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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE APOCALYPTIC KINGDOM OF GOD IN SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH
LITERATURE AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IN MATTHEW

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE APOCALYPTIC KINGDOM OF GOD IN SECOND
TEMPLE JEWISH LITERATURE AND THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IN MATTHEW

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The apocalyptic kingdom of God is a common theme in Second Temple Jewish literature. This kingdom is often presented differently in the various literary works of this era. This first chapter of this thesis considers the various aspects of the kingdom in relation to God's coming judgment and the coming messiah who is often seen as the one bringing judgment and setting up the kingdom of God. The second chapter elaborates upon Jesus' teachings about the apocalyptic kingdom of God and compares and contrasts them with the teachings of the kingdom in His day as understood through the Second Temple Jewish literature.

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INTRODUCTION

A clear understanding of second temple Jewish literature is crucial to an understanding of the New Testament because “Jesus and His apostles read the sacred Scriptures of Israel through the lens of Second Temple Judaism.”¹ Therefore, this perspective should inform the twenty-first century interpreter understands the New Testament. This thesis shows the influence of the Second Temple Jewish literature on the New Testament. Scholars are recognizing “both the considerable body of literature (larger than the Christian Bible) and its importance to the interpretation of the NT.”² Much of the teaching of the New Testament reflects the theology coming out of the era often referred to as the “silent years.”³ In fact these years are not silent at all when one considers the vast amount of literature that was written in this time period which reflects the theology of the day. This theology was influenced by not only Jewish sources but also non-Jewish sources such as Persian, Greek, and Roman. One must understand that “the NT did not emerge in a vacuum but was rooted in a particular historical, cultural, and religious context, and understanding this context, at least in a general sense, puts the study of the NT into proper perspective from the very start.”⁴ Many interpreters of the New Testament now take into account the significance of the material found in the Apocrypha and Jewish Pseudepigrapha which gives a clearer understanding and a fuller picture of the events that were taking place in the time of Christ.

¹ Larry R. Helyer, “The Necessity, Problems, and Praise of Second Temple Judaism for Discussions of New Testament Eschatology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 47:4 (Dec. 2004), 598.

² Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2009), Kindle Location 2374 of 41394.

³ *Ibid.*, Kindle Location 2352 of 41394.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Kindle Location 2949 of 41394.

Second Temple Jewish literature is full of doctrine which is developed from religious, political, and cultural experiences. The kingdom of God is one of these doctrines that more fully develops during this time period. Jewish apocalyptic literature develops this doctrine from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. Jesus began His ministry while the teachings from this literature were prevalent. Jesus further develops the concept of the kingdom of God through His teachings in the gospels, especially the parables and His own apocalyptic discourse. Certain of the parables provide pictures of what the kingdom looks like and the apocalyptic discourse provides a picture of what the kingdom was expected to look like. From these pictures one starts to develop a fuller understanding of what the kingdom of God actually is like. The study of Second Temple Jewish literature provides a fuller understanding of how Jesus' Jewish audience would have understood the kingdom of God. Jesus was familiar with Jewish literature and the popular theology of His day. In the gospels, Jesus uses similar and sometimes the same language as is found in Jewish literature, but He often uses this language with a different emphasis. Sometimes He uses it to teach something contrary to what is popularly taught by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 7:28-29). Part of the reason for the Jewish leaders to be at odds with Jesus is for the reason of the often stark disagreement of His teachings with theirs.⁵

The kingdom of God is a broad subject and can be a daunting task for anyone who desires to learn the many views concerning the kingdom. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the apocalyptic facet of the kingdom. Jewish apocalyptic literature displays a perspective of the kingdom which is eschatological. Even in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the views about the

⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 299.

kingdom are numerous.⁶ This literature provides various views concerning the coming messianic kingdom that would bring with it judgment upon the Gentiles and an establishment of God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. It is out of this setting that Jesus comes and establishes a new concept of the coming kingdom which in some ways is similar, but in other ways would have seemed drastically different to a first century Jew. This thesis seeks to give a comparative study of the apocalyptic kingdom of God in Second Temple Jewish literature and the teachings of Jesus with an emphasis on the contrastive nature of Jesus' teachings to the predominant understanding of the apocalyptic kingdom of God maintained by a first century Jewish audience.

⁶ D. S. Russell compares and contrasts the different views of the Kingdom of God on Earth which is just one of the many aspects of the Kingdom represented by him. D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC-AD 100*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 286-90.

CHAPTER ONE: THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH LITERATURE

Background

Political Influences on Second Temple Jewish Literature

Much of the literature that came out of the Second Temple era was greatly influenced by the political situation of the day.⁷ From the exile to the time of Christ, the Jews were ruled over by four major nations outside the borders of Palestine. These nations allowed various levels of freedom, but oppression and lack of freedom caused certain Jews to write various works which influenced the religious thought of the nation. Some major themes in Second Temple Jewish literature are the judgment of the Gentiles, a restoration of the Jewish nation through a future theocratic kingdom, and the coming of a Messiah who would bring the former two things into fruition. In order to understand Second Temple Jewish literature more fully, one must first understand the context from which it originates. Therefore, a brief historical overview is provided to better understand why certain writings were penned, especially the apocalyptic literature.

Oppressive Hellenistic Rule

Alexander the Great came through swiftly and replaced Persian rule with Hellenistic rule. During his lifetime, Alexander maintained his sovereignty by allowing the people to maintain many of their own customs and a level of political autonomy.⁸ Because of a desire to escape Persian rule, “the Samaritans and inhabitants of Judea voluntarily switched allegiance from

⁷ James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 1.

⁸ J. Julius Scott Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 79.

Persia to Alexander and apparently were left relatively undisturbed.”⁹ Alexander did not change many of the policies the Jews had under Persian rule. The major change was the Hellenization of the culture. The acceptance of Hellenization meant that “the Jews would now have to deal with a series of Greek kings who had a strong belief in their cultural superiority and fully intended to implant that culture firmly in all the lands they occupied.”¹⁰ Alexander’s brevity of life left very little political impact on Palestine. After his death, his kingdom was fought over and split amongst four of his generals.

Ptolemy I received Egypt and Palestine to rule over.¹¹ Under Ptolemaic rule, the Jews continued to have relative freedoms including religious freedom.¹² Judea may have been ruled by priests as a temple state.¹³ To the north of Palestine the Seleucids had control of Syria and Persia and “the Jews could not escape involvement in the rivalry between the two powers. In the following centuries the land of Israel became a major battlefield in several wars between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies.”¹⁴ This constant conflict eventually led to Seleucid dominance and control of Palestine as the Ptolemies waned in their ability to control this part of their territory.¹⁵

When the Seleucids came in, there was a forced Hellenization of the Jews in Palestine, especially under the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.¹⁶ Antiochus IV increased taxes and

⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2543 of 41394.

¹¹ Josephus *Antiquities* 12.1.2.

¹² Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2522 of 41394.

¹³ Ibid., Kindle Location 2566 of 41394.

¹⁴ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 80.

¹⁵ Josephus *Antiquities* 12.5.242-43.

¹⁶ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2566 of 41394.

increased efforts to Hellenize Palestinian Jews in order to create a loyal ideological-cultural boundary with Egypt.¹⁷ In part, this forced Hellenization meant a decrease in religious freedom. The extent of this was seen later in Antiochus' reign as he sought to abolish Judaism.¹⁸ He made it a crime to practice certain rituals of Judaism and even sentenced people to death.¹⁹ His zeal for Jewish Hellenization culminated when he set up a statue of Zeus in the Temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar.²⁰ This act, among many others, eventually led to the Maccabean revolt which hoisted Hellenistic rule out of Palestine and led into a period of Jewish self rule.

Jewish Self Rule

The oppressive Hellenistic rule eventually led to the Maccabean revolt led mainly by Judas Maccabeus and his brothers.²¹ After a few years of warfare, the Seleucids offered terms to Judas and his followers.²² This led to an independent Jewish state and self rule for about a century. The Maccabees set themselves up as kings over Israel. Within this era of self rule, Simon, the last surviving brother of Judas, was set up as king and was even given the position of high priest. Simon's son developed this position further and during his reign there was a secularization of the Jewish religion as he shifted his loyalties from the Pharisees to the Sadducees.²³ At first there was relative stability in the nation through the establishment of the

¹⁷ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁹ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2587 of 41394.

²⁰ 2 Maccabees 6:1-9

²¹ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2607 of 41394.

²² 1 Maccabees 6:55-63.

²³ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 86.

Hasmonean dynasty,²⁴ but after the nation was secure and peace started to be felt throughout, there arose disunity and strife among the Hasmoneans which led to a power struggle.²⁵ This power struggle led warring parties to seek Roman support from Pompey who eventually discharged the Hasmonean dynasty and set up Roman rule in Palestine.²⁶

Oppressive Roman Rule

At the beginning of Roman rule, there was a continued power struggle between the last of the Hasmonean dynasty and the invading Parthians who sought control of the Jewish state.²⁷ This struggle finally came to an end when Herod gained Roman assistance and was given authority in the land of Israel.²⁸ Herod was established as the sole ruler in Israel and his reign was characterized by tyranny. He also sought to please both Romans and the Jews. Herod is greatly remembered by the Jews for his building projects and a complete renovation and additions to the Temple. After his death, Palestine was divided amongst his sons who also had power struggles. This eventually led to Rome's stepping in and setting up a procurator over the land; Pontius Pilate was the most famous of these.²⁹ Along with Roman rule came heavy taxation and limited freedom. Rome allowed the Jews to maintain their worship and ritualistic practices and Jewish

²⁴ The name Maccabeus comes from Judas son of Mattathias which means 'hammer' because of the way he fought against the Seleucids. The name Hasmonean is the household name from which Judas and his brothers were from and formal name taken by the dynasty which ruled Israel during this time period. John Hyrcanus I was the first of the Hasmonean rulers. Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Edition 2609-53.

²⁵ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 83-9.

²⁶ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2695 of 41394.

²⁷ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 89.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁹ Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, the Crown*, Kindle Location 2787 of 41394..

worship saw a peak up to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Rome maintained control of Palestine for a few more centuries following the destruction of Jerusalem.

Messianic Expectation

Because of this constant shift and struggle of political rulership, a yearning and expectation for a Messiah grew among the Jews in Palestine. A view of what this Messiah would look like also developed. By the start of the first century A.D., the prevalent view concerning the Messiah was that He would come in military might and vanquish all of Israel's enemies and establish an eternal theocratic kingdom from the line of David on earth in Jerusalem (cf. Ps. of Sol. 17).³⁰ However, of all the kings that arose during the Second Temple era, such as the Hasmoneans and Herodians, none of them were from the House of David.³¹ Although the most significant expectation for this Messiah sees Him in light of political strength, there were some who also had in mind a spiritual Messiah who would lead the people into righteousness and cause a restoration and reconciliation between man and God. This view is depicted in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* with the king coming from both the line of Judah and Levi.³² In other writings this person is viewed as one Messiah and in others there is a notion of two Messiahs.³³

³⁰ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 311.

