

A JUSTICE INTERPRETATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD
IN
MARK, Q, *THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS*, AND *THE DIDACHE*

A thesis submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree,
Master of Arts

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May 2017

ABSTRACT

From A Justice Interpretation of the Kingdom of God in
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M.A. Thesis by

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May 2017

This thesis identifies, compares, and analyzes the views of the kingdom of God in four early primary sources representing four different communities to determine how each community understood the concept of the kingdom of God and to determine if there are differences in the understanding among the communities and if so to account for the reason for those differences. The four primary sources used are two canonical sources: Mark and Q and two non-canonical sources: *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Didache*. In comparing the references to the kingdom of God within the sources, the sayings are placed within five organic categories which arise from the texts themselves. Those categories are "like" sayings, "enter" sayings, "when" sayings, "where" sayings, and "blessing" sayings. Once the sayings of the Kingdom have been analyzed in this way, they are further analyzed for commonalities to determine the most applicable interpretation for the kingdom of God among three of the most common interpretation: apocalyptic, wisdom, and political. From this analysis it is determined that a political interpretation related to justice is most applicable.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Often the phrase "kingdom of God" is understood spatially and temporally as a place to be occupied after death. Stephen J. Patterson in his book, *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins*, says most Christian believers take the phrase "kingdom of God" for granted. For them "the kingdom of God is that heavenly realm to which the faithful go when they leave this earth for a better place."¹ The Gospel of Matthew's frequent use of the phrase "kingdom of Heaven" in place of the phrase "kingdom of God" probably has contributed to and continues to support much of this understanding. John Dominic Crossan in his book *God and Empire: Rome, Then and Now* says it is unfortunate that the phrase "kingdom of Heaven" ever entered the Christian vocabulary.² In the Greek the phrase is literally "kingdom of the heavens" (*basileia tōn ouranōn*). Crossan points out that "'Heaven' was simply a euphemism for 'God'"³

"All critical scholars today accept that Jesus' main concern and aim was expressed under the term *Kingdom of God*,"⁴ and although, we can never know for sure what can be

¹ Stephen J. Patterson, *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 196.

² John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 116.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Douglas E. Oakman, *The Political Aims of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 70.

attributed to Jesus, we can know what the earliest communities attributed to him, and in some cases we are able to assume some of these sayings did come from the historical Jesus.

Even though the kingdom of God is seen as a main concern of Jesus, there is much debate over just what is the kingdom of God. Over the years there has been much interest in and study done on the subject. The concept of the kingdom of God is elusive; it refuses to be nailed down. The metaphors for the kingdom of God contribute to this elusiveness. They never say what the Kingdom is; they only say what it is like which makes them interactive. What one brings to these metaphors influences one's interpretation. Melanie Johnson-Debaufre in her article "Dreaming the Common Good/s: The Kin-dom of God as a Space of Utopian Politics" lists twenty binaries which have been used to understand the phrase "kingdom of God." These include present and future, spatial and temporal, physical/material and spiritual, political and religious, communal and individual, Jewish and Christian, prophetic and apocalyptic, wisdom and apocalyptic; and earthly and heavenly.⁵ Perhaps it is this very elusiveness which has generated a voluminous amount of scholarship.

This thesis will identify the various references to the kingdom of God in four early, primary sources. Two of these are canonical: the Gospel of Mark and Q and two are non-canonical: the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Didache*. Once the references to the kingdom of God in these sources are identified, they will be compared, and analyzed to provide an understanding of the different meanings of the phrase "kingdom of God" and

⁵ Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "Dreaming the Common Good/s: The Kin-dom of God as a Space of Utopian Politics" in *Common Goods: Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology*, ed. Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, Catherine Keller, and Elias Ortega-Aponte (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 105.

to account for those differences in the four communities of Jesus followers which produced them. This analysis then will be used to show why a justice interpretation is an appropriate interpretation for the kingdom of God.

The first source used is Mark, a narrative gospel. Most scholars today consider Mark to be the earliest of the synoptic gospels. Beyond that there is not much agreement. As Dwight N. Peterson says in his book, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate*,

The community behind the Gospel of Mark lived either before 70 or after 70, either in the tense times leading up to the destruction of the temple or in its immediate aftermath. It lived in Rome or in Galilee, or in Southern Syria. It was a Gentile community, or a mixture of Jews and Gentiles or a Jewish community.⁶

Werner H. Kelber in his book, *The Kingdom in Mark: A Place and a New Time* admits that most scholars date the Gospel of Mark to 60-70 C.E. prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, but he gives it a date after the destruction in 70 C.E. He sees the fall of the city as a collapse of the community's entire basis of existence.⁷ Whether the Gospel of Mark was written shortly before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, it comes from a period of domination and change and represents a community living under those conditions.

⁶ Dwight N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark: The Markan Community in Current Debate* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 152-153.

⁷ Werner H. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 1.

Kelber sees significance in the very first word of Mark with the use of beginning (*archē*). He says, "This beginning is the answer to the end of Jerusalem and the implied end of history."⁸ (*Archē*) implies that there is more to come.⁹

He says,

What they needed was a new place and a new time. To meet the present crisis, a system was required which could account for the disaster, create a new configuration of time and space, and provide a sense of continuity and stability. This is precisely what was done.¹⁰

The second canonical source used is Q, a sayings gospel, which has been referred to as the lost gospel.¹¹ Q comes from the German word *Quelle* meaning source. Q was hypothesized in order to explain the relationship between the gospels of Matthew and Luke as it appeared that Matthew and Luke drew upon Mark and a sayings source.¹² Marcus Borg in *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus* identifies the Q gospel as the earliest of the gospels dating it to "the 50s of the first century, only a couple of decades after the death of Jesus."¹³ Such an early date may be correct for the earliest layer of Q, but not for Q in its final form as John S. Kloppenborg Verbin in *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* says Q did not receive "its final form until slightly after the events of 70 CE."¹⁴

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 3.

¹² John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 1.

¹³ Marcus Borg, Mark Powelson and Ray Riegert, eds., *The Lost Gospel Q: The Original Sayings of Jesus* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁴ Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 87.

A number of scholars over the last half century have come to recognize that all of Q was not composed at the same time.¹⁵ John S. Kloppenborg, Burton L. Mack and others have proposed that there is stratification within Q. Therefore they have labelled the earliest or first layer of Q as Q1, the next layer as Q2 and the latest layer as Q3. John S. Kloppenborg proposes Galilee as the probable location for the composition of Q.¹⁶ For Stephen J. Patterson the sayings gospel of Q, represents the wisdom tradition.¹⁷ He says, "the sayings collections express one of wisdom theology's most basic claims: wisdom and insight lie at the heart of the well-led life."¹⁸ Q texts are usually identified by their *Lukan* versification. Thus, Q 10:8 is the Q text that is found at Luke 10:8.

The first non-canonical primary source used in identifying references to the kingdom of God is the *Gospel of Thomas*. Like Q it is a sayings gospel. This gospel is a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus. It is stated by Marvin Meyer in *Secret Gospels: Essays on Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark* that "textual evidence for an early date for the *Gospel of Thomas* may . . . rival that of any of the New Testament gospels."¹⁹ The sayings "in the *Gospel of Thomas* . . . seem to be transmitted in a form that is earlier than what we have in the canonical gospels."²⁰ It is possible "that the

¹⁵ John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), xv-xvi.

¹⁶ John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 62.

¹⁷ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁹ Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 137.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

collections of sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* . . . may include some traditions even *older* than the gospels of the New Testament . . . as early as, or earlier than Mark."²¹

The opening words of the *Gospel of Thomas* are "these are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down."²² As indicated by the beginning of this gospel, the authorship "is attributed to Didymos Judas Thomas, that is, Judas 'the twin' (both the Aramaic *Thomas* and the Greek *didymos* mean 'twin'). In the Syrian church, (Judas) Thomas was known as the brother of Jesus who founded the churches of the East."²³ It is Syria where it is believed the *Gospel of Thomas* was written.²⁴

"In 1897 and 1903 three ancient papyrus fragments from Greek copies of the *Gospel of Thomas* were discovered during archeological excavations on the site of an ancient town at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt."²⁵ These fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* apparently date to between 130-250 C. E.²⁶ Each of the fragments are believed to have come from different copies of the *Gospel of Thomas*.²⁷ "At least one of these Greek fragments comes from a manuscript that was written before 200 C.E.; thus the Greek version of this gospel was used in Egypt as early as the second century."²⁸

²¹ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels; Adam, Eve, and the Serpent; The Origin of Satan* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 2005), xvii.

²² "The Gospel of Thomas," trans. Thomas O. Lambdin, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 126.

²³ Helmut Koester, "The Gospel of Thomas (II,2)," in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: HarperCollins Publishers 1988), 124.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "The Greek Oxyrhynchus Fragments," in The Gospel of Thomas Collection at The Gnostic Society Library. http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/thomas_poxy.htm.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Koester, "The Gospel of Thomas (II,2)," 124.

The textual source of these fragments was unclear until a Coptic version believed to have been translated from the original Greek was found accidentally in December 1945²⁹ near the town of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt by two peasants who discovered thirteen papyrus books while digging for fertilizer.³⁰ Only after this discovery were the Greek fragments identified as parts of *The Gospel of Thomas*.³¹

As with Q, Patterson sees *The Gospel of Thomas* being related to the wisdom tradition.³² "*The Gospel of Thomas* in its oldest form, stressed the finding of wisdom, or of the 'Kingdom of the Father,' in the knowledge (*gnosis*) of oneself . . . , guided by the sayings of Jesus."³³

Meyer says, ". . . as a gospel of wisdom with a commitment to knowledge and understanding, [it] resembles aspects of gnostic text,"³⁴ but it does not fit precisely into this or any other category.³⁵ When scholars apply the label *gnostic* to the *Gospel of Thomas* and other works found at Nag Hammadi, they are assigning them to a group "of religious doctrines and practices that flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era and were condemned as heresy in a movement spearheaded in the second century by the . . . bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus."³⁶ Eventually, the suppression of Gnosticism as "heresy" resulted in the destruction of their texts.³⁷

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, ix.

³¹ Koester, "The Gospel of Thomas (II,2)," 124.

³² Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 16.

³³ Koester, "The Gospel of Thomas (II,2)," 125.

³⁴ Marvin Meyer, *The Secret Gospels: Essays on Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 4.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jacob Needleman, forward to *The Gospel of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom of Jesus*, by Jean-Yves Leloup (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2005), vi-vii.

³⁷ Ibid., vii.

Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library what was known of Gnosticism was based mainly on the adversarial accounts provided by Irenaeus in his book, *Against the Heresies*.³⁸ It is thought that the writings found at Nag Hammadi were hidden to keep them from being destroyed by those who considered such gnostic works as heresy.³⁹

In applying the term *gnosticism* to these teachings, scholars and theologians . . . call our attention to the emphasis that most of the Nag Hammadi documents place on the role of knowledge in the religious life—in apparent contrast to the demand for faith that became the central tenet of the Church over the centuries, especially in the West.⁴⁰

As a saying gospel, the *Gospel of Thomas* contains a rather large number of metaphors telling what the Kingdom is like. Each of these can be understood to be in contrast to what the kingdom of Rome was like. And, as a wisdom gospel, the *Gospel of Thomas* provides insight on how to live and survive by knowing one's self in a world where one experiences domination and injustice.

The second early non-canonical primary source used to identify references to the kingdom of God is the *Didache*. In 1873, while browsing in the library of the Greek Convent of the Holy Sepulchre in Istanbul, Archbishop Philotheos Bryennios discovered an overlooked copy of the *Didache* among a collection of early church writings.⁴¹ Prior to Bryennios's discovery no copies of the *Didache* were known to exist. It was known only to have existed by its being referenced in some early Christian writings.⁴² It is an

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, viii.

⁴¹ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), xi-xii.

⁴² Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 1.

anonymous document which "represents the preserved oral tradition whereby mid-first-century house churches detailed the step-by-step transformation by which gentile converts were to be prepared for full active participation in their assemblies."⁴³

Aaron Milavec, in his translation of the *Didache*, says most likely the text was composed and transmitted orally for a number of years before a written text was created.⁴⁴ Originally it did not have a title. "When the written copy did finally get a title it was called 'The Training of the Lord Through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles.'"⁴⁵ Scholars have shortened this title to *Didache* which is "the Greek word for the systematic training that a mentor (or a master craftsworker) would give to an understudy (apprentice)."⁴⁶ Thus, the title gives understanding of the context of the *Didache*, its community, and its purpose. It was a community which was providing the training, as by a mentor, to those gentiles being apprenticed for full participation in the community of Jesus followers.

The references to the *Didache* in numerous early sources and the complete Greek copy and fragments of the manual in Coptic and Ethiopic indicate that the document circulated widely during the early Christian centuries; however, after the fifth century the *Didache* fell into obscurity⁴⁷ waiting to be discovered again fourteen centuries later.

In a discussion of the kingdom of God it is necessary to define "empire" (specifically the Roman Empire) and to define the "kingdom of God" itself in order first to understand what it was like to live under empire, secondly, to understand why the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., ix-x.

⁴⁶ Ibid., x.

⁴⁷ van de Sandt, *The Didache*, 2-6.

phrase "kingdom of God" was used, and thirdly to understand the contrast between empire and the kingdom of God. With "empire" (specifically the Roman Empire) and "kingdom of God" defined, it will be possible to see the relationship between the kingdom of God and justice.

Throughout their history, the Jewish people and their Israelite ancestors experienced living under a number of different empires. The earliest being the Egyptian followed by the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hellenistic, and, then during the time of Jesus and the early Christian writings, the Roman. Their experiences varied from being carried off into exile with the Babylonian Empire to being allowed to return with the Persian Empire. But, in all cases they lived under domination for empires are domination systems. As Richard A. Horsley says, "Ancient empires were all about power, or rather, a whole network of interrelated powers."⁴⁸ Within those empires there was no separation between the political, economic, and religious aspects.⁴⁹

Warren Carter in *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* points out the extent of Roman domination during the time of Jesus and the early communities of his followers. He says,

In the first century, Rome dominated the territory and people around the Mediterranean Sea. Its empire extended from Britain in the northwest, through (present-day) France and Spain to the west, across Europe to Turkey and Syria in the east, and along North Africa to the south. Rome ruled an estimated 60 to 65 million people⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant, and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 3.

