthew rarely mentions the kingdom of God except when Jesus is addressing those in authority, he uses the kingdom of God when he wants to capture or to grab the attention of the reader.” So, there is no real difference between the two phrases, and therefore, the two are synonymous.

Another thought from the participant's views that the researcher found interesting was that when Matthew refers to heaven, he usually refers to God, and thus the kingdom of heaven means the kingdom of God. The researcher added that this pattern of thought makes sense because, as some people believe, God's original intention was to make the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church the same in scope during the dispensation of the church. Therefore, the researcher said the church is the kingdom of God. Likewise, the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 16:18-19). Furthermore, those in the church should be in the kingdom of God, and those in the kingdom of God should be in the kingdom of the heavens, which means the two kingdoms are the same.

Intervention Week 2

The second week of the intervention began with ten to fifteen minutes of instructions in which the researcher taught from the book of Matthew. The participants arrived excited and eager to hear and be a part of the week's study. However, before the lesson started, the researcher started off the study with a question. The researcher asked the participants, "Does one enter the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in the same manner?" The researcher put this question out there before any instructions were given to better understand each participant's understanding of these two phrases. The researcher asked the question and recorded each participant's response. Once the researcher collected data, it was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and a graph was created from the data. The results can be found below in Figure 2.

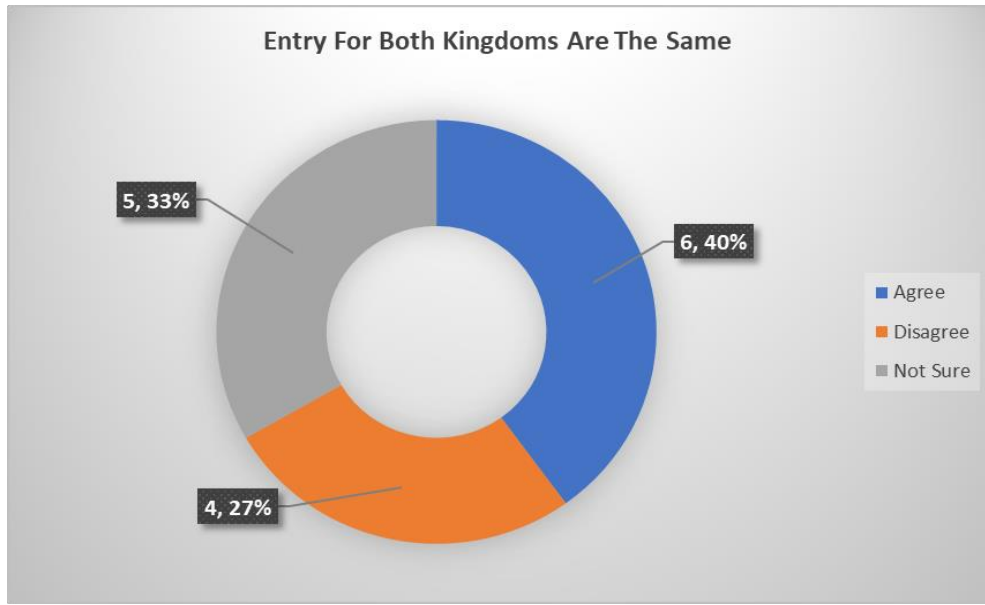


Figure 2. Entry For Both Kingdoms Are The Same

The above graph showed the total number of fifteen participants with 100% participation. The participant's response is depicted on the chart and displayed as a percentage (%) of the total number of participants. This percentage reflected their position that one enters the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God in the same manner. 40% (6) of the fifteen participants agreed that one enters both kingdoms in the same manner, 33% (5) of the fifteen participants were not sure if one enters both kingdoms in the same manner, and 27% (4) of the fifteen participants disagreed that one enters both kingdoms in the same manner. As stated earlier, this question was asked at the beginning of the study to understand each participant's position. This same question will be asked at the end of the study, the data will be recorded and placed in an Excel spreadsheet, and a graph will be produced that shows the participant's position after receiving instructions. The two graphs will be held in contrast, comparing what participants believed before receiving instructions as opposed to what their position was after receiving instructions.

As the study began, the researcher used John's Gospel to teach on eternal life and how one enters it, and Matthew's Gospel was used to teach on the kingdom of heaven and the

requirements for entry. According to John 3:36 and 5:24, he that believes has eternal life. When the passages in John are compared to Matthew 5:20, 7:2, and 18:3, which states that the believer's righteousness must surpass the scribes and the Pharisees, or one shall by no means enter the kingdom of the heavens, all the verses from the Gospel of John speak of eternal life being obtained through faith. Obtaining eternal life is a matter of faith alone. If one wants eternal life, they do not need to do anything but believe because faith is the only requirement for obtaining eternal life. If a person believes, they obtain eternal life; if they do not believe, they will not obtain eternal life. For a person to enter the kingdom of the heavens, their righteousness must surpass the scribes and the Pharisees; they must also do the will of God and change their lifestyle. It is not enough to merely believe and have no works. John says that he who believes has passed out of death into life, and Matthew says that the believer must turn and become as little children to enter the kingdom of the heavens. John says that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord of life, that life is in Him, and that He came that men may have life, which is received by faith. Thus, John repeatedly speaks of believing to obtain life.

Matthew says that Jesus is the King of the kingdom of the heavens who came to the Earth to establish a heavenly kingdom and who needs people to follow Him so that they may enter the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew repeatedly speaks of following Him, taking up the cross to follow Him, and leaving everything to follow Him. John shows that one only needs to receive the Lord of life by faith to obtain eternal life. Matthew shows that one must faithfully follow the King to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Eternal life is obtained by receiving the Lord through faith; the kingdom of the heavens is entered into by faithfully following the Lord. Every time the Bible speaks of eternal life, it speaks of believing rather than doing, but whenever the Bible speaks of entering the kingdom of the heavens, it does not speak of faith. Instead, it speaks of

righteousness, doing the will of God, or something related to a believer's living. Therefore, according to the Bible, one should realize that obtaining eternal life and entering the kingdom of the heavens are two different things.

After about fifteen minutes of teaching, the floor was opened to the next set of interview questions that the researcher asked. The questions placed on the floor for open discussion was:

- How does one enter the kingdom of heaven?
- How does one enter the kingdom of God?

All the participants responded to these questions, and their positions varied. While a few participants believed one enters both kingdoms in the same manner, most participants disagreed that one enters both kingdoms the same way. One participant believed that "the kingdom of heaven is all about one's relationship with the Father. As that relationship deepens, the believer's life begins to change." The researcher added that the believer also becomes more sensitive to the Spirit of God because of the relationship deepening. Through the sanctification process, the Holy Spirit begins to strip away the things that are not like Christ, making the believer more into a mirror image of Christ. Another participant said, "Faith in Jesus is required to enter the kingdom of God and salvation is obtained as a result." The researcher interjected and said that at that moment of confession and faith, the believer is regenerated, reborn, and has entered the kingdom of God. One participant raised a fascinating question about entering both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God at the same time and if that were even possible.

The researcher responded to the question by referencing John's Gospel and stated that entering the kingdom of God is based on faith, believing as Paul declared in Romans 10:9-10 that the confession of the Lord Jesus and believing in one's heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, one obtains salvation. At that instant, the believer is born into the kingdom of God. The

kingdom of heaven is different in Matthew 5, Jesus' sermon on the mount; the kingdom of heaven seems to be a future event. Matthew 13 is Jesus' parables of the kingdom of heaven. In these parables, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a sower, wheat and the tares, a mustard seed, leaven, and hidden treasure. All these parables find their consummation later. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the harvest is at the end of the age when Jesus in Matthew 13:41 describes His role at the end of the age. In Jesus' parables in Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of heaven seems to allude to a future event. The kingdom of God in John's Gospel is obtained instantaneously through regeneration. It is difficult to say with any certainty that one can enter both kingdoms simultaneously.

At the end of the study, the researcher asked the same question that was asked at the beginning of the study to see if any participants changed their position once they received instructions. The researcher recorded each participant's response and collected the data. The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and a graph was produced from the data. The data results clearly showed that the participant's view of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God had changed.

Figure 3 shows the contrast between the before and after positions of the participants.