³¹ Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Promise to David in Early Judaism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 150:599 (July 1993), 286-88.

³² *Ibid.*, 291-93.

³³ Russell, *Method and Message*, 308-19.

The Messiah as a Physical Deliverer

Other than a brief political interlude of self-rule under the Hasmonean dynasty, the Jews were dominated continuously by foreign powers. The Jews believed a physical deliverer was necessary because they desired to be free from outside oppression.³⁴ This messianic expectation was developed throughout Second Temple literature and became the prevailing view of the Messiah.³⁵ The Messiah depicted as coming in the glory of the Lord as a conquering king.³⁶ “By the time of Jesus the majority of the common people thought of the coming Messiah primarily as a political, military king who would deal with the external crises faced by the nation.”³⁷ This king was interpreted by many as stemming from the line of David who would reestablish the Davidic dynasty and bring an end to foreign oppression.

The Messiah as a Spiritual Deliverer

Just as there was an expectation of a kingly Messiah, there were also leanings toward a priestly Messiah as seen in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.³⁸ Part of this leaning may have come from the Hasmonean kings setting themselves up also as high priests.³⁹ The writer may have seen the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty as the dynasty that would bring in this coming Messiah from this lineage.⁴⁰ It is also suspect that more pious Jews saw a need to return to the law and former ways of the Old Testament because of the secularization of Judaism

³⁴ Ibid., 308-10.

³⁵ Arthur Metcalf, “The Parousia Versus the Second Advent,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 64:253 (Jan. 1907), 55.

³⁶ Ibid., 55-56.

³⁷ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 310.

³⁸ E.g. Test. of Reuben 6:7-8; Judah 21:1-5; Dan 5:10-11; Joseph 19:5-11.

³⁹ Russell, *Method and Message*, 310-11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 311.

that was happening during the time of John Hyrcanus.⁴¹ Despite the desires of a few pious Jews, the yearning for a spiritual Messiah was far outweighed by the people's desire for a military leader to deliver them from foreign oppression.

Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature is a genre of literature developed in the Second Temple era in response to the situation the Jews were facing. Much of this literature was written to give the Jews future hope during a time of national distress.⁴² Apocalyptic literature “is a many-sided phenomenon in which the writers seek to understand and respond to what they perceive as evil and dangerous circumstances.”⁴³ Within this literature, there are places in which the author describes a current or past event using figurative language to predict a future event.⁴⁴ Many of the future events focused on God intervening and bringing judgment upon the enemies of the Jews and restoring the Jewish kingdom through a militant Messiah and establishing this kingdom for eternity. This representation is a summary from various apocalyptic works and is not representative of all the thoughts that came out of Second Temple Judaism concerning the establishment to the kingdom of God on earth. Because of this variety of beliefs, a careful overview of some of the most prevalent Jewish apocalyptic works is necessary to have a fuller understanding of what the Second Temple Jews thought about the kingdom of God.

⁴¹ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 323.

⁴² VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 103.

⁴³ Paul D. Hanson, “Apocalypses and Apocalypticism, The Genre,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

⁴⁴ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 102-03.

Assumption of Moses

The *Assumption of Moses* was written in the first part of the first century A.D. by a quietist Pharisee who saw the steady secularization of the Jewish faith and the Pharisaic party.⁴⁵ If a first century authorship is assumed, it would be one of the closest representations to the understanding of popular thought about the kingdom of God during the time of Jesus' ministry. This work influenced the Apostles because Jude refers to it in his short letter (Jude 9, 16, 18). The author wrote from the perspective of Moses who was uttering a prophetic testament to Joshua at the end of his life.⁴⁶ The author of this short work "sought herein to recall his party to the old paths, which they were fast forsaking, of simple unobtrusive obedience to the law."⁴⁷ This growing secularism caused the author to pen the words of this book for he likely saw the course of the nation leading toward some sort of destruction which is depicted in the latter portion of this book.⁴⁸ This causes the author to look forward to direct intervention from God and an establishment of a theocratic kingdom on earth (Chap. 10).

1 Enoch

The book of *1 Enoch* was composed by many different authors in the first and second century B.C. and covers a multitude of topics mainly based on what the author was experiencing at the time of writing. As a whole, *1 Enoch* "in its final form, is artificially contrived to form five

⁴⁵ R. H. Charles, *Vol. 2: Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004), 407.

⁴⁶ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 113.

⁴⁷ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 407.

⁴⁸ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 114.

books, perhaps on the analogy of the Pentateuch or the Psalms.”⁴⁹ A large portion of this book is apocalyptic. With multiple authors, came a wider range of eschatological views. The views presented in this work influenced many of the other writings and teachings of this era and even influenced various parts of the New Testament.⁵⁰ The wide variety of authors also caused inconsistencies in the doctrine and theology present.⁵¹ Large portions of this book focus on eschatological thought such as views of the Messiah and messianic kingdom as well as the final judgment. The various views on these subjects in Enoch are much more fully developed than in many other Jewish apocalypses. This variety of thought also shows that there was not just one view concerning the kingdom during the Second Temple era which would have influenced Jesus’ audience in the first century.

Jubilees

The book of *Jubilees* was written by a Pharisee in the second century B.C. as a republication of the Law received by Moses on Mount Sinai.⁵² This book is retelling Genesis and many parts of Exodus. This book is accompanied by all sorts of new information which answers questions about the biblical narrative.⁵³ The author wanted “to defend Judaism against the attacks of the Hellenistic spirit that had been in the ascendant one generation earlier and was still

⁴⁹ D.S. Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 27.

⁵⁰ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 177-85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁵² Charles argues for a this date because of references made within the text itself which refer to Maccabean-Hasmonean wars. VanderKam argues for a post Hasmonian date and possibly into the herodian period based upon evidence from Qumran and intertextual evidences as compared to these. James C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, (Missoula, MO: Scholars Press, 1977), 214-283.

⁵³ James Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of Its Creation*, (Boston: Brill, 2012), 1.

powerful, and to prove that the law was of everlasting validity.”⁵⁴ The author of *Jubilees* is writing from Moses’ perspective when he received the covenant from God. This book presents prophecy that one day Israel would stray from this covenant. It is “against this background, one can see that the writer pictures a new beginning for the covenantal relationship.”⁵⁵ Part of this covenantal renewal is seen in the portions of messianic expectation. This book was written during the days of Jewish self-rule which is the period of Maccabean dominion.⁵⁶ There was an expectation for the Messiah to come and set up his kingdom. *Jubilees* represents a “kingdom [that] would be gradually realized on earth, and the transformation of physical nature would go hand in hand with the ethical transformation of man till there was a new heaven and a new earth.”⁵⁷ Although this book is not classified as apocalyptic because of its focus on the Law, it is useful in understanding certain aspects of the kingdom of God taught in the Second Temple era, especially in light of its emphasis on the coming messianic kingdom.

Psalms of Solomon

The *Psalms of Solomon* were likely composed in the middle of the first century B.C.⁵⁸ These psalms focus heavily upon the Davidic kingship and the eventual reestablishment of a Davidic king on Israel.

The basic theme of the collection consists of petition and thanksgiving in view of the innocent suffering of the righteous, understood as a trial in the context of the

⁵⁴ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1.

⁵⁵ James C. VanderKam, “Studies on the Prologue and Jubilees 1,” in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Ed. Randal A. Argall, et al, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 278.

⁵⁶ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 97.

⁵⁷ VanderKam, “Prologue,” 1.

⁵⁸ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 129.

expectation of the coming Day of Judgment and the associated arrival of the kingdom of God and resurrection of the dead brought about by the Messiah.⁵⁹

The community in which these songs originate is to understand the suffering the innocent experience as the correction of the merciful God and to fix their hope on the imminent Day of Judgment and Mercy. In it, the godless will meet with eternal annihilation while the God-fearers and the righteous will be delivered and, together with the already deceased pious, rise to eternal life.⁶⁰

These psalms were likely written at the dawn of Roman rule in Palestine and an end to Jewish self-rule. One element brought out in the psalms is, “the Pharisaic piety that breathes through the Psalms; it is their opposition to the worldly, non-Davidic monarchy, and to the illegitimate high-priesthood, of the ruling Hasmonaean king, Aristobulus, that finds expression here.”⁶¹ This leads the way for a true desire to have a kingly Messiah from the line of David to come in and establish his earthly kingdom (Pss. of Sol. 17-18). There was a strong desire for a political deliverer from the line of David amongst the Jews during the Second Temple era.

Sibylline Oracles

The Sibylline Oracles, similar to *I Enoch*, have a wide range of authorship over a few centuries. They are prophetic in nature and stem from Jewish, Greek, or other authors.⁶² The Sibyl was a prophetess who was usually an older woman who would utter prophecies about the future and often sought out for guidance concerning important decisions.⁶³ Even though the concept of the Sybil has its roots in pagan theology, “the main object of the Jewish Sibyllists is

⁵⁹ Otto Kaiser, *The Old Testament Apocrypha: An Introduction*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶¹ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 630.

⁶² VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 107.

⁶³ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 368.

to maintain the unity and sovereignty of God.”⁶⁴ Within the doctrine of God, the Sibyl spoke about many different areas. A prevalent utterance concerned the coming judgment and wrath of God on the earth since “it is noticeable that the destruction of the world is not strongly distinguished from judgments that are to affect merely certain localities.”⁶⁵ The oracles may have only had a limited area of influence, but they still show Jewish theological thought of the day, especially with reference to the coming judgment.

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs

The *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* was likely written by a Pharisee during the reign of John Hyrcanus.⁶⁶ This book pretends to be the last will and testament of each of Jacob’s twelve sons.⁶⁷ This book was written during a time period when Israel’s king claimed rights not only to kingship but also to the priesthood. His kingship did not follow a Davidic line nor was he in the Aaronic succession of high priests. The lack of proper lineage had many ethical ramifications. Therefore, “the overwhelming value of the book lies not in this province, but in its ethical teaching, which has achieved a real immortality by influencing the thought and diction of the writers of the New Testament, and even those of our Lord.”⁶⁸ This book also brings light into messianic expectation and the kingdom. Its influence on New Testament thought makes it

⁶⁴ Ibid., 374.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 375.

⁶⁶ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 100.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁸ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 282.

invaluable for understanding Jesus' teachings concerning his own messiahship as well as the kingdom of God.⁶⁹

The Kingdom Represented in Second Temple Jewish Literature

God's Judgment on the Gentiles and the Unrighteous Comes before the Establishment of the Kingdom Represented in the Assumption of Moses

If one holds to a first century authorship, one can start to draw conclusions to the reason for wanting God to pour out his judgment upon the Gentiles. The visitation of God's wrath is seen to be greater than any previous judgment (8:1a). This is a punishment of the wicked and especially foreign tyranny (8:1b). This punishment will come upon the Gentiles because of their wicked treatment of the Jews and the great persecution which they placed on the Jews (8:2-3). The author portrays the punishment that these Gentiles will receive. This punishment is perceived as harsher than the treatment they gave to the Jews (8:4-5). The view on judgment maintained by the author reflects a large portion of what was held by other Second Temple Jewish authors.