The Roman Empire was an empire which claimed to be ordained by the gods⁵¹ and which was built by military conquest.⁵² After the Romans created their empire through military conquest, they maintained it through pyramids of patronage in what they considered the "civilized" parts of the empire.⁵³ For the less "civilized" parts, they relied on military strongmen and client kings, such as Herod.⁵⁴ "After their initial conquest of Palestine, the Romans attempted to rule through the temple-state"⁵⁵ With this arrangement, Judeans continued to serve their God "in the Temple with their tithes and offerings, thus supporting the priestly aristocracy that maintained order and collected tribute for the imperial regime."⁵⁶

While the Roman Empire was an agrarian empire with its wealth and power based in land,⁵⁷ it was increasingly becoming urbanized. The empire was hierarchical with the few at the top having vast wealth and power. There was no middle class. The majority were poor and were relatively powerless with little opportunity to improve their lot in life.⁵⁸ The people of Lower Galilee experienced empire in terms of taxes, debt, malnutrition, sickness, and agrarian oppression.⁵⁹ Carter describes the early Christians and New Testament writers as engaging "the empire largely 'from below' as the

⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

⁵² Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers*, 22.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34-35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), xi.

powerless and oppressed who had no access to channels of power, no voice, and no hope of changing the imperial system."⁶⁰

In 27 B.C.E. Cesar Augustus became the first Roman emperor.⁶¹ Immediately before the Romans, much of Palestine was under the control of the Hasmoneans in Jerusalem.⁶² Later the Herodians replaced the Hasmoneans and at the time of Jesus were the local rulers of Palestine.⁶³ It was into this world which Jesus was born and came proclaiming the good news of the nearness of the kingdom of God (*basileia tou theou*).

Stephen J. Patterson points out that "In Jesus's day, the Greek word *basileia* would have been used primarily in reference to various earthly kingdoms, especially the currently reigning kingdom, Rome. But we don't usually refer to Rome as a kingdom. We call it an empire—the Roman Empire,"⁶⁴ but in Jesus's day it would have been the kingdom (*basileia*) of Rome. Why did Jesus and/or the early communities of his followers use *basileia*, the same word used to describe Rome? Patterson says, "This is more than just a little bold."⁶⁵ He suggests that it was used to register a complaint against the Roman Empire.⁶⁶ At the very least the use of kingdom of God sets up a contrast with the kingdom of Rome and leaves questions to be asked about kingship, authority, and justice.

In the four early primary sources used in this thesis, the kingdom of God is referred to as the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of the Father,

⁶⁰ Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, x.

⁶¹ Douglas E. Oakman, *The Political Aims of Jesus*, 46.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁴ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 197-198.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

and simply as the Kingdom. The phrase "kingdom of God" has a diversity of meanings, is elusive, and perhaps cannot be adequately defined. As previously mentioned Johnson-Debaufre has identified twenty binaries that have been used to describe the kingdom of God. Although the phrase "kingdom of God" has diverse meanings, is elusive and difficult to adequately define, perhaps some comments can be made which may provide a better understanding of the phrase. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* in defining the kingdom of God says the kingdom of God is

the phenomenon of God's rule, or the realm over which God rules or will rule. The phrase is not used as such in the Hebrew Bible, but occurs first in the apocryphal . . . book Wisdom of Solomon where Wisdom, declares the kingdom of God to the righteous. . . . The phrase is used repeatedly in the NT, especially in the Synoptic Gospels.⁶⁷

The entry goes on to say that although the Hebrew Bible does not use the phrase, "the kingdom of God," it "does have much to say about God's present and future reign."⁶⁸ The dictionary points out that in the New Testament "according to the Synoptic gospels, the phrase "kingdom of God" was a central feature of Jesus's proclamation."⁶⁹ Then the dictionary says the phrase encompasses ambiguity and seems to fall into at least three categories: (1) The kingdom of God is a reality that is already present, (2) the kingdom of God is an imminent future reality, and (3) the kingdom of God is the culmination of all human history.⁷⁰ As is seen here the three categories which the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* uses in defining the "kingdom of God" are all temporal.

⁶⁷ "Kingdom of God," in *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 515.

⁶⁸ "Kingdom of God," 515.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Ann Moore in her essay "The Search for the Common Judaic Understanding of God's Kingship" adds to both the definition and understanding of the "kingdom of God" as well as "empire." Moore agrees with the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* that the phrase "kingdom of God" is ambiguous. She points out that "the kingdom of God is not explicitly defined or explained in any of the Jewish or early Christian texts."⁷¹ Because of this she believes there must have been a shared understanding of God's kingship which is associated with the metaphor "God is king."⁷² Moore sees the diversity of the phrase "kingdom of God" as being evident in three different ways in which God was seen as king: "(1) Yahweh as the sovereign of Israel; (2) God as eternal suzerain of world, and (3) Lord as monarch of the disadvantaged and marginalized populace."⁷³

Moore's third way in which God was seen as king has particular relevance for this thesis as it relates to justice for the most vulnerable which is present in a number of the references to the kingdom of God in the four primary sources.

With the three views of God as king, Moore sees the understanding of God as king and the kingdom of God changing depending on the historical events and experiences of the people at any given time.⁷⁴ This includes experience with Israelite kings, non-Israelite kings, and ideal visions of kingship as well as the various historical events regarded as pivotal and recorded in the Jewish texts including "views of kings drawn from Israel's experience with the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and

⁷¹ Anne Moore, "The Search for the Common Judaic Understanding of God's Kingship," in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 131.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 131-132.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

Hellenistic empires,"⁷⁵ and "experiences with the Hasmonean dynasty and the Roman imperial system."⁷⁶

John Dominic Crossan provides additional understanding of the kingdom of God in saying "the kingdom of God is inextricably and simultaneously 100 percent political and 100 percent religious."⁷⁷

Now that the four sources to be used in this thesis have been identified and "empire" and "the kingdom of God" have been identified, the next chapter will review some of the scholars who provide three different interpretations of the kingdom of God. Such a review will give a basis for determining why a political interpretation which focuses on justice for communities living under domination is an appropriate interpretation provided by an analysis of the kingdom of God sayings in the four primary sources.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Crossan, *God and Empire*, 117.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How should the kingdom of God be interpreted? Is it about apocalypticism, or wisdom, or politics, or something else? Much of the scholarly work done on the kingdom of God has given it either an apocalyptic, wisdom, or political interpretation. This chapter will identify some of the scholars in each school and their arguments. With an understanding of these interpretations, it will be possible later, after identifying and analyzing the kingdom of God statements in the primary sources, to show that a political interpretation with an emphasis on justice is the more appropriate.

Debate continues over how the kingdom of God should be interpreted. Within this major debate there is a sub-debate within the wisdom interpretation over whose wisdom. Those who see Jesus as a wisdom teacher and the Kingdom statements as wisdom sayings debate over the source of this wisdom. Some identify the wisdom as Jewish, others as Greek Cynic, and still others as a combination of the two.

The first of the major interpretations of the kingdom of God statements is an apocalyptic interpretation. Such an interpretation sees transformation coming from outside. It involves God's intervention and judgment with the destruction of the present world or age and the creation of a new world. Apocalyptic views derive from a belief that God is just, but what people are experiencing is injustice and there seems to be no hope for justice in this world. Thus, it is necessary to believe that God will ultimately intervene and justice will prevail.

Among early scholars who gave an apocalyptic interpretation of the kingdom of God were Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer. Johannes Weiss, who was born in Kiel, Germany in 1863,⁷⁸ was an early influential scholar holding this view. In *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, Weiss wrote that the coming of the Kingdom involved transformation, judgment, and destruction of the old world.⁷⁹ He saw Jesus in agreement with John the Baptist that judgment would come before the establishment of the Kingdom.⁸⁰ He believed that the kingdom of God and hope to enter it could not be separated from its religious context which he saw as being eschatological and derived from "Repent, *because* the Kingdom of God has drawn near."⁸¹ Weiss believed that only God could establish the kingdom of God, and initially Jesus had hoped this would occur in his lifetime. But, Jesus gradually became aware that he would die first, and after his death, he would "return upon the clouds of heaven at the establishment of the Kingdom, and do so within the lifetime of the generation which had rejected him."⁸² Weiss concluded that when the Kingdom comes,

God will destroy this old world which is ruled and spoiled by the devil, and create a new world. Even mankind is to participate in this transformation and become like the angels. . . . At the same time, the Judgment will take place, not only over those who are still alive at the coming of the Son of man, but also over those who will then be raised from the dead, good and evil, Jews and Gentiles alike. . . . The land of Palestine will arise in a new glorious splendor, forming the center of the new Kingdom. Alien peoples will no longer rule over it, but will come to acknowledge God as Lord. There will be neither sadness nor sin; instead

⁷⁸ Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 130.

those who are in God's Kingdom shall behold the living God, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and bliss.⁸³

Albert Schweitzer was another early scholar who gave the kingdom of God an apocalyptic interpretation. In *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*, Schweitzer saw within the teaching of Jesus an ethical, as well as, an eschatological line of thought and struggled with understanding how the two were compatible⁸⁴ because the ethical involved non-violence while eschatological involved violence. Schweitzer concluded the ethical proclamation was based on the eschatological view.⁸⁵ Schweitzer said Jesus's "eschatology is the apocalyptic of the book of Daniel, since the Kingdom is to be brought about by the Son of Man when he appears upon the clouds of heaven (Mk. 8:38; 9:1)"⁸⁶ As with Weiss, Schweitzer saw the resurrection of the dead as being part of the eschatological event. He said that Jesus understood the coming Kingdom not to be directed toward the future generations but had to do with past generations. It was they who would, "rise up to meet the Judgment which inaugurates the Kingdom."⁸⁷

Today many scholars still espouse an apocalyptic interpretation. Among them are Dale C. Allison and Bart D. Ehrman. Allison in his article, "A Plea for Thoroughgoing Eschatology," says that "Jesus and those around him held hopes close to those attributed to him by Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer."⁸⁸ He says Schweitzer was right in

⁸³ Ibid., 130-131.

⁸⁴ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 46-47.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 66-67.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁸⁸ Dale C. Allison, Jr., "A Plea for Thoroughgoing Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 658.

believing "either the prophet from Nazareth was a man whose imagination dwelled in a world akin to the imaginative worlds of the old Jewish apocalypses or perhaps about him we know next to nothing."⁸⁹ Allison says because Jesus was baptized by John and had positive things to say about John, "there must have been significant ideological continuity between the two men."⁹⁰

Another of the current ardent advocates of this approach is Bart D. Ehrman, who like Allison agrees with Weiss and Schweitzer that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet.⁹¹ Ehrman insists that the historical Jesus "be situated in the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism"⁹² implying that if one does not view Jesus as an apocalypticist one is not viewing him in a first-century Palestinian context.

As will be seen later, others agree that Jesus should be situated in first-century Palestinian Judaism, but that in and of itself does not make Jesus an apocalyptic prophet. Based on the three understandings of kingship identified by Anne Moore in the previous chapter, it can be assumed the prominent way the kingdom of God would be viewed at any given time would be based on the current conditions under which the people would be living, but even then there would probably be those who held different understandings of the Kingdom.

Ehrman defends his position that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet by saying that "few people who devote their lives to studying the historical Jesus actually want to find a Jesus who is completely removed from our own time."⁹³ He claims his interpretation is

⁸⁹ Ibid., 652.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 655.

⁹¹ Bart D. Ehrman, "Jesus as an Apocalyptic Prophet," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 27, no.2 (Summer 2000): 155.

⁹² Ibid., 154.

⁹³ Ehrman, "Jesus as an Apocalyptic Prophet," 155.

based on the good scholarship of looking at the earliest sources which include Q, Mark, M (the special materials found only in Matthew), and L (the special materials found only in Luke).⁹⁴ He argues that the earliest sources contain much evidence that Jesus was an apocalypticist. Among the evidence is the baptism of Jesus by John who himself was an apocalyptic prophet. Other evidence Ehrman puts forth is Jesus' first proclamation found in Mark 1:15 which Ehrman translates as "the time is filled up and the Kingdom of God is almost here; repent and believe in the good news!"⁹⁵ Ehrman says "time being filled up" is an apocalyptic image and reminds the reader that "for apocalypticists there were two ages of history—the present evil age that was running along its predetermined course and the glorious age to come in which God would establish his sovereignty once and for all."⁹⁶ Ehrman also uses "Son of Man" passages to bolster his argument that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet. He claims that those denying Jesus was such a prophet say that there are multiple levels of Q to get around the argument that the early sources reveal Jesus as an apocalypticist. He suggests that scholars who see different levels within Q have come to the text with the preconceived idea that Jesus was not an apocalyptic prophet; therefore, they try to support their view by saying there are levels of Q and are thus able to eliminate apocalyptic elements from the earliest stratum.⁹⁷

More recently, in his latest book, *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior*, Ehrman seems to cast doubt on his earlier apocalyptic interpretation. In this book he writes,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁹⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 142.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ehrman. "Jesus as an Apocalyptic Prophet," 160.

"Probably the majority of modern scholars have remembered Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who was predicting that the end of the world was near, that God was soon going to intervene in the course of human affairs to destroy the forces of evil. . . ." ⁹⁸ Then he adds, "This is a view that I myself have held since I was a graduate student in the early 1980s. But is it an accident that the view became so forcefully expressed by scholars in the nuclear age, when the world was in imminent danger of destruction?" ⁹⁹ Here it appears that Ehrman is questioning if he and others using an apocalyptic interpretation might be doing what he accused others of doing who reject such an interpretation when he said, "Few people who devote their lives to studying the historical Jesus actually want to find a Jesus who is completely removed from our own time." ¹⁰⁰ If the reason for seeing Jesus as an apocalypticist is because one lives in a nuclear age where there is the possibility of cataclysmic destruction, then, Jesus has not been completely removed from our time and placed in his historical setting.

Although Ehrman has stated that "probably the majority of modern scholars have remembered Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet," ¹⁰¹ a review of the literature indicates recent scholarship on the historical Jesus and the kingdom of God contains much scholarship which provides wisdom and political interpretations.

One of the scholars belonging to the wisdom school of interpretation is John S. Kloppenborg, the foremost Q scholar, who has written a number of books on the subject including *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in ancient Wisdom Collections*, *The Earliest*

⁹⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 23.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Ehrman, "Jesus as an Apocalyptic Prophet," 155.

¹⁰¹ Ehrman, *Jesus before the Gospels*, 23.

Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus, and *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*. In his book, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Kloppenborg recognizes the criticism of those such as Ehrman which is directed toward Q scholars who see strata within Q. In his second edition of the book he reacts to critics of the first edition who point out that in other documents such as the *Wisdom of Solomon*, *I Enoch*, and *Didache* there is both "wisdom" and "apocalyptic." He says that just because they appear in the same document does not mean they come from the same stratum. He says, "The question is, when diverse elements subsist in a document, how does one understand the *literary* and *generic* relationship among the various elements."¹⁰² He sees these diverse elements having occurred because of redaction.¹⁰³ Through the use of literary analyses, he has determined that there are three major layers within Q. The earliest layer, Q1, is composed of wisdom sayings; the second layer, Q2, is made up of announcements of judgment; and the third level, Q3, contains biographical material such as the temptation story. By examining blocks of material that include preaching of judgment and wisdom speeches in Q, he has concluded that a collection of wisdom speeches was the formative element of Q and the judgment portions were added later.¹⁰⁴ If Kloppenborg is correct, then an apocalyptic interpretation of Jesus and the kingdom of God would not be supported by the earliest layer of Q.

Other scholars belonging to the wisdom school agreeing with Kloppenborg on Q include Burton L. Mack and Stephen J. Patterson. Mack agrees with Kloppenborg in

¹⁰² John S. Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q*, xix.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.

saying that not all the sayings in Q can be attributed to Jesus because "many of them address issues that could only have been encountered in the course of later social experiences and they bear the marks of reflection on such experiences."¹⁰⁵ In *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* Mack lists the passages found in Q as belonging to Q1, Q2, or Q3. Stephen J. Patterson, in his book, *The Lost Way: How Two Forgotten Gospels Are Rewriting the Story of Christian Origins*, talks about Q and Thomas both being wisdom gospels. He says, "At the heart of Q are a series of speeches . . . that comprise . . . a series of wisdom teachings and advice on how to live in the new empire of God. The sayings of judgment often appear to be tacked onto these speeches. . . ."¹⁰⁶ Patterson finds the "series of wisdom teachings and advice on how to live in the new empire"¹⁰⁷ in the beatitudes of Q 6:20-49, the mission discourse of Q 10:2-12 and the speech of cares of Q 12:22-31,¹⁰⁸ all of which reflect compassion and justice for the most vulnerable.

Ehrman said that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet and advocated that other scholars should view Jesus in the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism. John Dominic Crossan, who is generally considered to be within the wisdom school but sees room for other interpretations, is one scholar who definitely puts Jesus in the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism with his books *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, and *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now*. In the first book Crossan goes into great detail about what life would have been

¹⁰⁵ Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 6.

¹⁰⁶ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

like for a peasant living under Roman rule. He says, "*The historical Jesus* must be understood within his contemporary Judaism. But that contemporary Judaism was . . . a richly creative, diverse, and variegated one."¹⁰⁹ While Crossan provides a wisdom interpretation but sees room for other interpretations, he argues against Jesus being an apocalyptic prophet. He says at the time of his baptism, Jesus accepted John's

message of God as the imminent apocalyptic judge. But the Jordan was not just water, and to be baptized in it was to recapitulate the ancient and archetypal passage from imperial bondage to national freedom. Herod Antipas moved swiftly to execute John, there was no apocalyptic consummation, and Jesus, finding his own voice, began to speak of God not as imminent apocalypse but as present healing.¹¹⁰

For those scholars arguing that the Son of Man statements provide proof of an apocalyptic Jesus, Crossan points out that there are more Kingdom references than Son of Man references and the Kingdom sayings have more plural attestations than do the Son of Man. Then he says, "If one emphasizes, however, that 'kingdom of God' could have been easily heard as an apocalyptic expression at the time of Jesus, one must just as equally emphasize that it could have been heard instead as a sapiential one."¹¹¹

In Crossan's second book mentioned here, he again puts Jesus in his historical setting, and again makes some of the same arguments that he had made in his previous book. He writes, "I think that Jesus started by accepting John's theology of God's *imminence* but, precisely because of what happened to John, changed from that to a theology of God's *presence*."¹¹² He goes on to say "Jesus's own proclamation therefore

¹⁰⁹ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 417.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹¹² Crossan, *God and Empire*, 115.

insisted that the Kingdom of God was not imminent but present; it was already here below upon this earth, and however it was to be consummated in the future, *it was a present-already and not just an imminent-future reality.*"¹¹³

Crossan does not indicate whether he sees the present Kingdom as being temporal and/or spatial. Perhaps Crossan does not make this indication because of the very elusiveness of the kingdom of God. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus says that the kingdom of God has drawn near, it appears to be a temporal reference, but a spatial reference cannot be totally eliminated.

In another of his books, *How to read the Bible and Still Be a Christian: Struggling with Divine Violence from Genesis through Revelation*, Crossan again recognizes the influence John had on Jesus but believes Jesus changed his vision because of what happened to John. In this book he involves Q and provides a different view of John's perception of the Kingdom. He says, ". . . for the historical John the Baptist, the Kingdom's advent involved not a violently avenging God, but a miraculously liberating God. I think, however, that the Q Gospel morphed John's God from nonviolent to violent,"¹¹⁴ and he sees Q doing exactly the same thing to the historical Jesus.

Another scholar in the wisdom school is Marcus Borg. In his book, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*, he also places Jesus in first-century Palestinian Judaism. He describes the Jewish tradition Jesus would have experienced and the imperial world in which he lived. He says that Jesus was a wisdom teacher, and describes two types of wisdom. He says one is conventional

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *How to Read the Bible and Still Be Christian: Struggling with Divine Violence from Genesis Through Revelation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 163.

wisdom which is wisdom of the culture. The other is a wisdom "that challenges the taken-for-granted cultural consensus of conventional wisdom. A counterwisdom, a subversive or alternative wisdom."¹¹⁵ He then places Jesus as a teacher of the second kind of wisdom.

What kind of wisdom teacher was Jesus? Borg has provided an answer, but among scholars there is debate about whether Jesus taught Jewish or Greek wisdom. Did statements on the kingdom of God reflect Jewish or Greek wisdom? Jesus' wisdom for Borg is similar to what others have identified as Greek Cynic philosophy, but Borg does not identify Jesus' wisdom as such.

Burton L. Mack is one of the current scholars who sees the Greek philosophy known as Cynic within Q1 material. He says, "The crisp sayings of Jesus in Q1 show that his followers thought of him as a Cynic-like sage."¹¹⁶ He then describes what the Cynics were known for, some of which, corresponds to what is found in Q1.

Cynics were known for begging, voluntary poverty, renunciation of needs, severance of family ties, fearless and carefree attitudes, and troublesome public behavior. Standard themes in Cynic discourse included a critique of riches, pretension, and hypocrisy, just as in Q1.¹¹⁷

John Dominic Crossan is another of the current scholars who sees a Cynic connection with Jesus. He describes Cynicism as involving "practice and not just theory, life-style and not just mind-set in opposition to the cultural heart of Mediterranean civilization, a way of looking and dress, of eating, living, and relating that announced its

¹¹⁵ Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 167.

¹¹⁶ Mack, *The Lost Gospel*, 115.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

contempt for honor and shame, for patronage and clientage."¹¹⁸ He sees Jesus and his followers fitting this description well, but he points out that Cynics were city dwellers, who were not involved in communal action, all of which are descriptions not fitting for Jesus and his followers.¹¹⁹ Having looked at the backgrounds of Cynics and Jesus and his followers, Crossan characterizes the historical Jesus as a "peasant Jewish Cynic."¹²⁰

A wisdom interpretation of the kingdom of God provides a very different understanding than does an apocalyptic interpretation. For wisdom the kingdom is more of a present reality; whereas, for apocalyptic it is more of a future reality. As Patterson said, the wisdom teachings are about how to live in the new empire of God,¹²¹ a present empire. A wisdom interpretation of the kingdom of God focuses on how best to live in the present. There is a recognition of injustice, but all hope is not presently abandoned. An apocalyptic interpretation of the kingdom of God sees no hope in the present age. For justice to occur God must intervene bringing about the end of the present age.

A third interpretation given to the historical Jesus and in turn the kingdom of God is a political interpretation. Scholars writing in this area include Douglas E. Oakman, William R. Herzog, II, Richard A. Horsley, Mary Ann Beavis, and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre. The first of these scholars, Douglas E. Oakman, in his book *The Political Aims of Jesus* does exactly what Ehrman says needs to be done. He places Jesus within the historical context, but comes out with a different understanding of the historical Jesus and the kingdom of God.

¹¹⁸ Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 421.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 80.

Oakman says too many of the recent treatments of Jesus view Jesus one dimensionally. They treat Jesus "as merely a 'religious' figure, so that Jesus is only arguing about Judean theology or religio-cultural issues, without clear conceptions of his social or political interests."¹²² He argues "that Jesus' aims were materially political and essentially different from those of his disciples after his death."¹²³

Unlike Allison and Ehrman who see Jesus's baptism by John as one piece of evidence that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, Oakman believes that, although Jesus was baptized by John and heard John's message, he rejected John's apocalyptic message.¹²⁴ He says an apocalyptic view of Jesus automatically distances him from mundane concerns.¹²⁵ He adds that an otherworldly, apocalyptic Jesus logically would have had little concern for worldly politics.¹²⁶ He believes Jesus's politics should be situated in the peasant world of Galilee and that Jesus should be 'read' through peasant eyes and issues.¹²⁷ He says "the political aims of Jesus were deeply influenced by a concern about agrarian taxation leveraged by commerce, and the social situation developing in Herodian Galilee . . . ,"¹²⁸ and ". . . Jesus' message about the Power of God . . . was about its presence and workings, not about its future arrival or apocalyptic fireworks."¹²⁹

¹²² Oakman, *The Political Aims of Jesus*, xi.

¹²³ Ibid., xii.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 119.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 71.

Oakman's interpretation political interpretation involves justice as he sees God "already graciously present and concerned about subsistence,"¹³⁰ He sees the kingdom as "very much a matter of eating and drinking. Jesus's God was not the stern, angry God of John but the gracious Patron of all good things who was even now inspiring a new sense of action for just subsistence."¹³¹ Oakman says "the Prayer of Jesus suggests that central to the aims of Jesus was subsistence freed from exploitative taxes and institutions. . . ."¹³²

He believes that Jesus sought to help those "from below" through networking, and points out that the Gospels indicate Jesus networked with both the poor and the rich.¹³³ He says Jesus' group was not made up of natural kin, nor formed by political religion, but was a fictive-kin group who trusted the Power.¹³⁴ As an effective networker Jesus established fictive-kin groups for whom he brokered healing and restoration of honor and dignity.¹³⁵ Oakman says a "peasant subsistence and taxation reading of Q1 . . . demonstrates how differently, these early traditions look from the standpoint of peasantry and political economy over against the assumption of wandering radicals pursuing a religious mission."¹³⁶ He adds it was Jesus' opposition to Mammon, his advocacy of tax and debt forgiveness, under God's eminent domain that led to his political execution on a Roman cross.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 101.

¹³³ Ibid., 82-83.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 102.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 111.

For Oakman the central aim of Jesus and his group was "to broker healing and relief from debt and taxes so as to alleviate hunger or obtain more secure subsistence."¹³⁸

"For Jesus, money was at the heart of agrarian evil because it abstracted taxation from real goods without regard to needs."¹³⁹

Oakman says

Jesus (in his own mind) was not a messiah, apocalyptic prophet, or cynic philosopher, nor did he promote a thorough-going eschatology with an interim ethic; rather, Jesus was a worldly and world-engaged peasant artisan. . . . He especially enjoyed helping out his friends and mediating material aid between those who could offer it and those who would welcome it.¹⁴⁰

For Oakman Jesus was involved in seeking justice for people who were experiencing injustice under a domination system.

William R. Herzog II is another scholar who gives a political interpretation of the historical Jesus and the kingdom of God. In his book *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation*, he says that, if Q and *The Gospel of Thomas* are used as the primary sources, Jesus will emerge as a teacher of wisdom with little consideration of his public activity.¹⁴¹

On the surface Herzog's statement would seem to be accurate as Q and *The Gospel of Thomas* are sayings gospels rather than narrative gospels. As sayings gospels, they are wisdom statements which do not reflect the public action that is possible with narrative. Although public activity is not revealed in the wisdom gospels, an interest in

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 132.

¹⁴¹ William R. Herzog II, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 35.

such an activity can be seen in the very use of the phrase "kingdom of God." This phrase suggests opposition to the present kingdom, the kingdom of Rome. Also, while action cannot be seen in sayings, the sayings which indicate a concern for the most vulnerable and an interest in justice suggest the possibility of public activity regarding these issues unless it is "all talk and no action."

Herzog continues by talking Jesus' public activity. He says that "one way to interpret Jesus' public activity is to view him as a prophet of justice of the reign of God."¹⁴² He says that during the Second Temple Period there were three types of prophets: Clerical prophets, sapiential prophets, and popular prophets.¹⁴³ He classifies Jesus as one of the latter. He says that Jesus was an odd combination of prophetic types as he understood and argued the Torah, but he brings his own message focused on the present questions of survival.¹⁴⁴ Like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, Jesus "interpreted what was happening to the people of Galilee who were being increasingly squeezed by colonial domination and internal exploitation,"¹⁴⁵ and he claimed the role of broker of God's forgiveness "through his words and deeds, especially his healings. In this role, Jesus canceled the debts peasants owed the temple and offered them a new lease on life."¹⁴⁶

Herzog adds, "Clearly, Jesus was well received by the common people, villagers, peasants, rural artisan, and the more destitute as well. If he had not been popular with the

¹⁴² Ibid., 47.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 52-53.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 253.

masses . . . , he would not have been tried and executed by Jerusalem elites and their Roman rulers."¹⁴⁷

In an earlier book, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, Herzog poses a series of questions:

What if the parables of Jesus were neither theological nor moral stories but political and economic ones: What if the concern of the parables was not the reign of God but the reigning systems of oppression that dominated Palestine in the time of Jesus? What if the parables are exposing exploitation rather than revealing justification?¹⁴⁸

Approaching the parables in this manner, Herzog concludes

that Jesus' ministry was concerned with political and economic issues. Matters of justice were not peripheral to a spiritual gospel but were at the heart of his proclamation and practice. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that justice was at the center of Jesus' spirituality.¹⁴⁹

Another scholar agreeing with Ehrman that Jesus should be understood in his historical context, but giving a different interpretation is Richard A. Horsley who gives a political interpretation of the historical Jesus. In *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant, and the Hope of the Poor* Horsley writes "The Gospel stories portray Jesus as carrying out a *renewal of Israel*. He carries out new actions of deliverance of the people reminiscent of the sea crossings and feedings in the wilderness led by Moses and the healings of Elijah,"¹⁵⁰ and he "pronounces God's condemnation of the rulers for having exploited the people."¹⁵¹ Horsley adds that these features are prominent in the Gospels,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴⁸ William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵⁰ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant, and the Hope of the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 2.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

but are rarely found in interpretations of Jesus. He sees the Lord's Prayer indicating Jesus's interest in addressing the people's economic needs.¹⁵² He says

The imminent blessings of the kingdom . . . offered empowerment in the concrete sense of enough to eat (daily bread) and relief from debilitating debts. The kingdom of God was happening, becoming a social-economic reality in the people's response, such as their mutual cancellation of debts even as they prayed for the kingdom.¹⁵³

Horsley's interpretation relates to Ann Moore's third way in which God was seen as king with God being seen "as monarch of the disadvantaged and marginalized populace."¹⁵⁴ Here Horsley sees Jesus as having the same interest in the disadvantaged and the marginalized.