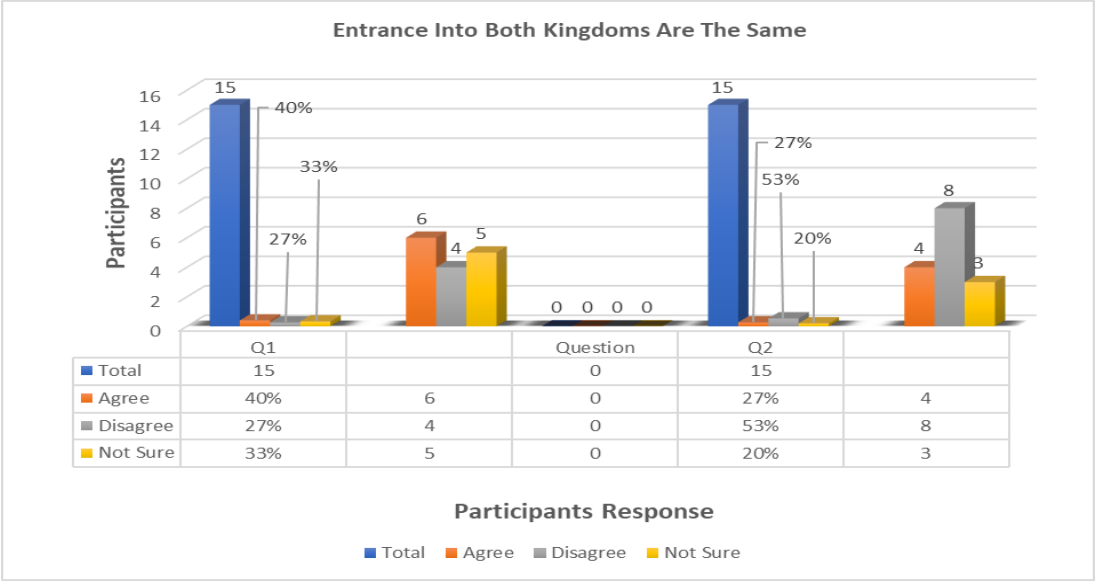


Figure 3. Entrance into Both Kingdoms Are The Same

The graph shows that 40% (6) of participants at the beginning of the study agreed that entrance into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God were the same. However, the percentage dropped to only 27% (4) of participants after the study. Those who disagreed that entrance into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God were the same at the beginning of the study doubled by the end of the study. 27% (4) of participants at the beginning of the study disagreed that entrance into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God was the same. At the end of the study, that percentage increased to 53% (8) of participants. While 33% (5) of participants were unsure in the beginning if entrance into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God were the same, that number decreased to 20% (3) of participants. It appears that because of the study, participants changed their position once they received instructions.

Intervention Week 3

Week three of the study focused on evangelism and the church’s mission to evangelize the world. The kingdom or reign of God is the central message of Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew

4:17, Jesus begins His public ministry by preaching repentance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He called His disciples and He commissioned them to go out and spread the gospel. Evangelism was at the heart of Jesus' ministry; His purpose and His mission were to reach those that were lost. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom appears at crucial points in the story, such as at the introduction of John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In both cases, the message preached is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The fundamental object of the mission is the proclamation of the dawning of the kingdom of heaven. Evangelism is undoubtedly about finding ways of telling the good news story. Believers know through Jesus Christ that they are His disciples, and they are commissioned to go into the world to tell this good story. The story believers should be telling is the story that tells the world about God's concern for their welfare. The good news believers must share is that God loves the world and cares about what happens to every aspect of it. As Christians, believers believe that Jesus is one of the most explicit and compelling expressions of God's love for the world. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, Jesus transferred His authority from Himself to the disciples and to the believer. In this passage in Matthew 28, Jesus commissions the believer to baptize and make new disciples in His name and teach those who do not yet know about Jesus. The disciples were to teach the people what it means to follow Jesus and be His disciples. Jesus ends His commission with a promise to be with the believer always to the end of the age. Believers are commissioned to go out and preach the good news to the lost. The believer is to communicate the good news of God's love for all creation and invite people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. In John 13:34-35, Jesus speaks of giving a new commandment that the believer is to love one another just as Christ has loved them, and they also should love one another. This Scripture's emphasis on love as the characteristic that most clearly communicates God's presence in the

world is a necessary balancing point to the Great Commission. Ideally, all of Christianity's efforts at evangelism would have at their core the assurance of God's love for all people and God's presence with them no matter what. This assurance of God's love is more important by far than any other message one might hope to share about personal salvation. After studying the Great Commission from Matthew's Gospel, the researcher asked the participants questions about the Great Commission, evangelism, and the church's role in supporting missions. One participant responded to what the Great Commission meant to them by saying that "Jesus authorized it in His name and assured every believer that He would be with them. Jesus gave them power and His authority." Another participant responded and said, "As Jesus gave the Great Commission, the believer is to go unto the world and tell people about the good news of salvation." The participant added that "every believer may not have the opportunity to go to Samaria, Judea, or the uttermost parts of the Earth, they said that Samaria or Judea or the uttermost parts of the Earth could be the believers' neighborhood, community, or town in which they live." The researcher added that the emphasis here is that the believer is to go out and spread the good news and make disciples. The participant also said that "believers are to be something different from the world; they are to show love and compassion to those lost." The researcher agreed with the participant and said that in Jeremiah 31, God said, "it is with love and kindness that I have drawn you." Because of God's expressed love to the believer, believers are to show that same love, and the world should see the love of Jesus within the believer. Another participant responded and said "that someone took the time to share their faith with them, and when they heard the good news of the gospel, they gave their life to Christ, and now they are saved." The participant went on to say, "It is our responsibility to share our faith in order to win the lost to Christ." One participant put it this way, "The Great Commission is a privilege, and an honor, because Jesus

saved and changed them.” The researcher said that Jesus gave the believer the power of the Holy Spirit to help them grow, and the believer should share with others what God has done for them. As a result of God’s power being manifested in the believer's life, there should be an urgency to go out and share with others the good news.

Another participant added to what a participant had said and expanded on the thought of the Great Commission being a privilege is because “Jesus went where the believer could not go. He did what the believer could not do. As a result of Jesus paying the ultimate price of dying on the cross for man’s redemption, believers are the beneficiaries of His ultimate sacrifice. So, yes, it is a benefit and a privilege to fulfill the Great Commission.” As this portion of the study concluded, the researcher thought it would be good to present a question to the participants and record their responses. The researcher took the data and created an Excel graph representing the participant's response to the question. The question was, “Has studying the kingdom of heaven has changed my view about Evangelism?”

Figure 4 shows the results from the participant's response to the question.