A Judgment for Deceitful Spiritual Beings

Assumption of Moses (10:1-10)

After the punishment of the Gentiles, there will also be a punishment upon Satan for all the sorrow which he brings (10:1) with the result that "God will manifest his kingly rule and expel the Devil."⁷⁰ This passage illustrates the totality of God's judgment. It will not only be a judgment upon Satan and evil men, but it will also be a judgment upon the creation itself (10:4-

⁶⁹ Ibid., 294.

⁷⁰ Johannes Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 228

6). God Himself will come from heaven and He will be the one to bring about this wrath upon the Gentiles. It is likely that the reason that the judgment comes from God and not the Messiah (cf. Ps. of Sol. 17) is because of the quietist nature of the Messiah. He would not see the Messiah acting in this way but reserves divine wrath for God alone (10:7).⁷¹ This is God's sovereign power becoming manifestly effective in the world of human experience.⁷² It is a reversal of all earthly condition.⁷³ In the end, Israel will be exalted to heaven and shall look down upon their enemies who are in Hell and rejoice over this fact (10:10).⁷⁴

Jubilees (23:29-31)

There will be no more Satan or other being to destroy them for there will be judgment upon all the enemies of the Jews. Satan is typically depicted in Second Temple Jewish literature as a spiritual foe who stands opposed to God. He is seen as the arch-enemy of God bent on controlling and ultimately destroying mankind and even the cosmos itself.⁷⁵ He is one who brings deceit among the people. He is depicted as a fallen angel and the great deceiver of Adam and Eve who transforms himself into the form of an angel from God (*Life of Adam and Eve* 9:2). Eventually Satan will receive his due punishment for his deceit of the world. This is the same fate that wicked men will receive as they seek to rise up against the Israelites and oppress them. In the renewed kingdom there will no longer be anyone to deceive the people of Israel whether from spirit or man because all will be done away with (*Jub.* 29). Then there will be an eternal joy

⁷¹ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 412.

⁷² C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, (New York: Scribner, 1961), 24.

⁷³ Tromp, *Assumption*, 228

⁷⁴ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 412.

⁷⁵ Davenport, *Jubilees*, 238.

that will be felt by all the righteous because of the judgment that has come upon the wicked and because of the mercy which God has bestowed upon the righteous (*Jub.* 30-31).

The Status of Man Prior to the Coming of the Kingdom Represented in the Assumption of Moses

This passage looks toward what will happen on the earth just prior to the coming judgment of God. Destructive and impious men will be the rulers of the people and all they practice is deceit and treachery (7:3-7). There will be hypocrisy of leadership, and wicked men will reign during this portion of the eschatological event.⁷⁶ These men will have an appearance of good and will utter words which seem right, but their hearts will be full of deceit and they will say such things in order to deceive. This is behavior that the author would have seen typical of the Romans who occupied Palestine at this time and the escalation of this behavior would be characteristic also of all mankind.⁷⁷

A Call to Repentance before the Kingdom Comes

Assumption of Moses (1:17-18)

This passage depicts a call to repentance just before the consummation of the end of days. The kingdom was to be ushered in by a day of repentance.⁷⁸ This is a call of repentance to the Jews for the judgment that is coming will be upon the unrighteous and unrepentant, especially the Gentiles. This may reflect greatly how the Jews may have understood John the Baptists' message of repentance because the kingdom of God was about to be ushered in (cf. Matthew 3:2). If this is the case, the Jews would have understood the coming kingdom in light of Second

⁷⁶ Tromp, *Assumption*, 207.

⁷⁷ VanderKam, *Early Judaism*, 114-115.

⁷⁸ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 412.

Temple teachings which saw God's judgment coming upon the nations after the people repented (1:18).

Jubilees (1:17-29)

The perspective of the author of Jubilees is that Israel is already at the beginning of the messianic kingdom.⁷⁹ This chapter shows Israel that their predicament is the result of their violation of the Law. When Israel confesses their guilt, they will be restored to the land, reconciled to God, and transformed into a Torah abiding people.⁸⁰ The messianic kingdom begins with God's dwelling in the midst of the people (v.17). This passage seems to reflect heavily upon the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. This passage also reflects parts of Ezekiel where God tells the Jews that He will give them a new Spirit and parts of Deuteronomy where Moses tells Israel to have circumcised hearts. It is possible that the author sees the promise of the New Covenant as something that is already being brought about by God since "in a new era Israel will cling to God and yearn to keep His Commandments because God will create a new desire and ability."⁸¹ This renewing of the people toward righteousness brings about this coming kingdom, for God cannot dwell permanently among the people until this transformation happens. When this happens, the renewing of creation will be brought about and peace and blessing will be brought to Jerusalem (v. 29). In this coming kingdom, God himself will be the king that rules forever since only God can establish the true sanctuary.⁸² This theme is seen in other areas of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰ Gene Davenport, *The Eschatology of the Book of Jubilees*, (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1971), 20.

⁸¹ Davenport, *Jubilees*, 27.

⁸² Ibid., 30-31.

Jewish literature but it also stands opposed to other works which foresee a messianic king establishing this eternal throne.

The Messiah will Judge the Righteous and the Unrighteous

1 Enoch (45:3; 49:4; 61:8ff; 62:10-13)

These passages illustrate the messianic figure as taking his throne in order to judge everyone in creation including angels and kings (45:3). The presentation of this one's judging is prevalent throughout *1 Enoch*.⁸³ The throne of the Messiah is portrayed as in heaven and not on the earth in Jerusalem as other writings have it. (61:8). He will judge people according to their deeds and even those deeds that are hidden (61:9; 49:4). This judgment is for the righteous and unrighteous alike, and each will answer according to one's own righteousness. Chapter 62 outlines the severity of the judgment for those who have been found to be unrighteous. Sinners and the unrighteous will be ushered from his presence and only the righteous and elect will remain (62:10-13).

This short passage shows that there will be judgment on kings and the mighty. It seems that the author of *1 Enoch* says that those in a position of power will receive a harsher judgment than the common man who is found with unrighteous deeds. More specifically "the kings and the mighty ones will be punished for the wrong they have done to the children and the chosen ones of the Lord of Spirits. Their treatment of the righteous and elect will be the basis for the condemnation."⁸⁴ This judgment is greater because these kings and mighty men oppressed God's children and His elect (62:11). It also seems that at the judgment the tables will be turned

⁸³ George Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch 2: A Commentary on 1 Enoch Chapters 37-82*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 250.

⁸⁴ Leslie W. Walck, *The Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch and in Matthew*, (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 110.

because now the unrighteous have become a spectacle for the righteous and the oppressors are now seen as the oppressed (62:12). Even with a plea for mercy on the part of the kings and the mighty, the Lord's Messiah rejects their petition and drives them from his presence.⁸⁵

Psalms of Solomon (17:23-38)

A militant king from the line of David will shatter unrighteous rulers, free Jerusalem from tyranny, and thrust out sinners.⁸⁶ This psalm looks to the promise that God made to David in 2 Samuel 7 concerning his promise that his descendants would rule forever on the throne in Jerusalem. One of the purposes of his coming is judgment upon the unrighteous which “will be performed by the king, a son of David, raised up by God. The king will then rule in absolute righteousness over his people and the peoples of the world solely by the power of his word.”⁸⁷ This portion of the psalm looks forward to God's raising up once again a king from the line of David to rule over Israel (v. 23). When this king is raised up he will destroy the unrighteous rulers and purge Jerusalem from all Gentile influence (v. 24-25). The idea from this psalm is that this righteous king will utterly purge Jerusalem and Israel from all sinners. He will establish a holy nation bringing in an eternal righteous kingdom.

This king will rule over his people in righteousness but he “will draw his strength, however, from the fact that he allows the Lord to be his king. Thus, here the Davidic kingdom of the end times is incorporated into and subordinated to the kingdom of God.”⁸⁸ Part of this subordination to God is the extent and means of his rulership. As a result “the Messiah is

⁸⁵ Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch* 2, 266.

⁸⁶ Russel, *Method and Message*, 289.

⁸⁷ Kaiser, *Apocrypha*, 84.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

portrayed as having the same character of righteousness that God does, which qualifies him as a judge over Israel and the nations.”⁸⁹ He will be a king who mirrors God’s righteousness and it is with this righteousness that he is able to exact judgment properly upon all of the people. Not only will this king rule over the people, he will also judge the people and expel all unrighteousness and evil from the midst of the people to the extent that even the knowledge of evil will be vanquished from the land (v. 29).

The nations outside of Israel will also be subject to this anointed king (v. 32). This psalm “asks God to awaken a king for Israel from the house of David so that he may chasten Israel’s enemies, cleanse Jerusalem, and lead his people to righteousness.”⁹⁰ The establishment of this righteous and holy city will capture the attention of the rest of the nations and cause them to come from the ends of the earth to see the glory of God which has been made present in this city. This psalm clearly depicts a kingdom which will be established firmly upon the earth through military strength. This king’s strength is not seen like the strength of those that are being vanquished, but his strength is in the Lord and not horses and weapons of war nor the size of his army (v. 37-38).

Sibylline Oracles (3:652-56; 672-88; 702-709)

God will send His Messiah and the curse of war will be lifted from all mankind. This passage depicts that God himself is the one who sends this king and not a self-appointed king nor one appointed by men (v. 652). This is no ordinary king, but a king who will bring an end to all war (v. 654). He will be a king that only does the will of God unlike the rulers of the earth who

⁸⁹ Danny Zacharias, “The Son of David in the Psalms of Solomon 17,” in *“Non-canonical” Religious Texts in Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, Ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James H. Charlesworth, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012), 79.

⁹⁰ Kaiser, *Apocrypha*, 9.

rule upon their own whims or seek to please men by their actions (v. 655-56). This king will be unlike any ruler that has ever ruled upon the earth.

Judgment will come upon those who oppose the Messiah. This passage provides great detail about what will happen to all those who oppose this Messiah. “In the final conflict, God will directly intervene to judge the nations gathered against Israel and usher in an age of peace.”⁹¹ All who oppose him will meet a final end and no mercy will be shown them. Despite this inability to stand against this king, there will still be many who think they can and with one last effort will try to defeat this holy one (v. 688). This will be seen as a futile effort because God will cause His anointed to be triumphant over His foes and God will fight with His Messiah and bring swift judgment upon these that oppose Him.

The righteous will remain unharmed. This is a continuing theme throughout much of Second Temple Jewish literature and is made very clear in this passage as well. The picture that the author seems to be giving is that while all of this judgment is happening to the unrighteous, God himself is shielding the righteous of Israel from any harm. This shielding of His people is not just to protect from outside forces that are seeking to harm them, but it says that they will be sheltered to the extent that they will not even know that there is a war going on (v. 705-09). God shows the nations that He will preserve His people.