Two current scholars Mary Ann Beavis and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre also give political interpretations to the kingdom of God, but offer a somewhat different perspective in that they introduce the concept of utopia or utopian thought into an understanding of the kingdom of God. Beavis in her book, *Jesus & Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* combines the kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching with the study of ancient utopian literature for an understanding of the kingdom of God. She suggests that the Hebrew Bible contains the concept of utopia and has many portrayals of an idealized Israel. She mentions Eden and such phrases as the "promised land" and the "land of milk and honey."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid., 7.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 208.

¹⁵⁴ Moore, "The Search for the Common Judaic Understanding of God's Kingship."

¹⁵⁵ Mary Ann Beavis, *Jesus and Utopia: Looking for the Kingdom of God in the Roman World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 35.

She says that "surprisingly, in view of the long tradition of biblical utopian thinking, the utopian character of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God has not been brought into the discussion."¹⁵⁶ She concludes

for Jesus, the kingdom of God was not a hoped-for restoration of political independence to the Jewish nation but evocation of the myth of God as king. As such, the kingdom was preexistent, since God had ruled the world since its creation; it was a present reality, since God's kingship was eternal; it would be manifested perfectly in the future, as the prophets had foretold.¹⁵⁷

As with Horsley, Moore's article relates to Beavis' interpretation of the kingdom of God as they both talk about the kingship of God. Beavis's understanding specifically connects to Moore's second way in which God was seen as king with God being seen "as eternal suzerain of world."¹⁵⁸ Both see God's kingship as eternal.

Johnson-DeBaufre continues this interpretation in her essays "Unmapping the Kingdom: Releasing Christian Social Dreaming," and "Dreaming the Common Good/s: The Kin-dom of God as a Space of Utopian Politics." She uses the phrase "utopian social dreaming" as a way of understanding the kingdom of God. She talks in terms of envisioning utopia as a continuing process. It is never reached for what is reached ceases to be the utopia. She says that "completeness is neither possible nor 'good.'"¹⁵⁹ She refers to Ernst Bloch as characterizing "the utopian impulse with a two-word statement: "something missing."¹⁶⁰ In relation to the "something missing" she says it is

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 98-99.

¹⁵⁸ Moore, "The Search for the Common Judaic Understanding of God's Kingship."

¹⁵⁹ Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "Unmapping the Kingdom: Releasing Christian Social Dreaming," in *Glücksbilder, Die Wirklichkeit der Utopien. Tagungsband 2015 Zum. 4. Symposion Dürnstein* (Krems: Edition Donau-Universität Krems, 2015), 90.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 89.

"dissatisfaction with the here and now . . . that drives utopian dreaming."¹⁶¹ She adds, "The utopian begins (again and again) with disconnection."¹⁶²

Johnson-Debaufre notes that while Jesus speaks often of the Kingdom in the synoptic gospels, he never directly defines it. With the Kingdom not being defined it is helpful to view the Kingdom as utopian for it presses us to consider what it is not. It allows ". . . looking at a social practice in the world and saying: the kingdom of God is not that? We do not know exactly what it is, but we do know what it is not."¹⁶³ And, what it is not seems to be injustice for she says the pedagogical function of utopian social dreaming in the teaching of Jesus and his group as connecting "utopian social dreaming to transformation of the everyday life."¹⁶⁴ Johnson-DeBaufre adds that the stories in the gospels "fill out the negations: healing the sick, release of prisoners, forgiveness of debt, caring for the poor, rich sharing wealth, serving others."¹⁶⁵

She notes that the Kingdom is open-ended and when seen in light of social dreaming of the common good, the Kingdom is relevant today as it "makes it possible to build connections across discursive and social divides without insisting that the same vision must occupy every space. This connects Christians with the struggles for social change among non-Christians."¹⁶⁶ Johnson-DeBaufre's understanding of the kingdom of God in terms of social dreaming and utopia definitely puts her in the category of a political interpretation of the kingdom of God with an emphasis on justice.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 90.

¹⁶⁵ Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, "Dreaming the Common Good/s: The Kingdom of God as a Space of Utopian Politics," 113.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 117.

Oakman, Herzog, and Horsley do not talk in terms of utopia as do Beavis and Johnson-Debaufre, but they all see Jesus and the kingdom of God involved with the utopian idea of "something missing." For Oakman the Kingdom involved the "something missing" being supplied by Jesus' networking to meet the needs of people; for Herzog the "something missing" is supplied by Jesus' healing, canceling debts and being involved with political and economic issues; and for Horsley it is met by Jesus addressing economic needs. For all of these scholars there is an understanding that the Kingdom involved justice.

All three interpretations of the kingdom of God: apocalyptic, wisdom, and political involve justice. For the apocalyptic God will intervene and bring about justice in a new age; for the wisdom the Kingdom is present with some indication of concern for those experiencing injustice as seen with Patterson; for the political the Kingdom is also present with an emphasis on active involvement in counteracting injustice.

The next chapter will identify the kingdom of God passages in the Gospel of Mark, Q, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache*. After these passages have been identified, they will later be compared and analyzed in order to determine an appropriate interpretation for the concept of the "kingdom of God" and the role of justice in these passages.

CHAPTER 3

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE PRIMARY SOURCES

This chapter will identify the references to the kingdom of God in the four primary sources: The Gospel of Mark, Q, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The Didache* with Q being broken down into Q1, Q2, and Q3. The identification of the references was done by reading Mark, Q, and *The Gospel of Thomas* and making a list of each Kingdom reference. For Mark also was noted the references to the good news or gospel as the Greek word (*euaggelion*) for both is the same. This was done because the very first chapter of Mark verses 14-15 read "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"¹⁶⁷ Here the indication is that the good news is the kingdom of God has drawn near.

For Q Burton L. Mack's book *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* was used to make a list of those Q Kingdom references from the passages which he identified from Q. Once this was done, those passages were double checked with *The Critical Edition of Q*, and only those passages appearing in both sources were included.

Once the passages have been identified in this chapter they will be listed in categories in the next chapter in order to compare the passages from these four primary sources.

¹⁶⁷ Mark 1:15 (*New Revised Standard Version*).

The first source in which to identify the Kingdom passages is the Gospel of Mark. Within this gospel there are eleven passages which reference the kingdom of God and several other passages which relate to the concept by the use of the terms good news and gospel. In quoting these passages the translations will come from the New Revised Standard Version. The first reference appears is in the first chapter of Mark. It is the passage previously mention in Mark 1:14-15 where Jesus comes from Galilee proclaiming the good news and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news,"¹⁶⁸ and as mentioned before, since the good news is identified here as the kingdom of God having come near, it becomes important to note other passages involving the good news.

The first of these is the very first verse of Mark, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."¹⁶⁹ As indicated in a note in New Revised Standard Version, "other ancient authorities lack the phrase "the Son of God."¹⁷⁰ This introductory statement in connection with Mark 1:14-15 could then be taken to indicate that the Gospel of Mark as a whole is about the kingdom of God having drawn near although some would argue that the good news is about Jesus himself. I would argue that in this early source the good news is about the Kingdom and not about Jesus himself. If it is about Jesus, then one has to ask, what is the good news about Jesus? Is it his resurrection? Atonement might be considered good news, but that is not present in Mark. The closest Mark comes to atonement is Jesus breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine and saying this was my body and blood, but this is not atonement. In Mark

¹⁶⁸ Mark 1:15.

¹⁶⁹ Mark 1:1.

¹⁷⁰ Harold W. Attridge, ed., *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 1725.

10:29-30a Jesus is quoted as saying, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundred fold. . . ." ¹⁷¹ Here the good news does not seem to be about Jesus. Without a definite indication of what the good news is about Jesus, it appears that an appropriate understanding of good news is what Jesus is said to have said himself. The good news is that the kingdom has drawn near. Other passages related to good news will be discussed later as they appear in The Gospel of Mark.

The second passage found in Mark in which the kingdom of God is mentioned is in Mark 4:10-12 in a passage in which Jesus was asked about the Parable of the Sower. Here Jesus is quoted as saying, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven." ¹⁷² The indication here is that the secret of the kingdom is not for everyone. In being a secret which everyone does not understand, there is something of a mystery about the kingdom which the next passage picks up on.

In Mark 4:26-29 appears the first statement of what the kingdom of God is like. Here the writer of Mark has Jesus saying, "the kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." ¹⁷³ The passage continues by mentioning the development from stalk, to head, to grain, to harvest. In describing the sower as someone

¹⁷¹ Mark 10:29-30a.

¹⁷² Mark 4:11-12.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷³ Mark 4:26-27.

who does not know how the seed sprouts and grows, again there is an indication of mystery involved in the kingdom. While one might be aware of the kingdom and its effects, it is a mystery that cannot be fully explained. Both of the preceding passage may relate to the messianic secret within the Gospel of Mark.

A second passage of what the Kingdom is like follows in Mark 4:30-32. Here The Gospel of Mark has Jesus saying,

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."¹⁷⁴

The next reference to the kingdom of God is found in verse 9:1 of the passage Mark 8:34-9:1. In this passage Jesus tells a crowd that if they want to be his followers they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him and those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for his sake, and for the sake of the gospel (*tou euaggeliou*), will save it. Here the Greek word translated as gospel, as noted previously, is the same word as the word for good news. Thus, Mark would be talking about individuals losing their lives because the kingdom of God has drawn near. Then, in verse 9:1 there is an indication the Kingdom is to come soon. Here, Mark has Jesus saying, "Truly I tell you there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."¹⁷⁵

Mark 9:42-48 provides an indication of the importance of entering the Kingdom. This passage gives instruction of what to do if something will prevent entrance into the

¹⁷⁴ Mark 4:30-32.

¹⁷⁵ Mark 9:1.

kingdom. These verses talk about not causing anyone who believes in Jesus to stumble and to cut off one's hand or one's foot if they cause one to stumble. Then the passage concludes with "And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched."¹⁷⁶

In Mark 10:13-16 is given the first indication of the type of person who will enter into the Kingdom. In this passage people were bringing little children to Jesus and the disciples were speaking sternly to them. Mark reports Jesus reacting by saying, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."¹⁷⁷ This passage indicates that the kingdom of God belongs to one of the vulnerable groups of society.

Mark 10:17-31 presents another characteristic for entering the Kingdom, or perhaps more accurately a characteristic for denial of entrance. In this passage Jesus is asked by a man what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him that he needs to keep the commandments. When the man says he has done this since his youth, Jesus says, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."¹⁷⁸ We are told at hearing this requirement, the man left grieving because he had many possessions. Then Jesus says to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"¹⁷⁹ When the disciples are perplexed by this, Jesus says, "Children, how hard it is

¹⁷⁶ Mark 9:47-48.

¹⁷⁷ Mark 10:14-15.

¹⁷⁸ Mark 10:21.

¹⁷⁹ Mark 10:23b.

to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."¹⁸⁰ Upon hearing this Peter says, "Look, we have left everything and followed you"¹⁸¹ to which Jesus replies,

"Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."¹⁸²

Again the good news is mentioned. Thus, again we have a connection to the kingdom of God having drawn near. In this passage we also have the first reference to reward being connected to the kingdom of God, but not only is there reward, there is also persecutions. The final verse of this passage Mark has Jesus saying, ". . . many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."¹⁸³

The next reference to the kingdom of God occurs in Mark 12:28-34. Here a scribe asks Jesus which commandment is the most important. When Jesus answers with

". . . Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these,"¹⁸⁴

the scribe responds to him,

"You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength," and "to love one's neighbor as

¹⁸⁰ Mark 10:24b-25.

¹⁸¹ Mark 10:28.

¹⁸² Mark 10:29-30.

¹⁸³ Mark 10:31.

¹⁸⁴ Mark 12:29-31.

oneself,"—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."¹⁸⁵

To the scribe's statement, Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."¹⁸⁶

Here love of God and love of neighbor are related to the kingdom of God, and such love appears to draw one near to the kingdom. This love can be contrasted to what is experienced under domination.

In Chapter 13 of this gospel the writer of Mark has Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple. Later Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus when this destruction will take place and what will be the signs that it is about to happen. Jesus replies,

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs"¹⁸⁷

for ". . . the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations."¹⁸⁸ As Jesus's proclamation in the first chapter of this gospel revealed, the good news is that the kingdom of God has drawn near; therefore, in this passages Jesus is recorded as saying that the drawing near of the Kingdom is to be proclaimed to all nations before the end comes.

Another reference to good news appears in Mark 14:9. This passage is a response to Jesus's being anointed at Bethany. Here Jesus is reported as saying, "Truly I tell you,

¹⁸⁵ Mark 12:32-34.

¹⁸⁶ Mark 12:34.

¹⁸⁷ Mark 13:7-7.

¹⁸⁸ Mark 13:10.

wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."¹⁸⁹ Again, the good news is that the kingdom of God has drawn near.

This passage is followed by another Kingdom statement in the same Chapter. This is found in Mark 14:22-25, and involves the Passover meal where Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."¹⁹⁰ This passage sounds like liturgy of the Markan community, but, if the words do come from Jesus himself, they could mean that Jesus will experience the Kingdom after his death or that he thinks the Kingdom is so near that he will experience it before his death.

The kingdom of God is mentioned again in the next chapter in Mark 15:42-43. This time it is in relationship to Joseph of Arimathea. This passage reads,

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.¹⁹¹

The last passage of Mark which is related to the kingdom of God is Mark 16:14-15, a passage that possibly should not even be considered here since the thesis involves the early sources. This passage at the end of Mark appears to be a later addition as it does not appear in the earliest manuscripts of Mark although "it was known as early as the late second century."¹⁹² This passage does help to frame Mark since the very first verse of

¹⁸⁹ Mark 14:9.