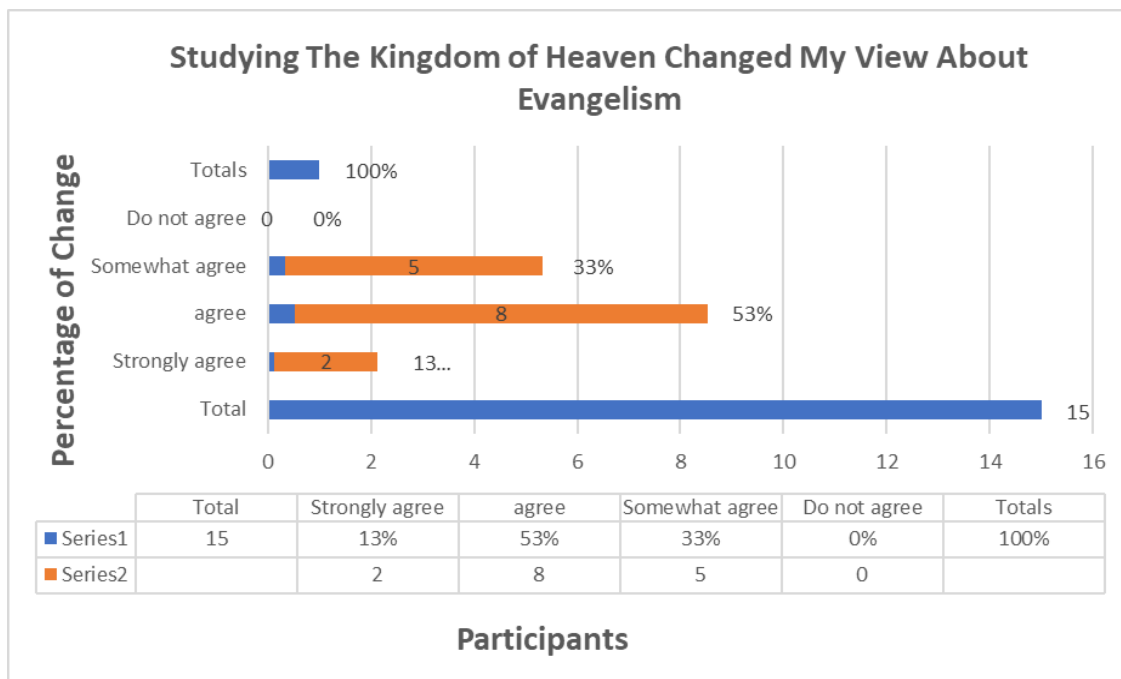


Figure 4. Studying The Kingdom of Heaven Has Changed My View About Evangelism

When looking at the chart, 53% (8) of participants agreed that studying the kingdom of heaven had changed their view about evangelism, while 33% (5) of participants somewhat agreed. 13% (2) of participants walked into the study as solid proponents in favor of evangelism and continue to advocate the importance of personal evangelism.

The next section of the study focused on evangelism and the church's responsibility in supporting missions. The researcher asked the question: "Should evangelism be a central focus of church ministry?" The researcher asked the question before any discussion took place, and the participants responses were recorded. After instructions were given, the same question was asked, and the participants responded. One participant had spoken of the evangelistic programs currently operating within the church, programs like the prison ministry and Agape walk. The participant further explained that the Agape walk is one of the evangelistic programs aimed at drawing the lost to Christ. The Agape walk is an evangelistic outreach ministry of Word Warriors Ministries that target communities within the neighborhood that need the church's resources. The participant concluded by saying, "The Agape walk is a ministry where people are fed, and the good news is shared with unbelievers." Another participant said, "The church fellowships with the community and shares God's Word as they break bread together; thus, people are more open and receptive to hear and receive God's Word." The researcher added that the Agape outreach is not only a ministry that addresses salvation; it is also tied to servant evangelism, where believers are serving and ministering. The believers have become servants, and the objective is to meet their spiritual needs while also meeting their physical needs.

One participant had spoken of one critical aspect of evangelism; they said, "The church must train believers how to make disciples; the mission of God is to reach everyone."

Furthermore, the participant said, “The mission of the church is also to reach the world with and through disciples.” The researcher interjected and said that there must be an intentional strategy to develop individuals to accomplish the mission of the Master. Another participant weighed in and expanded on the thought by saying that intentional means observing the passages of the New Commandment found in John 13:34-35. Jesus in John said: “by this, all men would know that you are My disciples by the love you have one for another.” The researcher said that the body of Christ would grow as each part does its unique specific function in the body. The passage in Acts 2:42-47 make it clear that the early church had a clear strategy for winning souls; they all worked together and had all things in common. They sold all their possessions and goods and parted them to all men. The strategy of the early church revolved around love: their love for God, love for people, and love for believers. One participant reminded the group that “people are transformed by God’s grace, which has always been God’s method. So, the church must become intentional to develop people who genuinely love God, love people, and love believers.” The researcher asked the question, “Should evangelism be a central focus of church ministry?” The response from participants was that most of them agreed. That data was recorded and put into an Excel spreadsheet. The results can be seen in figure 5.

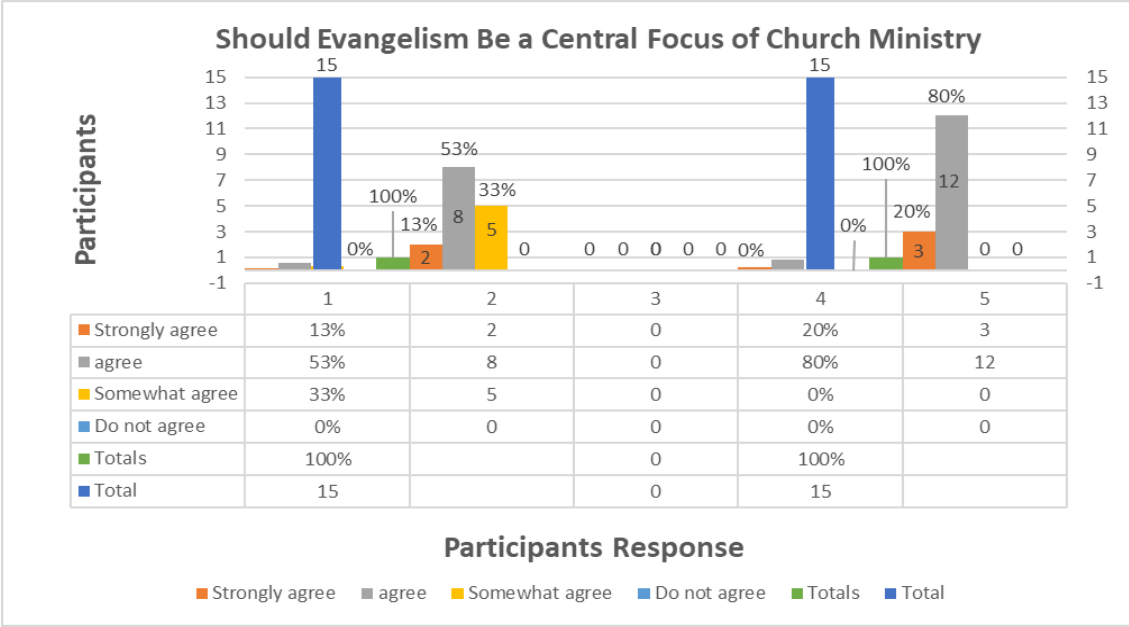


Figure 5. Should Evangelism Be a Central Focus of Church Ministry

When viewing figure 5, most of the participants changed their position after the study. Before the study, 53% (8) of participants agreed that evangelism should be a central focus of church ministry. However, after the study, the percentage of those who agreed moved to 80% (12) of participants. One participant changed their position to strongly agree, whereas before the study, only 13% (2) of participants strongly agreed; and now, 20% (3) of participants strongly agreed after the study. This study intervention was successful; the position of participants had changed, which means that the study had a positive impact.

Intervention week 4

Intervention week four focused on how this study has challenged the participant to seek the kingdom. In Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus invites His followers to seek His kingdom first, He is after much more than a mere rearranging of the believer’s priorities. Instead, He intends to give them a new way of seeing everything, a new center around every part of life, family, work,

friendship, money, leisure, power, and play. All the rest of the cares of this life must revolve around seeking God's kingdom first. Jesus' reasoning culminates in the famous directive, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:34). Jesus' admonition draws the listeners back to the key verse of the sermon, where Jesus declared, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). The use of the imperative "seek" does not mean looking for something not present, for Jesus has already announced the kingdom's arrival. In this context, it means that His disciples are to make the kingdom of heaven the center of their continual, daily priorities. They have already entered the kingdom of heaven and are to live with that reality, drawing on God's ordering of their daily lives. As stated earlier, the kingdom of heaven is God's rule. The kingdom of heaven is a genuine offer from God to rule in the hearts of those who believe in His name. Submission to the kingship of God is what brings true freedom. As the believer submits to the ruling of God in their lives, they are allowing the Holy Spirit to take control. The Holy Spirit knows which direction to take the believer, and He knows what is best for the believer. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 14:12 that "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." Jeremiah said: "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Only God knows what is best for us. Surrendering to the will of God means that He has complete control of our lives; He controls everything the believers do. Submitting to God is entirely in line with entering the kingdom of heaven. For one to enter the kingdom of heaven, one must do acts of righteousness, do the will of God, and change their style of living. No one on their own can change the way they live; the Holy Spirit must be given free rein in their lives.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:2 that the believers' minds are to be transformed by the renewing of their mind; the Holy Spirit controls the renewing process. Transformation means an inward renewal and reshaping of the mind through which a Christian's inner person is changed into the likeness of Christ. The body of the believer is the vehicle through which this new life in Christ is expressed. Cultivating the mind and consecrating the body enables the Holy Spirit, who has made the believer's body His temple in order that He might have free access to all its faculties and have free control over all the believer's activities. The believer who surrenders their body to the Holy Spirit will be changed. The condition for obtaining God's full blessing is absolute surrender to Him. Jesus' followers must settle the question of priorities and make the kingdom of God their primary concern. To do that, believers must consistently honor and represent the kingdom.

