

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

TITLE: THE MEANING OF *BASILEIA* IN MATTHEW 16:28

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In view of the prevailing conflict among biblical scholars on the meaning of βασιλεία in Matthew 16:28, the study sought the correct interpretation of the text. In this undertaking, the first objective was to determine the proper literary setting of the text. The second objective was to determine the meaning of the text within its historical and grammatical setting. The third objective was to draw some theological implications from the text.

A wide range of sources were consulted during the investigative process. Articles from journals, theological dictionaries, lexicons, commentaries, and other theological books which have a bearing on the topic provided useful information for the overall development of the study and the ultimate conclusion. An exegetical study using the historical grammatical method was undertaken to achieve the goal.

After a careful analysis of Matthew 16:28, the study has ascertained that the meaning of βασιλεία is to be found in the context of the transfiguration of Matthew 17:1-13. This decision was informed by four grounds. Firstly, the literary analysis of the passage within its immediate and wider context assisted in defining the limits and possible considerations for the correct rendering of the text. Secondly, the textual analysis of the parallel phrases and clauses including word studies strengthened the transfiguration as the fulfilment of the promise. Thirdly, contextual evidence from Matthew and the related synoptic accounts demonstrated that the placement of the transfiguration immediately after the prediction is indicative of what the evangelists had in mind as the correct interpretation. In this case, the pericope identified in Matthew is 16:28-17:13. Lastly, intertextual evidence points to the transfiguration as the event which carries the primary abstract meaning of βασιλεία. Theological implications covered such themes as the certainty of the Parousia, the kingdom of Christ and also Christ as Messiah.

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THE MEANING OF *BASILEIA* IN MATTHEW 16:28

A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

by

Isaac Chiyokoma

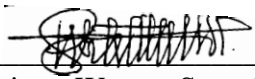
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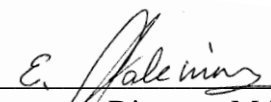
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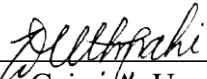
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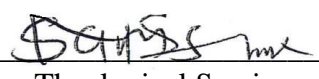
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This work is dedicated to my wife, Chipu Chimoga,
for her sacrifice and support during this undertaking.

To my two sons, Wampa and Lumba,
for indulging my numerous periods of absence.

To my family and friends who believed in me and
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

The nature of the kingdom of God in the Gospels has posed challenges to scholars leading to some casting doubts on the authenticity of the prophetic claims which Christ made during His earthly ministry. They say that He seems not to have known exactly what He was teaching and also that He expected the βασιλεία (basileia, kingdom) to come during His time in Israel, which expectations were never fulfilled.¹ As a consequence of this failed actualisation of the kingdom, Schweitzer taught that Jesus died in despondency and disappointment.²

Consequently, there has been a debate on the meaning of βασιλεία in Matthew 16:28. A survey of material on this text has revealed disunity among biblical scholars regarding its right interpretation. There are about six views which have been widely offered on the interpretation of this text. One view holds that Christ meant the

¹Willoughby C. Allen, *The International Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 183.

²Albert Schweitzer in George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., edited by Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 55.

transfiguration episode that immediately followed.³ Two other views are the Resurrection account⁴ and the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.⁵ Others hold to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD⁶ and also the rapid expansion of the early church.⁷ Finally, there is a school of thought that favours

³This view is supported by Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 335; also Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 574-575; also William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 312-314; also Robert H. Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 411; also James M. Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1 [Libronix Digital Library] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

⁴This view is supported by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 201; also John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 695; also Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary* [Libronix Digital Library] (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991); also Darrell L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 1:858-859; also Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 114.

⁵This view is supported by Barton W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament: With Explanatory Notes* [Libronix Digital Library] (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999); also William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* vol. 2, Rev. ed. (GOM) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 155-156; also William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew* [Libronix Digital Library] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001); also John MacArthur, *Matthew* [Libronix Digital Library] (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989).

⁶This view is supported by A. Sloman, Brooke F. Westcott, and Fenton J. A. Hort, *The Gospel according to St Matthew: Being the Greek Text* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 113; also Anthony C. Cotter, "Non Gustabunt Mortem" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 6 (1944): 451; also R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (IMG) (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), 648-649; also Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume [Libronix Digital Library] (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996).

⁷This view is supported by Alexander B. Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek Testament: The Synoptic Gospels* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, MCMXII), 228; also R. T. France, *Luke* (LUK) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 166; also Donald C. Fleming, *Concise Bible Commentary* [Libronix Digital Library] (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1994); also D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (NBC) [Libronix Digital Library] (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

the Second Coming itself at the end of the eschatological age.⁸ There are also two other views not widely held on the interpretation of this text.⁹

Statement of the Problem

In view of the disagreement on the proper interpretation of the text, this study was guided by three objectives. The first objective was to identify the proper literary setting of the present passage. The second objective was to discover what Jesus meant by coming in His βασιλεία. The third objective of the study was to identify theological implications of the text on Christians and also on Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) theology. How we understand the passage has an impact on the Adventist teaching of the second coming of Christ, especially the timing and manner of the event. There are apocalyptic synoptic prophecies which point to certain indicators as precursors to Jesus' second coming (Matt 24; Luke 21; Mark 13). If the text is understood to mean the *Parousia* (second coming), then the failure of its fulfilment before the death of *some* who stood with Him defeats His claim as Messiah and prophet.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold: (a) to determine the literary setting of the text, that is, its proper pericope and related boundaries within the immediate and

⁸This view is supported by Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28*, 33B [Libronix Digital Library] (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002); also W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [Libronix Digital Library] (London: T& T Clark International, 2004); also D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 231-232, 236; also Larry Chouinard, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Matthew* [Libronix Digital Library] (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997).

⁹“Perceiving or becoming aware of the fact that the kingdom of God ‘has already come’” and “experiencing the realized dimension of the kingdom’s arrival.” See in Stein, 411.

wider context; (b) to determine the meaning of the text within its historical and grammatical setting; and (c) to draw some theological implications from the text.

Significance of Study

The present study has attempted to clarify the meaning of the text in light of the transfiguration account. Although other scholars have argued in support of the transfiguration, I am not aware of a study that has offered a solution based on the literary structural approach and the textual analysis as added grounds in support of the transfiguration view. For this reason, the study contributes to the scholarly world where the debate is still prevalent and also ordinary church members who are likewise perplexed by the meaning of the text.

Delimitation of Study

This research focuses on the Gospel of Matthew 16:28. Cross references have also been made to the related texts in the Synoptic accounts, i.e. Mark and Luke. To this end, attention has been given to Mark 9:1 and 2 Peter 1:16-18 in order to further clarify the meaning of Matthew 16:28.

Methodology of the Study

This is a biblical exegetical study of Matthew 16:28. It is mainly dependent on the historical grammatical method of biblical interpretation. This method primarily focuses on seeking for meaning of biblical material based on scripture itself apart from the historical details and the laws of the language which encompass a text. Once the original situation is understood, it is easier to make an application to the secondary audience. The relevant historical parts i.e. political background, authorship, date of the gospel, religious setting, target audience and setting of Matthew 16 have been considered in an effort to put Matthew 16:28 in its proper original setting.

Consequently, the issues which could have influenced the author and his original audience have been highlighted.

The study has taken into account the grammatical and syntactical elements within the text and its immediate context. This is an important step in understanding the intended meaning of the biblical author. It commences with a translation of the Greek text followed by a literary analysis of the passage in order to establish how the text fits into the immediate and wider limits of the passage. Thereafter, the textual analysis has shown the syntactical relationship of the parallel clauses and phrases identified in the passage. This has been followed by a study of key words in the text which have a bearing on the meaning of the text. This word study also includes βασιλεία in order to discover how it was used in the Old Testament and also in the New Testament by Christ himself. A contextual analysis has also been done to show how the transfiguration best suits the interpretation on the basis of the immediate context. Intertextual evidence in favour of the transfiguration has also been discussed. Finally, theological implications have been drawn from the text in light of what the transfiguration represents.

Overview of the Research

The thesis is divided into five major chapters. The first chapter deals with preliminary issues which include: the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, delimitation of the study, the methodology employed as well as an overview of the study.

The second chapter is the literature review. It highlights the literature reviewed on the six interpretations offered on this text. Arguments for and against are reflected. These views include the advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the passion

and the Resurrection, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, the second coming of Christ, the transfiguration episode and the rapid expansion of the early church.

The third chapter highlights the passage in its original historical context. Isagogical issues have been dealt with i.e. authorship, the date of the Gospel, the target audience, the purpose of the Gospel, the setting of the passage in its Matthean tradition and other additional historical circumstances relevant to the overall understanding of the passage.

Chapter four is the exegetical portion of the study that has delved into the grammatical and syntactical analysis of relevant phrases and clauses which have a significant bearing on the understanding of the text. It also comprises word studies, including βασιλεία, in order to understand their meaning for a right understanding of the present passage. Furthermore, this chapter equally involves a theological analysis of the text in order to draw theological implications of the study.

The fifth and final chapter comprises the summary of the findings for the entire research. Further, the conclusions arrived at are also highlighted. Recommendations on Christian faith and practice have also been made, including the ones for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of works that have been written on the meaning of βασιλεία in Matthew 16:28 such that it would be a daunting task to sufficiently review all of them. Nevertheless, the consulted literature seemed sufficient to adequately represent each of the six views. Arguments for and against each proposition have been laid out even though some of them have been highlighted again in chapters four and five of the thesis. The interpretations offered on the present text have been set out in topical order.

Transfiguration

The transfiguration view was the position held by most of the early church fathers and early theologians. For example, John Chrysostom understood the transfiguration to be a fulfilment of this saying of Christ in Matthew 16:28. He reasoned that Jesus did not want to mention the specific names of those who were to witness His glory a few days later “to spare the other disciples any feeling of human weakness.”¹ This is something that the rest of them would have desired to witness and be a part of but He concealed it so that it does not appear like they were overlooked. As a result of that act, He spared them from the pain of exclusion.² Adamantius

¹John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom*, Homily LVI, Matthew 16:28 in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols., 4th ed. (n.p.: David S. Schaff, 1919), BibleWorks, v.9.

²Ibid.

Origen also saw the leading of the three disciples up the mountain (after six days, Matt 17:1) to be in tandem with the previous saying (Matt 16:28). According to him, their being led up was intentional and marked the fulfilment of what Christ had said a few days earlier. He now chose those He deemed to be worthy of witnessing His glory on the high mountain.³

Michael J. Wilkins supports the transfiguration view on the basis of the immediate context since the transfiguration episode immediately follows the prediction of Christ. According to his understanding, the event signals the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom as can be observed in the other synoptic parallel accounts (Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36).⁴ William L. Lane agrees with Wilkins and posits that the saying of Christ refers to a near event and the transfiguration occurrence fits the context better. Accordingly, it is an event that “certain individuals present”⁵ are privileged to witness and encompasses the glory or dignity bestowed upon Christ in a manner that assures and strengthens believers for what lies ahead.⁶

Robert H. Stein equally sees the fulfilment of the saying of Christ to refer to the transfiguration as best captured in the Markan version since some of the disciples of Christ “experienced ‘already now’ a foretaste of the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom’s future consummation at the Parousia of the Son of Man.”⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield further adds that the careful noting of the number of days by the evangelist after the promise

³Adamantius Origen, *Origen’s Commentary on Matthew 16:28* in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Apostolic Fathers English Translation from the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo: The Christian Literature, 1896), BibleWorks, v.9.

⁴Wilkins, 574-575.