¹⁹⁰ Mark 14:25.

¹⁹¹ Mark 15:42-43.

¹⁹² Attridge, *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, 1758.

Mark is "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,"¹⁹³ and is followed in Mark 1:15 with "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."¹⁹⁴ Mark 16:14 has Jesus appearing to the eleven disciples after his death. In the next verse he is reported to have told them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."¹⁹⁵ Thus, the thread of the nearness of the kingdom of God runs throughout the Gospel of Mark with Mark 16:14-15 completing the framing of the Gospel of Mark. The question is whether the good news is spatial or temporal. A definite answer cannot be given although temporal would seem to be more probable as the nearness of the Kingdom seems to be involved with meeting the needs of people. This is seen in Jesus immediately going out after the announcement of the nearness and casting out demons and healing the sick.

The next early source in which passages related to the kingdom of God are to be identified is Q. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the identity of these passages and to what strata of Q they belong comes from Burton L. Mack's *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. These passages were double checked with *The Critical Edition of Q* edited by James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffman, and John S Kloppenborg. Mack has provided his own translations of these passages, but for more familiarity with the passages, this thesis, as was done with the Gospel of Mark, quotes the passages from the New Revised Standard Version with the passages coming from the Gospel of Luke. Although Mack includes a total of ten Q passages referencing the kingdom of God, seven from Q1, two from Q2, and one from Q3, *The Critical Edition of*

¹⁹³ Mark 1:1.

¹⁹⁴ Mark 1:15.

¹⁹⁵ Mark 14:15.

Q recognizes only eight of those, five from Q1, two from Q2, and one from Q3. Here only those agreed on by Mack and *The Critical Edition of Q* are included.

The first Q1 passage is Q 6:20 which reads, "Then he looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'"¹⁹⁶ Here to whom the Kingdom belongs is identified; it belongs to the poor.

The next Q1 passage which references the kingdom of God is Q 10:2-11a, a passage in which individuals are sent out. In verses 8-9 they are told, "Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"¹⁹⁷

The third Q1 passage with reference to the Kingdom is found in a familiar passage known today as the Lord's Prayer. It is found in Q 11:2-4. Verse two of this passage reads "He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.'"¹⁹⁸ The prayer appears to connect the Kingdom with daily sustenance and debt relief as the prayer follows immediately with "Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us."¹⁹⁹

The fourth Q1 passage referencing the Kingdom is Q 12:22b-31. This is a passage in which the disciples are told not to worry about their life, about their body, what they will eat, what they will drink, or what they will wear. Then in verses 30-31 Jesus is quoted as saying, "For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these

¹⁹⁶ Luke 6:20.

¹⁹⁷ Luke 10:8-9.

¹⁹⁸ Luke 11:2.

¹⁹⁹ Luke 11:3-4a.

things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."²⁰⁰

The final Q1 passage with reference to the kingdom of God is Q 13:18-21. In this passage there are two metaphors describing what the kingdom of God is like. The first of these compares the Kingdom to a mustard seed. It reads, "He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And so what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."²⁰¹ The second compares the Kingdom to yeast, and reads, "And again he said, 'To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."²⁰²

The first four of these Q passages reflect a concern for justice. In the first of these the kingdom of God belongs to the poor; this is certainly not the experience the poor had with the kingdom of Rome. The poor are a vulnerable group. In the next passage another vulnerable group is presented; they are the sick who are to be cured and told that the kingdom of God has come near to them. In the third Q1 passage which is the Lord's Prayer, a concern for vulnerable is also displayed. Here the vulnerable who need justice are those whose daily sustenance is in question and those whose debts need to be forgiven to help them be less marginalized. In the fourth passage a contrast is made between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Rome. Here the disciples are told not to worry about their life, body, food, drink, or clothing for God knows their needs. In contrast they are told it is the nations that strive after these things. The final Q1 passage

²⁰⁰ Luke 12:30-31.

²⁰¹ Luke 13:18-19.

²⁰² Luke 13:20-21.

may also reflect a concern for justice under the domination system if Stephen J. Patterson is correct in recognizing the mustard seed and yeast metaphors as representing the subversive nature of the kingdom of God.²⁰³ More will be said about Patterson's view in the next chapter.

The next group of sayings come from Q2 which contains two passages with references to the kingdom of God. The first is Q 7:24-28. In this passage the author of Luke reports Jesus talking about John and asking what the people expected to see when they went into the wilderness. In verses 27-28 Jesus is reported as saying of John, "This is the one about whom it is written 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."²⁰⁴

The second Q2 passage is Q 13:28-30. While Mack contributes the entirety of these verses to Q2,²⁰⁵ *The Critical Edition of Q* eliminates the second reference to the kingdom of God from this passage.²⁰⁶ As found in the *New Revised Standard Version*, the passage reads,

"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourself thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 199-200.

²⁰⁴ Luke 7:27-28.

²⁰⁵ Mack *The Lost Gospel*, 98.

²⁰⁶ Robinson, *The Critical Edition of Q*, 416.

²⁰⁷ Luke 13:28-30.

The only Q3 passage which mentions the kingdom of God is Q 16:16-18. Verse 17 of this passage talks about the difficulty in changing the law with verse 18 talking about divorce and adultery. In verse 16 is found mention to the kingdom of God. This verse reads, "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force."²⁰⁸ Here the Kingdom is projected as something that can be entered.

The second passage from Q2 and the Q3 passage definitely have a different tone than the Q1 passages. Both reflect more chaos and violence. The Q2 passage particularly has an apocalyptic tone.

In identifying references to the kingdom of God in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the translation used is by Thomas O. Lambdin and is found in *The Nag Hammadi Library* edited by James M. Robinson. The *Gospel of Thomas* has more and perhaps more diverse references to the kingdom of God than any of the other early sources being considered. The kingdom of God has a number of synonyms in the *Gospel of Thomas*. In addition to the phrase, the kingdom of God, the gospel also uses Kingdom, kingdom of Heaven, and kingdom of the Father. There are eighteen passages referencing the Kingdom found in this gospel. The first of these is number 3 and reads:

Jesus said: "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are poverty."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Luke 16:16.

²⁰⁹ "The Gospel of Thomas (II,2)," 126.

The second Kingdom saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* is numbered 20. It is a familiar metaphor of the Kingdom and one that is also found in Q. This saying reads, "The disciples said to Jesus, 'Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like.' He said to them, 'It is like a mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds. But when it falls on tilled soil, it produces a great plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky.'"²¹⁰

The next Kingdom saying, 22, also involves a metaphor. It indicates that the Kingdom is something that can be entered and it provides characteristics for entering and when it can be entered. This passage states:

Jesus saw infants being suckled. He said to his disciples, "These infants being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom." They said to him, "Shall we then, as children, enter the kingdom?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, and when you make the male and female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then you enter [the kingdom]."²¹¹

As with some of the Mark passages and Q1 passages, the kingdom is linked to a vulnerable group. Here that group is children. The linkage of vulnerable groups to the Kingdom relates to justice as these are the groups which do not receive justice in the earthly kingdoms. More explanation of this passage will be given in the next chapter.

Saying 27 of the *Gospel of Thomas* talks about the Kingdom as something that is to be found and what it takes to find it. This reads, "<Jesus said,> 'If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not observe the Sabbath as a

²¹⁰ Ibid., 128.

²¹¹ Ibid., 129.

Sabbath, you will not know the father."²¹² Here there is a contrast between the world with its kingdoms of domination and the kingdom of God. It is necessary for one to separate from the world in order to find the Kingdom.

The following saying numbered 46 in the *Gospel of Thomas* is similar to a passage found in Q2. This reads,

Jesus said, "Among those born of women, from Adam until John the Baptist, there is no one so superior to John the Baptist that his eyes should not be lowered (before him). Yet I have said, whichever one of you comes to be a child will be acquainted with the kingdom and will become superior to John."²¹³

Again, the Kingdom is connected to children.

The next saying referring to the Kingdom is number 49. It is another saying which identifies the Kingdom as something which can be found. It also indicates that the Kingdom is something from which one comes and will return. This saying states, "Jesus said: 'Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you will find the kingdom. For you are from it, and so to it you will return.'"²¹⁴ This is the only passage in any of the four sources which talks about coming from and returning to the Kingdom.

Reference number 54 is a short familiar saying which also appears in Q and which indicates to whom the Kingdom belongs. Here the Kingdom is referred to as the kingdom of Heaven. It reads, "Jesus said, 'Blessed are you, the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.'"²¹⁵ Again, there is reference of the Kingdom belong to a vulnerable group, a group which does not receive justice under kingdoms of domination.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 131.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 132.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

The next saying to be identified, number 57, refers to the Kingdom as the kingdom of the Father. It is a passage that provides a metaphor stating what the Kingdom is like. It states,

Jesus said, "The kingdom of the father is like a man who had [good] seed. His enemy came by night and sowed weeds among the good seed. The man did not allow them to pull up the weeds; he said to them, 'I am afraid that you will go intending to pull up the weeds and pull up the wheat along with them.' For on the day of harvest the weeds will be plainly visible, and they will be pulled up and burned."²¹⁶

As with the Q2 passage which talks about weeping and gnashing of teeth, this passage also has an apocalyptic tone.

The ninth Kingdom passage is number 76 and is another passage which uses a metaphor and refers to the Kingdom as the kingdom of the Father. This passage indicates that the Kingdom is valuable and everlasting. In this passage is found, "Jesus said, 'The kingdom of the father is like a merchant who had a consignment of merchandise and who discovered a pearl. That merchant was shrewd. He sold the merchandise and bought the pearl alone for himself. You too seek his unfailing and enduring treasure where no moth comes near to devour and no worm destroys.'"²¹⁷

The next saying, number 82, is a saying which indicates a location for the Kingdom. This saying reads, "Jesus said, 'He who is near to me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the Kingdom.'"²¹⁸

The next four sayings appearing in the *Gospel of Thomas*, numbers 96-99, are all sayings about the Kingdom, and all refer to the Kingdom as the kingdom of the Father.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 135.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

The first three of these are metaphors describing what the Kingdom is like; the last of these four tells who enters the Kingdom. The first of these four, number 96, involves a familiar metaphor which is also found in Q. It reads, "Jesus said, 'The kingdom of the father is like [a certain] woman. She took a little leaven, [concealed] it in some dough, and made it into large loaves. Let him who has ears hear.'"²¹⁹

The following saying, number 97, states,

Jesus said, "The kingdom of the [father] is like a certain woman who was carrying a [jar] full of meal. While she was walking [on the] road, still some distance from home the handle of the jar broke and the meal emptied out behind her [on] the road. She did not realize it; she had noticed no accident. When she reached her house, she set the jar down and found it empty."²²⁰

This is a different type saying which has no parallel in any of the three other sources. It appears that one can have the Kingdom and then can lose it. Or, is the implication that one can spread the Kingdom without being aware of it?

Saying number 98 is the third saying in this group revealing what the Kingdom is like. It reads, "Jesus said, 'The kingdom of the father is like a certain man who wanted to kill a powerful man. In his own house he drew his sword and stuck it into the wall in order to find out whether his hand could carry through. Then he slew the powerful man.'"²²¹ This is another unusual saying. It is a statement of violence which is not present in most of the Kingdom statements. Is this a subversive passage as Patterson has suggested of the mustard seed and the yeast? Who is the powerful man? Does the powerful man represent the kingdom of Rome?

²¹⁹ Ibid. 136.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

The last of the sayings in this group of four consecutive Kingdom sayings, number 99, indicates who will enter the Kingdom. Here is found, "The disciples said to him, 'Your brothers and your mother are standing outside.' He said to them, 'Those here who do the will of my father are my brothers and my mother. It is they who will enter the kingdom of the father.'"²²²

Number 107 is another saying in which a metaphor is used, and in which like the passage about the pearl indicates that the Kingdom is something to be valued. This passage reads,

Jesus said, "The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and looked for that one until he found it. When he had gone to such trouble, he said to the sheep, 'I care for you more than the ninety-nine.'"²²³

The next Kingdom saying, number 109, is another metaphor. Here is found,

Jesus said, "The Kingdom is like a man who had a [hidden] treasure in his field without knowing it. And [after] he died, he left it to his [son]. The son [did] not know (about the treasure). He inherited the field and sold {it}. And the one who bought it went plowing and [found] the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished."²²⁴

Again, the Kingdom is seen as something of value.

Saying number 113 mentions the when and where of the Kingdom. This saying states, "His disciples said to him, 'When will the kingdom come?' <Jesus said.> 'It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying "here it is" or "there it is". Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.'"²²⁵

²²² Ibid., 136-137.

²²³ Ibid., 137.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid., 138.

The final Kingdom saying in the *Gospel of Thomas*, number 114, refers to the Kingdom as the kingdom of Heaven, and involves women and how they can enter the Kingdom. It reads,

Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."²²⁶

This is another passage in which a vulnerable group, this time women, have a place in the Kingdom. Peter wants to exclude Mary, but Jesus includes her in the Kingdom. Thus, this is another Kingdom passage which links the kingdom of God to justice.

As was noted earlier, *The Gospel of Thomas* has more Kingdom statements than any of the other four sources. Some statements appear strange with men and women becoming the same, and there is the one statement of coming from the Kingdom and returning to it. Many of the statements are metaphors which tell what the Kingdom is like, but not what it is which is very appropriate for a community interested in knowledge of one's self based on Jesus' sayings as a way of becoming part of the Kingdom. Also within the *Gospel of Thomas*, there are a number of statements which indicate the Kingdom is for the most vulnerable of society. It belongs to the poor, to children, and to women. The inclusion of these indicates that the kingdom of God for the *Gospel of Thomas* community was related to justice.

While the *Gospel of Thomas*, had the most Kingdom passages, the next source, the *Didache*, another non-canonical work, has the least number of references. The Kingdom references for the *Didache* are taken from *The Didache: Text, Translation*,

²²⁶ Ibid.

Analysis, and Commentary by Aaron Milavec. In the *Didache* there are only three references to the kingdom of God. All are referred to as Kingdom, all are found in prayers, and all are petitioning for the Kingdom to come. The first prayer which is numbered 8:2 is the familiar Lord's Prayer which was also found in Q. It reads,

Our Father, the [one] in heaven, your name be made holy, your kingdom come, your will be done upon earth as in heaven, give us this day our loaf [that is] coming, and forgiving us our debt [at the final judgment] as we likewise [now] forgive our debtors, and do not lead us into the trial [of the last days] but deliver us from [that] evil because yours is the power and the glory forever.²²⁷

The wording of this prayer has an apocalyptic tone to it if "at the final judgment" was part of the prayer for the community. But, there is also a concern for justice with the request for the Father's will to be done on earth and for daily sustenance to be given. It is questionable what is meant by the request that the Father forgive debts at the judgment, but it is stated that members of the community are presently forgiving their debtors. Thus, there is the element of justice in this prayer which is seen in many of the kingdom of God passages.