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Test. Dan 5:10-11; Test. Judah 25:3; Test. Benjamin 10:8ff.)

The Messiah makes war with the enemies of Israel and executes vengeance upon his enemies. This passage also says that war will be against Beliar (*Test. Dan 5:10*). The use of

⁹¹ Gordon Zerbe, “‘Pacifism’ and ‘Passive Resistance’ in Apocalyptic Writings: A Critical Evaluation,” in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, Ed. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 94.

Beliar is common throughout *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and also other Second Temple Jewish literature (*Jubilees* 1:20; 15:33 *Sibylline Oracles* 3:63, 73). Beliar is depicted as an enemy of God and one who seeks to lead men astray and causes them to sin.⁹² He is often identified with Satan or the Devil.⁹³ This equation is seen in the *Testament of Dan* 5-6 where all three names come up just a few verses apart from each other. Similar descriptions are used of each one. The main idea of this passage is not to expound upon the identity of Beliar, but the author seeks to show Beliar's fate. Once Beliar taken captive, there will be an end that comes to his influence upon the world and an end to sin (*Test. Levi* 18:9).⁹⁴ His final fate comes when he is cast into the lake of fire for eternity (*Test. Judah* 25:3).

This passage expounds upon the concept that the prelude to the kingdom begins with war and judgment upon the unrighteous. This is brought about by a messianic figure coming from the Lord (v. 10). The Messiah in this passage stems from the line of Levi instead of the line of Judah.⁹⁵ Part of this reason may be because the author was writing during the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty and because of his loyalty to them, he saw this line of kings as the one to bring about this eschatological event.⁹⁶ Another reason may be that the author wanted to bring out a dual aspect of the Messiah which was both kingly and priestly.⁹⁷ Another piece of evidence

⁹² Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 154.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁹⁵ Russell, *Method and Message*, 310-316.

⁹⁶ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 294.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

for one Messiah with two offices is that the word for ‘tribe’ is in the singular.⁹⁸ This brings out the idea of one person fulfilling two offices and not as two different people.

The *Testament of Benjamin* expounds upon a judgment that will come upon Israel and the Gentiles (10:8ff.). The Gentiles are the ones that will receive the majority of the judgment, but there is also a judgment that will come upon unrighteous Jews who have forsaken God. In this passage Israel will be the first to be judged for their unrighteousness (10:9). The author does not show the reader by what standard Israel will be judge. In other portions of Jewish literature, the authors clearly show the offenses for which the Gentiles will be judged. However, the offenses of the unrighteous Jews are not given. One may speculate upon these offenses since the author is writing during a time of spiritual decline and secularization of the Jewish religion.⁹⁹ The author seems to want to grab the attention of his reader by saying that judgment will also come upon these Jews who are leading others into hypocrisy and apostasy. After he has judged Israel he will then judge the Gentiles and the Lord will use the Gentiles to convict the Jews and bring them to repentance (10:10). This passage includes portions of Gentiles in the category of the ‘righteous’ who will be saved.¹⁰⁰ This is unexpected because of the exclusivity that the Jews saw toward themselves concerning salvation.

God Will Establish an Earthly Kingdom

1 Enoch (90:18-27)

God smites the Gentiles in their final assault against Israel. This final assault is the last of five assaults upon the Jews depicted starting in *1 Enoch* 89 with the captivity into Babylon going

⁹⁸ Robert Kugler, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Press, 2001), 69.

⁹⁹ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 282.

¹⁰⁰ Kugler, *Testaments*, 86.

through each of the major power changers that Israel has experienced. Chapter 90 depicts this final assault of the Gentiles as the last one because God finally comes down and fights for the Jews and smites the Gentile invaders and causes them to flee from before him. The author here may be implying the typology of a flood and a final destruction.¹⁰¹ This intervention by God is not just felt by the enemies of Israel, but all of creation will feel His wrath (v. 18).

The Jews saw the intervention by God as imminent. This section of *1 Enoch* was written during the time of Judas Maccabaeus and likely penned before his death.¹⁰² The idea of imminence may stem from the fact that the Jews had won a great victory over the Seleucids and this victory would usher in the messianic kingdom and bring about God's final judgment upon the Gentiles. The recounting of previous oppression by the various Gentile nations shows the audience the pain from which the Jews had been continually suffering. One gets the feeling that the Jews had had enough of the various forms of oppression and desire for God to intervene with a mighty hand to deliver them from their enemies. This is made clearer as the thought develops in chapter 90 and in other places throughout this book.

God sets up His judgment throne upon the earth. This passage lies somewhat in contrast to what has been previously seen with the establishment of God's throne in heaven in chapter 61. "The important point, which is a development, is the idea of the punishment of the wicked taking place on this earth, the very scene of their unrighteous triumphs."¹⁰³ The judgment in this passage starts with the one who led this assault on the Jews (90:21) and then the rest of the leaders of the Gentiles were also judged and found guilty (90:25). Those found guilty are thus

¹⁰¹ George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 401.

¹⁰² Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 170.

¹⁰³ R. H. Charles and W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Enoch*, (London: Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1935), xxvi.

cast into a fiery abyss which may be seen as the final judgment for those who fight against God and against His chosen people (90:25-27). Also in contrast to previous sections, the one setting up this throne is seen as God himself and not the anointed one who establishes a throne in heaven.

Jubilees (1:29, 4:26, 23:26-30)

The coming of the kingdom is seen as gradual and “according to our author (1:29, 23:30) this kingdom was to be brought about gradually by the progressive spiritual development of man and a corresponding transformation of nature.”¹⁰⁴ The end of chapter one seems to depict a gradual process. The process of transforming the people will take place over a thousand years of one’s lifetime (23:29). The starting place of the sanctification of the world will be on Mount Zion. From this mountain all the rest of creation will start to become righteous (4:26). While this transformation is happening, part of this process will be a return to the study of the law and seeking to obey His commandments with a covenant renewal (23:26).¹⁰⁵ The oppression by the Gentiles resulted from a disobedience to Torah which prompted the Jews to return to the Law which will result in peace and freedom from the Gentile oppressors.¹⁰⁶ As the Jews steadily become more righteous, their days of life on the earth also become steadily lengthened to a thousand years (23:27). This may be seen as a reversal of how things were before the flood with people living several hundred years.

¹⁰⁴ Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ John C. Endres, *Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Jubilees*, (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1987), 59.

¹⁰⁶ Davenport, *Jubilees*, 36.

Psalms of Solomon (18:1ff.)

This psalm describes an earthly kingdom of eternal duration ruled over by the Messiah under whom the Gentiles will be made to serve.¹⁰⁷ This psalm is not as blatant about the Davidic king as psalm 17 is. It points more toward what the reign of the anointed one will look like and how he leads God's people. Part of his task is to lead and guide every man into works of righteousness (v. 9). This is one of the ways that he accomplishes the work of psalm seventeen which is to rid the land of all evil and unrighteousness. The result of this effort which is established in the kingdom is that God's people no longer turn away to their former ways but walk in a path of righteousness which is established by God (v. 11-14). The view of the kingdom that the psalmist presents seems to be a gradual transition towards righteousness (v. 9-10). The same gradualness is observed in psalm 17 as the nations gradually come to Jerusalem and acknowledge the glory of God.

Sibylline Oracles (3:741-59)

God will establish His kingdom on the earth. In this passage there is an appeal to the Gentiles to serve God so that they too can be part of this future bliss along with the Jews.¹⁰⁸ Without the Jews, the heathen peoples are doomed and therefore there is an appeal to the Gentiles to repent because the Messiah is about to come.¹⁰⁹ The establishment of this kingdom is preceded by a great day of judgment, a judgment as never yet seen upon the earth. This judgment will come from God himself (v. 741-43). After this judgment will come a great blessing for the

¹⁰⁷ Russell, *Method and Message*, 289.

¹⁰⁸ Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 344-45.

¹⁰⁹ John R. Bartlett, *Jews in the Hellenistic world: Josephus, Aristeas, the Sibylline oracles, Eupolemus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 38-39.

righteous who remain upon the earth. This blessing is depicted as something greater than has ever been seen before. This blessing stands in great contrast to the judgment and acts as a reversal of this judgment showing that creation will steadily return to a perfect eternal state (v. 744-59). This is something that is supposed to happen upon the earth where the king will establish His eternal kingdom.

A New Heavens and a New Jerusalem will be Established

1 Enoch (45:4-5; 49:2; 90:28ff.)

A renewal of the universe, which points toward a creation being made new, is depicted in *1 Enoch* 45. It is also seen “that retribution will overtake the wicked, and the righteous will have peace and prosperity, even on this earth, with the setting up of the messianic kingdom; and that at the last there will come, with the final judgment, the destruction of the former heaven and earth, and the creation of the new heaven.”¹¹⁰ There will be a transformation of the heavens and of the earth (v. 4). This new earth will only be for the righteous because the wicked will not dwell there because they will be cast out and no longer dwell with the elect ones (v. 5).

The kingdom is to be an everlasting kingdom (49:2). The author does not portray the Messiah in this passage and the ones already considered as establishing his throne or kingdom on the earth. This verse portrays the Messiah’s everlasting strength and might.¹¹¹ This is not portrayed as a temporary kingdom or a prelude to the eternal kingdom. His throne is established in the heavenlies and it will be a kingdom that endures forever and will not pass away as did the kingdoms of the kings and mighty rules that he has judged.

¹¹⁰ Charles and Oesterly, *Enoch*, xxvi.

¹¹¹ Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *1 Enoch* 2, 178.

The New Jerusalem is now the site of God's judgment and the place where God will reign for eternity (90:28ff.). This does not specifically mention Jerusalem by name, but by the imagery used about the house being made new, the author points to Jerusalem and the temple because this is the city in which God's house dwells. The house is made new and much greater than the first (90:29). After the great judgment upon the mighty leaders of the Gentiles, the righteous Jews are exalted and the Gentiles which remain pay homage to God and to the Jews. A transformation also starts to take place which includes the Gentiles that remain. The Gentiles are changed and given a similar demeanor to that of the Jews and eventually become counted with the righteous Jews (90:30-33). This represents an entirely new era because the judgment is over, Jerusalem is renewed, and there is a return on the dispersion.¹¹²

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Dan 5:13)

The kingdom will be ruled from the New Jerusalem and "the idea of the kingdom, then, is an earthly one and of eternal duration in whose glories even the Gentiles are permitted to share."¹¹³ This city and its people will also remain free from harm for the rest of eternity. They shall dwell in peace with safety and security without threat of exile or war.

Summary

The apocalyptic kingdom of God represented in Jewish literature was not written without exterior influences. The outside political influences helped mold the Jewish concept of the kingdom of God and the Messiah. Apocalyptic literature was a response to the oppressive rule of the Greek and Roman empires. In part, this literature gave people hope to look forward to a day when these nations would be judged for the way that they treated the Jews. This literature also

¹¹² Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 404.