⁵Lane, 312-314.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Stein, 411.

of Christ indicates an intention to announce the fulfilment of the promise based on the manifestations of the transfiguration episode which tie in well with the saying.⁸

Craig S. Keener is another proponent of this view. His argument is anchored on the trend of thought he notices in Matthew 16:27 and observes that if the disciples had any doubts about the future reign of Christ in glory, those doubts are addressed by Christ when He assures them of His return in glory with the promise in Matthew 16:28. This is what proleptically happens six days later with the transfiguration account when the disciples witness the vision which included the Old Testament figures of Elijah and Moses.⁹

However, it is important to note that within the transfiguration school of thought, scholarly opinion is divided when it comes to what the transfiguration proleptically represents. For example, Cranfield thinks that the “transfiguration points forward to, and is as it were a foretaste of, the Resurrection, which in turn points forward to, and is a foretaste of, the Parousia; so that both the Resurrection and the Parousia may be said to have been proleptically present in the Transfiguration.”¹⁰ He assumes a chronological order of events emanating from the transfiguration.

On the other hand, William Barclay contends that the transfiguration does not seem to fit the argument of being “a foretaste of the resurrection,”¹¹ which is a common view. Instead, he suggests that there is some kind of relationship between the

⁸C.E.B Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 287-288.

⁹Craig S. Keener, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 277-278.

¹⁰Cranfield, 288.

¹¹William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed. (LJP) (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 310.

transfiguration and the second coming of Christ itself.¹² Stein equally sees the transfiguration as a “preliminary fulfilment of the coming of the kingdom”¹³ or as Daniel J. Harrington states: “a preview or anticipation of ‘the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom.’”¹⁴ Lane also agrees to these assertions when he comments that “the transfiguration was a momentary, but real [and witnessed] manifestation of Jesus’ sovereign power which pointed beyond itself to the Parousia, when He will come ‘with power and glory.’”¹⁵

However, R. T. France argues against the view that the transfiguration fulfils the promise of Christ. He says it hardly fulfils the coming of Christ with His angels to reward every man (Matt 16:27) “even though it may be a foretaste of such a coming.”¹⁶ France expands his argument by saying that the fulfilment should not be seen to be “a specific event”¹⁷ but rather it should be looked at from the perspective of “Daniel 7:13-14, in the authority of the risen Jesus which will be proclaimed in [Matthew] 28:18.”¹⁸ In this context, according to him, the fulfilment cannot be a single event but instead a series of events beginning with the resurrection and glorification of Christ as a Saviour in an authoritative position who will finally be

¹²Barclay, *LJP*, 310.

¹³Stein, 411.

¹⁴Daniel J. Harrington, ed., *Jude and 2 Peter*, vol. 15 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 258.

¹⁵Lane, 314.

¹⁶R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (GAM) (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 261.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

revealed as a judge.¹⁹ In another work, France casts doubt as to “whether the vision on the mountain fully matches the promise of ‘seeing the Son of Man coming in his kingship,’ as that kingship was yet to be established after his death and resurrection.”²⁰

D. E. Nineham is another opponent of the transfiguration view. He argues that the most natural interpretation of the text has to do with “contemporary Jewish expectations”²¹ whose focus was the future consummation of the kingdom. The Jews expected a different order of things in contrast to what was prevailing at the time. Even though this interpretation compels one to see Jesus as having erred, Nineham insists that it has to be accepted as something “fully compatible with belief in the Incarnation.”²² He further argues that no matter how the experience of the disciples at the transfiguration is viewed, it inadequately suits the notion of the “the kingdom of God having come with power.”²³ In addition, he mentions that the very words of Christ, “Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death” (Matt 16:28) give an impression of something that is not to be fulfilled within a few days but will instead happen after a good number of years.²⁴ D. A. Carson concurs with Nineham on the inadequacy of the transfiguration as a fulfilment of this promise of Christ. Not only does he see its vagueness, he equally thinks the timing is

¹⁹France, *GAM*, 261.

²⁰R.T France, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew (NICNT)* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 641.

²¹Nineham, 231-232, 236.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

too short for reckoning it as a proper event which justifies the transfiguration interpretation.²⁵

The Second Coming

Donald A. Hagner is one of the advocates of the second coming of Jesus as the interpretation which properly fits the puzzling statement of Christ. His view is based on the immediate preceding context as the one which should naturally provide the meaning in the sense that the eschatological appearance of Christ includes the anticipated blessings as well as judgement. These two elements seem to be coexistent.²⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison also see a close connection between Matthew 16:27 and 28. In their view, since v. 27 speaks of a *last judgment* then the verse that follows should logically refer to the same event, not a different one. They also add that the expression “‘Son of Man coming in his kingdom’ [16:28] is most naturally associated with the Parousia.”²⁷

Furthermore, Hagner submits that the glorious return of Christ would take place within the lifetime of those present at the time of the saying. He reasons that “the ἔως (before or until, Matt 16:28) does not require the conclusion that these persons will die after seeing the coming of the Son of Man in power and that therefore the Parousia cannot be meant since it will usher in the final age.”²⁸ This is because the text seems to suggest that once *some* witness the Son of Man coming in His glory, then they would die at some point. This understanding would be difficult to

²⁵ D. A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew* (EBC) edited by Frank E. Gaebelein [CD ROM] (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

²⁶Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

²⁷Davies and Allison, [Libronix Digital Library].

²⁸Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

accommodate in support of the Second Coming view since such witnesses would be expected to live and not die. Furthermore, Hagner proposes that what is significant in the interpretation of this text is the idea that there would be *some* that would be present at the time of the appearance of the Son of Man, not necessarily the Disciples of Christ.²⁹

Frederick D. Bruner opposes the idea of the Second Coming as the correct interpretation. He argues that if the second coming of Jesus is what was meant by this promise, “then either Jesus or Matthew’s representation of Jesus was mistaken, for Jesus’ Second Coming has not yet occurred.”³⁰ This is the most challenging element of this interpretation. If the argument is maintained, it only succeeds in naming Jesus as an impostor.

Leon Morris also sees the Second Coming interpretation to be unlikely based on the observation that Jesus repeatedly declined to announce dates for His coming. In addition, Morris says that Jesus admitted in His Olivet Discourse that He did not know when the end would occur (Matt 24:36).³¹ Consequently, to insist that Christ was predicting His Parousia would be misrepresenting the biblical teaching on time setting for His appearance at the end of the age.

Alfred Plummer also disputes the Second Coming interpretation. He says that Jesus could not have been referring directly to the Parousia because none of those who heard His pronouncement are alive to this day “except in the sense that all men

²⁹Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

³⁰Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary* Rev. & Exp. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 162.

³¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* [Libronix Digital Library] (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992).

will witness it.”³² Plummer agrees with Morris on Jesus’ apparent ignorance of the dates of His appearance and further adds that “we cannot suppose that in spite of that ignorance He predicted that it was near; still less that He uttered a prediction which has not been fulfilled.”³³ Plummer closes his argument by stating that the phrase “by no means taste death until” (Matt 16:28) is implicit of the fact that *some* will encounter death after witnessing the kingdom of God “which would not be true of those who live to see the *Parousia* (1 Cor 15:51).”³⁴ Once the Parousia is ushered in, there will be no more death for those who will be found in Christ, the living or the righteous dead.

Destruction of Jerusalem

R. C. H. Lenski is one of the advocates for the view that the statement of Jesus in Matthew 16:28 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.³⁵ The destruction was as a result of the Jewish Roman war which began in AD 66 and ended in 70. During this time, an estimated “90, 000 Jews were sold into slavery, and the nation was abolished as a nation, never again to be a nation.”³⁶ Against this background, Lenski argues that the coming of Christ should be “viewed in the wider sense and thus includes the divine judgment on the Jewish nation.”³⁷ The destruction of Jerusalem

³²Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke*, 5th ed. (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1922), 250.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Lenski, *IMG*, 648-649.

³⁶R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel (ISL)* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1946), 525.

³⁷Ibid.

represents the reassignment of the gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles and thus entails the execution of judgment upon them. The idea of not tasting death for “some standing here” (Matt 16:28) does not appear to refer to His literal coming since in another place i.e. Matthew 24:36, no one knows the day nor the hour of His coming, not even Jesus himself. The fulfilment of the saying through the destruction of Jerusalem would be proleptic of the final judgment, an assurance for those who witness it that what has taken place shall similarly occur at the Parousia.³⁸

Anthony C. Cotter is another proponent of this view. He strengthens his argument on the “full force”³⁹ of the phrase, “There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death” (Matt 16:28). He posits that such a phrase can only be supported by an event that occurs after a lengthy period of time, in this case 40 years later. At this time, many of those who heard the words of Jesus had presumably died already.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Sloman, Westcott and Hort are of the understanding that after 70AD, there was no hope for another Messiah. Subsequently, Christ’s kingdom was now evidently established and would be in existence until the day of the eschatological judgment referred to in Matthew 16:27.⁴¹

Darrell L. Bock argues against the view of the destruction of Jerusalem. He says that the events of the destruction of Jerusalem are mentioned as end-time events but not necessarily as kingdom events. Instead, they portray what the final coming of the kingdom will be like. Furthermore, Bock argues that Jesus himself is not candidly

³⁸Lenski, *IMG*, 648-649.

³⁹Cotter, 451.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Sloman, Westcott and Hort, [Libronix Digital Library].

associated with the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, on this basis, this interpretation is rather doubtful.⁴²

Carson also recognizes the difficulty which exists in upholding the destruction of Jerusalem interpretation. He contends that the immediate context does not seem to support this view. For example, “there is no mention of the cities of Israel, of persecution in synagogue settings, etc.”⁴³ On the other hand, he suggests that the preceding text (Matt 16:27) appears to be a reference to the Parousia and not the events which occurred in 70AD.⁴⁴

The Pentecost

One of the major proponents of this view is William Barclay who establishes his interpretation of this promise on the parallel Markan account (9:1). He sees the saying being fulfilled among those who stood there as they witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Thus, they witnessed an unprecedented expansion of the kingdom as it incorporated both Jew and Gentile and spread “across Asia Minor and cover Europe until it reached Rome.”⁴⁵ In this way, the kingdom had manifested itself with power according to the tenor of the Markan version.⁴⁶ Johnson agrees with Barclay and says that “the kingdom came with power on the day of

⁴²Bock, 859-860.

⁴³Carson, *EBC*, [CD ROM].

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Barclay, *GOM*, 155-156.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Pentecost (Acts 2:1).”⁴⁷ This occasion marked the spiritual coming to institute His reign.⁴⁸

Barclay also ties this saying closely to the preceding context where Jesus had predicted his approaching suffering and subsequent death at Jerusalem. The cross became the means to an end as it led to the resurrection and this resulted in the manifestation of the power that “was to surge throughout the whole world. This is a promise to the disciples of Jesus Christ that nothing men can do can hinder the expansion of the kingdom of God.”⁴⁹

Cranfield is opposed to the view that the promise of Christ is fulfilled by the phenomenon which occurred at Pentecost. His protest in accepting this view is based on the limiting factor of the indefinite pronoun *τινες* (some).⁵⁰ The Pentecost experience was witnessed by eleven of the Disciples of Christ who happened to be present in the audience when Jesus made the promise. Only Judas Iscariot would be considered not to have witnessed the event. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the indefinite plural pronoun would be used in reference to the exclusion of one person.⁵¹

Further opposition to the Pentecost view is propagated by Davies and Allison who contend that the word Pentecost is not found in the book of Matthew. Since the word is unmentioned, it is unlikely that Matthew would have expected his audience to

⁴⁷Johnson, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Barclay, *GOM*, 156.