Then the way believers deal with family, friends, work, and leisure will all be transformed. The question must be asked of the believer, what is most important? People, objects, goals, money, pleasure, and other desires all compete for priority. Any of these can quickly take a higher priority than God if one does not actively choose to give God first place in every area of life. Jesus in Matthew 13 speaks in His parable about the seed that was sown and how it fell among the thorns and the thistles, and when the thorns grew, it choked out the seed. The problem is that the thorns grew faster than the seed, so when the seed sprung up, the thorns choked out the seed. The insight into this is that the same thing that causes the thorns to grow causes the seed to grow, the same thing that promotes the thorn promotes the seed. Every believer has time, talent, and treasure, and what one gives their time, talent, and treasure to is what grows. In life, believers have priorities, and they place them in order of importance.

What Jesus was saying in this scenario is that there are people who give priority to other things rather than to Him. Thus, when Jesus finally emerges (the seed), when Jesus finally breaks through and starts to show promise, He has been choked out by the other priorities the believer has placed over Him. However, when believers get their priorities right, Jesus promised that God would give them all they need from day to day if they lived for Him. Thus, when Jesus' followers seek His kingdom first, God takes care of their needs. After giving instructions, the researcher opened the floor for participants to address the importance of seeking the kingdom and what that meant to them. One participant said, "The message of the kingdom of heaven is to repent and turn around. It is a complete surrender of one's will and letting God have control." Another participant responded by saying, "In Jesus' message of the kingdom of heaven, His focus was on repentance and surrendering one's will to God and letting Him reign and rule in their life." One participant said, "Jesus' message of the kingdom of heaven means that one must turn from sin, repent and turn to God." All these participants had spoken on the theme of surrendering to God's will and letting Him have complete authority over their lives, which was essential if one chooses to seek the kingdom of heaven. Considering the instructions that were given and contrasting it to the participants prior position, the researcher asked, "Has this insight challenged you to seek the kingdom of heaven?" The researcher recorded each participant's responses and put the data in an Excel spreadsheet. The data can be found in figure 6.

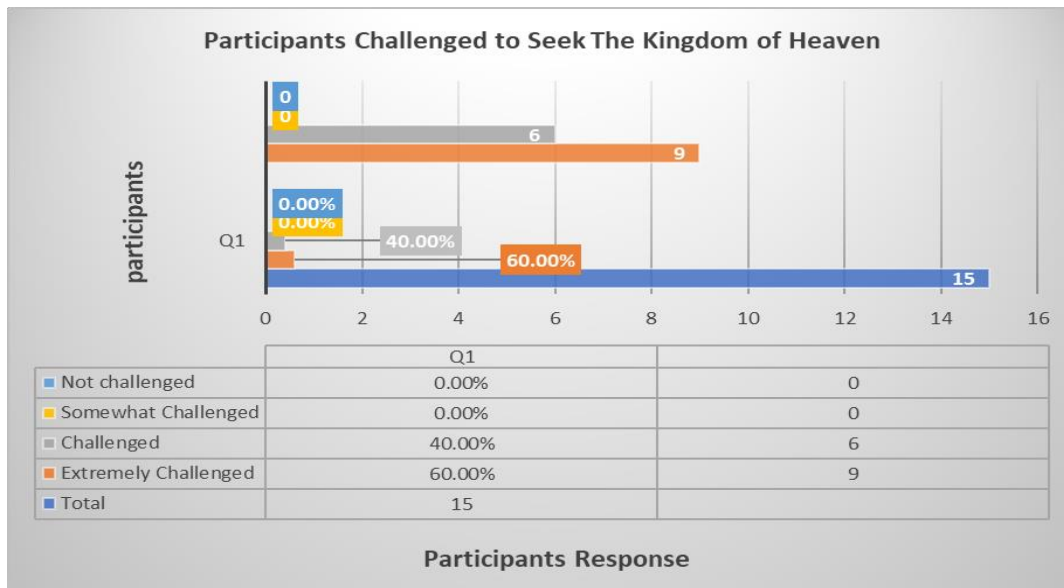


Figure 6. Participants Challenged to Seek The Kingdom of Heaven

The chart above clearly showed that participants were committed to seeking the kingdom of heaven. 40% (6) of participants were committed to seeking the kingdom of heaven, while 60% (9) of participants were extremely committed to seeking the kingdom of heaven.

Intervention week 5

This week’s study session was the culmination of everything that had been covered over the previous five weeks. The post-interview questions gauged how much the participants gained from these five interventions. The group’s effectiveness was measured by contrasting it with the researcher's bottom line. At the beginning of the intervention, the researcher established a bottom line, which would be that: 1) each participant would have a clear understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel; 2) each participant will understand the importance of evangelism in their personal lives; 3) each participant understands the impact the kingdom of heaven has on their personal walk with Christ; 4) each participant would be challenged to seek the kingdom of heaven, and 5) each participant’s relationship with Christ would be impacted as a

result of this study. The researcher asked the participants how this study has impacted their walk with Christ. One participant said, “The study was very impactful because it stirred me to consider my relationship with Christ, which led me to reflect on my relationship with Christ. After evaluating my efforts, I came to the conclusion that I was not doing all I could for the Lord. It is not about just talking, but it is walking the walk; it is a lifestyle that should reflect the love of Christ.” The researcher said that the believer’s life is to display Christ-like characteristics. Believers’ actions should produce fruit, and the unbeliever should be able to see that fruit. These lessons have encouraged the group to do more for Christ.

One participant said, “I learned so much about the kingdom of heaven as a result of these study sessions. Through these teaching I can grow and learn, cultivating a closer walk with Christ.” The researcher added that the more the believer intentionally moves closer to God in fellowship, the more God reveals the things the believer needs to work on. One participant said, “Another thing I learned is that I must strive to be better as a child of Christ. God has so much more for me, and as I surrender to God, God will grow me up in Him.” A different participant interjected and added, “These study sessions inspired me, and I am at the point where I need to know Christ in a more profound way; God desires that I matures and grows in Him.” The researcher added that Paul tells believers that they are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The only way the believer can grow is to draw close to Him and spend time in His Word. This lesson has sparked the desire to spend more time in the Word of God. A different participant said, “These study sessions have caused me to do a self-examination in order to be better. Reflecting on seeking the kingdom of heaven reminds me that I am to surrender to the will of God.” A different participant said, “The impact that this study has had on me with respect to walking with Christ was deep and profound. As a result, that desire to walk worthy of God and

become more like Christ had intensified within me.” A different participant added, “This study had caused me to examine my walk with Christ, and every effort will be made to deepen that walk.” The participants responses were recorded, the data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, a chart was produced from that data, and the results can be found in figure 7.