¹¹³ Russell, *Method & Message*, 288.

spoke of what kind of Messiah would be sent to deliver God's people. The aspect of the kingdom of God that becomes the most dominant is an apocalyptic aspect which elaborates upon the end of the age when God's final judgment comes. The views about the kingdom of God that have already been explored are as numerous as the many works that came out of this era. This literature also helped increase messianic expectation. By the first century A.D., the most prevalent view of the kingdom is a militant Messiah who would swiftly bring God's judgment upon the Gentiles and establish God's kingdom on earth. The righteous, the Jews, will reign with the Messiah from Jerusalem after the unrighteous are judged and cast into hell. This survey of apocalyptic literature serves to inform the reader the context in which Jesus came into the world and preached about the kingdom of God. Jesus' audience would have had many of these kingdom and messianic concepts and would have looked to Him to fulfill these preconceived notions.

CHAPTER TWO: THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Second Temple Jewish literature saw a wide variety of views on the kingdom of God. This is the setting in which Jesus came. Jesus would have likely been taught these views as He grew up while attending synagogue and annual travels to the Temple. Jesus would have been familiar with the high messianic expectation of His day because much of this comes out in His own teachings. Jesus would have been familiar with the writings that came out of the last two centuries of Jewish thought. This is also evident in the language that Jesus uses when teaching and rebutting the Pharisees. He would have been familiar with the types of Messiah that the Jews expected. It is against this context that Jesus enters the world and teaches the Jews what the Messiah and the kingdom of God truly look like.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He continually taught about the kingdom of God. Much of this teaching was through the use of parables. In His parables, Jesus dealt with many different aspects of the kingdom. Jesus paints a picture for the Jews that shows them that the kingdom is more than just a kingdom brought about by a militant king who delivers Israel from the hand of their enemies while bringing judgment upon the Gentile oppressors and the unrighteous. In one parable Jesus compares the kingdom to seeds that grow in different types of soil and in another the growing of a mustard seed into the largest plant in the garden. Jesus uses the imagery in these parables to convey a certain truth about the kingdom which was not previously perceived by His audience. The message conveyed in these parables about the kingdom illustrates a different idea about the kingdom than what the Jews were expecting the kingdom to be like.

Jesus directly answers the teachers of the Jews about their own apocalyptic conceptions of the kingdom through the use of a few different parables as seen in Matthew 21- 22. The parables in these passages are directed toward the Pharisees and Sadducees who were the ones

teaching the Jews about their ideas of the kingdom. Jesus is speaking these parables to them to show where their teachings are flawed and how they led the people astray from the true Word of God.

Jesus gets even more in depth with His own disciples as they ask Him about the times and seasons of God's coming and final judgment in Matthew 24-25. This is an area where Jesus confirms some of what has been taught concerning the final judgment, but there are also many places in His teaching where He differs from the teaching of Jewish literature and the popular eschatology of His day. One interesting characteristic of these two chapters are that Jesus speaks plainly to His disciples concerning the last things. Jesus uses parables here as well, but He also gives an explanation of the teaching from these parables to make clear what He is teaching His disciples.

The Kingdom Taken from the Jews and Given to Others.

The occasion for the following parables is that Jesus is in Jerusalem for Passover one last time just before His crucifixion. The Pharisees and Sadducees use this opportunity to question and challenge Jesus in order to catch Him in His own words in order to arrest Him and sentence Him to death. Jesus utilizes this opportunity to preach directly to the heart of the true nature of the religious leaders. Through these parables, Jesus points out the failures of the religious leaders to properly guide the people toward righteousness and be proper caretakers of the Law and the people of Israel which God has entrusted them with. Jesus also shows them how they are the ones who God chose to give His invitation to and they are the ones who rejected this invitation to the kingdom. Because of this rejection, God is now giving this kingdom to others who are the lowly of Israel and even those who are outside of Israel.

The Parable of the Landowner (Matthew 21:33-46)

The Parable of the Landowner is an intriguing parable because of the imagery conveyed within it. Jesus summarizes the main thought of the entire Old Testament of Jewish disobedience within the perimeters of this parable since “the whole nation is held guilty along with its leaders, and the who spectacle of their unbelief, stretching from the distant past to the imminent crucifixion of the Messiah, is held against them. The Parable thus embraces the entire conflict between Israel and the Lord.”¹¹⁴ At the end of the parable, the religious leaders do not seem to know what this parable is about because of how they respond to Jesus’ question. However, their answer to the question prompts Jesus to make a final statement and application of the parable which reveals to them what He seeks to convey from the parable. It is this accusation which caused them to want to arrest Jesus and deliver Him to be crucified.

This parable is also significant in understanding a teaching about the kingdom of God.

If this parable is in fact about the kingdom, then two significant elements immediately fasten in the mind the first is the proclamation *everything is now ready*: the beasts are slain, the preparations are complete, the table are spread, the guests have only to come and eat. The second is that although those originally invited have spurned the invitations, others have joyfully accepted them; the newly invited guests are streaming into the house and taking their places at the tables, and the house is getting full. The picture does not suggest that God in his merciful providence will arrange a great feast for mankind *some day*. On the contrary, the parable indicates that *the feast is spread*. The Jewish hope is characteristically expressed in the exclamation of a guest sitting at table with Jesus.¹¹⁵

Further, this parable also contains teachings that were contrary to what was taught by Second Temple Jewish literature of the kingdom being only for the Jews and the Jews would be the center of this kingdom. The thought of rejection by God was completely foreign to the Jews. The

¹¹⁴ H. N. Ridderbos, *Bible Students Commentary: Matthew*, Trans. Ray Togtman, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 397.

¹¹⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 120-21.

religious leaders saw themselves as the righteous of God and not the unrighteous Gentiles who were the ones to be judged when the Messiah would come and establish His throne in Jerusalem.

The Land Owner

The land owner of the parable is identified as God.¹¹⁶ He is the one who chose the nation of Israel and gave them a promised land which they did not have to build for themselves. He is also the one who gave the people His Law and gave them commands to follow. He is the one who sent various prophets to the people as they periodically disobeyed His Law. From this parable, God is ultimately the one rejected by the very people who He chose and weaned from infancy.

The Vineyard

The vineyard is identified as the house of Israel (cf. Isaiah 5:7). This may be connected to the land itself since a major part of the promise to Abraham was the promise of the land or even the nation of Israel as a whole.¹¹⁷ It seems that the allusion to Isaiah 5 more fully supports the idea of the vineyard representing the nation of Israel. The conclusion to this parable shows that this vineyard will be given to other tenants. This is a reason why Jesus is not referring to a literal physical nation or land. This new nation is a nation drawn from both Jews and Gentiles, thus a new Israel.¹¹⁸

The Vine-Growers

¹¹⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 330.

¹¹⁷ Blomberg, *Parables*, 330.

¹¹⁸ France, *Matthew*, 817.

The vine-growers or the tenants represent the leaders of Israel, both political and spiritual.

Even without the allusion to Isaiah 5 the listeners would know that the parable was about God and his people, but no Jewish listener would identify himself or herself with the tenants. Rather, the tenants would be evil people, possibly the Romans, who were violating God's people, or at least the purposes of God with his people. Not until the stone quotation is the impact of the parable made clear.¹¹⁹

This parable is directed toward those who are in a position of authority and those who teach the ways of the Law (v. 45). These are the ones who hold similar positions to those that have been held by the Jews since they came into the land. They are the ones who should have been teaching the people properly and upholding the Law in a just manner. However, when the leaders of Israel failed to keep the commands of the Lord, God sent prophets, who are the servants of the parable, to preach to the people and beseech the people to return to the Lord. The leaders typically did not like these messages and often had the prophets beaten, stoned, and even killed as Jesus nuances in this parable.

The Servants

The servants are mainly depicted as the prophets of the Old Testament.¹²⁰ The prophets were typically ones that were sent by God with a message for a certain individual such as a specific leader or ruler. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament remain unnamed and only their message is given. Other prophets spoke messages to groups of people and even to certain nations. Most of the messages were to the Israelite leadership. One reason why the rulers and the people did not like the message was because it revealed their sin and the people did not want to give up this sin. Another reason for persecuting the prophets was because they spoke of Israel's

¹¹⁹ Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 290.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 288.

coming judgment. In general, the message of this judgment seems to have been rejected by the people and therefore a rejection of the prophet sent by God.

The Son

The son in this parable is represented as Jesus.¹²¹ Throughout the gospels Jesus was identified as the Son of God. Although in Matthew Jesus does not directly call himself the Son of God, He does accept the title (Matthew 16:16). The Pharisees and Sadducees would have heard and known claims about Jesus as being the son of God, for this is what they ask Him while Jesus is on trial and thus Jesus confirms their question by an affirmation of His sonship. After Jesus finished this parable, the Jews would have known that the son in the story referred to Jesus because this is part of the reason why they sought to arrest Him.

The Stone Which the Builders Rejected

When Jesus gets to this point in His conversation with the religious leaders, He has finished with the parable itself. He goes on to make application of this parable. He further explains His relationship with the religious leaders by quoting Psalm 118:22-23 and directly corresponding that as a prophecy about himself and the religious leaders. This quotation is the key to understanding the parable because it determines how a first century Jew would have heard and understood this parable.¹²² This quotation definitively points to the religious leaders that Jesus is speaking about them as the ones that reject this cornerstone. This leads to the fact that “Jesus concludes the story with a prediction of His future victory. The death of the only son who

¹²¹ Ibid., 294.

¹²² Ibid., 289-90.

is rejected by the builders will not hinder the ultimate success of the son of David.”¹²³ Jesus as the cornerstone shows the significance of who He claims to be for the cornerstone is the most important stone in the building of a house or building.

The Kingdom Taken Away

The kingdom’s being taken away and given to others is a significant teaching in this parable because it is contrary to what the Jews have been teaching about the kingdom. The irony of the situation is that the religious leaders themselves are the ones who give this answer to their own fate (v. 41). Jesus confirms their conclusion about the rejection (v. 43) and shows that “the kingdom is transferred because of failure to render what is due to God and at least partly because of the rejection of God’s envoy.”¹²⁴ The final rejection of the religious leaders would come when they sought His crucifixion and had Him killed.

The taking away of the kingdom is quite significant because the Jews saw themselves as God’s righteous chosen people who would inherit the kingdom. God was about to intervene on their behalf and judge the nations that oppressed them (cf. 1 Enoch 61:8ff; 45:3; 49:4). This idea is strongly brought out in Old Testament thought as well as Second Temple literature. It would have been nowhere in the thoughts of any of the Jews that God was going to give the kingdom to a people other than Israel. This statement that Jesus made was completely foreign; especially when He concludes His statement by saying that the kingdom will be given to a different people.

¹²³ Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 220.

¹²⁴ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 295.