⁵⁰Cranfield, 287.

⁵¹Ibid.

understand the saying to be fulfilled in an occasion which he does not refer to anywhere in his gospel.⁵² For that reason, they reject the Pentecost view.

The Early Church Expansion

France is a proponent of this view and suggests that the saying of Christ probably refers to the rapid establishment and expansion of the early church despite the death of Christ himself. According to him, this rapid establishment would become visible before certain of them *taste death* as martyrs. Consequently, the gospel would be proclaimed and the church would extensively expand after the resurrection.⁵³

Donald C. Fleming agrees with France that “this was possibly a reference to the victorious expansion of the church after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1).”⁵⁴ On the other hand, Carson sees Matthew 28:18 as the text that inaugurates this reign. He states that “as the kingdom of God grows, and the church becomes increasingly a force to be reckoned with, the kingship of the Son of Man will be established for all to see.”⁵⁵

William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker adopt a comprehensive view which includes the resurrection, day of Pentecost and early church exploits. In their view, these biblical events are associated with power, kingship, exaltation, and coronation. Accordingly, the resurrection and Pentecost experience usher in a period of extensive movement never seen before in the growth of the “church among the Gentiles, the conversion of people by the thousands, the presence and exercise of

⁵²Davies and Allison, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁵³France, *LUK*, 166.

⁵⁴Fleming, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁵⁵Carson, *NBC*, [Libronix Digital Library].

many charismatic gifts (Acts 2:41; 4:4, 32-35; 5:12-16; 6:7; 19:10, 17-20; 1 Thess 1:8-10).” All of these occasions mark the fulfilment of the declaration that the Son of Man will be coming in his kingship; that is in his royal dignity. And by implication, Jesus makes a prediction that these remarkable episodes would take place in the lifetime of those present at the time of the pronouncement.⁵⁶

Hagner doubts the veracity of this view on the ground that it seems to favour the Markan and Lukan versions only which appear to suggest kingdom expansion. When the Matthean version is properly considered, it works against this view in the sense that the preceding context, as found in Matthew 16:27, refers to the Son of Man who comes in powerful judgment.⁵⁷ Davies and Allison agree with Hagner in disputing this view. They object that the expression “Son of Man coming in His kingdom” most naturally refers to the Parousia and not to the expansion of the church. The judgment of Matthew 16:27 is similarly associated with the eschatological appearance of Christ and does not fit in well with the idea of remarkable church expansion. The context, therefore, seems to go against such an understanding of the text.⁵⁸

The Passion and Resurrection

W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann are among those that see this saying to be fulfilled in the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For them, this was a statement of fact stating that there would be some “[either bystanders or of the inner circle] who

⁵⁶Hendriksen and Kistemaker, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁵⁷Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁵⁸Davies and Allison, [Libronix Digital Library].

would not die before the Messiah's passion and resurrection."⁵⁹ John Nolland agrees with them and states that "for Matthew the royal rule of Jesus is in a proleptic manner visible at the cross."⁶⁰ In addition, Richard B. Gardner alludes to the words of Christ uttered after His resurrection in Matthew 28:18 that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" to be the ones which confirm his "coming with royal power."⁶¹ The disciples, therefore, have a preview of his eschatological coming in the events surrounding the text.⁶²

Another New Testament Scholar who supports this view is Darrell L. Bock. He sees the *already now* dimension of the kingdom being fulfilled in the occurrences of the resurrection and the subsequent ascension of Christ. The ascension brought about the Pentecost experience which he combines with the Resurrection as significant happenings which demonstrate the power of salvation of the kingdom. He further asserts that the response of Christ to the Jews that "hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69) demonstrates the imminence of the kingdom in which the disciples take part in the glory He introduces. However, Bock appears to be holding a broader perspective in his interpretation by combining the resurrection with the transfiguration episode as the fulfilment of what Christ said.⁶³

Anthony A. Hoekema also sees merit in this stance and suggests that Christ employs a literary device called *prophetic foreshortening* by linking the resurrection

⁵⁹Albright and Mann, 201.

⁶⁰Nolland, 695.

⁶¹Gardner, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Bock, 858-859.

episode and the Parousia together. In so doing, He mentions these words in the hearing of His audience that many of them would be alive to witness His resurrection which in a way typifies His coming in His kingdom with power. His resurrection will be followed by the Parousia even though He does not explain this part fully. However, the resurrection guarantees the Parousia.⁶⁴

Davies and Allison are in agreement with Hoekema as they also observe complementary elements in the resurrection and the Parousia. According to them, Matthew portrays the resurrection as an eschatological event and also that the two scenarios, resurrection and Parousia, are both represented in the “Danielic Son of Man imagery; see, for example, on [Matthew] 24:30 and 28:18.”⁶⁵ As a result, the resurrection is seen to be a foretaste of the Parousia, and furthermore, it is viewed as the “first act in the eschatological instalment of Jesus.”⁶⁶ Therefore, both events are reflected in the saying and one can conclude that “[Matthew] 16:28 foretells both because they are the two halves of one event, the eschatological glorification and vindication of the Son of Man.”⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Anthony C. Cotter disputes the resurrection view. His argument is based on what he terms as the initial phrase of the text which is: “There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death” (Matt 16:28). He points out that it would be inconceivable to expect that Christ would be talking about an event which takes place a few days, weeks or months later to its fulfilment. He questions as to whether

⁶⁴Hoekema, 114.

⁶⁵Davies and Allison, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

there was any likelihood that any of his hearers would die in the foreseeable near future. If not, why would Jesus speak as He did knowing that most of them, except for one (Judas), would still be alive to witness His resurrection? Cotter concludes that the event of the resurrection would be incongruent with the saying since it happened too soon after His promise.⁶⁸ Hagner agrees with Cotter in disputing the resurrection and contends that the time period, probably less than one year when Jesus pronounced the statement appears to be too brief to warrant such an interpretation.⁶⁹ The correct interpretation should therefore be found in an event which is remote.

Summary

This chapter has discussed six views suggested as possible interpretations of Matthew 16:28. In the order of discussion, the first is the transfiguration which is premised on the immediate context and the usage of *τινες*. The second view is the Second Coming mainly based on the understanding of Matthew 16:27. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is the third view founded on the time element of the prediction as well as association with the last judgement. The fourth view is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost whose understanding is entrenched in the Markan version which talks about “the kingdom having come with power.” The fifth view is the expansion of the early church after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Finally, the sixth view is the passion and resurrection which are seen to be in tandem with the Parousia. The opposing views to each of these interpretations have also been presented.

⁶⁸Cotter, 451.

⁶⁹Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

CHAPTER 3
THE PASSAGE IN ITS CONTEXT

Historical Background

During the time of Christ, Palestine was politically under the rule of the Romans. The Roman political control started about 63 BC when the Roman general Pompey took advantage of a weakened establishment due to a family feud within the Hasmonean dynasty between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II. After the conquest, the Romans decided to install Hyrcanus II as high priest and ethnarch even though the real power lay with his advisor, Antipater. Subsequently, the Romans made Antipater governor of Judea, after which his son (Herod the Great) fled to Rome following the murder of his father in 43 BC and found favour in the eyes of the conquering Romans. Herod was assisted by the Roman army to defeat Antigonus (the Son of Aristobulus II), signalling an end to the Hasmonean dynasty thereby ushering in the Herodian dynasty.¹

Historically, the Jewish nation had enjoyed a period of political independence before the Romans came on the scene. The legendary Maccabean revolt ushered in the independence from Seleucid domination which had existed between ca. 198 - 166 BC. The revolt lasted for about 30 years (166 - 135 BC). As a resultant effect of the revolt, a family dynasty arose which ruled over Judea from ca. 135 - 63 BC. Although this period was characterized by family power struggles, the period is generally regarded

¹Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 104-105.

as one that emancipated the Jews from the oppression of the Seleucids. This is the reason why subsequent Roman occupation (ca. 63 BC – AD 135) was despised by the Jewish populace.² The loss of independence exacerbated their disapproval of the captors. Even though the Roman senate later on made Herod the Great to be king over most of Palestine, the masses were still dissatisfied.³ Mark L. Strauss says that “Herod was a strange mix of a clever and efficient ruler and a cruel tyrant. On the one hand, he was distrustful, jealous, and brutal, ruthlessly crushing any potential opposition.”⁴ Jews were not keen to accept his kingship due to his Idumean origin. This rejection did not augur well with him. As a result, he was perpetually apprehensive of possible schemes against his rulership. Therefore, in order to appease the Jews and “legitimize his claim to the throne, he divorced his wife Doris and married the Hasmonean princess Mirriamne, later executing her when he suspected she was plotting against him.”⁵ The same fate befell his three sons and another wife including his mother-in-law when he suspected them of conspiring against his rule.⁶

There were two geographical areas which became the major focus of Christ’s earthly ministry: the southern province of Judea and the northern province of Galilee. The Roman procurator at this time in Judea was Pontius Pilate (ca. 26 - 36AD) and is reported to have been cruel and unprincipled.⁷ It was under his administration that

²Strauss, 100-104.

³“Historical Setting” *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Francis D. Nichol, ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 5:272.

⁴Strauss, 105.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷A.W. Argyle, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 18.

Jesus was ultimately crucified. In the other province of Galilee, the beginning place of Christ's public ministry, Herod Antipas (one of the three sons of Herod the Great) was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea from about 4 BC to 39 AD, and is the one who beheaded the harbinger of Christ, John the Baptist.⁸ Thus the Jews lived under the environment of Roman oppression in Jesus' time and were despondent.

Religious Setting

Jewish religion was mainly centred on "the Jerusalem temple with its priesthood and sacrificial system."⁹ Even so, after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, there was a paradigm shift in the practice of Judaism. The focus was now on "worship and the study of Torah"¹⁰ in the synagogue communities. These two scenarios were the point of reference for the dynamic development of Judaism. "The Judaism of Jesus' day, however, was a much more diverse collection of movements and belief systems."¹¹ Some beliefs were held in common by all Jews while some groups within Judaism held divergent views on religious matters.¹²

There are two aspects to be considered in the first century Judaism relevant to the study. The first element is apocalypticism. This ideology "refers to a variety of eschatological movements which arose in Israel from about 200 BC to AD 200 during

⁸Strauss, 108-109.