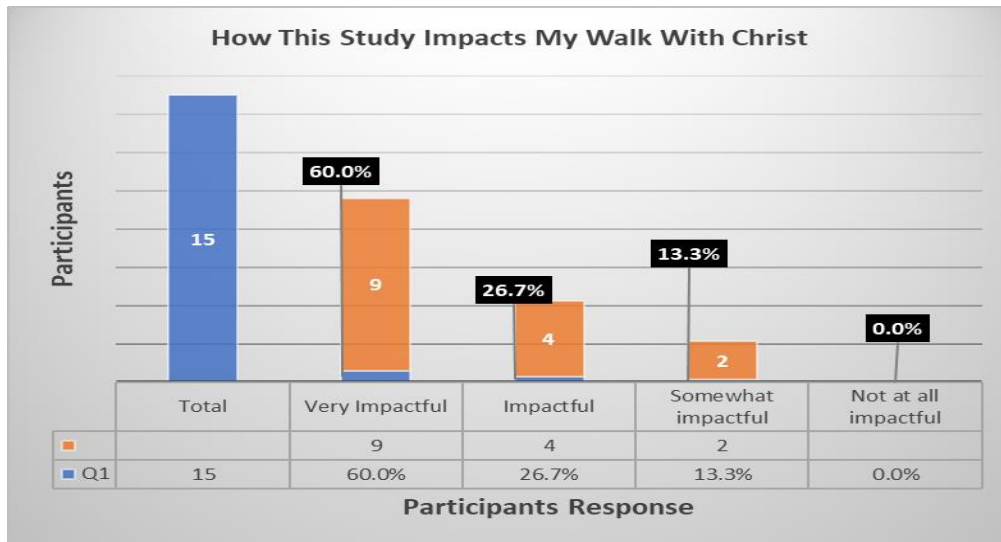


Figure 7. How This Study Impacted My Walk with Christ

The participants response to this question was impressive. For example, 60% (9) of participants said that this study was very impactful, while 27% (4) of participants said that it was impactful. The researcher presented another question and asked the participants, “What impact has this study had on your relationship with Christ?” One participant said, “Self-examination is something that will be the focus for me going forward. So often, when there are opportunities to get into the Word, that opportunity was squandered because of other priorities. However, it will be a priority for me after this study.” Another participant added to the conversation and said, “I believe that self-examination is what I intend to be more intentional about. I will be more diligent about seeking the face of God more so than ever before. As a believer, the word of God should be lived and not just talked about.” A different participant said, “Christ must be lifted up in my life, and this study session has stirred the desire to lift up the name of Jesus and let His

light shine in me.” Another participation said, “Christ is soon to come, and it is time for me to get ready. The only way that could happen is if I intentionally draw close to God.” The researcher said that dwelling in His presence would deepen believers’ relationship with God, which would impact their walk with Christ. Self-examination seems to be what most participants have focused on. Self-examination will positively affect their walk with Christ and deepen their understanding of who God is and cause them to seek His face as never before.

Another participant highlighted the importance of self-reflection; they said, “One day, Christ is coming back again, and I need to be ready; I need to prepare myself for His coming.” One other participant commented about the study lesson; they said, “The lesson caused me to think about the things that kept me bound. I tend to think that material things are necessary: the cars, the houses, clothes, jobs, and I sometimes forget that there is a kingdom that I should be seeking.” The participant went on to say, “Because Jesus is coming soon, I need to be ready to meet Jesus, therefore, seeking the kingdom of heaven will be one of my main focuses going forward.” Believers desire to strengthen their relationships with God, and each participant intends to do that as a result of these intervention study sessions. The researcher recorded the participant's responses, and the data was put in an Excel spreadsheet. The results can be found in Figure 8 in the chart below.

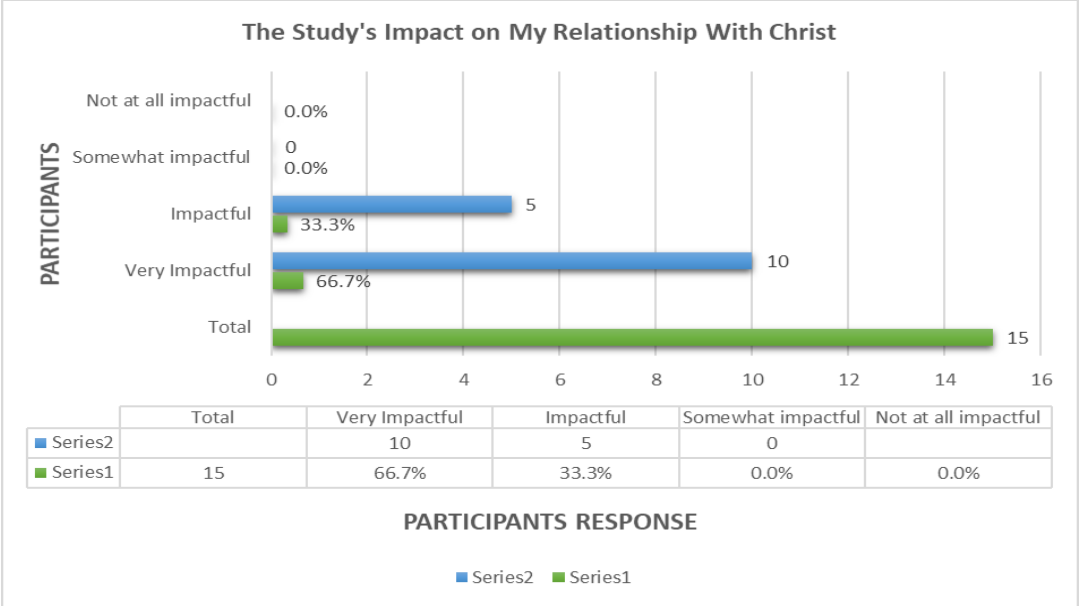


Figure 8. The Study’s Impact on My Relationship With Christ

Looking at this chart above and having had some interesting conversations with the participants, it is evident that most of them desired a closer relationship with God. While 33% (5) of participants said that this study was impactful, 66% (10) of participants said that it was very impactful. Most of their comments alluded that this intervention study session had profoundly impacted them, and more should be taught on this subject. Looking in Matthew’s Gospel, they see Jesus’ interaction with the disciples and the disciple’s interaction with each other. As a result of this intervention, the message becomes clear that one of the dynamic natures of the kingdom of heaven is that the kingdom consists of a community; a community where believers are interacting and communicating with each other. Community is all about relationships that believers have with one another. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians and the Corinthian letters stresses the importance each member of the body has with each other.

The church is a community of believers striving and working together for a common goal. The goal is to go back with Christ when He returns, and the mission is to tell the world about the good news of the gospel, compelling others to come. One participant responded and

said, “I felt a strong desire to deepen my relationship with Christ as a result of this study.” The researcher said, in James 4:4-10, the Apostle lets the believer know that God has declared in His Word that if the believer draws nigh to Him, He will draw nigh to them. What James meant by drawing near to God is founded upon the approach of the priest to God in His temple for worship and sacrifice. Godly people approach God to perform their spiritual service. Believers come near to God by focusing attention on Him in the devout uttering of His name in the knowledge of God and His promises to be with them. The believer went to God in prayer, ready to hear the will of God for service and made ready to go away from the encounter to perform that service. Part of this approach to God involves service in the presence of God, who draws near to the believer. In this service, the language of priestly activity is apparent, suggestive of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, interceding before God (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Romans 15:16; Revelations 5:10; 20:6). This approach to God by drawing closer to Him in service is done in view of God’s approaching, and His initiative in coming to His people whom He has chosen as His witnesses in the Earth. The mutual drawing near of people and God is their unique privilege.

It is essential that the believer draw close to God to cultivate their relationship with the Father for the purpose of advancing, growing, and maturing. As believers draw close to God, their inadequacies, weaknesses, and those hidden things become exposed. It is not that those things one does are hidden from God and are only revealed when they draw close to Him, but rather the reality of being in the presence of God and having those hidden things revealed. The reality of believers’ imperfection, their flaws, is made manifest as the believer stands in His presence. It is then that the Holy Spirit brings conviction and seeks to surgically remove the things that are not like Christ to make them into the mirror image of Christ. God’s objective is to mature the believer, build character, and grow them up in Him. The closer one draws to God, the

more He reveals to them, whether it is more of Himself or is more of the believers themselves. The Apostle James, in James 4:4-10, calls the believer to commit their lives to God. He says: “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you.” James 4:8 emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the believer's relationship with God the Father. When the believer takes a step toward God, they find that He already has taken a step toward them.

He desires the believer's fellowship, and He desires for believers to love Him from a willing heart. The Psalmist says in Psalms 145:18 (NIV), “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.” The Apostle James may have had in mind the promise God made through Zechariah, in which He says in Zechariah 1:3, “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” God desires for believers to develop relationships with Him and God has given the believer all the essential tools to allow access to Him. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and the veil of the temple was torn in two, Jesus declares that the believer can boldly come to the throne of grace. The believer has been given access to the secret places where God resides, and He is ready for the believer to kneel and worship Him as they enter His presence.