The Kingdom Given to Others

The statement of the kingdom's being given to another people would not resonate too well with a people who had strong nationalistic pride. The Jews saw those outside of Israel as dogs and often would not associate with people of other nations unless they had to. This parable alludes to future events as one "may reasonably see an allusion to the horrors of the Roman capture of Jerusalem: and in the concluding sentence we surely have the doctrine of the rejection of Israel and the election of the Gentiles."¹²⁵ The peculiar part of this verse is the word which identifies the group of people to whom the kingdom was going to be given. The word which Jesus uses is *ethnos*. This word was typically used by the Jews to refer to other nations than themselves.¹²⁶ This is also a word the Jews used to mean Gentile. Jesus is telling the religious leaders that not only are they going to be rejected as leaders by God, but the nation of Israel itself is eventually going to be rejected by God for their rejection of His son. God giving the kingdom to others and possibly the Gentiles was a repugnant thought to the Jews which in part was another reason why they wanted to seize Him and put Him to death

The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14)

The Parable of the Wedding Feast is a continuing account of the Parable of the Landowner. Both of these parables are directed toward the religious leaders and much of the imagery and figures used are the same in each of the parables.¹²⁷ A few differences remain which nuance different aspects of the kingdom. This Parable is about Israel's response to Jesus.¹²⁸ This

¹²⁵ Dodd, *Parables*, 99.

¹²⁶ France, *Matthew*, 816-17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 821.

¹²⁸ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 314.

parable is used to further illustrate the extent of the rejection of the Messiah by the religious leaders and ultimately by the Jews as a whole. This parable also includes imagery that has a few comparisons and contrasts to Second Temple Jewish literature which will be explored more in depth below (cf. 1 Enoch 10:4; 62:15-16). The main contrast in this parable compared to Jewish literature is the identification of who is actually the ones who will be righteous in the kingdom and inherit the kingdom and the ones who will be judged and destroyed. The religious leaders saw themselves as righteous and the ones who will inherit the kingdom. Jesus says that this will not be so because they rejected God's anointed one and therefore God chooses to invite the unworthy and even the Gentiles to inherit the kingdom. This contrast holds a great amount of irony because those seen by the religious leaders as unrighteous are the ones that will inherit the kingdom instead of those that were righteous in their own eyes.

The King

The king in this parable is representative of God. The depiction of God in this parable is different from the first parable. God represented as king would be the way that the Jews would have viewed God in the Old Testament.¹²⁹ This is also seen in some of the Second Temple literature (cf. 1 Enoch 90:18-27; Jubilees 1:29; 4:26; 23:26-30). In these writings God is depicted as a king who comes down from heaven mightily and conquering and judging Israel's enemies. The religious leaders whom Jesus was talking to would have understood who this king was supposed to be.

The king in this story is acting typical to what one in the first century might expect a king to do when giving a wedding feast for a son.¹³⁰ This would have been a serious event because the

¹²⁹ France, *Matthew*, 823.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 822.

son in this parable is likely being depicted as the inheritor of the throne and therefore this wedding would be a milestone for the kingdom and of utmost importance for the invited guests to attend. The rejection of the invitation is ultimately a rejection of the king and the king's son.

The Wedding Feast

The wedding feast itself is viewed differently by scholars. One thing that it may represent is the marriage of God and Israel since throughout the Old Testament God is depicted as the Bridegroom and Israel as the bride (Isaiah 54:5; 61:10; 62:5; Hosea 2). However, this idea falls short because one will see later that Israel is represented as the invited guests and not as the son's bride. Another view is that this is the feast at the consummation of the age.¹³¹ This is a possibility because of the result of the one thrown out of the banquet to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. However, this banquet is more than that. It can be seen as God's invitation of salvation to His chosen people to enter into His kingdom and enjoy the eternal blessings of the marriage with His son.¹³²

The Servants

The servants once again in this parable represent the prophets of the Old Testament.¹³³ From a New Testament perspective, the disciples and Apostles of Jesus can be added to this group because they also were sent into the towns and cities of Israel to preach the kingdom of God and admonish the Israelites to repent and invite them into Christ's kingdom. In the

¹³¹ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 304.

¹³² Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 322-23.

¹³³ France, *Matthew*, 824.

immediate context Jesus is talking about the Old Testament prophets because of the treatment that they receive by the invited guests. This treatment should be seen in light of the previous Parable of the Landowner. The disciples at this point had not yet faced this degree of persecution.

The Initial Invitation

The initial invitation is extended to those who are the important ones of the kingdom such as nobles or wealthy land owners. The invitation in this parable represents the invitation that the prophets would extend to the people.¹³⁴ The invitation of the prophets was often a message of repentance to put away foreign gods and return to the Lord and serve Him only. Within the invitation of the parable the king tells his servants to tell the invited guests that the banquet is all ready and all they have to do is show up and celebrate with him. The invitation to repentance was the same for Israel. God was ready and willing to forgive them and everything was set and ready for them and the Jews still refused the invitation regardless of how easy and enticing the invitation of blessing may have been.

The Invited Guests

The invited guests represent the religious leaders of Jesus' day.¹³⁵ They are the ones that God chose through His promise to Israel. A similar representation is also given of the tenants of the vineyard in the previous parable. One similarity to the previous parable is the way that they treated the servants which were sent to them. Jesus uses this part of the parable for shock value. He desires to get the attention of His listener because an invited guest would not treat a messenger in this fashion after receiving an invitation to a royal wedding. This would be

¹³⁴ Ibid., 824.

¹³⁵ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 314.

something accepted with a feeling of great honor that even the king would think to invite this person to his son's wedding. The other shock effect is the response that the invitees give to the servants to the disregard for why they cannot go to the banquet and "the enormity of the rejection of the invitations to the feast is greatly increased by the fact that the host is depicted as a monarch."¹³⁶ Again, one would not just keep going on about one's business as a reason to not attend such a grand occasion.¹³⁷ The opposite would be true, for the guests would cancel or postpone all other obligations in order to attend.

The Destruction of the Invited Guests

This is a turning point of the story because now the king is enraged at not only the treatment of his servants but also at the flippant disregard for such a joyous occasion. This can also be seen as referring to a form of judgment for the Jews whether one like the one coming in 70 A.D. upon Jerusalem or even the final judgment at the end of the age, but the allusion is not close enough to be convincing.¹³⁸ Whatever this judgment may be, it is a different judgment than the one depicted in Jewish literature. That judgment is on the Gentiles and mostly only on the Gentiles (cf. Ps. of Sol. 17:23-38; Test. of Dan. 5:10-11). The judgment that Jesus is talking about in this parable is clearly on the Jews and the blessings of the wedding feast are bestowed upon the undesirables of the nation and those considered the least and most unlikely to be extended the offer of salvation. One may also interpret this invitation as going out to not only the poor and lowly of the Jews but also the Gentiles as well,¹³⁹ especially in light of the

¹³⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 120.

¹³⁷ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 304.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 309.

¹³⁹ France, *Matthew*, 826.

interpretation given to the previous parable since Matthew presents both of these parables to the same group of people.

The Invitation Extended

The king desires to have a full house regardless of who the original invitation was for and decides to extend the invitation to the least desired of the populace. The original invitation was for the Jews who ultimately reject Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, He extends the invitation to those that will accept it such as the poor and lowly of society and even to the Gentiles. It was unthinkable for the king “to gather in poor men off the streets, laboring men and idle men, bad men and good men, to the wedding of the Crown Prince—this was a new thing under the sun.”¹⁴⁰ The unexpected ones are the ones who will ultimately receive the invitation for salvation and gladly accept it and all of the blessings that come with it.

The Righteous Rewarded and Wicked Punished

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43)

The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus’ clearest parables about the final judgment of the righteous and unrighteous. The reason for this is that this is one of the few parables of which Jesus gives an explanation. One of the reasons for Jesus to explain such a parable is that “the immediate and natural reaction of the people to Jesus’ announcement of the presence of God’s kingdom was to wonder about the continuing presence of evil in the world, particularly as manifested in Roman rule over the people of God.”¹⁴¹ As for comparing this parable to Second

¹⁴⁰ James M. Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2 the Triumph of the King*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 470.

¹⁴¹ Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1-52),” *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, Ed. Richard N. Longenecker, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 109.

Temple Jewish literature, this parable has very similar elements to the judgment portions in Jewish literature. The judgment depicted in this literature is either done by God or by God's Messiah and a similar fate awaits the unrighteous as seen in this parable. The use of the term Son of Man as being the one who judges is also seen throughout parts of Jewish literature (cf. 1 Enoch 62:5; 69:27; Ps. of Sol. 17:21-32).

The Sower

Jesus identifies the sower as the 'Son of Man.' This is a term that Jesus uses throughout the gospels to refer to himself,¹⁴² thus the Son of Man in this parable should be seen as Jesus. This parable is in a series of parables that Jesus uses farm analogies to depict various aspects of the kingdom of God and "in this parable the picture of sowing reflects the initiation of the saving sovereignty of God in the word and deed of Jesus."¹⁴³ He is the that sows this good seed in the field and He is identified at the end of the parable as the one who will send out his angels at the end of the age to gather both the good and the evil ones.

The Son of Man, identified as the sower of good seed, has a role of sowing the word of God, or God's kingdom, on earth. Secondly, the Son of Man has the role of ruling over an interim kingdom before the final judgment when God's kingdom comes fully into being. And thirdly, the Son of Man has the role of judging in that final judgment, and of sending out the angels to root out the causes of evil and all evildoers. In this role, the fate of those judged is final and eternal.¹⁴⁴

The title 'Son of Man' is seen throughout various writings during the Second Temple era. The Son of Man is typically seen in Jewish literature as a messianic figure and sometimes as one who brings salvation (cf. 1 Enoch 48:7).

¹⁴² Richard N. Longenecker, "'Son of Man' as a Self-Designation of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 12:3 (Summer 1969) 158.

¹⁴³ Beasley Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Walck, *Son of Man*, 172.

The Good Seed

Jesus identifies the good seeds as ‘sons of the kingdom.’ Jesus does not give much more description or identification to the sons of the kingdom. Even without further explanation one can quickly make a relatively accurate conclusion that the sons of the kingdom are those that stand righteous before God and they stand opposed to ‘the sons of the evil one’ who will be rooted out and finally judged.¹⁴⁵ These are the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God.

The Enemy

Jesus identifies the evil one with the devil. The devil is also often referred to as Satan who is the one who seeks to deceive wherever and however he can. Therefore, “to depict Satan as a spiteful enemy trying to spoil the good work of the landowner and ruin his harvest expresses graphically his status in biblical literature: He is a spoiler, not a constructive authority in his own right.”¹⁴⁶ He is depicted the same way throughout Jewish literature as he is the New Testament (cf. 1 Enoch 54:6; Test. of Dan 3:6). This evil one is responsible for planting the bad seed or those men throughout history who seek to do unrighteous deeds all their lives.