⁹Ibid., 124-138.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²For example, among the core Jewish beliefs are the following: Monotheism, The covenant: Israel as God's chosen people, The Law (Torah): Standards for covenant faithfulness. In spite of these commonly held beliefs; there were religious-political groups which emerged within Judaism with different perspectives on matters of religious practice. These were: Pharisees; Sadducees; Scribes; Essenes; Zealots, Social Bandits and Other Revolutionaries; and Herodians. See Strauss, 124-138.

periods of political instability and repeated foreign domination.”¹³ This type of writing “look[s] to the imminent intervention of God in human history to establish his kingdom, deliver the righteous, judge sinners, and bring the age to come.”¹⁴ Although this work differs contextually, “apocalyptic literature is generally [crisis] literature, written to encourage God’s people to persevere in the face of extreme adversity.”¹⁵

In some literature, God performs the deliverance by himself while in others, “a Messiah or some other agent of God intervenes.”¹⁶ The Jewish people developed a belief system which assumed “that only supernatural intervention by God would usher in the messianic age. This belief easily led to a second [dimension]: that it was the responsibility of a select group of Jews within the nation to prepare the way for the advent of that coming by intense obedience to the law.”¹⁷ The ascetic group of Essenes at Qumran and the Disciples of Christ were “viewed as apocalyptic sects.”¹⁸ However, for the disciples, “obedience to the Law is replaced by following Christ.”¹⁹

The other element found in first century Judaism is the messianic expectation. There was a lot of “desire among Jews for God’s intervention in human history.”²⁰ They were looking forward to the appearance of an anointed one or a Messiah who

¹³Strauss, 138.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 47.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Strauss, 139.

would establish an earthly kingdom characterized by justice and righteousness.²¹ They continuously looked to the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament which guaranteed them hope and restoration.²²

Nevertheless, the Jews had a challenge in correctly understanding the mission of the Messiah. They erroneously perceived him to be a political Messiah who would emancipate them from the hold of Roman political bondage. They also believed that the Messiah would lead them in a revolution to subjugate other nations.²³ This is because “the most widespread messianic hope in the first century was for the Davidic Messiah, the coming king from David’s line who would destroy Israel’s oppressors, re-establish her independence, and reign forever on David’s throne in justice and righteousness (see 2 Sam 7; Isa 9, 11; Jer 23:5-6; Ps 2, 89, 110).”²⁴ It should be noted however that there were divergent views “among various sects and movements” within Judaism concerning the Davidic Messiah’s roles.²⁵

Consequently, such distorted political views of the anticipated Messiah affected the Jews’ proper perception of Christ’s earthly ministry and subsequently led

²¹Strauss, 139.

²²Nichol et al., 272.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Strauss, 139.

²⁵According to Strauss, on page 140, he states that “while the expectation of a Messiah from David’s line was widespread among first century Jews, it was not universal. Groups like Sadducees were not expecting a Messiah at all but were content with the present rule by the priestly leadership. The Samaritans were expecting not a Davidic Messiah but a Moses-like deliverer known as Taheb (the ‘restorer’ or ‘returning one’)... The Qumran sectarians looked for two Messiahs, a military-political one from the line of David and a priestly Messiah from the line of Aaron. The characteristics of these Messiahs also varied from group to group. In some texts, the Messiah seems little more than a powerful human king who accomplishes God’s purpose (e.g., *Psalms of Solomon*). In others, he appears a heavenly figure with superhuman powers (e.g. 4 Ezra). In the pseudepigraphic apocalypse known as *I Enoch*, a pre-existent heavenly deliverer identified as the ‘Elect One’ and the ‘Son of Man’ (an image drawn from Daniel 7) provides deliverance for God’s people.”

to their denial of His Messiahship.²⁶ It was inconceivable to them that the one to come and deliver them from the yoke of the oppressors would die a shameful death on the cross. It is against such a background of anticipated independence and a deliverer who would set up a kingdom that would turn against the unpopular oppression of the Romans that the book of Matthew was conceived.²⁷

Theme

The book of Matthew appears to be a gospel that connects well with the Old Testament, as if to prove fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies²⁸ as well as to “demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Jewish hopes for the Messiah.”²⁹ This is the major recurring theme given due attention in the gospel, a fulfilment of the promise given to both patriarchs Abraham and David.³⁰ This theme has an *apologetic* element which provided the church with an answer to those who questioned the Messiahship of Christ.³¹ The other element which seems to permeate the writings of Matthew is the issue of discipleship. There are a number of segments arranged topically which are for the instruction of Jesus’ followers.³²

On the other hand, there is a special interest in the idea of the church in Matthew. He is the only one who uses the word *ecclesia* (assembly) among the

²⁶Nichol et al., 272.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Barclay, *GOM*, 5-6.

²⁹Strauss, 248.

³⁰Lenski, *IMG*, 20.

³¹Strauss, 248.

³²Nolland, 20.

Synoptic Gospels.³³ The church is called upon to “greater faith and trust in their risen and ever-present Lord.”³⁴ Furthermore, he also has a strong interest in the apocalyptic pronouncements concerning Jesus’ second coming and the primary last day events.³⁵ The gospel also portrays the salvation history, the wonderful acts of God performed in redeeming people from their sins.³⁶ This salvific theme is especially pronounced through the coming of the Messiah which is a “fulfilment of God’s plan to bring salvation to his people Israel and to the Gentile nations.”³⁷

Authorship

There is no internal evidence in the gospel on the question of authorship.³⁸ Nonetheless, the most ancient evidence by the early church fathers is in favour of Matthew as the author of this *First Gospel*. For example, Papias of Hierapolis (ca. 140 AD) is quoted by Eusebius as having stated that: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”³⁹ Eusebius further refers to the testimony of Irenaeus (ca. 190 AD) who stated that “Matthew published his Gospel among the Hebrews in their own language, while Peter and Paul

³³ Barclay, *GOM*, 7.

³⁴ Strauss, 248.

³⁵ Barclay, *GOM*, 7.

³⁶ Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (DJ) (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 536.

³⁷ Strauss, 248.

³⁸ Charles Price, *Focus on the Bible: Matthew* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1998), 13.

³⁹ Papias of Hierapolis in *The Church History of Eusebius*, Book III, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff, 2nd Series, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890), BibleWorks. v.9.

were preaching and founding the church in Rome.”⁴⁰ Although some of Irenaeus’ (and Papias’) claims are disputable,⁴¹ the evidence on the question of authorship by the early church fathers may not be lightly regarded.⁴² The author suggested here is Matthew (also known as Levi) the disciple of Jesus; formerly a Tax Collector whose summon to follow Christ is cited in Matthew 9:9.⁴³

However, there is an opposing view which arose in the twentieth century, based on the internal evidence of the composition of the Gospel in the Greek text, that the writer of this Gospel was a Gentile figure.⁴⁴ Further support for Gentile authorship is founded on the gospel’s universal appeal.⁴⁵ This is done in spite of the overwhelming external evidence in favour of a “Palestinian or Hellenistic-Jewish author.”⁴⁶ Proponents of this view argue that Matthew could have written the teachings of Jesus in Aramaic or Hebrew and then a translation into Greek was made for the text which is now in circulation. Nevertheless, the Gospel in its Greek configuration does not portray the slightest possibility or evidence of having been a translation or rendering to Greek from any Semitic language.⁴⁷

⁴⁰Irenaeus in *The Church History of Eusebius*, Book V, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff, 2nd Series, Vol. 1 (Edinburg: T& T Clark, 1890), BibleWorks. v.9.

⁴¹“Irenaeus’s [sic] statement is suspect, however, since Matthew does not seem to have originally written in Hebrew, and since neither Peter nor Paul founded the church in Rome (it was already long established when Paul wrote Romans around AD 55).” Strauss, 251-252.

⁴²Wilkins, 22.

⁴³France, *GAM*, 30.

⁴⁴Davies and Allison, [Libronix Digital Library].

⁴⁵Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (DJG) (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 528.

⁴⁶Davies and Allison, *ICC*, 9.

⁴⁷Nolland, 3-4.

Another argument raised for disputing Matthew's authorship is grounded in the historical critical method with its propagation of the Markan priority concept. Advocates contend that if Mark wrote his account first, how could Matthew borrow from him (a non-apostle), including his own call (Matt 9:9-13 cf. Mark 2:13-17), when he himself was a disciple of Jesus Christ?⁴⁸ The dating of the Gospel also raises questions of authorship among critics who advocate for the priority of Mark, opposing that if Mark wrote first, Matthew's gospel is unlikely to have an earlier date.⁴⁹ Even though these viewpoints may seem plausible, they are disputed on the basis that Mark borrowed his writings from Peter's authoritative witness. Therefore, even if Matthew could have borrowed from Mark, it only renders further credence to his literature and does not subtract from it.⁵⁰

All the same, it is interesting to note that despite all these disputations on Matthew's authorship, no other author has ever been proposed in his stead.⁵¹ Therefore, looking at the various arguments discussed, this study favours the Matthean authorship as is supported by the early church fathers and other scholars. Matthew's authorship is significant in the sense that he was a disciple of Christ who witnessed the prediction in 16:28 and offers a possible interpretation of the same in his treatise.

⁴⁸Green et al., *DJG*, 528.

⁴⁹Wilkins, 23.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹France, *NICNT*, 15.

Date of Authorship

The dating of the Gospel of Matthew is another point of debate. A date fixed after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD militates against Jesus' dependability in matters of predictive prophecy present in the Gospel. According to Wilkins, the testimony of the early church father Irenaeus who records that Matthew wrote his account while Paul and Peter were still alive makes the traditional dating to be set around the late 50s or early 60s.⁵² Moreover, Matthew reports that the "field of blood" (27:8) was known that way at the time of his writing; further suggesting that this was prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.⁵³

Nonetheless, some critical scholars who have adopted the Markan priority concept have suggested a date after the 70s based on the assumption that Mark wrote in the middle to late 60s and therefore Matthew could only have authored after Mark's account had circulated for about a decade, thereby advocating for a date between 75 - 80 AD.⁵⁴ France also contends that the language in certain Matthean passages (22:7; 23:38; and parts of chapter 24) depicts influences derived from the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD.⁵⁵ He further holds that there appears to be a highly developed ecclesiastical system or church order for the Gospel to have an earlier date⁵⁶ which indicates a clear separation "between church and the synagogue."⁵⁷

⁵²Wilkins, 24.

⁵³Ibid., 24-25.

⁵⁴Green et al., *DJG*, 528.

⁵⁵France, *GAM*, 28.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷France, *NICNT*, 18.

James L. Mays is one of the scholars who supports a later date of around 90 AD. He claims that since most of Jesus' disciples would have already died at this time, the expression in Matthew 16:28 "[some] refers either to the one or two who are still surviving or, more likely, to the church of Matthew's own day."⁵⁸ He further explains that Matthew believed the Parousia would take place within the lifetime of a few of those contemporaries who were alive then; "It has been postponed, but not indefinitely."⁵⁹ When Jesus returns, He will return as a Judge in the spirit of the Matthean text.⁶⁰

However, other scholars have disputed a date after the 70s based on the authenticity they find in the claims of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24. The statements therein appear to be futuristic and do not seem to have been fulfilled at the time the gospel was authored.⁶¹ Not only that, a date prior to 70 AD as supported by the early church fathers who believed Matthew wrote before Mark,⁶² though in the minority, gives credence to the writing of the gospel at the time the Jerusalem temple "was still standing."⁶³ A date pre 70 AD is more plausible in view of the evidence rendered against a later date and also that such a view upholds the prophetic ministry of Christ as far as predictive prophecy is concerned.

Subsequently, a pre-70 AD date provides an interpretive framework for predictive prophecy within the gospel of Matthew. For example, within the wider

⁵⁸James L. Mays, *Society of Biblical Literature: Harper's Bible Commentary* [Libronix Digital Library] (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1996).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Nolland, 16.

⁶² France, *GAM*, 28.

⁶³ France, *NICNT*, 18.

limits of the passage being considered, Jesus predicted his suffering, death, and resurrection (Matt 16:21-23). Matthew records that these events were fulfilled (Matt 26-28). In the same vein, Christ predicted His coming in His kingdom (Matt 16:28) and the transfiguration represents the fulfilment in miniature (Matt 17:1-13). On the other hand, it appears that Matthew wanted to portray Christ as a messiah to his readers by using the messianic idiomatic expression “Son of Man” (Matt 16:28). Evidently, some first century Jews did not believe in Christ’s Messiahship (see for example, John 10:19-27). To this end, Matthew wanted to show them that Christ was the promised and long awaited messiah. He also wanted to demonstrate the nature of the kingdom of Christ through the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13) as a spiritual kingdom which differed from Jewish earthly and political messianic expectations.