All the participants shared their feelings about how they learned that the kingdom of heaven is relational, and God desires a close relationship. It became apparent that all the participants intended to establish an even closer relationship with God and make every effort to cultivate the necessary changes in their lives that would foster a deeper, more profound relationship with the Father. After giving instructions, the researcher asked the participants a question. The researcher asked, “After participating in these past five interventions, how many of you are likely to make a concentrated effort to deepen your relationship with Christ?” The response from each participant was overwhelming. The participants responses were recorded, the

data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and a chart was produced from that data. Figure 9 shows the results.

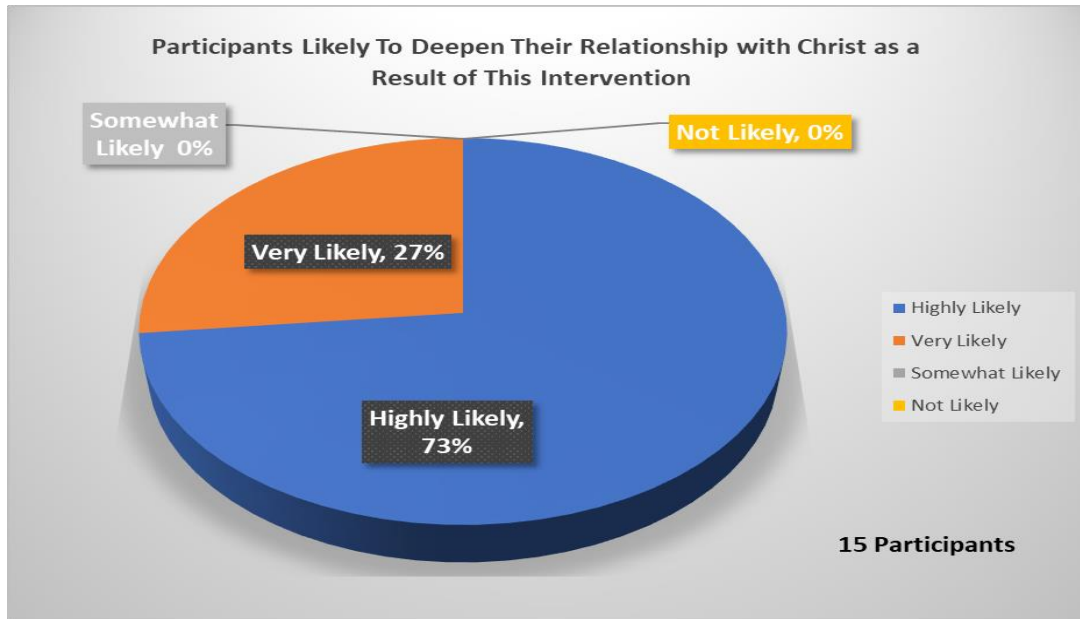


Figure 9. Participants Likely to Deepen Their Relationship with Christ as a Result of This Intervention.

The chart demonstrates that, 73% (11) of participants were highly likely to make changes in their lives to deepen their relationship with Christ. In comparison, 27% (4) of participants were very likely to make attempts to deepen their relationship with Christ. Thus, this intervention had proven to be very successful in bringing an awareness that steps must be taken to cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The research project's purpose is to clear up the misunderstanding about the kingdom of heaven that exists in Matthew's Gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries. The research project articulates the purpose of the study, giving a brief overview. The overview discusses how to clear up this misconception by providing a clearer understanding of the gospel through teaching and cultivating an awareness of the different aspects of the kingdom. There is a need for clarity to understand the gospel. There is a way of balancing present reality and future expectation between present grace, demand, future promise, and consummation. Matthew appears to have struck such a balance around the word "kingdom," using the kingdom of God for present grace and the kingdom of heaven for future promise and consummation. Researching the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel and sharing the results will provide a clearer understanding of the gospel. Through teaching and providing instruction, it enables the believer to cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Through teachings, the believer gains insight into the importance of evangelism, seeking the kingdom of heaven, and deepening their relationship with Christ. This project articulates the importance of receiving instructions essential in understanding the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Chapter five reflects on the research's collaborative findings through three lenses: the literature review, the theological framework, and this research project's theoretical framework.

The Purpose for Research and Overview

Many believers misunderstand what Jesus meant when He speaks of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Although both phrases, the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of God," are used in the Gospels, one should not treat these two terms as a reverential

circumlocution for God. These two phrases are unique and very important. While circumlocutionary techniques were undoubtedly in use in the first century, there is no evidence that "heaven" was being used for this purpose during that time. When studying the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel, one finds the answer when recognizing that Matthew's kingdom of heaven language is but one part of an elaborate theme of heaven and Earth. This theme can be found all throughout Matthew's Gospel. Recognizing this theme sheds light on Matthew's choice to speak of the kingdom in this unique way. It also reveals a deep and powerful theological point: the apocalyptic and eschatological contrast between heaven and Earth. The most common of these periphrases is the "heavens," while the most important is the "Father" or a combination: the "heavenly Father," or the "Father in heaven."

In Matthew 4:17, Jesus begins His public ministry by preaching repentance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom appears at crucial points in the story, such as at the introduction of John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In both cases, the message preached is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When Jesus subsequently sent His disciples out, He commands them to preach the same message, that the kingdom of heaven is near (Matthew 10:7). The disciples' message is the same as both John the Baptist and Jesus' message: the kingdom of heaven is near. The content of the disciples' message was very much like that in Matthew 3:2 and 4:1 repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The long-awaited kingdom was now near enough to be attested by miracles.

The word "kingdom" is essential in Matthew's Gospel, over one-third of the New Testament uses the word kingdom. Kingdoms today are considered in terms of the land over which a king reigns. In the Bible, and especially in Matthew, the focus is not on land but the King's authority. Jesus comes to the disciples and establishes the basis for His command here;

His absolute all-embracing authority as the Risen Lord. One aspect of the kingdom of the heavens is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. To know the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, one must know what the kingdom of the heavens entails. A kingdom is a realm where a king exercises authority. Thus, the kingdom of the heavens is the realm where the heavens exercise authority. God's throne is in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all the universe. God's throne and kingdom are similar terms referring to God's rule over the world. The throne of God's authority is also in the heavens (Psalms 103:19). Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is the reign of the heavens where God dwells. God's "throne" and "kingdom" are similar terms referring to God's rule over the world. His kingdom rules over the universe (1 Chronicles 29:12).

Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom in Matthew's Gospel is understood better along the lines of inaugurated eschatology; this kingdom though not yet consummated, has already been inaugurated by the appearance of Christ on Earth. This inaugurated kingdom will be consummated when Jesus Christ returns. The pivotal part of the biblical foundation is the "happening" of the kingdom in the person and history of Jesus. The coming of Christ is the event that gives faith confidence because here, God proves Himself faithful to His promise for the whole world in one person, with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The kingdom begins with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and overcoming death's power by His resurrection. The kingdom of heaven did not start when Jesus showed up by the shores of Lake Galilee; God discussed the kingdom in Old Testament times. The Old Testament tells the big, beautiful, hope-filled story of a God who would one day lovingly reign over His people and the people of the Earth. God's reign is marked by a peaceful "rightness" to the world. Everything would be in its proper place, and every relationship would be on its correct terms. Matthew broadly conveyed heaven as the place where things are right. Heaven represents for Matthew the full authority of

God, the complete execution of His will, the full expression of His desires, and His values' full implementation. Matthew's central emphasis is found in what is designated the "gospel of the kingdom." The good news is that the reign or rule of God is realized in history through the presence of Jesus Christ.

Project Results in Contrast to Literature Review

The literature review for this project revealed how divided scholars are on the meaning of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel. It was observed through reading scholarly material that most scholars rarely, if ever, begin with what is the most unique and most important way that Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν). As stated earlier Pennington believes that neglecting to begin with the most unique and most important way Matthew speaks about the kingdom of heaven is a consequence of too quickly assuming that heaven is merely a periphrasis for God and no more needs to be said. Nevertheless, considering their position, other scholars continue to argue that the kingdom of heaven is simply a circumlocution for the kingdom of God that Matthew used for the sake of his audience's conscience.