The Tares

The tares represented as the ‘sons of the evil one.’ This depiction lays in stark contrast to the sons of the kingdom. These are the unrighteous of the world. The unrighteous of the world is a very common theme throughout Jewish literature. However, it is more common to see the unrighteous in Jewish literature as those outside of Israel and especially the rulers of the Gentiles who seek to oppress the Israelites. The fate of the unrighteous remains the same regardless of

¹⁴⁵ France, *Matthew*, 533.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 535.

whether the teaching comes from Jewish literature or Jesus. At the end of the age the righteous and unrighteous will be separated and the unrighteous will receive an eternal punishment (cf. Assum. of Moses 10:10). The difference comes in who the righteous and unrighteous are. As previously demonstrated, the religious leaders had a completely different view of the identity of the righteous than Jesus did.

The Harvest

Jesus identifies the harvest as the end of the age when the final judgment will take place. This parable does not share much detail about what this time will look like. However, Jesus does expand on what the end of the age will look like in Matthew 24-25. The end of the age is also a common theme throughout much of the Jewish literature. The Jews saw this happening at any moment (cf. 1 Enoch 90; Jubilees 1). They also expected that when the Messiah came there would be an establishment of a pure Jewish community and an expulsion of the Romans and other enemies.¹⁴⁷ In contrast, Jesus does not give a time frame to when this event will happen (cf. Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6-7).

The Separation

The Separation of the wheat and the tares is depicted as the separation of the evil ones and the righteous ones done by the angels since ““the angels’ were commonly believed in Jewish tradition to be administrators of the will of God in accomplishing the eschatological judgment (cf. [1 Enoch] 46:5; 63:1).”¹⁴⁸ Along with this separation comes the judgment due each group. The wicked will be cast into the fire and the righteous will shine forth into the kingdom.

¹⁴⁷ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 206.

¹⁴⁸ Hagner, “Matthew’s Parables of the Kingdom,” 111.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha indicate that the motif of a fiery judgment circulated widely during the Second Temple period. It was rooted in several biblical passages, and such interpretations for these Scriptures could have arisen at any time. In all events, the fire used for burning the tares in the Gospel parable portrayed a fearful end in the final judgment of the human soul.¹⁴⁹

This is a very harsh reality of what will happen to the unrighteous. This passage also serves as a warning to what will happen to those that do not repent. This imagery of separation is also prevalent in Second Temple Jewish literature where the elect will dwell in the kingdom, but sinners will not set foot therein and be destroyed from the face of the earth (cf. 1 Enoch 45:2-6; 67:13; 103:7; Test. of Jud. 25:3). From a first century Jewish perspective, the Jews would have seen themselves as the wheat and the Gentiles as the tares. The tendency of Jewish literature was to see the Jews as 'righteous' and the Gentiles as 'unrighteous.'¹⁵⁰ However, this perspective contrasts with Jesus' teachings because elsewhere throughout the gospels Jesus further defines who the righteous one is and for many of the Jews, the ones who were seen as righteous are opposite to what the religious leaders taught.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)

This parable, as well as the Parable of the Talents, is given in light of what has already been said about the end of the age, the coming judgment, and the second coming of Christ.¹⁵¹ These two parables also have a different audience from first two parables analyzed. These parables are spoken to Jesus' disciples and not to the crowds or even in the hearing of the religious leaders. The reason for this is because the message contained within is spoken specifically for the followers of Christ as they await His second coming. These parables do not

¹⁴⁹ Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 290.

¹⁵⁰ Russell, *Method and Message*, 297.

¹⁵¹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 511.

speak of how things presently are concerning the kingdom, but how they will be at the advent of the Son of Man.¹⁵² These parables show His followers how they are supposed to act with prudence and work with diligence as they wait for His return. Even with these particular messages from these parables, there are still aspects of the kingdom that compare and contrast with Second Temple Jewish literature. These will be made known as the text is unfolded and interpreted.

The Foolish Virgins

The virgins of this story represent two distinct groups of people. The foolish ones represent those that expected an immediate coming of the Messiah and therefore they did not prepare properly for a possible delay in His coming.¹⁵³ This parable shows what happens to the one who neglects to be prepared and when the end does come it is too late to repent and find entrance into the kingdom.¹⁵⁴ The judgment that comes upon the group of foolish virgins happens because of lack of prudence, but this is not a punishment which will happen to those who are in Christ.¹⁵⁵ Jesus clearly teaches that “there is a fundamental division between those who were ready and those who were unready, and that this division has eternal consequences for their contrasting destinies.” Regardless of who this group is, it is a warning to the followers of Christ to not be foolish concerning the second coming, but always be prepared.

¹⁵² France, *Matthew*, 948.

¹⁵³ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 241.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹⁵⁵ Richard T. France, “On Being Ready (Matthew 25:1-46),” *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, Ed. Richard N. Longenecker, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 183.

The Prudent Virgins

The second group of virgins is easier to interpret due to the nature of the audience and what Jesus has already talked about concerning His second coming. These virgins are seen as the prepared followers of Christ who would be ready for Christ's return even if there was a delay.¹⁵⁶ Just like the foolish virgins, these five also expected the bridegroom to be on time, but there was also an expectation, with all weddings, that the bridegroom might be running a little late.¹⁵⁷ Knowing the tendencies of the bridegroom helped the prudent virgins to be prepared for his late coming.

The comparison to Jewish literature comes in seeing that the Jews did not typically see the Messiah being delayed in His coming (cf. Ps. of Sol. 2:29; 17). With a high messianic expectation, there was an expectation that the Messiah could come at any moment and "there was an air of eager, even desperate, expectancy that soon, very soon, God's rule would suddenly and devastatingly break in and God himself, either in person or through His Messiah, would right all wrongs and reward the patience and longsuffering of the righteous."¹⁵⁸ Impatience on the part of the Jews caused them to want to bring about God's kingdom on their own terms, which led to their destruction. Jesus did not fulfill for them the type of Messiah that they were looking for.

The Bridegroom

The bridegroom is depicted as Jesus himself being the one with a delayed return.¹⁵⁹ It was typical that the bridegroom would be delayed in first century Jewish weddings.¹⁶⁰ At the

¹⁵⁶ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 241.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

¹⁵⁸ Russell, *Method and Message*, 263.

¹⁵⁹ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 514-15.

time of this parable, Jesus is about to be crucified and then after His resurrection He will ascend to heaven. Jesus says that one of the reasons for His going is to prepare a place for His followers (John 14:2-3). However, here Jesus says that there will be a delay in His coming and He does not divulge when that will be, but He gives signs to His disciples to be mindful of that lead up to His return. Jewish literature also makes mention of certain signs which will precede the coming of the Messiah (cf. Assum. of Moses 8:1; Jub. 23:13ff.; 1 Enoch 80:2-7). The message of this parable seems to say that since there will be a delay in His return, one should be prepared for that delay.¹⁶¹ The bridegroom comes in a similar manner as the as the Messiah comes as depicted in Jewish literature. This Messiah will judge the prudent and the foolish, the righteous and unrighteous.

Judgment

The theme of judgment is also prevalent in this parable as well as Jewish literature. Once again there are two distinct groups here which will be judged, the foolish and the prudent and there is a continued teaching that the kingdom will be a time of separation.¹⁶² This common theme also prevails in the Parable of the Talents as well as throughout other areas of Jesus' teachings and parables. Jewish literature typically portrays the groups receiving judgment as the Gentiles. Jesus does not make a distinction between ethnic groups concerning those righteous and unrighteous. The distinction is usually centered around one's deeds and in the case of this parable, one's entrance into the kingdom is determined by whether or not the bridegroom knows

¹⁶⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 212.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁶² Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 517.

Him. Those that the Bridegroom does not know are not allowed into the kingdom (cf. Matthew 7:21-23).

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

The Parable of the Talents is presented alongside the previous parable and therefore both of them should be interpreted together. This parable reiterates the diligence that one is to have while waiting for Christ to return. “The parable is a call to faithfulness and a warning against unfaithfulness.”¹⁶³ This parable also shows the unexpectedness of this return. Common themes run throughout both of these parables and therefore there is an overlap in a few aspects of interpretation.

The Master

The master in this parable is depicted as the Messiah himself.¹⁶⁴ The Messiah is seen as one who sends out His servants to preach the gospel and do the work of the kingdom which He has entrusted to them.¹⁶⁵ In the Jewish mindset an unexpected thing happens with this Messiah; He leaves. This could be a foreign concept to some Jews because the Messiah depicted in some Jewish literature was one who was there to stay and establish an eternal kingdom (cf. Ps. of Sol. 18:1ff.; Syb. Or. 3:741-59). Another aspect, which was also seen in the previous parable, is that the master is delayed in His return. It seems that the thrust of this parable is not the identity of the master, but the expectation that the master has for those whom He has entrusted with certain ‘talents’ to be diligent to multiply those ‘talents.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Ibid., 533.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 537-39.

¹⁶⁵ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 270-71.

¹⁶⁶ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 533-35.

The Reward and Punishment

This parable has represented within it two types of servants and “the focus of the story is on the contrasting achievements and fates of the first two slaves in comparison with the third. And since the third is dealt with at greater length than those who succeeded, it seems clear that it is his example that we are particularly meant to notice and to heed as a warning.”¹⁶⁷ Two of the servants are prudent and receive a just reward for their diligence, but “at the other end of the parable, the closing sentence goes beyond depriving the guilty servant of his talent: the man is thrust into outer darkness—that is, outside the kingdom of God—and hence we are to assume that the sentence is that of the Lord at the judgment.”¹⁶⁸ The last servant represents a foolish servant who misuses the task afforded him by his master and he receives just punishment for his lack of diligence. The difference of the two represents the righteous and the unrighteous who will be duly judged for their righteousness and wickedness.

This judgment of the righteous and the wicked is often represented throughout Jewish literature. In some places it is a judgment based on spiritual righteousness and often accompanied with the idea of righteous deeds as Jesus lays out in Matthew 25:31-46. There is, however, a contrast in some portions of Jewish literature. As previously noted, some teachings advocate that the righteous represent the Jewish people and the unrighteous as all Gentiles. It does not seem that Jesus makes a distinction between Jew and Gentile. In fact, Jesus often advocates a harsher punishment for the Jews because they had the Law and the Prophets and chose to ignore and persecute them (cf. Matthew 23:13-38). The Jews would have seen the

¹⁶⁷ France, “On Being Ready,” 185.

¹⁶⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 218.

burying of this money in the ground as a wise move,¹⁶⁹ but this action is deemed foolish and lazy by Jesus and casts this one into outer darkness.

Destruction is Coming to Jerusalem and not the Enemies of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1-2)

This is a significant passage because it is dramatically opposed to what is pictured in Jewish literature of Jerusalem being the place from which the Messiah will come and reign and rule for eternity. In fact the opposite is predicted to happen. Most equate this prophecy with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹⁷⁰ This event was a shock to many Jews and even Christians because both groups saw the coming of the Messiah as imminent. Instead of Jerusalem becoming the place from which judgment would come forth, Jerusalem is the place which receives judgment. This statement about the temple and ultimately about Jerusalem would have been shocking to the ears of the disciples. It is likely that the disciples were thinking that Jesus at this moment in time was about to claim his kingdom in Jerusalem. This anticipation is not without merit because a few days prior Jesus was led into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey and received a kingly welcome by the people. Jesus also had unmatched confrontations with many of the Jewish leaders and other leading officials. Therefore, for Jesus to be speaking in terms of judgment for the Jews would have been counter to what the disciples would have been taught all their lives about the Messiah.