Audience

Due to the Jewish tenor of the gospel, some have suggested that Matthew’s target audience was the “influential Church at Antioch in Syria” identifying them as the first recipients.⁶⁴ Other places are also suggested: Alexandria, Caesarea Maritima, Tyre and Sidon, Jerusalem, Edessa, and Pella. Nevertheless, Antioch is still the more popular proposed destination.⁶⁵ Others say it was written for a church made up of converts from Judaism, thereby expanding the audience to include other places where Jews had settled in the eastern region of the Roman Empire.⁶⁶ Francis D. Nichol adds another element that unbelieving Jews were also part of the audience.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Wilkins, 25.

⁶⁵Nolland, 18.

⁶⁶France, *GAM*, 27.

⁶⁷Nichol et al., 273.

Due to the foregoing, it is further noted by Lenski that the Jewish terminologies used in the gospel are not explained because the author expects his audience to be familiar with the terms used.⁶⁸ Strauss identifies some of the terms and customs Matthew does not explain, namely: “ceremonial washings, 15:2; the temple tax, 17:24-27; phylacteries and tassels, 23:5; whitewashed tombs, 23:27.”⁶⁹ Barclay also indicates that “it was written by a Jew in order to convince [fellow] Jews.”⁷⁰

However, despite the acknowledged bias towards a Jewish audience, Joel B. Green et al. advocate for a wider view which depicts the gospel as universal and inclusive of Gentile believers.⁷¹ Generally, identifying the target audience is significant because the author usually takes into account the audience’s customs, religious practices, economic undertakings, geographical setting, etc. when composing a literary piece. These issues impact a writer’s perceptions and meaningfully influence his literature to a certain extent. Subsequently, on the basis of the evidence presented, the popular view that the letter was probably written to the church at Antioch seems plausible.

Setting of Matthew 16

The opening section of Matthew 16 narrates a demand on Christ for a heavenly miracle by two Jewish religious sects which existed during the time of

⁶⁸Lenski, *IMG*, 20.

⁶⁹Strauss, 249.

⁷⁰Barclay, *GOM*, 5.

⁷¹Green et al., *DJG*, 528.

Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees (vv. 1-4).⁷² This is in spite of Jesus having performed a number of miracles in the preceding chapter (15), including that of feeding the four thousand men with seven loaves of bread and a few fish. It appears to have been a deliberate test set for Him. But since Jesus was aware of their craftiness, He decided to evade their unreasonable demand by giving an illustration on their good judgment on weather forecasts, vv. 2-3. Based on this illustration, He then made a conclusion in v. 3b by expressing His astonishment at their deep knowledge in the signs of the sky and yet lacked a similar appreciation of the “signs of the times.” Then in v. 4, He made reference to the “sign of the prophet Jonas” as the only sign that will be given to this “wicked and adulterous generation.”

After the encounter with the abovementioned two Jewish sects, Jesus decided to leave Galilee, a predominantly Jewish territory, crossed the lake and headed further north to the Gentile region of Caesarea Philippi (v. 13). It seems this was the last time He withdrew from Galilee before He undertook the last trip down south for His

⁷²According to Everret Ferguson, in the book *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 514-516, 519-520, “the name *Pharisee* is usually derived from the Hebrew *parush*, meaning “separate” but also “interpret.” In the writings of Josephus, Fergusson sees the Pharisees to be “a political party who sought to impose their interpretation of the law upon the nation.” Subsequently, their chief concern was the “accurate interpretation of the law and with promoting their own tradition.” In terms of their philosophy, “the twin pillars of the Pharisaic system were ‘Torah and Tradition.’ Torah was primarily the first five books of Moses. A written law must be interpreted and applied. The process of applying the teaching contained in the Torah involved new precepts. The Pharisees differed from the Sadducees in giving divine authority to the interpretation and application of the law. ‘It is more culpable to teach against the ordinances of the scribes than against the Torah itself’ (Sanhedrin 11.3). The Sadducees answered the question ‘By what authority?’ in terms of Deuteronomy 17:8-13, that the priests were to give the authoritative applications of the Torah, but their instructions were not Torah. The Pharisees, on the other hand, felt that the Torah had been given to all Israel, not just to priests, and therefore was open to all who were competent to interpret it.” On the other hand, “the derivation of the name *Sadducee* is not certain, but it is usually connected with Zadok, either the high priest under David or some later Zadok, or with ‘just ones’ (either positively or ironically). The Sadducees were the party of the wealthy priests (some priests were Sadducees but not all) and their friends in the aristocracy (Acts 5:17). They combined conservative religious attitudes with power politics. They rejected the Pharisees’ innovations, and their interpretations were stricter than those of the Pharisees.” It has also been said that “their center of strength was the temple.” They are also well known for rejecting the concept of the resurrection.

passion.⁷³ Matthew then introduces another section from vv. 5-12 which talks about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the two groups which earlier on demanded for a sign. Having gone across the lake, the disciples forgot to carry bread with them. Jesus talked to them on the need to be watchful against the “leaven of the Pharisees” (v. 6). In v. 7, the disciples conversed amongst themselves and wrongly concluded that Jesus’ statement on yeast had been necessitated by their inability to carry bread with them. However, Christ reprimanded and reminded them of the miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves which fed over five thousand people and that it was not the physical bread that He was chiefly concerned with (vv. 8-11). Instead, Matthew records that having said this, “then understood they (the disciples) how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (v. 12). More than anything else, Jesus was interested in their spirituality as opposed to the mere religiosity of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When Jesus and the disciples finally got to the region of Caesarea Philippi, two significant events in His public ministry took place in this Gentile territory. This was paradoxical since these events took place at the end of His Galilean ministry, a Jewish territory.⁷⁴ The first important incident was the declaration by Peter that Jesus was the Messiah (vv. 13-20). Jesus began by asking His disciples what people were saying concerning the Son of Man. The disciples offered a number of possible choices: “John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (v. 14). Then Jesus asked them what they themselves called Him and then Peter made the Messianic declaration, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). The identification of Christ’s Messiahship by Peter was a divine revelation, according

⁷³Carson, *EBC*, [CD ROM].

⁷⁴Albright and Mann, 199.

to Jesus (v. 17). It was not something that was revealed to him by “flesh and blood.” Jesus proceeded to talk about establishing His church (vv. 18-19) and that the revelation of His Messiahship was to be kept as a secret, not to be disclosed to anyone (v. 20).

The second important event which occurred in Caesarea Philippi appears to have been a development from the confession of Peter. After acknowledging the pronouncement of His Messiahship, Jesus seemed to portray it as a sorrowful one by predicting His suffering and death for the first time. Nevertheless, His Messiahship would not just be a suffering one but also a salvific one.⁷⁵ He explained to them that He needed to go to Jerusalem and “suffer many things” at the hands of the religious leaders, “be killed, and be raised again the third day” (v. 21). However, disturbed by this revelation, Peter pulled Christ aside and reprimanded Him for having made such a pronouncement. Jesus rebuked Peter and suggested that He was now being used by the devil. His concerns were earthly or physical and not spiritual (v. 23).

Furthermore, Jesus began to elucidate on the course to be pursued in the discipline of discipleship (vv. 24-27).⁷⁶ He enumerated the characteristics which were to be found in those who wished to be His followers. Some of which are disowning or renouncing oneself and also that whoever desires to be His disciple should “take up his cross” and follow Him (v. 24). In vv. 25-26, Jesus cautioned on the vanity of preserving one’s soul in the interim as a measure that would result in one eternally losing their soul and also that the opposite is true. Then v. 27 discusses the eschatological judgment when He would come and reward each one according to their labour. At the end of his pronouncements, Jesus made a prophetic saying or promise

⁷⁵Carson, *EBC*, [CD ROM].

⁷⁶Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

(v. 28) concerning His coming in His kingdom. This is the text under study which has brought about a number of interpretations. The prediction was immediately followed by the transfiguration account which took place six days later.

Summary

This chapter discussed the passage in its context. Preliminary matters which surround the text were considered. The first unit deals with the historical background which spells out the political domination of the Romans over the Jews. The second issue pertains to the religious setting with Judaism at the core of the Jewish belief system, before and after the temple. The third element reflected on the themes which can be deciphered from the book of Matthew. The fifth segment dealt with the issue of the date of the gospel. Some critical scholars put Matthew's date after 70 AD as a way pouring contempt on the predictive prophecies found in the book. Nevertheless, others settle for an earlier date which is favoured in this study. The sixth divisions ought to identify Matthew's target audience and concluded that it was primarily written for the Jews of the *diaspora* (dispersion), probably those at Antioch which became a major Christian centre after Jerusalem. Lastly, the setting of Matthew 16 was also considered.

CHAPTER 4

EXEGESIS

This chapter deals with the exegetical component of the study. It begins with the translation of the Greek text into English. This is followed by the literary analysis which sets the text in its proper context by showing its relationship to what occurs before and after it. Thereafter, the textual analysis is deliberated upon encompassing parallel phrases and clauses within the immediate and wider context of the passage including selected word studies to further appreciate the meaning of the text. Then the chapter examines the immediate contextual evidence even as it is augmented by parallel synoptic accounts. The other unit considered is the intertextual evidence relating to the transfiguration. Finally, theological implications drawn from the text are presented.

Greek Text

ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰσὶν τινες τῶν ὧδε ἐστώτων οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ (Matt 16:28).

Personal Translation¹

Truly I say to you that there are some of you standing here who will by no means taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Literary Analysis

The literary analysis of a section, passage, or book assists in appreciating the central theme of the unit so that the author's original intent is understood. In looking at the immediate context of the text being studied, the preceding unit (Matt 16:24-27) is introduced by the "narrative Τότε" (Then, v. 24). Τότε is a temporal adverb marking a new development. Jesus points out the cost of discipleship to be borne by all those who claim to be His disciples (Matt 16:24-27).² In this pericope, the coming of the Son of Man in His father's glory is connected to the award giving of τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ (his disciples) in the distant future at the eschatological parousia (Matt 16:27). The depiction of Christ "coming with his angels" in this text is somewhat an allusion to the Second Coming itself. In other parts of the gospel of Matthew, angels are portrayed as active participants in the event of the Second Coming (Matt 13:39, 41, 49; 24:31; 25:31).

Subsequently, the "attention getter and forward-pointing device" ἀμὴν (truly or verily, Matt 16:28), breaks the flow of the discourse which started with the narrative Τότε in Matthew 16:24. Accordingly, the forward-pointing word can either

¹This text does not have any textual variants to consider. See Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce Metzger, *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* 4th ed. (Stuttgart: C.H Beck, 2001) and also Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) on Matthew 16:28.

²Steven E. Runge, *A Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Guide to Teaching and Exegesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2010), 52.

be at the beginning or middle of the clause to break the flow of the discourse.³ In this case, it stands at the beginning of 16:28. As an attention getter and forward-pointing device, it works together with *μετα* (after, Matt 17:1) not only to break the flow of the discourse, but to also attract more attention to what follows, whether it is a new pericope or an important proposition.⁴

Therefore, in this context, Matthew 16:28 should probably be considered together with chapter 17:1-13 as a new pericope different from 16:24-27. See the NKJV, for example, which treats them as separate pericopae. Thus the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom in the near future, and the indefinite pronoun *τινες* who see him before tasting death (16:28), is connected to the prepositional phrase *μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ* (after six days) in 17:1, which introduces the main clause “Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother.”