Scholars believe that Matthew's use of the kingdom of heaven is simply a stylistic variation like the use of "kingdom," "kingdom of the Father," and "kingdom of God" to refer to the same reality in Matthew and the other Gospels. This literature review addressed the misconceptions about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel by analyzing the purpose of Matthew's use of the kingdom of heaven and comprehensively investigating the meaning of the kingdom of heaven, and whether the kingdom of heaven is synonymous with the kingdom of

God. An in-depth study was performed on Jesus' preaching on the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven as a present reality, and the dynamic nature of the kingdom.

From this research, it is clear that there is sufficient evidence that one can cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven and what Jesus meant when He invited people to seek the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus invites His followers to seek His kingdom first, He is after much more than a mere rearranging of their priorities. Instead, He intends to give the believer a new way of seeing everything, a new center around every part of life, family, work, friendship, money, leisure, power, and play. All the rest of the cares of this life must revolve around seeking God's kingdom first. Jesus' reasoning culminates in the famous directive, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:34). Jesus' admonition draws the listeners back to the key verse of the sermon, where Jesus declared, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). The use of the imperative "seek" does not mean looking for something not present, for Jesus has already announced the kingdom's arrival. In this context, it means that His disciples are to make the kingdom of heaven the center of their continual, daily priorities. They have already entered the kingdom of heaven and are to live with that reality, drawing on God's ordering of their daily lives. Jesus' disciples are not simply to refrain from pursuing temporal things as their primary goal to differentiate themselves from pagans. Instead, they are to replace such pursuits with goals of far greater significance. To seek first the kingdom is to desire above all to enter, submit to, and participate in spreading the news of the saying reign of God, the messianic kingdom already inaugurated by Jesus, and to live to store up treasures in heaven in the prospect of the kingdom's consummation.

Most of the literature addressing how one enters the kingdom of heaven shows that entrance into the kingdom of heaven is different than entering the kingdom of God. yet most scholars insist that the two kingdoms are synonymous. The researcher used John's Gospel to teach on eternal life and how one enters it, and Matthew's Gospel is used to teach on the kingdom of heaven and the requirements for entry. According to John 3:36 and 5:24, the believer has eternal life, and when John's Scripture is compared to Matthew 5:20, 7:2, and 18:3, Jesus says that the believers righteousness must surpass the scribes and the Pharisees, or you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens. All the verses from the Gospel of John speak of eternal life being obtained through faith. Obtaining eternal life is a matter of faith alone. If one wants eternal life, they do not need to do anything but believe because faith is the only requirement for obtaining eternal life. If a person believes, they obtain eternal life; if they do not believe, they will not obtain eternal life. Matthew says that Jesus is the King of the kingdom of the heavens who came to the Earth to establish a heavenly kingdom and who needs people to follow Him so that they may enter the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew repeatedly speaks of following Him, taking up the cross to follow Him, and leaving everything to follow Him. John shows that the believer only needs to receive the Lord of life by faith to obtain eternal life. Matthew shows that the believer must faithfully follow the King of the kingdom of the heavens to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Eternal life is obtained by receiving the Lord through faith; the kingdom of the heavens is entered into by faithfully following the Lord. Every time the Bible speaks of eternal life, it speaks of believing rather than doing, but whenever the Bible speaks of entering the kingdom of the heavens, it does not speak of faith. Instead, it speaks of righteousness, doing the will of God, or something related to believer's living. Therefore, according to the Bible, one should realize that obtaining eternal life and entering the kingdom of

the heavens are two different things. The participants, in this case, agreed with the literature. When the researcher presented the question to the participants, the results were overwhelming. Over half of the participants not only believed that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God were synonymous, but they also believed that entrance into both kingdoms was different.

Lessons Learned from Project Implementation

The researcher learned many impactful lessons. However, to identify what was learned from the intervention study, some things need to be addressed. First, does having a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven have an impact on individuals' relationship with Christ? Participants that were a part of this survey desire a closer relationship with God. While 33% (5) of participants said that this study was impactful, 66% (10) of participants said that it was very impactful. Most of their comments have alluded to the fact that this intervention study session has profoundly impacted them. When one looks at Matthew's Gospel, one sees Jesus' interaction with the disciples and the disciple's interaction with each other. The message becomes clear that one of the dynamic natures of the kingdom of heaven is community. Community is all about relationships that believers have with one another.

Second, did having a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven change their view about evangelism? One participant spoke of one critical aspect of evangelism; they said the church must train believers how to make disciples because the mission of God is to reach everyone. Furthermore, the mission of the church is also to reach the world with and through disciples. As a result, there must be an intentional strategy to develop individuals to accomplish the mission of the Master. Another participant weighed in and expanded on the thought by saying that "intentional" means observing the passages of the New Commandment found in John

13:34-35. Jesus, in John, said, “By this, all men would know that you are my disciples by the love you have one for another.” The body of Christ will grow as each part does its unique specific function in the body. The passage in Acts 2:42-47 makes it clear that the early church had a clear strategy. That strategy revolved around love: love for God, love for people, and love for believers. One participant reminded stakeholders that people are transformed by God's grace, which has always been God’s method. Therefore, the church must become intentional in developing people who genuinely love God, love people, and love other believers. The participant's position is reflected in what they thought about evangelism. 53% (8) of participants agree that studying the kingdom of heaven has changed their view about evangelism, while 33% (5) of participants somewhat agree. 13% (2) of participants walked into the study as solid proponents in favor of evangelism and continue to advocate the importance of personal evangelism.

Third, does having a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven give one pause to consider the necessity of making evangelism the central focus of church ministry? When participants were asked about the church’s role in evangelism and whether it should be the church’s central focus, the participant’s response was clear: 80% (12) of participants believed that evangelism should be a central focus of the church and that they would be more engaging in sharing their faith.

Fourth, does having a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven impact one’s walk with Christ? One participant responded by saying that it was very impactful because it stirred them up, which caused them to self-reflect to see if they were doing all they could for the Lord. If one’s life is impacted, they will not just talk about cleaning up their walk with Christ but put actions behind their talk. Another participant added that the believer’s walk is a lifestyle that

should reflect the love of Christ. The believer's life is to display Christ-like characteristics. Believers' actions should produce fruit, and the unbeliever should be able to see that fruit. One other participant said that these lessons had encouraged them to do more for Christ. Another participant said they had learned so much about the kingdom of heaven and this experience is an ongoing thing in which the believer can learn more in their walk with Christ. Furthermore, the participant added that the more the believer intentionally moves closer to God in fellowship, the more God reveals the things the believer needs to work on. One participant said that these study sessions have caused them to do a self-examination to be better. Reflecting on seeking the kingdom of heaven reminds believers that they are to surrender to the will of God. They went on further to say that the impact that this study has had on walking with Christ is deep and profound, and as a result, participants should strive to walk worthy of God and become more like Christ. The participants response to this question was impressive. 60% (9) of participants said that this study was very impactful, while 27% (4) of participants said that it was impactful.

Fifth, has having a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven impacted one's relationship with Christ? One participant responded by saying that self-examination is something that will be the focus going forward. So often, when there are opportunities to get into the word, the window for that opportunity was missed because of other priorities placed before God; however, participants said it would be a priority after this study. Another participant added to the conversation and said they believe that self-examination is what they intend to be more intentional about; they will be more diligent about seeking the face of God more so than ever before. As a believer, the Word of God should be lived and not just talked about. Christ must be exalted in the believer's life, and this study session has stirred the desire to lift up the name of Jesus and let His light shine within the life of the participants. Seeking the kingdom of heaven

will be one of the main focuses going forward. Although believers desire to strengthen their relationship with God, it is also clear that each participant intends to strengthen their relationship due to these intervention study sessions. Most participants desire a closer relationship with God. While 33% (5) of participants said that this study was impactful, 66% (10) of participants said that it was very impactful. Most of their comments have alluded to the fact that this intervention study session has profoundly impacted them.