The Righteous will Suffer at the Hands of the Wicked (Matt. 24:9-14)

The depiction from Jewish literature suggests that the Messiah was about to come and when He did all of the sufferings and oppression would come to an end and there would be an

¹⁶⁹ Blomberg, *Interpreting*, 272.

¹⁷⁰ France, *Matthew*, 887-89.

ushered in time of peace. However, Jesus depicts quite a different portrait. The followers of Jesus, who they believed to be the Messiah, would receive continued persecution and would continue until the gospel was preached to the entire world.¹⁷¹ This would be an unexpected teaching for the disciples and even for the Jews in general because once the Messiah comes there was not any more suffering that was to take place for the Jews. This may have been confusing for the disciples because they believed that the Messiah was the one in front of them. At this point, they still did not understand the full implications of what Jesus was about to do.

The Advent of False Messiahs prior to the Coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:15-23)

The theme of antichrist is prevalent in Matthew 24 and throughout other portions New Testament. The concept in Jewish literature of one who seeks to lead the righteous astray such as Beliar in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* or one with the spirit of Beliar in *Jubilees* is not as fully developed as the antichrist in the New Testament. This ‘lawless one’ will lead a final assault and after his defeat this deceiver will be judged and receive eternal punishment.¹⁷² Beliar will make one final assault against Jerusalem just as the Antichrist depicted in Revelation will make an assault against God’s people just before his final judgment.¹⁷³

The idea of the Messiah in Jewish literature does not give the picture of a false Messiah coming prior to the advent of the true Messiah who makes claims to certain kingship and authority. There is a prevalent leader outside of Israel that will challenge the true Messiah, but there is not a teaching that shows false Messiahs coming and leading astray the elect who claim

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 906.

¹⁷² Helyer, “The Necessity, Problems, and Promise,” 615.

¹⁷³ Russell, *Method and Message*, 277.

to be this king.¹⁷⁴ The rise of false prophets is prevalent, but there is only one main idea of a Messiah prevalent in Jewish literature which is God's anointed who will deliver His people Israel and bring about God's kingdom on earth (cf. 1 Enoch 90:18-27; Syb. Or. 3:741-59).

One comparison of Jesus' teaching and the teaching from Jewish literature is the steadily increasing persecution of God's people just before the coming of the Son of Man. Many of the same ideas exist between the two teachings concerning the events which take place prior to the coming Messiah. Jesus mentions the 'abomination of desolation' from Daniel 9:27. Jesus also uses this prophecy to point to a similar figure in the future who will again desecrate the Temple. This individual may have already come in the form of one from Rome such as emperor Gaius or the Roman troops, since Rome was a constant threat.¹⁷⁵ Another interpreter sees the 'abomination' as Israel's covenantal infidelity and particularly the rejection of Jesus as messianic king. He sees the 'desolation' as the natural consequence of her disobedience through the use of Roman intervention.¹⁷⁶ Regardless of who this may be, Jesus points to this event as what will bring about the last great tribulation just prior to the coming of the Son of Man. The parallels to a great tribulation between Jesus' teaching and Jewish literature are seen throughout Jewish literature. Both teach that the Messiah will come right after this great persecution (*Assum. Mos.* 8:1-5).

The Arrival of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:30-31)

The coming of the Son of Man or the Messiah in Jewish literature does not always give an origin of where He comes from. Some sources depict Him coming from heaven and others

¹⁷⁴ Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds*, 290.

¹⁷⁵ France, *Matthew*, 913.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Theophilos, "The Abomination of Desolation in Matthew 24:15," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 60:1 (2009), 160.

from earthly lineage. The Messiah is often depicted as showing up without much warning or many signs. Matthew on the other hand specifies that the Messiah will come after many signs of His arrival are given and He gives a clear and precise portrayal of this coming of the Messiah. “The content of the sign of the Son of Man has been hotly debated, with some taking the view that a heavenly portent of some kind, a light, a banner, or the cross, was envisioned, while most of modern scholarship views the genitive as appositive, understanding that the sign *is* the Son of Man Himself.”¹⁷⁷ Both Jesus’ teaching and Jewish literature speak of the force and power in which He will come. Jewish literature often depicts His coming with force and might with a strong conquering army.¹⁷⁸ In Matthew those that come with the Messiah are the angels who gather the elect from the four winds. This gathering of the elect is also often represented in Jewish literature as the Diaspora Jews being gathered back to Jerusalem to partake in the kingdom.

The Judgment of the Righteous and Wicked (Matt. 25:31-46)

In Matthew 24:31-46, Jesus presents what the final judgment will look like and consist of. “Jesus’ eschatology is one of imminence, stressing present action over against anticipating the final result.”¹⁷⁹ He also shows by what criteria He judges the righteous and the wicked. One of the focuses of this passage is the punishment and the reward each group will obtain. For the wicked, He says that they will get the same punishment that is reserved for the Devil and his angels. This place of punish is often represented with fire throughout the gospels and in various places referred to as Hell. In Jewish literature, hell is often referred to as Gehenna which is the

¹⁷⁷ Walck, *Son of Man*, 191.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁷⁹ Young, *Parables*, 295.

final resting place of those that are wicked, both men and angels, and a place of fire and everlasting torment.¹⁸⁰ This is also the representation that is found in various Jewish writings (cf. As. Mos. 10:10). The receivers of the punishment are similar if not the same and the place of punishment is often seen as a place of fire and everlasting torment.

The place of reward in this parable is also given. The inheritance of the righteous is eternal life which is spent forever dwelling in the kingdom. This is also an idea that transpires from Jewish literature (cf. 1 Enoch 45:3-6; 61:8; 62:2-11; 69:29; 90:17-42). Various writings depict an eternal kingdom, whether earthly or heavenly, which the righteous will inherit and reign with the Messiah over the nations forever.

There is a difference in what this judgment looks like and who will do the judging. Matthew represents Jesus as the one doing the judging. Some Jewish literature shows God as the judge and others as the Messiah as the one judging the nations (cf. Psalms of Solomon 10:4; 11:6; 14:12-13; 17:26-32). Matthew's main goal in this passage, however does not seem to be to show what the judgment looks like, but to show who will receive this judgment.

We can assume that the saying concerning the sheep and the goats is referring to humanity in its entirety assembled before the son of man for judgment—not the Gentiles alone, but all mankind including those who confess Christ and those who know nothing of him. If that is in fact the case, then all the parallels between this vision and Jewish apocalypses and the religious ethical teaching of the Jews and other nations are transcended in a unique phenomenon: *the Son of Man, revealed in the name Jesus, owns his unity with mankind in all places and at all times.* Deeds of love and compassion shown to the members of the human race are accepted as having been shown to him, just as deeds of love withheld from individuals are viewed from being withheld from him. To our knowledge such a concept is unknown in the literature of the Jews or of the nations surrounding them.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Hans Scharan, "Part 1: Gehenna in the Synoptics," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 149:595 (July 1992) 328-29.

¹⁸¹ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, 310.

Many areas of Jewish literature show a gathering of the nations to come before the Messiah for judgment.¹⁸² Jesus shows that there is an idea that there will be those that will be judged who viewed themselves as righteous, but in the end they are judged because of the wickedness of their deeds. It is likely that Jesus may be talking about Jews who saw themselves as righteous because of their nationality and the keeping of the law. It is also possible that since Jesus is only speaking to His disciples that the judgment is for those that professed Christianity, but did not live and act like a Christians and proclaim the gospel not only in word but also in deed. This passage may also be used to console and encourage the Christians who sought to do the work of the Great Commission as well as a warning against those who treated their fellow brothers in Christ poorly.¹⁸³ This passage also needs to be taken alongside other judgment passages throughout the New Testament so that the reader does not think that one becomes righteous and is judged based on works.

¹⁸² Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 554.

¹⁸³ Gaylen Leverett, “Looking for the Least: An Analysis and Evaluation of Interpretive Issues which Have Influenced the Interpretation of the Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46),” (Ph.D. dissertation, South Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 304.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis has sought to give a comparative study of the apocalyptic kingdom of God in Second Temple Jewish literature and the teachings of Jesus. This study has been conducted by analyzing the political and religious background of the Jews. One area of importance was an understanding of apocalyptic literature which was given through the analysis of key passages in Jewish literature which spanned from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. This study then considered key parables that Jesus told which had an emphasis on the apocalyptic kingdom of God. The Olivet discourse also played an important role in an understanding of the kingdom. The New Testament analysis was given to demonstrate the similarities and differences of Jesus' teachings on the kingdom to Jewish literature. The conclusion of the matter reveals that Jesus often differed with Jewish literature and Jesus often left His audience with a different interpretation of the kingdom than what they would have been taught by the religious leaders.

This thesis also has sought to bring light to various interpretive issues that arise when one ignores Second Temple Jewish literature. Jesus was teaching to a first century audience which would have had their own interpretation of what the apocalyptic kingdom of God was like. Many would have seen the kingdom as the final judgment of the Gentiles and the unrighteous brought about by God or His Messiah. When Jesus taught, He brought a concept of the kingdom that was contrary to many of the contemporary teachings. Jesus used similar language to what was written in Jewish literature. However, Jesus used this language often with a different meaning or emphasis. Some of His teachings were in complete contrast to what the religious leaders taught. This contrast caused enmity between them and caused the religious leaders to seek Jesus' life. The similarities and differences are brought out on His parables and teachings. To the religious

leaders Jesus presented an apocalyptic kingdom which saw others inheriting the kingdom instead of them. This message was pointed directly to their own rejection of God's Messiah and unbelief. To His disciples, Jesus emphasized the departure of the Messiah for God to finish His work in the world before the Messiah was to come again. Jesus used the parables and teachings of the Olivet discourse to teach His disciples to be constantly ready for His return and to be diligent while He is away. Both of the lessons taught were contrary to a first century mindset of what the kingdom of God was to look like when Messiah came.

A study of Second Temple Jewish literature reveals a clearer picture of first century Jewish thought and theological doctrine than just the New Testament alone. A first century Jewish mindset informs the interpreter of the stark reality of Jesus' teachings. Without this understanding, the interpreter may not realize the impact that this literature had on the writing of the New Testament. Also, one may not recognize the contrast in Jesus' teachings with those of the religious leaders. A study of this literature reveals to the interpreter a much fuller picture of Jesus' interactions with first century Jews. Therefore, an understanding of Second Temple Jewish literature is highly useful to New Testament interpretation which gives a more encompassed understanding of the New Testament.

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