The next prayer is numbered 9:4. Here is found

Just as this broken [loaf] was scattered over the hills [as grain], and, having been gathered together, became one; in like fashion, may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. Because yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.²²⁸

The last reference to the Kingdom in the *Didache* is number 10:5. It reads, "Remember, Lord, your church, to save [her] from every evil and to perfect [her] together

²²⁷ Milavec, *The Didache*, 21.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

from the four winds [as] the sanctified into your kingdom which you have prepared for her, because yours is the power and the glory forever."²²⁹

The three kingdom of God passages in the *Didache* all are found in prayers and thus are part of the liturgy and the training for Gentiles who are becoming part of the communities represented by the *Didache*. In all three prayers there is the request for the future Kingdom.

Now, that the kingdom of God passages in Mark, Q, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The Didache* have been identified, the next chapter will place them into categories in order that the understandings of the kingdom of God for the four communities can be compared.

²²⁹ Ibid., 25.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPARISON OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE PRIMARY SOURCES

Now that the kingdom of God sayings have been identified in Mark, Q, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Didache*, this chapter will place them into categories in order that they might be compared. William E. Arnal says that history is really about ourselves; it comments "on the world as it is by casting current categories and basic understandings into the past."²³⁰ While this is true, this thesis will use categories which appear to arise from the primary sources themselves.

When one identifies the references to the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark, Q, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache*, it becomes obvious that the Kingdom statements can be grouped organically into a number of categories. These categories are metaphors which tell what the kingdom of God is like ("like" sayings); who possesses, finds, is acquainted with, or enters the Kingdom ("enter" sayings); temporal ("when" sayings); spatial ("where" sayings) and the blessings or rewards of the Kingdom ("blessing" sayings). A few of the Kingdom sayings fall into multiple categories.

Most of the references fall in the temporal category if the Kingdom being near is considered as temporal. Because it appears that the nearness of the Kingdom statements are temporal, but can also be considered spatial they will be considered in both categories. Fifteen sayings fall in the temporal category when considering the nearness

²³⁰ William E. Arnal, "Making and Re-Making the Jesus-Sign: Contemporary Markings on the Body of Christ," in *Whose Historical Jesus?*, ed. William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 317.

references in this category. The categories with "like" sayings and "entry" sayings follow with twelve sayings falling into each of the two categories. The category of "where" sayings has seven sayings, and the category of "blessing" sayings has four.

In both the "like" category and the "entry" category most of the sayings come from the *Gospel of Thomas*. The *Didache* contains no "like" sayings. Both Mark and Q contain only two "like" sayings while the *Gospel of Thomas* contains eight. Both of Q's "like" sayings are attested to in at least one of the other sources. One of these sayings appears in three of the sources. That is the saying that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It appears in Mark 4:30-32, Q1 13:18-19, and the *Gospel of Thomas* number 20. Mark's version reads,

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large braches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."²³¹

The metaphor is similar in the two other sources, but has some variations. Both Mark and Q1 mention the seed being sown. For Mark it is sown in the ground; for Q1 it is sown in the garden. For the *Gospel of Thomas* it is not sown but falls on tilled soil. In the *Gospel of Thomas* the mustard seed becomes a great plant; in Mark it becomes the greatest of shrubs; and in Q1 it becomes a tree. In Mark and Q1 birds make nest in the tree or shrub; in the *Gospel of Thomas* the great plant provides shelter for the birds. The only other difference is that the Kingdom is referred to as the kingdom of Heaven in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the kingdom of God in the other two sources.

²³¹ Mark 4:30-32.

The only other metaphor that appears in more than one source is the yeast/leaven being added to flour. It appears in both Q1 13:20-21 and the *Gospel of Thomas* number 96. Q1 13:20-21 reads, "And again he said, 'To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'"²³² There is little difference between the two versions. However, instead of the woman mixing in the yeast in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the leaven was concealed in some dough and was made into large loaves. The *Gospel of Thomas* also ends with "Let him who has ears hear."²³³ In Q these two sayings are grouped together. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, as in Q the saying of the mustard seed comes first, but the two sayings are separated by seventy-six other sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*. A suggestion for this separation will be made later.

Mark has one "like" saying that does not appear in any of the other three sources. That is found in Mark 4:26-29 where the kingdom of God is likened to someone scattering seeds and after several days the seeds sprout and grow, but that person does not understand how this happens. Although he does not understand, when the grain is ripe, he harvests it.

The *Gospel of Thomas* has six other "like" sayings which do not appear in any of the other three sources. Four of these indicate that the Kingdom is something to be valued. The first of these is number 57 where the Kingdom is described as being like a man who had good seed and at night his enemy sowed weeds among the good seeds. The man then allows the weeds to grow until harvest because of fear of accidentally pulling up the wheat. At harvest he says the weeds will be pulled up and burned.

²³² Luke 13-20-21.

²³³ "The *Gospel of Thomas*," 136.

The second of these "like" sayings indicating the Kingdom is to be valued is number 76 which compares the Kingdom to a merchant who had a consignment of merchandise and in discovering a pearl, sold the merchandise and bought the pearl. This saying ends with "You too seek his unfailing and enduring treasure where no moth comes near to devour and worm destroys."²³⁴

In saying number 107, the Kingdom is again seen as something of value. Here it is likened unto a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. When his largest went astray he left the other ninety-nine to find it. When he found the lost sheep, he said, "I care for you more than the ninety-nine."²³⁵

The last of these four sayings indicating the value of the Kingdom is number 109. Here the Kingdom is described as a man who was unaware of a hidden treasure in his field. When he died, his son, who was also unaware of the treasure, inherited the field and sold it. The person buying the field from him discovered the treasure in plowing the field. Then, after his discovery, he began to lend money with interest to anyone wishing to borrow the money.

The *Gospel of Thomas* contains two other "like" sayings. The first of these, number 97 likens the Kingdom to a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal to her house when the handle broke and all the meal fell out without her realizing it. Then, when she got home she discovered the jar was empty. The final "like" statement describes the Kingdom like a man who wanted to kill a powerful man. In preparation for this he practiced in his own house by drawing his sword and thrusting it into the wall to see if he could carry through with the act. Then, after this practice, he slew the powerful

²³⁴ Ibid., 135.

²³⁵ Ibid., 137.

man. What are the meanings of these two sayings? The first appears to be saying that the Kingdom can be lost without one being aware that it is happening or maybe it can spread. What is meant by the slaying of the powerful man? Is the Kingdom something for which to practice or is this a statement against the powerful? Is this a reaction to domination? Does it involve justice?

The "like" sayings are interactive. It is significant that in all of these sayings the hearer is never told, "The kingdom of God is ____." The hearer is only told, "The kingdom of God is like ____." When one hears that the kingdom of God is like ____, then one begins to interact with that metaphor by asking how the kingdom of God can be like that with which it is being compared. It is possible to discover a number of different connections; different people at different times may come to different understandings. By not saying, "The kingdom of God is," the concept of the Kingdom is flexible, and its understanding can differ among individuals and change over time based on the experiences of the one hearing what the Kingdom is like. Thus, when hearing the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed or is like yeast, many people view the Kingdom as being something that starts out small, but has the potential to become large. But, is this the only way the mustard seed and yeast are like the Kingdom? With different understandings or experiences it may be viewed differently. Stephen J. Patterson takes a different view in saying, "Mustard was a weed in the ancient world. Why sow weeds in your garden? And who wants birds in a garden? Is the empire of God weedlike? Is it a nuisance? Does it attract unwanted pests?"²³⁶ If mustard is an unwanted weed in a garden which attracts birds which can destroy the garden, then, is the kingdom of God like a

²³⁶ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 199.

mustard seed because it is subversive to empire? Is the garden the empire? Patterson has a similar understanding of the yeast. He says that on the surface adding yeast to flour until the whole batch was leavened does not sound odd.

If you mix yeast into flour, add a little water, and bake it, you have bread. But these ancient Jews were not baking Wonder Bread in the Galilee. The normal meal consisted of unleavened bread—pita bread. In that context, leaven had a different metaphoric flavor altogether. One can see this elsewhere in the New Testament itself, where it always signifies something bad, rotten, corrupt (see, e.g., Mark 8:15: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees . . ."). That is true generally in the Mediterranean world. Leaven is more like mold. Who puts mold in flour?²³⁷

Again, does this also suggest the kingdom of God is subversive? Again, the "like" statements are interactive. What one brings to these metaphors will influence how the kingdom of God is understood. Both of the mustard seed and the yeast sayings can provide similar understandings of the Kingdom. Thus, it is understandable why they would be grouped together in Q. (They appear to have been grouped together by the Q community since they appear together in both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew.) But, why are they not grouped together in the *Gospel of Thomas*? Was the Q community more interested in the subversive nature of the Kingdom than the *Gospel of Thomas*? That could very well be possible since the emphasis for this community is on knowing one's self. For this community the emphasis would be on changing one's self; the emphasis would not be on changing external conditions.

A second category of Kingdom sayings contains those sayings which involve who possesses, finds, is acquainted with, or enters the Kingdom. This "enter" category might be labelled "who is in and who is out." Again, as with the "like" sayings, the

²³⁷ Ibid., 200.

majority of the sayings in this category come from the *Gospel of Thomas*. The *Gospel of Thomas* has five sayings which fall into this category while Mark has four, Q has three with one each found in Q1, Q2, and Q3, and the *Didache* has two. One of these is found in both the *Gospel of Thomas* and in Q1. In the *Gospel of Thomas* it is number 54; in Q it is Q 6:20. In saying it is the poor who have the Kingdom, Q 6:20 reads, "Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."²³⁸ The *Gospel of Thomas* has very similar wording.

A related Kingdom saying talks not about the lack of wealth as in the previous saying, but the possession of wealth. This passage specifically talks in terms of entering the Kingdom. The passage is Mark 10:17-31 where a man came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him he knows the commandments and the man replied that he had kept them since his youth. Then, Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. When the man heard this, he went away grieving. Jesus responded by saying it is so difficult for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Thus, three sources in the "enter' category have something to say about wealth or the lack thereof in terms of the Kingdom. In these passages there is a concern for justice for vulnerable. In this case it is the poor who are vulnerable. First, it is they who have a place in the kingdom of God, and, as been said before, they certainly did not have a place in the kingdom of Rome or at least a place that anyone would want. Secondly, those who do not help the vulnerable and do not seek to right the injustice have no place in the kingdom of God.

²³⁸ Luke 6:20.

The *Gospel of Thomas* has two sayings which indicate the necessity of being like a child in terms of entering or being acquainted with the Kingdom, and Mark has one passage. The first of these sayings from the *Gospel of Thomas* is number 22 in which Jesus is said to have seen infants nursing and said the ones nursing are like those who enter the Kingdom. Then he added:

"When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then you enter [the kingdom]."²³⁹

What does all of this mean? Perhaps it is another place where the recipient of this saying is supposed to be interactive with the text. Steven J. Patterson says that this is an odd saying, a riddle to be pondered.

But its basic solution lies . . . in those opening chapters of Genesis. Recall that in Genesis Adam is originally alone, a solitary human being living in paradise. But God sees that it is not good for him to be alone and so decides to create a second person to be his companion.²⁴⁰

Jean-Yves Leloup understands the passage differently. He says of this saying: "The theme of the androgyne recurs often in gnostic literature. It symbolizes this integration of masculine and feminine polarities: rigor and tenderness, intellect and feeling, strength and gentleness."²⁴¹ As with the "like" passages, this passage is interactive with the kingdom of God being understood on the bases of what one brings to the passage. While

²³⁹ "The Gospel of Thomas," 129.

²⁴⁰ Patterson, *The Lost Way*, 128.

²⁴¹ Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom of Jesus*, trans. Joseph Rowe (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1986), 100.

Patterson and Leloup both give possibly plausible interpretations of this passage, is there at least one other plausible explanation? Is it about transformation? There is much transformation indicated in this passage. If it is about transformation, then for the community of the *Gospel of Thomas*, that transformation would come through knowledge, through knowing one's self. Through that transformation, one would enter into the Kingdom and know the Father. In comparing this passage with the other primary works, none of the other sources have similar wording.

The other passage indicating the necessity of being like a child found in the *Gospel of Thomas* is saying number 46 in which Jesus is quoted as saying that John the Baptist was superior to anyone who had lived, and he was so superior that all others should lower their eyes before him, but anyone who becomes a child will be superior to John and will become acquainted with the Kingdom. Here the Kingdom is not entered rather one becomes acquainted with it by becoming like a child. More will be said later about the *Gospel of Thomas* using "acquainted" in relation to the Kingdom.

The passage found in Mark in which being a child is related to entering the Kingdom is Mark 10:13-16 where the disciples spoke sternly in objecting to people who were bringing little children to Jesus to be touched. Jesus became indignant with the disciples and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."²⁴²

Mark has one other "entry" passage in which children may be mentioned or the passage may be referring to those who are new to believing in Jesus, but even so there

²⁴² Mark 14b-15.

would be similarity to this and being a child. That passage is Mark 9:42-48 where the term "little ones," is used in regards to believing in Jesus, and is used as a warning against placing a stumbling block before the "little ones." This passage continues with warnings to do away with whatever causes one to stumble be it a hand, a foot, or an eye and saying it is better to enter the kingdom of God without these body parts than to be thrown into hell. Here it would appear that one who eliminates the stumbling blocks enters the kingdom of God. This would relate back to the wealthy man who could not depart with his wealth in Mark 10:17-23, a passage which appears in Mark shortly after the above passage.

These passages from the *Gospel of Thomas* and from Mark, again indicate an interest in the vulnerable. This time it is the children or those like a child to whom the kingdom belongs.

The *Gospel of Thomas* has two additional passages in which the Kingdom is talked about in terms of being entered. The first of these is saying number 99 in which the disciples told Jesus that his brothers and mother were outside to which Jesus replied that it was those who did his father's will who were his brothers and his mother and it was they who would enter the Kingdom. The other is saying number 114, a strange saying similar to saying number 22, which has no similarity to sayings in the other primary sources. Here Peter says that Mary should leave because women are not worthy of life. Jesus replies with "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."²⁴³ This passage portrays an inclusive view of

²⁴³ *The Gospel of Thomas*, 138.

the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not just for men; the kingdom of God is for women also. Women would have been a vulnerable group within that society. Thus, as with the poor and children the Kingdom belongs to women. The kingdom of God belongs to those who most experience injustice. This passage and may also reveal the androgyne of gnostic literature which Leloup talked about in regards to saying number 22, or like number 22 this passage may be understood in terms of transformation.