Textual Analysis

Parallel Phrases and Clauses

One of the prepositional phrases noticeable in Matthew 16:28 is *ἕως ἄν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ* (till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom). This particular phrase is a type of *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔρχεσθαι ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ* (the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, Matt 16:27). Based on this observation, one can postulate that the former is witnessed by the three disciples (Peter, James, and John) before they die while the latter by all the disciples at the end of the world.

³Runge, 151.

⁴Ibid.

The other phrase is μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ (after six days, Matt 17:1), which introduces an independent clause: “Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother” (Matt 17:1) to the mountain where the transfiguration happened. In as much as the καί and μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ look back to 16:28, there is no doubt that the mentioned trio (Peter, James, and John) in Matthew 17:1 parallels the indefinite pronoun τινες. These are the ones who get the opportunity to witness the promise of Christ.

Furthermore, one can submit that the indefinite pronoun τινες parallels the prepositional phrase κατ' ἰδίαν (by themselves, Matt 17:1). Undoubtedly, this refers to the same group. Jesus chooses *some* among the twelve and goes with them to a mountain as a fulfilment of His prediction. Similarly, the clause τινες τῶν ὧδε ἐστῶτων οἵτινες (some who are standing here) parallels the clause παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ (Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, Matt 17:1).

On the other hand, the phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man) occurs 3 times in the immediate and wider limits of the present passage (Matt 16:27, 28; 17:9). The first two instances are associated with the coming in glory of the Son of Man while the third talks about His anticipated suffering and resurrection. Ladd concurs with this categorization when he submits that “the use of the ‘Son of Man’ in the Synoptics falls into three categories: the Son of Man serving; the Son of Man in suffering and death; the Son of Man in eschatological glory.”⁵

Meanwhile, the promise in the subjunctive aorist ἴδωσιν (to see, Matt 16:28) the Son of Man coming in his kingdom can be paralleled with ὄραμα (a vision, Matt 17:9) as its fulfilment. This would be indicative of a brief experience which was not

⁵Ladd, 147.

far off. Wallace thinks that this is “probably an ingressive aorist.”⁶ Talbert agrees with Wallace and suggests that the verse may be better paraphrased by taking the verb as an ingressive aorist (begin to see). This means that the transfiguration does not exhaust the disciples’ vision of Jesus’ Parousia, but its happening gives them an initial Parousia view.⁷

Word Study

Like every exegetical study, there are some words in the text and its immediate context which have a bearing on the meaning of the passage being studied. Therefore, a brief examination of these words is essential.

Τινες. The first of such words to be examined is the indefinite plural pronoun τινες which has a double usage here both as a substantive, since there is no noun for it to function as an adjective,⁸ and also stands as a relative pronoun having an antecedent “Truly I say” in addition to a subsequent clause it is a part of “standing here who will by no means taste death.”⁹ On the other hand, it refers to someone or something indefinite, spoken of or written about “someone, something, anyone, a [thing], anything”¹⁰ out of a certain class.¹¹ Therefore, it is apparent that as Jesus

⁶Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), BibleWorks, v.9.

⁷Charles T. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 204-205.

⁸N. Clayton Croy, *A Primer of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), BibleWorks, v.9.

⁹Wallace, BibleWorks, v.9.

¹⁰Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), BibleWorks, v.9.

¹¹Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BibleWorks, v.9.

addresses the disciples (or the crowd as reported in Mark); He singles out some standing among them who would experience a certain phenomenon pertaining to His βασιλεία. The promise is restricted to a few out of those who were literally standing there and is not applicable to everyone.

Consequently, the fulfilment of the prediction ought to be found in an event which involves *some* of them, not all. This consideration excludes a number of views advanced as possible interpretations of this statement of Jesus. The transfiguration account seems to fit in very well with this pronoun's usage since three disciples out of twelve are said to have witnessed it.

ἑστῶτων. Another word that should be discussed pertains to the usage of the verbal participle ἑστῶτων (standing) in reference to the people that Jesus was addressing. There are some who have reasoned that this verbal participle could have been referring to a futuristic standing in the face of persecution.¹² Nevertheless, a closer examination of this perfect participle, which carries the force of the present tense (standing),¹³ would reveal that it refers to a state of being at a particular place “with the emphasis less on standing than on being or existing.”¹⁴ However, the physical position at the time Jesus speaks is hereby indicated by the adverb of place ὧδε (here).¹⁵ Therefore, looking at the context of the passage, there appears to be no reason that would necessitate a metaphorical understanding of the word since Jesus was referring to people He was addressing at a particular locative place.

¹²Hagner, [Libronix Digital Library].

¹³Wallace, BibleWorks, v.9.

¹⁴Bauer, BibleWorks, v.9.

¹⁵Ibid.

θανάτου. The other issue pertains to the resultant phrase *γεύσονται θανάτου* (taste death) which has been another point of contention in this text. Some have suggested that it should be understood in the light of the disciples being exempted from a “spiritual death”¹⁶ with Bruce Chilton proposing that Christ did not mean experiencing the actual death but is some “technical reference to ‘immortals’ like Elijah and Enoch”¹⁷ and that His statement should be understood in the light of Moses and Elijah who make an appearance during the transfiguration episode which follows. As a result, there is no need to find a period for the fulfilment of the prediction.¹⁸

In addition, Nolland suggests that the imagery of death depicted here probably refers to some “violent death [a martyr’s death] than to reaching the end of one’s life span.”¹⁹ Chilton is correct on the event but misses the point on the meaning of death. The context does not seem to favour any of these aforementioned hypotheses. Firstly, Moses and Elijah were not among the disciples or the crowd being addressed; therefore, the fulfilment of the prediction cannot be attributed to them in that respect.

Secondly, according to Bauer, the word *θανάτου* here means “a termination of physical life”²⁰ which is understood as “natural death.”²¹ Jesus was talking about the physical death that awaits everyone, that *some* of those standing there would not taste death (*γεύσονται* understood figuratively to mean *experience*)²² until they see Him

¹⁶Cranfield, 286.

¹⁷Bruce Chilton in Carson, *EBC*, [CD ROM].

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Nolland, 695.

²⁰Bauer, *BibleWorks*, v.9.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Louw and Nida, *BibleWorks*, v.9.

coming in His βασιλεία. Advancing the view that Christ meant martyrdom or violent death as opposed to natural death would be overstating the simple fact.

ἕως. Another point of debate in the text relates to the interval of time from the pronouncement of the promise to the fulfilment as found in the transfiguration. Some have contended that this prediction would not be supported by an event that takes place merely six days later.²³ However, an analysis of the adverb of time ἕως which is a subordinating conjunction and refers to “those who will not taste death,” will reveal that such an understanding may not be warranted. According to Thayer, one of the nuances of the adverb ἕως is that it is a particle which marks a limit. It is a *terminus ad quem* (boundary at which) something that is spoken of continues up to a certain point. In its occurrence here, used with the particle ἄν and the aorist subjunctive ἴδωσιν, it implies: “where it is left doubtful when that will take place till which it is said a thing will continue.”²⁴

Bauer agrees with Thayer and says that when used with the aorist subjunctive; it shows “the commencement of an event is dependent on circumstances.”²⁵ Wallace says the subordinating conjunction ἕως suggests temporal time which is contingent on the lifetime of some who were standing there.²⁶ Therefore, when Jesus makes the pronouncement, He does not set any observable period of time. The promise (not to taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom) could not be a remote one. Advocating for a longer period of time other than six days before death

²³Carson, *EBC*, [CD-ROM].

²⁴Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Abridged and Revised Thayer Lexicon)* (Ontario, Canada: Online Bible Foundation, 1997), BibleWorks, v.9.

²⁵Bauer, BibleWorks, v.9.

²⁶Wallace, BibleWorks, v.9.

occurs is putting into the text what is not really there. For Jesus, death to a few among them would not occur until they witness “His coming in the kingdom.” Therefore, the statement of Jesus must be understood in that light so that the event that comes afterwards (transfiguration); marks the end of waiting for the possible death of the few witnesses.

Καί. The connective conjunction *καί* in Matthew 17:1 “connects an additional element to a discussion or adds an additional idea to the train of thought.”²⁷ Even though the two verses are situated in separate chapters according to many Bible translations, the author probably saw no discontinuity between them. Therefore, one may conclude that the events of 17:1ff are a continuation of what began in 16:28.

Βασιλεία. In order to understand the meaning of the key word *βασιλεία* as rendered in Matthew 16:28, it is essential to briefly look at how the word was used in the Old Testament and also by Christ himself.²⁸ This would assist in understanding the nuances which the word carried in biblical times.

Old Testament. The Hebrew word *מַלְכוּת* (*malkut*, kingdom) is the one used for the Greek equivalent *Βασιλεία*. The word is an abstract noun which expresses the idea of “sovereignty, royal power and dominion.”²⁹ The word appears about ninety one times in the Hebrew Old Testament.³⁰ An analysis of its various occurrences suggests

²⁷Wallace, *BibleWorks*, v.9.

²⁸I have discussed views found in the Old Testament and New Testament (usage by Christ in the Gospels). For an extended discussion on other biblical and extra biblical views (LXX, Philo, Josephus, Greek Literature, Rabbinic), see Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*(TDNT) [Libronix Digital Library] (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995).

²⁹W. E Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* [Libronix Digital Library] (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996).

³⁰*Groves-Wheeler Morphology and Lemma Database (4.10)* (WTM) (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2008), *BibleWorks*, v.9.

that it had a wide semantic range. The primary nuance had to do with reigning (e.g. 2 Chr 15:19; Ps 145:11-13; 103:19). Then as a metonym, the word was used as a concrete noun to denote the territory of the kingdom or a geographical realm (e.g. Dan 1:20; Esth 1:4). Finally, anything that was of a royal nature was likewise associated with the word (e.g. throne, Esth 1:2; crown, Esth 1:11; palace, Esth 1:9; sceptre or staff, Ps 45:6; and glory, Ps 145:11-12).

In present-day thought, the word mainly implies a geographical area but in the Old Testament it best expresses the idea of “power rather than locality.”³¹ Furthermore, the prophets proclaimed an eschatological day of the Lord when He would restore His people and “establish an everlasting era of peace, justice, and mercy.”³² They promised and anticipated the coming of God’s kingdom or reign on the earth.³³ Therefore, among the Jews, there was an expectancy of the promised kingdom with its associated benefits.

Usage by Christ in the Gospels. In the New Testament, the word βασιλεία appears in 154 verses, 162 times in 5 different forms. In the Gospels alone, it appears about 115 times with Matthew having the largest number of occurrences in a single book, 53.³⁴ Βασιλεία is a “term that refers to the nature, being or state of the king i.e. his dignity and secondarily the expression of this is in the territory he governs.”³⁵ One

³¹Verlyn D. Verbrugge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 210.

³²Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1985), 527-528.

³³Ibid.

³⁴*BibleWorks Greek New Testament Morphology* (BNM) (Norfolk: BibleWorks, 2001), BibleWorks, v.9.

³⁵Kittel et al, *TDNT*, [Libronix Digital Library].

other aspect of the uses of the word refers to the earthly kings, mentioned or unnamed, and these are sometimes contrasted with the Kingly Messiah. This is why Christ is rightly considered as the King. The usage is inclusive of His attributed qualities of dignity and power.³⁶ At times, βασιλεία in the New Testament is used to refer to “the realm in which a ruler acts to carry out his will.”³⁷ It should also be noted that, even in English, the word kingdom primarily means “the authority and power of a king, not the country ruled or the people ruled by a king.”³⁸ Therefore, the word primarily carries more of the abstract or dynamic sense as opposed to the concrete one.