Results Applied in Other Settings

This intervention successfully addressed the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's Gospel through five study sessions. The feedback received from participants was overwhelming. All the participants said the teaching was in-depth, well thought out, and it made them think about their relationship with God and what more they could do to further Jesus' message of the kingdom. All the participants were lay members, except for one participant. All participants had a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ; however, the maturity level varied from participant to participant. While the outcome of this intervention was successful, this project would be just as effective in another setting. For example, there is a potential for applying this project beyond lay members. While pastors were not among the initial participants, they would benefit from the intervention. This project could be applied to a setting that consisted of ministry leaders and pastors. The scope of the lessons could focus on evangelism, targeting leaders that do not fully support missions because they may feel it should not necessarily be the central focus of the church's ministry. While all pastors may not initially agree about the importance of missions, this teaching could have the potential of causing them to re-evaluate their position. When pastors and ministry leaders consider Jesus' position on evangelism and how evangelism was Jesus' primary focus,

perhaps, they will be moved to make evangelism their primary focus. The outcome in this setting could have the same level of effectiveness as the initial intervention

Another potential application could include only young people, ages eighteen to twenty-five. There would be no need to adjust the content of the lessons even though all the youth do not share the same level of spiritual maturity; the applications can still apply. Once the study lessons commence, the participants will gain exposure to the teaching which can cause them to consider their relationship with Christ and cause them to seek first the kingdom of heaven instead of the material cares of this life. Participants exposed to this teaching can cultivate a deeper understanding of the kingdom of heaven, which in turn will cause them to desire a deeper relationship with Christ. The outcome from this intervention can have the potential to be just as effective, thus, yield the same results as the initial intervention.

Recommendations for Further Study

Considering the collaboration with stakeholders and the theological and theoretical frameworks, the research finding makes the following inclusive and merit further research. The kingdom of heaven is a significant phrase because of the centrality of the kingdom message in Jesus' ministry. The five study lessons focused on the kingdom message in Jesus' ministry. Each participant involved in this intervention received instructions about Jesus' message of the kingdom and how they were to respond to Jesus' call for action in fulfilling the Great Commission. All the participants after being exposed to the five study sessions, identified areas of growth and development. They also saw areas in their lives and area that needed improvement.

This project could be a valuable tool in cultivating an understanding of who Jesus is, His mission, and the purpose in which He came in various settings. No matter what level of spiritual maturity they are in Christ, every believer can gain wisdom and knowledge that can have a transformational effect on their lives because of being exposed to this teaching. This tool has the potential to measure the spiritual growth of all believers when the study material is taught, and the participants apply the teaching to their lives. Families that have a desire to grow spiritually would find this project very useful. Although this intervention was only five sessions, further study should be performed to investigate the effectiveness of long-term exposure to this material.

Local churches can use this tool to teach members the importance of maintaining a walk with Christ that is vibrant and strong. The Bible tells the believer in 2 Peter 3:18 that they are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This tool can be the instrument that can facilitate and guide the believer in developing a biblical foundation for Christian living.

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Appendix A: Permission Letter

May 27, 2021

Jerome McDowell
Pastor
Word Warriors Ministries
112 Werz Industrial Blvd.
Newnan, GA 30263

Pastor McDowell:

As a graduate student at the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is “The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew’s Gospel.” The purpose of my research is to clear up the misunderstanding about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew’s Gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Word Warriors Ministries.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Jeffery Mize
DMin Student, Liberty University

Appendix B: Participants Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel

Principal Investigator: Jeffery Mize, Doctoral student, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member of Word Warriors Ministries, 18 years of age, and have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Once you receive this participant consent form via email attachment, I will schedule a Zoom conference meeting the following week, which will be the forum to address any questions or concerns you may have. So, please take the time to read this entire form. Once the meeting starts, please feel free to ask any questions before deciding whether to participate in this research project.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to clear up a misunderstanding about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries. The goal is to cultivate an understanding of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel. If ministry leaders at Word Warriors Ministries provide the essential teaching on the kingdom of heaven, then believers could cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Once you provide consent, I will send out by email the interview questions that will govern the study group within one week. Participant consent is required since each of the five sessions of the study group will be both video and audio recorded to capture the content discussed accurately. In addition, the researcher, along with another participant, will take field notes as another means of data collection.
2. After participants receive the interview questions, within one week, I will send out by email the documentation stating the ground rules that each participant must abide by.
3. Once all documentation has been reviewed, I will host a zoom meeting with all Word Warriors Ministries participants to discuss any questions. I will stress in this meeting the importance of abiding by the ground rules and respecting each participant. One week after the Zoom meeting, I will begin scheduling the sessions.

The sessions are scheduled on Wednesday nights from 7:30 PM-9:00 PM and will begin the following weeks:

1. June 16, 2021
2. June 23, 2021
3. June 30, 2021
4. July 7, 2021
5. July 14, 2021(Post Intervention session if necessary)

Each session, I will provide teaching out of the book of Matthew, which directly relates to the question presented. Once a question is presented, participants will have the opportunity to

address the question. Participants are encouraged to dialog with other participants, piggybacking on their thoughts and ideas to expand the conversation. I will also provide biblical teaching from Matthew's Gospel, referencing several scriptures to ground the conversation on biblical principles. The last session will be a time of reflection. The discussion will focus on the knowledge gained from learning about the kingdom of heaven and how it affects your walk with Christ.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from participating in this study are Members of Word Warriors Ministries would have a clearer understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel. Almost without exception, the kingdom of heaven is explained away as saying the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God has the same meaning. Matthew's frequent use of heaven is part of a rubric of heaven and earth language woven richly throughout his Gospel account. For Matthew, the kingdom of heaven's ultimate meaning resides in its function in the heaven and earth theme. Other direct benefits of participants could receive from participating in this study would be:

- Understanding the importance of evangelism in their personal lives.
- Understanding the impact the kingdom of heaven has on their personal walk with Christ
- Understanding what is required to enter the kingdom of heaven

If ministry leaders provide the essential teaching on the kingdom of heaven, then believers could cultivate an understanding of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew's gospel.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely on a password-locked computer, and field notes will be kept secure and will remain in the researchers' possession. Only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Study groups will be conducted over Zoom conference, and since this will be a private meeting, each session will be secure. Therefore, no one will be able to join except the participant in the study group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and field notes will be kept in a secure location under the researcher's supervision. The collected data may be used in future presentations; however, all electronic records will be deleted after three years, and field notes will be destroyed.
- The audio and video from each of the four study groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

There will be no cost to participate in the research.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Word Warriors Ministries. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffery Mize. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Daryl Rodriguez, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C: Permission Granted

May 27, 2021

Jerome McDowell
Pastor
Word Warriors Ministries
112 Werz Industrial Blvd.
Newnan, GA 30263

Dear Jeffery Mize:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled: The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel, I have decided to grant you permission to contact the membership and invite them to participate in your study. I also permit you to conduct your study at Word Warriors Ministries here in Newnan, GA.

I will provide this document on official letterhead and returned it to you by e-mail as an attachment.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- [The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.]
- [The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.]
- [I/We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.]

Sincerely,

Jerome McDowell
Pastor
Word Warriors Ministries

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

April 6, 2021

Word Warrior Member Participant

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. My research aims to clear up the misunderstanding that exists in Matthew's gospel as understood by Word Warriors Ministries, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be members of Word Warriors Ministries. Participants must be 18 years of age or older and must have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in five study groups. Each of the study groups will take place via Zoom conference. As participants respond to the given questions, they will also interact with other participants. Live video and audio from each session will be recorded from the start of each session to the end to capture the content discussed accurately. Field notes will also be taken as another means of capturing data. As a result of these audio and video recordings, your consent is required. Once you provide consent, I will send out, by email, the interview questions that will govern the study group within one week. I will also send out the documentation that lists the ground rules that each participant must follow. This study group should take approximately five sessions which will take place during Wednesday night Bible study. The sessions are scheduled on Wednesday nights from 7:30 PM-9:00 PM and will begin the following weeks:

1. June 16, 2021
2. June 23, 2021
3. June 30, 2021
4. July 7, 2021
5. July 14, 2021(Post Intervention Session)

Names are the only identifying information that will be requested as part of this study, and that information will remain confidential.

To participate in this study, please contact me at [REDACTED]

A consent document will be given to you one week before the study group meets. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the study group. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information, agree, and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Jeffery Mize
Doctoral Student
Jmize1@liberty.edu

Appendix E: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 13, 2021

Jeffery Mize
Daryl Rodriguez

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-802 The Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel

Dear Jeffery Mize and Daryl Rodriguez,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office