Mark 14:22-25 is a passage which sounds like liturgy of the early church. Here, after Jesus has broken bread and said, "Take; this is my body,"²⁴⁴ and taken a cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,"²⁴⁵ he says, "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."²⁴⁶ Presumably, Jesus enters the Kingdom because he has met the requirement of doing the Father's will which was a requirement in saying number 99 of the *Gospel of Thomas*.

In terms of who gets to enter the Kingdom, Mark is more exclusive than the other sources; although, there is some exclusiveness found in Q and the *Gospel of Thomas*. In Mark 4:10-12, after Jesus told the parable of the sower, when he was alone with the disciples and some others, they asked him about parables, and he responded to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven."²⁴⁷ Here secret knowledge and forgiveness is connected with the Kingdom. Although in some

²⁴⁴ Mark 14:22b.

²⁴⁵ Mark 14:24b.

²⁴⁶ Mark 14:25.

²⁴⁷ Mark 4:10-12.

places there is talk of entering the Kingdom, here as well as other places it is not entered. Here it is a secret given; in other places it is something with which one becomes acquainted or it is something found.

The Kingdom as something that is found is present in saying 77 of the *Gospel of Thomas* where the requirement of fasting in terms of the world is necessary to find the Kingdom. Not only that but observing the Sabbath as a Sabbath is necessary to see the Father.

The *Gospel of Thomas* has another saying, number 99, in which the Kingdom is also mentioned in terms of something to be found. This saying has no equivalent saying in any of the other sources. Here it is the solitary and elect who will find the Kingdom. Not only are the elect referred to, but it states that the solitary and elect are from the Kingdom and will return to it. Thus, here where it is stated the Kingdom is found and a specific mention of entering it is not present, it does appear the Kingdom is something to be entered as it is something to which the elect will return.

The first of the Q statements in the "enter" category comes from Q1 and is the Q 6:20 passage about the Kingdom belonging to the poor which was discussed above with the similar passage in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The other two Kingdom statements pertaining to "who is in and who is out" found in Q are believed by some to be later additions to Q and have a different more chaotic tone than the rest of the sayings in this category. The first of these is Q13:28-30 which has been classified as a Q2 saying. This passage talks about weeping and gnashing of teeth when being thrown out of the Kingdom and seeing Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all

the prophets in the Kingdom. It does not say why one would be thrown out, but it does end by saying that some of the last will be first and some of the first will be last.

The final passage in this category is Q 16:16-18 which is classified as a Q3 passage. This passage talks about the change that has occurred with the proclaiming of the good news of the kingdom of God. It says, "The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force."²⁴⁸ Again, here the kingdom of God is something to be entered.

The two passages from the *Didache* pertaining to entering the Kingdom come in the form of two liturgical prayers. The first of these is 9:4 which asks that the church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into the Kingdom. The second passage from the *Didache*, 10:5, has a similar request asking that the widespread church be sanctified into the Kingdom.

A third category of the kingdom of God is the temporal category: When will the kingdom of God come? Mark has more sayings in this category than in any other category and has more sayings in this category than any of the other three sources. Mark's emphasis on the temporal nature of the kingdom of God with the Kingdom being near probably stems from the destructive experience of domination under the kingdom of Rome as Mark was written sometime close to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Under such conditions there would be the desire for imminent justice, for an improved situation.

²⁴⁸ Luke 16:16-18.

The *Didache* has only three Kingdom statements all of which fall within the temporal category although two of these, as has been seen, can also be placed into the "enter" category. Q has one saying which falls into the temporal category. It is Q 11:2. In the *Didache* all of the references are found in prayers as well as the one from Q. Thus, the Kingdom passages occur in the liturgy of the communities involved with the *Didache*. The first of these passages in the *Didache* is number 8:2 and is in the prayer which today is known as The Lord's Prayer where the plea is for our Father's kingdom to come. This is also where the Kingdom reference is found in Q 11:2. In the *Didache* the plea for the coming of the Kingdom is tied to the Father's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. In the Q passage there is no reference to the Father's will being done. However, doing the Father's will being connected to the Kingdom was also seen in the saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* where Jesus is quoted as saying that his brothers and mother are those who do his father's will, and it is those who enter the Kingdom. In both the *Didache* and Q this prayer reveals the poverty conditions, under which the people were living, with the asking that debts be forgiven and the asking for daily sustenance (the loaf for the day in the *Didache* and daily bread in Q).

The next temporal reference to the Kingdom is found in the prayer which is passage 9:4 of the *Didache*. The request in this prayer is that the church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into the Kingdom, The final reference to the Kingdom in a prayer in the *Didache* is passage 10:5. It is another passage asking that the widespread church be gathered into the Kingdom. Here, the specific request is that the church as the sanctified be gathered into the Kingdom. In all of these prayers the

Kingdom is seen as being in the future but they do have a spatial aspect to them. For example, it is a space into which the church can be gathered.

One of the passages in Mark which is in the category of who enters the Kingdom also falls within the temporal category, and relates to the liturgy of the *Didache*. It is the passage in which Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, and gives it to his disciples and takes the wine, blesses it and gives it to his disciples saying, "This is my body and this is my blood" after which he says, "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."²⁴⁹ This is the first passage discussed which may indicate the kingdom of God is in the future after death; however, if this passage goes back to the historical Jesus it could be that he believed the Kingdom was so near that he would be drinking the wine in the Kingdom before his death; however, this passage sounds like liturgy, liturgy of the Markan community. It appears to be liturgy of a community remembering a past event, not something one would say in the present about one's self. As liturgy, this passage relates to the liturgical prayers of the *Didache*. Thus, it appears for the communities exposed to the *Didache*, Q, and Mark references to the kingdom of God became part of their liturgy.

The *Gospel of Thomas* has one saying, number 57, which was also a "like" passage and which might also be classified as a temporal passage. This saying has an apocalyptic tone and would locate the Kingdom in the future. Some similarity exists here between this saying and the previous saying in Mark if the Markan passage involved the end of Jesus's life. In the *Gospel of Thomas* it is the end of the growing season when the wheat is harvested and the weeds will be pulled up and burned. In spite of this verse, for

²⁴⁹ Mark 14:25.

the *Gospel of Thomas* as a whole, the Kingdom is more of a present reality than it is in the other three primary sources. Saying 22, which says infants are like those who enter the Kingdom, also answers the question of when the Kingdom comes. As was seen earlier Jesus said to them,

"When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female; and when you fashion eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, and a likeness in place of a likeness; then you enter [the kingdom]." ²⁵⁰

Here, the indication is that the Kingdom is present and is ready to be entered when one fulfills the aforementioned requirements.

Saying number 113 of the *Gospel of Thomas* specifically answers the question of when the Kingdom will come in Jesus' reply to the disciples' question of its arrival. Jesus reply was "It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it." ²⁵¹ In this saying the Kingdom is present. It is spread out upon the land. People just do not see it. Another saying from the *Gospel of Thomas* which indicates that the Kingdom of God is present is a saying that also indicates the location of the Kingdom. This saying is number 3 which says that the Kingdom is inside and outside a person. For the Kingdom to be located inside and outside a person, the Kingdom would have to be present as well as spatial.

²⁵⁰ *The Gospel of Thomas*, 129.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

In order to talk about when the Kingdom comes in the Gospel of Mark, it is necessary to first mention a couple of passages which are related to the Kingdom. The first passage is the very first verse of Mark which states, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."²⁵² The key in this verse is "the good news." In verses fourteen and fifteen of the same chapter, the good news is revealed. Here the reader finds in Mark 1:14-15, "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"²⁵³ This passage could indicate the temporal and/or spatial nature of the Kingdom. Context would seem to favor temporal as the verses that follow in Mark would seem to indicate that Jesus is talking about the Kingdom being near temporally. If it is close in terms of time, then the Kingdom is in the future, but it is the imminent future. A related passage, Mark 1:38-39, follows shortly with Jesus saying, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."²⁵⁴ The following verse reads, "And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons."²⁵⁵ As was learned from verses 14 and 15 the message Jesus proclaims is the good news that the Kingdom has drawn near. Mark more than any of the other sources perhaps gives an indication of what it means for the kingdom of God to have drawn near or perhaps how one tells that the Kingdom is near, for immediately Jesus goes out calls disciples and then begins casting out demons and healing the sick. Mark seems to be saying that the Kingdom is near when the vulnerable, in this case the

²⁵² Mark 1:1.

²⁵³ Mark 1:14-15.

²⁵⁴ Mark 1:38.

²⁵⁵ Mark 1:39.

demon possessed and the sick, are being healed or maybe more importantly when their needs are being met or their suffering is being relived. The Kingdom belonging to the poor would also be related to the Kingdom being near. It is their suffering of poverty that needs to be relieved. Likewise, the rich man cannot enter the Kingdom because he is not willing to sell his possessions and give to the poor. Thus, he is not willing to meet the needs of the poor and to relieve their suffering.

Mark 8:34-9:1 also reveals the temporal nature of the Kingdom. In verse 35 of this passage Jesus is quoted as saying, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."²⁵⁶ The gospel is the good news and the good news is that the kingdom of God has drawn near. Then, in verse 9:1 of this passage Jesus is quoted as saying, "Truly I tell you there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."²⁵⁷ These passages in Mark indicate the Kingdom is in the future, but it is the near future.

Chapter 13 of the Gospel of Mark is a significant chapter in terms of the Kingdom. In this chapter Jesus said, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."²⁵⁸ Then, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him to tell them when this would happen and what would be the sign that it was about to happen. Jesus responded,

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs. As for

²⁵⁶ Mark 8:35.

²⁵⁷ Mark 9:1.

²⁵⁸ Mark 13:2b.

yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations."

The significance is that these signs do not indicate the coming of the Kingdom, which would lend this passage to more of an apocalyptic interpretation, but rather the good news must be proclaimed to all nations before these things happen. Again, the good news is that the Kingdom has drawn near, and again, the indication is the Kingdom is in the future. If Mark was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the good news would provide hope in the nearness of the Kingdom..

Mark has three additional passages which indicate that the Kingdom is in the future. The first of these comes after Jesus has been anointed in Bethany and says, "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."²⁵⁹ Again the good news, as was expressed at the beginning of this gospel, is the kingdom of God has drawn near. The next passage in Mark comes after Jesus's death. This is Mark 15:42-43. In this passage "Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the Kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus."²⁶⁰ Joseph of Arimathea's waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God tells the reader that the Kingdom is future, but the near future as he was waiting for it.

The last verse related to the Kingdom in Mark in terms of "when" comes from the last chapter of Mark, a section which, as mentioned before, does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. It is Mark 16:15 which provides a bookend for Mark. Mark ends where it

²⁵⁹ Mark 14:9.

²⁶⁰ Mark 15:43.

begins with proclaiming the good news. This verse reads, "And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.'"²⁶¹ The kingdom of God has drawn near.

In looking at the temporal aspect of the kingdom of God, one discovers that the saying gospel of Q appears to have little interest in when the Kingdom will come. The one case in which it does appear, in the Lord's Prayer, it is in the future. For the *Didache* it is future and only appears liturgically in the form of prayers. In Mark the overall view is the Kingdom is in the near future. And, for the *Gospel of Thomas* the Kingdom is seen as more of a present reality than it is seen in any of the other primary sources.

The next category to be considered is the spatial: Where is the kingdom of God? Only the *Gospel of Thomas* and Mark reveal a definite, physical location. The rest perhaps could best be described as knowing and doing the will of the Father. The *Didache* has no Kingdom passages which fall into the spatial category. There are three spatial passages found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, three found in Mark, and one found in Q1. The first one in the *Gospel of Thomas* is saying number 3 in which Jesus is quoted as saying, ". . . . The kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you."²⁶² Then, Jesus goes on to say that when you know yourself you will be known, and "if you will not know yourself, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are poverty."²⁶³ Here the kingdom of God is connected with knowing one's self. It appears for the community of the *Gospel of Thomas* that the kingdom of God is understood as being everywhere since it is both inside and outside a person. Another saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* which indicates that

²⁶¹ Mark 16:15.

²⁶² *Gospel of Thomas*, 126.

²⁶³ Ibid.

the Kingdom is everywhere is number 113 where the disciples ask when the Kingdom will come and Jesus responds with "it will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'here it is' or 'there it is.' Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."²⁶⁴

The third Kingdom saying in the spatial category in the *Gospel of Thomas* is number 82 in which Jesus is quoted as saying, "He who is near me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom."²⁶⁵ Here the Kingdom is in the proximity of Jesus or perhaps living as Jesus which then would be presumably doing the will of the Father.

Jesus's first statement in Mark is "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." If this statement is spatial as well as temporal or spatial instead of temporal, then the location of the kingdom of God is near.

Mark has one passage, which is also a temporal passage, which gives the physical location of the Kingdom. It is verse 9:1 of the 8:34-9-1 passage. The verse reads, "And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'"²⁶⁶ This passage indicates that the kingdom of God is here on earth. The idea that it is coming before some die would indicate that Kingdom is on earth where the people are.

Mark has another passage possibly indicating spatially that the Kingdom is near. This is Mark 12:28-34, a passage in which a scribe comes to Jesus and asks, "Which

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 138.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 135.

²⁶⁶ Mark 9:1.

commandment is the first of all"²⁶⁷ to which "Jesus answers, "The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."²⁶⁸ When the scribe told Jesus he was correct and these commandments were "much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices,"²⁶⁹ Jesus saw that he answered wisely and "said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'²⁷⁰ Again in terms of location, the kingdom of God is near, and as with the *Gospel of Thomas* that nearness is associated with knowledge, or one might say correct knowledge or doing the will of the Father.

The one spatial reference in Q is found in Q 10:1-11 where Jesus sends people out and says to them, "Wherever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you."²⁷¹ Again, if seen spatially, the location is near. As with Jesus' initial proclamation in Mark what appears to indicate the nearness of the Kingdom is the sick being healed, people's needs being met. In this passage in Mark, as well as the other spatial passages in the primary sources, the kingdom of God is near. While these passages have been looked at spatially in terms of where the Kingdom is, there is little indication of physical location. For the most part it is simply near. Only the *Gospel of Thomas* gives a definite location for the kingdom: It is everywhere. It is inside and outside a person; it is spread out upon the earth.