Then we have the kingdom of Christ based on the Old Testament prophetic announcements. This is also equated to the kingdom of God and the usage is sometimes interchanged with the kingdom of Christ.³⁹ This understanding is affirmed by Kittel et al who submit that Christ also has a kingdom and “some will see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:28).⁴⁰ It is probably in this sense that Christ uses βασιλεία in the text when he speaks of coming in *his kingdom*. This concept is critical to our understanding of Matthew 16:28 in the sense that Christ may not have been referring to a concrete kingdom but an abstract or dynamic one i.e. a reign or a manifestation of His kingly glory or power as represented in the transfiguration which

³⁶Kittel et al, *TDNT*, [Libronix Digital Library].

³⁷Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 378.

³⁸G. R. Beasley-Murray, “The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus” *JETS* 35/1 (March 1992): 19.

³⁹Katharine D. Sakenfield, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 512.

⁴⁰Kittel et al, *TDNT*, [Libronix Digital Library].

occurred shortly after the promise. The presence of two Old Testament figures (Moses and Elijah) sets the transfiguration as a kind of specimen or illustration of the eschatological Parousia mentioned in Matthew 16:27. This kingdom is for the saved righteous resurrected (represented by Moses, see Deut 34:5-7 cf. Jude 9) and the righteous living (represented by Elijah, see 2 Kings 2). Katharine D. Sakenfield submits that there is the alternative expression, kingdom of heaven, found only in Matthew's gospel (except the textually uncertain John 3:5).⁴¹

Contextual Analysis

An analysis of the contextual setting for the text in the Matthean tradition argues for the transfiguration as the event that fulfilled the promise. The transfiguration follows immediately after the promise. Additionally, this text belongs to a segment of material referred to as triple tradition i.e. material that is found in all the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 16:28 cf. Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27).⁴² What is interesting to note is that all of these texts are entrenched in a similar contextual arrangement. This noticeable correspondence in context could be indicative of an interpretation (transfiguration) of the promise commonly held by the evangelists.⁴³

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells His disciples concerning His upcoming Messianic suffering and death (8:31-33). Then he proceeds to tell the crowd (Matthew only has disciples as his audience) concerning the cost of discipleship (8:34-38). After making these statements, he then talks about some of them seeing Him coming in His

⁴¹Some scholars debate details on the differences between the two expressions "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven." In this research the two are taken to mean the same thing. Others argue that the interchange between the two shifts the focus area from a particular locality to a demonstration of the larger extent of influence. See Sakenfield, 512.

⁴²Green et al., *DJG*, 911.

⁴³France, *NICNT*, 641.

kingdom with power (Mark 9:1) and this pronouncement is followed by the transfiguration narrative (Mark 9:2-13).

In the Gospel of Luke, a similar chain of events can equally be observed: Jesus makes His prediction on suffering, death, and resurrection (Luke 9:22) then He talks about the price of discipleship (Luke 9:23-26). The pronouncements are equally followed by the parallel text of consideration (Luke 9:27) which also sets in the transfiguration narrative in Luke 9:28-36. On the other hand, Luke’s gospel, unlike Matthew and Mark, has all these events (including the transfiguration) recorded in the same chapter. It should also be noted that Mark’s gospel has the prediction and the transfiguration in the same chapter. Table 1 shows the highlighted close similarities among the Synoptics.

Table 1. Synoptic Parallels

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Peter’s Messianic Declaration	16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-21
Messianic suffering and death	16:21-23	8:31-33	9:22
Cost of discipleship	16:24-27	8:34-38	9:23-26
Prediction or promise	16:28	9:1	9:27
Transfiguration	17:1-13	9:2-13	9:28-36

Intertextual Support

Mark 9:1. The other support for this view is found in the parallel text of Mark where he uses the phrase βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐληλυθυῖαν ἐν δυνάμει (kingdom of God coming with power) instead of Matthew’s ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ (coming in His kingdom). Verlyn D. Verbrugge submits that the noun *δυνάμει* (from *δύναμις*) principally means “power, might, strength, force, ability, capability, deed of power,

resources.”⁴⁴ In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels and Acts, it can also be understood to mean “the power of God, the heavenly powers (in the pl.), miraculous power (in the pl., mighty deeds, miracles), and the power that brings salvation to completion.”⁴⁵ The transfiguration “appears to capture best the Markan meaning. Because of their presence at the transfiguration, *some* (emphasis mine) of the disciples (Peter, James, and John [9:2]) experienced ‘already now’ a foretaste of the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom’s future consummation at the *Parousia* (emphasis original) of the Son of Man (see 1:15).”⁴⁶

In this vein, some scholars, like Cranfield, have found that this text sustains the idea of the transfiguration in that the “transfiguration points forward to, and is as it were a foretaste of, the Resurrection, which in turn points forward to, and is a foretaste of, the Parousia; so that both the Resurrection and the parousia may be said to have been proleptically present in the Transfiguration”⁴⁷ Cranfield is correct on the transfiguration as the event that fulfils the saying of Christ. However, his addition of chronological events in the idea of the transfiguration as a proleptic representation of the resurrection is disputed by Barclay who argues that the transfiguration does not seem to fit the argument of being a foretaste of the resurrection, which is a common view. Barclay contends that there is some kind of linkage between the transfiguration and the second coming of Christ.⁴⁸ Therefore, the transfiguration is a “preliminary

⁴⁴Verbrugge, 353-354.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Stein, 411.

⁴⁷Cranfield, 288.

⁴⁸Barclay, *LJP*, 310.

fulfilment of the coming of the kingdom”⁴⁹ or “a preview or anticipation of ‘the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom.’”⁵⁰

Lane also agrees with Barclay when he comments that “the transfiguration was a momentary, but real [and witnessed] manifestation of Jesus’ sovereign power which pointed beyond itself to the *Parousia* (emphasis original), when He will come ‘with power and glory.’”⁵¹ Donahue and Harrington make the following conclusion:

The kingdom saying in Mark 9:1 is taken by most commentators as part of the preceding unit with Mark 8:34-38. In fact it serves as a bridge from the final (eschatological) saying on discipleship in 8:38 to the story of the transfiguration in Mark 9:2-8. By placing it just before the transfiguration, Mark has given an interpretation to both the saying and the narrative. On the other hand the readers are provided with a clue toward understanding Jesus’ transfiguration as a preview or anticipation of the fullness of the kingdom of God.⁵²

Therefore, Mark’s statement is valuable in appreciating the relationship between the saying of Jesus and the transfiguration as an initial manifestation of Christ’s coming in His kingdom with power.

2 Peter 1:16-18. Intertextual evidence in support of the transfiguration is also found in 2 Peter 1:16-18 where Peter, one of the disciples in the audience of Christ’s prediction and also an eyewitness on the mountain, makes reference to the transfiguration experience in his second epistle as the fulfilment of Jesus’ saying

⁴⁹Stein, 411.

⁵⁰John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 2:258.

⁵¹Lane, 314.

⁵²Donahue and Harrington, 273.

(Matt 16:28 cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).⁵³ Peter states that he was an “eyewitness of his majesty” which he links to the “coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:16) and goes on to interpret what he witnessed saying, “For He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (1:17-18).”

Norman Hillyer proposes that the pairing of the two, honour and glory, probably refers to the transfiguration but he argues that both the Synoptics and Peter refer to the second coming of Christ.⁵⁴ In addition, he seems to be saying that the honour and glory that was manifested on the mountain cannot just be for the disciples, it is something that takes place to all when Jesus returns in His glory at the Parousia.⁵⁵ Hillyer makes a valuable contribution when he alludes to honour and glory as referring to the transfiguration.

Nonetheless, his treatment of the passage is incomplete. First of all, he fails to see the transfiguration as a miniature of the actual event, the Parousia. Secondly, the promise by Jesus was for a few among the disciples and Peter himself confirms that what he witnessed was the bestowing of honour and glory upon Christ by the Father. To suggest that the honour and glory cannot just be for the disciples would be to misrepresent the words of Christ who categorically stated that not all would be witnesses, but only some of them. Indeed, when it comes to the Parousia proper, it will not just be for a few eyewitnesses on top of a mountain, it shall be seen by everyone and the worthy ones will be glorified. Thirdly, the context of both the

⁵³Albright and Mann, 201.

⁵⁴Norman Hillyer, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 175.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Synoptics and Peter's epistle cannot be said with certainty to be referring to the second coming of Jesus, there is not much evidence in both works that guarantees such a firm position.

Consequently, Barclay sees Peter to be making an interpretation of the transfiguration as an event which is "a foretaste of the triumphant glory of the second coming."⁵⁶ Peter's testimony in his epistle is an important indicator of what he understood through his experience with Christ on the mountain. Plummer concludes, "the allusion to the transfiguration [2 Pet 1:16-18] is evidence of what was believed at that date respecting the incident, and is so far a confirmation of it."⁵⁷

Synopsis of Exegesis

After a careful investigation of Matthew 16:28, it has been revealed that the meaning of βασιλεία is to be found in the context of the transfiguration incidence which took place following the promise of Christ. Undoubtedly, the transfiguration served as a miniature of the kingdom of God. This conclusion has been informed by four points.

Firstly, the literary analysis has shown that the attention getter and forward pointing device ἀμὴν breaks the flow of the discourse which started with the narrative τότε (Matt 16:24-27). It works together with μετα so that 16:28 should be considered together with Matthew 17:1-13. This understanding reinforces the concept that 16:28 is fulfilled by what follows in Matthew 17:1-13.

Secondly, the textual analysis identified parallel phrases and clauses which enhanced the understanding of the passage. For example, the "coming of the Son of

⁵⁶Barclay, *LJP*, 310.

⁵⁷Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 238.

Man” of 16:28 is a specimen of Matthew 16:27. The first would be witnessed by some disciples while the second would be seen by all. The connective conjunction καί and μεθ’ ἡμέρας ἕξ (Matt 17:1) look back to τινες of Matthew 16:28. Also, the verb ἴδωσιν is a type of ὄραμα which took place in Matthew 17:9.

On the other hand, the word study has shown that τινες limits the people to witness the event. This interpretive key became crucial in deciding which view among the six is correct. The transfiguration fits in well since it had a limited number of witnesses i.e. Peter, James, and John. On this basis, a number of proposed views have been rejected. Furthermore, the study also investigated the key word βασιλεία and discovered that its primary meaning is abstract or dynamic, not concrete. Therefore, Jesus was referring to a *reign* as opposed to a geographical territory. The transfiguration somewhat offers a glimpse of the kingdom.

Thirdly, contextual evidence in favour of the transfiguration has also been discussed. It has been discovered that within the Matthean tradition, the transfiguration immediately follows the promise of Christ. Interestingly, the other two parallel synoptic accounts also have a similar arrangement of material leading up to the transfiguration itself. This could suggest that the gospel writers understood the transfiguration to be the interpretation of the saying hence placing it immediately after the saying. This is one of the strongest arguments in favour of this view.

Lastly, intertextual evidence has affirmed that the transfiguration is a proleptic view of the Parousia. The Markan version reinforces this idea by use of the word δύναμις which suits the primary meaning of βασιλεία to be an abstract concept (reign) as opposed to the concrete idea of a geographical territory. 2 Peter 1:16-18 equally enhanced the strength of the transfiguration view. Peter, one of the three witnesses, reports that he beheld the glory of the Lord on the holy mountain at the transfiguration

of Christ (cf. Matt 17:2). The event also features two Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah who seem to represent the resurrected righteous dead and the living respectively. In a way, through the transfiguration, one sees a complete panoramic view of the Parousia proper mentioned in Matthew 16:27.