²⁶⁷ Mark 12:28b.

²⁶⁸ Mark 12:29-30.

²⁶⁹ Mark 12:33b.

²⁷⁰ Mark 12:34b.

²⁷¹ Luke 10:8-9.

The final category for kingdom of God statements is the category of "blessings." There are only four references with blessings associated with the Kingdom. There are two to be found in Q, one in Q1 and one in Q2, one to be found in Mark, and one in the *Gospel of Thomas*. The first from Q1 is Q 12:22-31. It is the passage in which Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about their life or body, what they will eat or wear. Then he continues by saying consider the ravens which God feeds and the lilies which do not toil nor spin, but they are clothed better than Solomon. Then the passage concludes with

"and do not keep striving for what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."²⁷²

Several things are revealed in this passage. First the Kingdom is first priority. For it one should strive. Second, one should not worry. Third, the blessing involves not wants but needs being met. This would seem to relate to passages in Mark where Jesus or the disciples proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has drawn near and then provide healing to satisfy basic needs. It also relates to the prayer in Q and the *Didache* for bread and debt forgiveness. The fourth revelation from this passage is that it is the nations of the world that keep striving and worrying. Here, perhaps a contrast is being made between the kingdom of Rome and the kingdom of God.

The second passage for the blessing category comes from Q2. It is Q 7:24-23. This passage involves Jesus talking to the crowd who had gone out into the wilderness to see John. The passage concludes with Jesus saying, "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than

²⁷² Luke 12:29-31.

he."²⁷³ Saying number 46 in the *Gospel of Thomas* is that gospel's version of the passage in Q. Here the kingdom is not something one is in but something with which one is acquainted. If one is acquainted with the Kingdom one will be superior to John. The blessing or the reward for being in or acquainted with the Kingdom is greatness.

The last passage in the blessing category is Mark 10:17-31. It is the passage in which a man asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by telling him to keep the commandments. After the man said he had kept them since his youth, Jesus then told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. When the man heard this, he went away grieving. Then Jesus told the people that it was hard for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom. On hearing this, Peter responded by saying, "look, we have left everything and followed you,"²⁷⁴ to which Jesus responded,

"Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."²⁷⁵

This is an interesting passage because not only are there blessings associated with the Kingdom, but there are also persecutions.

This chapter has compared the kingdom of God statements found in Mark, Q, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The Didache* by placing the statements into the categories of "like" sayings, "enter" sayings, "when" sayings, "where" sayings, and "blessing" sayings. Many of these passages connect the kingdom of God with the vulnerable members of

²⁷³ Luke 7:28.

²⁷⁴ Mark 10:28b.

²⁷⁵ Mark 10:29-31.

society. The next chapter will use the findings of this chapter to analyze and make conclusions about the kingdom of God in the four primary sources.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

While we can never know for sure what the historical Jesus said about the kingdom of God, we can assume because of the number of references to it in the primary sources, the concept of kingdom of God was of prime importance to him. Even though we cannot know what Jesus said, we can know how the early communities of Jesus followers understood the concept of the kingdom of God. A comparison of the kingdom of God statements in Mark, Q, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Didache* reveals significant information about the Kingdom for these communities. When dividing the Kingdom statements into the categories of "like," "enter," "when," "where," and "blessings," fifteen fall into the category of "when," fourteen fall into the category of "enter," twelve fall into the "like" category, seven fall into the "where" category, and four fall into the "blessings" category. A look at how the Kingdom sayings break down within the sources will provide insight into the communities and their understanding of the Kingdom.

The "when" category reveals Q has very little interest when the Kingdom occurs as it has only one saying in this category; however, that one saying puts the Kingdom in the future for Q. The *Didache* has three sayings in this category; they are all found in liturgical prayers and are all future oriented. Mark has the most interest in when the Kingdom occurs, and more of Mark's sayings about the Kingdom are related to this category than any other category. Mark has eight sayings in this category, and in all eight

sayings the kingdom is in the near future. Thomas has three sayings in this category with his orientation being mainly that the Kingdom is present.

All of the primary sources have some passages related to entering the Kingdom. The *Gospel of Thomas* has five followed by Mark with four, Q with three and the *Didache* with two. In the "enter" category, the *Didache* is the only one of the four primary sources which does not specifically indicate that the Kingdom is for the most vulnerable of society. As was seen in the last chapter, the two *Didache* passages in the "enter" category are found in prayers which request that the widespread church be gathered into the Kingdom. The other three sources would appear to contrast the kingdom of Rome with the kingdom of God. The kingdom of Rome is not the place for the vulnerable, but it is those who are vulnerable that have a place in the kingdom of God. Both the *Gospel of Thomas* and Q say that the Kingdom belongs to the poor, and Mark says it is difficult for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom. Both the *Gospel of Thomas* and Mark include another vulnerable group, children, when talking about entering the Kingdom. Thomas includes a third vulnerable group, that of women who have a place in the Kingdom. When Peter wanted to deny Mary, Jesus said he would lead her to make her male and "every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."²⁷⁶ In the *Gospel of Thomas*, while not spelling out his Father's will, Jesus says it is those who do his Father's will who will enter the Kingdom. With concern for the vulnerable in the *Gospel of Thomas*, it would appear that doing the Father's will would be meeting the needs of the vulnerable which Jesus did in Mark after proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom had drawn near.

²⁷⁶ *The Gospel of Thomas*, 138.

When we turn to the "like" category, we find that the *Didache* has no interest in this category, but it is here that the *Gospel of Thomas* has the most interest having eight sayings in this category. Mark and Q each have two sayings

There is little interest among the sources of where the Kingdom is and even less interest in the blessings of the Kingdom. The *Gospel of Thomas* and Mark have the most sayings in the "where" category with three each; Q with one, and none for the *Didache*. For the *Gospel of Thomas* the Kingdom is mainly everywhere although one saying has the Kingdom near Jesus. For Mark the Kingdom is on earth as revealed in Mark 9:1 with the Kingdom coming before some will see death. For Q the Kingdom is simply near. In terms of blessings related to the Kingdom, Q has two sayings, the *Gospel of Thomas* and Mark have one each, and the *Didache* has none.

There are a number of other observations to be made from comparing the Kingdom statements in the four primary sources. One, the *Gospel of Thomas* has four "like" sayings which specifically indicate the Kingdom is something to be valued. None of the other sources has "like" sayings which indicate the Kingdom is something to be valued.

A second observation is Mark contains two sayings that connect mystery to the kingdom of God. They both involve the sowing of seeds. One involves a sower who scatters the seeds, sees them sprout and grow, and then harvests the crop. Although he sees the seeds sprout and grow, he does not understand how this happens. The other saying involving mystery is the parable of the sower where Jesus tells the disciples, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything

comes in parables. . . ."²⁷⁷ Both of these passages in Mark probably relate to the messianic secret of Mark's gospel.

A third observation is one which was mentioned in the previous chapter. It is the difference in Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* in Jesus' talking about John. In Q those in the kingdom are greater than John; in the *Gospel of Thomas* one is not in the Kingdom, but acquainted with the Kingdom. More will be said about this later when discussing what accounts for the differences involving the kingdom of God in the four different communities.

A fourth observation is one that was mentioned previously involving the "like" sayings. As was mentioned then, these sayings are interactive. The reader or hearer is never told what the Kingdom is; they are only told what the Kingdom is like. And, as was noted then, the reader or hearer interacts with the saying, bringing their own understandings and experiences to look at the number of ways the Kingdom could be like that to which it is being compared. The "like" sayings allow for flexibility in the understanding of the kingdom of God which makes the Kingdom relevant today. The communities of the primary sources show that flexibility with their use of Kingdom statements.

Some analysis can be made based on the above observations. There are differences within the primary sources based on the nature and experiences of the communities represented by those sources. As noted the *Gospel of Thomas* has the most "like" sayings involving the Kingdom. This is not surprising, since for the community of this gospel, knowledge was important, particularly knowledge of oneself. The number 3

²⁷⁷ Mark 4:11.

saying of the *Gospel of Thomas* ends with "but if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are poverty."²⁷⁸ The interactive nature of the "like" sayings encourages thought, the use and development of knowledge in understanding the nature of the Kingdom. This interest in the Kingdom being related to knowledge explains the difference between Q's saying and the *Gospel of Thomas's* saying involving being greater than John. For Q one is greater than John in the Kingdom. For the *Gospel of Thomas* one becomes superior to John by being acquainted with the Kingdom. Being acquainted involves knowledge. Also, as has been noted, the *Gospel of Thomas* is the only primary source which has sayings indicating the great value of the Kingdom. For this community that value comes from knowledge and specifically knowledge of oneself. As was noted above, not to know oneself is to dwell in poverty and to be poverty. For *Gospel of Thomas* the Kingdom is present, and it is everywhere. This is possible for this community since knowledge is related to the Kingdom, and it is presently possible for one to know one's self anywhere.

It has been noted throughout this thesis that the *Didache* differs from the other sources in that all of its Kingdom statements occur in liturgical prayers. Q and Mark each have only one Kingdom statement within what might be considered liturgy. Q's reference is in the Lord's Prayer as is one of the *Didache's*. Mark's is found in the bread and wine referred to as body and blood passage.

It is not surprising that the *Didache* would have more kingdom references in liturgy than the other sources when it is remembered that the *Didache* "represents the preserved oral tradition whereby mid-first-century house churches detailed the step-by-

²⁷⁸ *Gospel of Thomas*, 126.

step transformation by which gentile converts were to be prepared for full active participation in their assemblies.²⁷⁹ Liturgy is involved with group formation and building community. Liturgy in this case would be used to reinforce the community's beliefs and values. It would serve as a reminder of who this community understood itself to be and would help to assimilate new members into the community.

Two of the prayers talk in terms of the wide-spread church. Thus, these prayers being part of the liturgy would create a bond between different communities which used the *Didache*. Not only does this liturgy create a bond over distance, it also provides a connection between the past, present, and future as one remembers others before them have used these same prayers and held the same beliefs, and as one anticipates that these prayers will be used by others holding the same beliefs in the future.

Mark has two statements which involve mystery which connects with the messianic secret of that community. Mark also has more sayings than any of the other sources related to the Kingdom being near. Chapter 13 of Mark talks about vast destruction but the good news needing to be proclaimed first. The interest in the nearness of the Kingdom, and the violence and destruction in connection with the good news being proclaimed is probably influenced by the Markan community living shortly before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The nearness of the Kingdom would have provided hope among devastation.

Q has a higher percentage of passages about the Kingdom that are attested to in the other sources. Scholars consider that such passages which attested to in multiple early sources have a good possibility of going back to the historical Jesus. If these

²⁷⁹ Milavec, *The Didache*, ix.

attested passages do indeed go back the historical Jesus, then, Jesus and the community of Q were interested in those in those in need, and, if Steven J. Patterson is correct with his interpretation of the mustard seed and the yeast. Jesus and this community are advocating subversive activity against the Roman Empire and others who were part of the domination system.

The differences in the Kingdom sayings in the primary sources seem largely to reflect the nature and interests of the various communities they represent. It is important to remember that all of these communities lived under domination. At different times and at different places that domination was experienced with different degrees of severity with the Markan community possibly experiencing the greatest degree of severity being written around the time of the destruction of the temple which influenced that community's understanding of the kingdom of God; however, all of the communities reveal the conditions of living under domination. The Kingdom is seen through the eyes of those living under those conditions. All of the sources have sayings which relate the Kingdom being for the most vulnerable and to meeting basic needs, sustaining life or alleviating suffering. For Mark an indication the kingdom of God is near is the casting out of demons and the healing of the sick. Both Q and the *Gospel of Thomas* say the kingdom of God belongs to the poor. Q says the Father knows and will provide what is needed. Both Q and the *Didache* contain the Lord's Prayer where bread for the day is being asked for and debts are being forgiven.

Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre talks about the Kingdom as utopia which presses us to consider not so much what the Kingdom is as what it is not.²⁸⁰ The kingdom of God is not the kingdom of Rome. The kingdom of God is not a domination system.

In the chapter reviewing the literature many of the authors noted the need of putting Jesus in his historical setting to understand what was meant by the kingdom of God. In doing that some gave an apocalyptic interpretation of Jesus and the Kingdom, others gave a wisdom interpretation, and still others a justice interpretation. Regardless of the interpretation, they all have one thing in common. They are related to justice or how to deal with injustice experienced under domination. For they all advocate a better life for those living under current conditions whether that better life is in this age or the age to come.

An apocalyptic message appears when there is no justice and there is little hope that conditions will improve in the present age. If God is seen as being just and there currently appears to be no justice in the present age, then an apocalyptic message allows for the continued believe that God is just and there is still hope. But If Jesus is seen as an apocalyptic prophet proclaiming the kingdom of God, why does Mark have Jesus proclaiming the good news and going out casting out demons and healing the sick in the present age? Not only is an apocalyptic interpretation about injustice, a wisdom interpretation can also be about injustice. Wisdom can provide guidance for surviving, living the best one can, and helping others while living under domination and injustice. This seems to be the case with the wisdom statements of the *Gospel of Thomas*. Although this gospel connects the Kingdom with the vulnerable members of society, it

²⁸⁰ DeBaufre, "Dreaming the Common Good/s," 111.

also reflects the Kingdom as present rather than future. Its wisdom statements provide guidance for surviving in the present by knowing one's self. Thus, while being concerned about the poor, poverty brought about by domination is changed to the poverty of not knowing one's self. The third interpretation which was reviewed was the political interpretation. The political interpretation is very much concerned with justice. Thus, a justice understanding of the kingdom of God encompasses can be found in the apocalyptic, wisdom, and political interpretations of the kingdom of God.

Within Mark, Q, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Didache*, there is little specific mention of a next life in the kingdom of God statements. Looking closely at the kingdom of God passages in the primary sources reveals that the kingdom of God is not Heaven. The kingdom of God is not the place one goes after death. The kingdom of God is about justice and is here and is now. To wait for the kingdom of God after one dies is to miss it. Because of this there is much significance in Douglas E. Oakman's statement: "if for the next life only we have hoped in Jesus, then we are of all people most to be pitied!"²⁸¹ Because the kingdom of God, is involved with justice, it is present, and it continues to be relevant. And we can enter it, find it, possess it or be acquainted with it by helping to bring about justice in this life.

²⁸¹ Oakman, *The Political Aims of Jesus*, xiii.

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