Theology and Message

This section deals with theological themes that can be gleaned from the text under study. Since the passage and the related intertextuality have been discussed, there are at least three themes that can be identified: a) the certainty of the Parousia b) Christ's kingdom and c) Christ as Messiah.

The Certainty of the Parousia

The first theological implication of the study is derived from the phrase ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ “coming in his kingdom” which appears once in the book of Matthew and the entire New Testament.⁵⁸ When the phrase is considered together with the subjunctive ἴδωσιν (an ingressive aorist), it gives an idea that the disciples now began to see the Son of Man in His kingdom as promised in Matthew 16:28. This kingdom is that of the saved as represented in the transfiguration by Moses and Elijah. Nevertheless, what the three disciples begin to see is a foretaste of the glorious kingdom. Their experience on the mountain guarantees the certainty of the Parousia.

Subsequently, while the primary meaning of the phrase “coming in his kingdom” is to be found in the initial Parousia represented by the transfiguration, the secondary implication informs the reader that Christ will come in His full splendour at

⁵⁸*Greek New Testament and LXX Database (BGT)* (Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC., 1999), BibleWorks. v.9.

the eschatological Parousia itself. Even though the occurrence for the phrase may only be singular, there are other Matthean texts which promote the same concept. For example, in the preceding text (16:27), Jesus says “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” A similar message can also be found in Matthew 25:31, 32 and 26:64. The other gospel writers also record the second coming of Christ (see Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27).

Apart from the gospels, the theme of the Parousia is also present in the other New Testament writings. In Acts 1:11, Luke records the story of the ascension of Christ and the pronouncement made: “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven will come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” In Pauline literature, this truth is also foretold and the purpose thereof indicated (see 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Tim 4:1; Heb 9:28). Jude and Revelation also share in the belief that Christ shall come for the second time (Jude 14, 15; Rev 3:11; 22:20). Therefore, one can conclude that the Parousia is a definite anticipated event that will take place at the *eschaton* (the end of the world). As a result, all of Jesus’ followers need to come to this realization and prepare for it accordingly by renouncing self (Matt 16:24-27).

Another element that can be alluded to is the manner of the Parousia. It will be a visible and personal return which will be witnessed by those who will be found living and the righteous dead who will be resurrected. This understanding is derived from the word ὄραμα which Christ uses to describe what the three disciples witnessed on the mountain (17:9) in fulfilment of the promise (16:28 ἴδωσιν). Both words (ὄραμα and ἴδωσιν) are derived from the same root word ὁράω (to see) whose basic meaning implies seeing something with one’s eye or something that can actually be

seen, a vision or a sight.⁵⁹ Timothy Friberg agrees with this rendering of the word and submits that it means that which is literally seen, a spectacle, or an appearance.⁶⁰ Therefore, one can conclude that the promise of *seeing* the kingdom was fulfilled when the three disciples saw a preview of the kingdom with the transfiguration serving as a specimen of what will obtain at the universal Parousia referred to in Matthew 16:27. Such an understanding rejects the rapture theory.⁶¹ No group will supersede the other or go to heaven before the Parousia occurs. As a miniature of the second coming, the transfiguration demonstrates that both groups (living and resurrected) will be simultaneous witnesses of the literal, audible, and bodily return of the Son of Man in His kingdom. This concept can also be identified in other portions of the book of Matthew (see for example, Matt 26:64; 24:27, 30).

Christ Has a Kingdom

The second theological implication of the text is assumed from the personal possessive pronoun *αὐτοῦ* (his). The resultant phrase βασιλεία αὐτοῦ (his kingdom) suggests that Christ owns a kingdom. The phrase appears four times in the New Testament; twice in the book of Matthew (16:28; 12:26), once in Luke (11:18) and also Revelation (16:10).⁶² Of the two Matthean texts, one is a reference to the devil's

⁵⁹Bauer, BibleWorks, v.9.

⁶⁰Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), BibleWorks, v.9.

⁶¹For example, Renald E. Showers in the book *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* [Libronix Digital Library] (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Inc., 1995) argues that there will be a rapture which will take place before the great tribulation period of 7 years. On this occasion, Jesus will come secretly to take the church to heaven and after 7 years, He will come again in an open demonstration of power and glory. In between these two events, the Antichrist is supposed to come into power and the great tribulation period takes place in the second half of the 7 years i.e. for three and half years. Therefore, the rapture and the second coming will be separate events.

⁶²BGT, BibleWorks, v. 9.

kingdom (12:26). The Lukan text is similar to the Matthean one and also talks about the devil possessing a kingdom. The one in Revelation is also an allusion to the devil's kingdom and discusses what will happen to it after the fifth vial is released by the destroying angel. In this vein, it is proper to state that both Christ and the devil own a kingdom. However, there is a marked difference between the two kingdoms as can be deciphered from these occurrences and other related texts (Matt 6:33, 13:41; Luke 1:33; 12:31; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Tim 4:1): that the kingdom of Christ is one of salvation and eternal restoration while the kingdom of the devil consists of demons, darkness and eternal destruction.

The kingdom of Christ is further illustrated by what happens in the transfiguration. The presence of the two (Moses and Elijah) on the mountain is understood by some to symbolize the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) which culminate in Jesus himself (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44; 16:29, 31) as a fulfilment of the Old Testament.⁶³ While this view is acceptable, there are others who understand the presence of the three on the mountain i.e. Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, together with the disciples, to be a foretaste of what happens at the end of time. The three main protagonists: Jesus (the Redeemer), Elijah (representing the living at the time of the Parousia) and then Moses (representing those resurrected at the Parousia), offered a complete panoramic view of the glorious kingdom.⁶⁴ Consequently, in the saying of

⁶³Nineham, 235.

⁶⁴This is the view held by Ellen White who states that "Moses upon the mount of transfiguration was a witness to Christ's victory over sin and death. He represented those who shall come forth from the grave at the resurrection of the just. Elijah, who had been translated to heaven without seeing death, represented those who will be living upon the earth at Christ's second coming, and who will be 'changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump;' when 'this mortal must put on immortality,' and 'this corruptible must put on incorruption.' 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. Jesus was clothed with the light of heaven, as He will appear when He shall come 'second time without sin unto salvation.' For He will come 'in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.' Hebrews 9:28; Mark 8:38. The Saviour's promise to the disciples was now fulfilled. Upon the mount the future kingdom of glory was represented in miniature,--Christ the King, Moses a representative of the risen

Matthew 16:28 with its Synoptic parallels, Jesus was not referring to the eschatological coming in His βασιλεία but some manifestation of His royal power related to the Parousia (at His transfiguration). It appears He wanted to offer a miniature of the Parousia and a glimpse of heaven; a model of what will take place on the eschatological day of the Lord. This is what constitutes the kingdom He possesses.

There is a similar expression *Father's kingdom* (e.g. Matt 13:43; 26:29, etc.) which may appear to be at variance with the kingdom belonging to Christ. However, the two expressions are understood to retain the same meaning. They are used interchangeably since they refer to the same entity.⁶⁵ That is the reason why Christ attributes the kingdom to himself (Matt 16:28) and at the same time ascribes it to His Father (Matt 26:29; 16:27). Essentially, He is referring to the same kingdom.

On another score, the religious leaders of Israel (Pharisees and the priests) were fearful of the increasing popularity of Christ among the masses. They were of the view that such a scenario would create “a movement of such a character that the Romans would interpret it as a rebellion and would intervene to crush both the movement and the Jewish nation (John 11:47-48).”⁶⁶ And this is precisely what the people expected of their Messiah. At one occasion, when Jesus performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish to feed five thousand people, they sought to forcefully enthrone him as king so that He can lead a revolt against the Romans. By so doing, He would establish an earthly political Davidic kingdom which they would have gladly supported and waged their allegiance to Him in opposition to

saints, and Elijah of the translated ones.” Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White Writings: Comprehensive Research Edition [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 2008).

⁶⁵Sakenfield, 512.

⁶⁶Ladd, 137.

their captors (John 6:15).⁶⁷ However, it was evident that Christ did not come to set up an earthly kingdom but a spiritual one. The transfiguration episode offered a glimpse of what kind of a kingdom He had in mind. The personal possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ (16:28) distinguishes between the reigning Roman kingdom or the Jewish anticipated political Davidic earthly kingdom and that of Christ. His spiritual kingdom as depicted in the transfiguration was about salvation and restoration from sins and not salvation from political oppression.

Christ as Messiah

The third theological implication is drawn from the phrase τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (the Son of Man). Ladd says it is an idiomatic expression closely associated with messianic connotations.⁶⁸ The phrase appears four times in the gospel of Matthew and 20 times in the New Testament canon.⁶⁹ In the present text and in two other references (24:30; 26:64), Son of Man is used in an eschatological sense. Nevertheless, in this context, it is used as a foretaste of the proper eschaton. The other reference (16:13) pertains to the Son of Man on earth. The majority of the rest of the occurrences are found in the gospels except for one other reference in Acts 7:56 at the stoning of Stephen.

The most probable Old Testament background to this idiom is to be found in the vision of Daniel 7:21-27 where he sees four beasts successively coming out of the sea. These beasts represent four successive world empires. Thereafter, Daniel says

I saw . . . and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like the son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And

⁶⁷Ladd, 138.

⁶⁸Ibid., 144.

⁶⁹BGT, BibleWorks, v.9.

to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)⁷⁰

Ladd concludes by stating that “the Danielic son of man is a heavenly messianic eschatological figure who brings the kingdom to the afflicted saints on earth.”⁷¹

In most of the occurrences in the Synoptics, Jesus ascribes the title Son of Man to himself, as is the case with the present text. One possible reason is that He wants to be identified with humanity. After all, He is the incarnate Son of God as confirmed by His father during the transfiguration, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt 17:5). Up until now, the disciples have only being acquainted with the earthly Son of Man (e.g. Matt 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 32; 13:37). Now He introduces them to the suffering Messiah (e.g. Matt 16:21; 17:9, 22; 20:18; 28) and also the apocalyptic Son of Man (e.g. Matt 16:27; 24: 27, 30, 37, 44; 26:64). Seemingly, He wants his disciples and the Jews to take note that He is not a Davidic kind of Messiah but of a different order, a heavenly one. He is more than a prophet and a Messiah but the incarnate Son of God. This claim brings to view the authenticity of His messianic claims and His trustworthiness in matters of predictive prophecy.

In conclusion, three theological implications have been identified. The first is the certainty of the Parousia based on the phrase “coming in His kingdom” in the text. The fulfilment of the prediction of Christ ensures the certainty of the Parousia. The second implication is that Christ has a kingdom based on the phrase “His kingdom.” While the devil also has a kingdom, the kingdom of Christ is different. It offers

⁷⁰Ladd, 146.

⁷¹Ibid., 147.

salvation and is depicted in the transfiguration account with the saved resurrected and living righteous. The third and final implication is that of Christ as Messiah. This one is derived from the idiomatic expression “Son of Man” with its messianic overtones. Jesus was the messiah, a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies.

SDA Theological Implications

The doctrine of the Second Coming is probably the cornerstone of Adventism. In this light, the teaching of the kingdom in the context of the transfiguration and what it represents becomes cardinal. Firstly, it reinforces the concept of the certainty of the Parousia and the reliability of Christ in matters of predictive prophecy. What He predicted came to pass and in essence guarantees what is yet to happen (second coming) in due course. This is what Adventists believe.

Secondly, on the question of timing, the transfiguration offers Matthew’s readers an initial Parousia view. It is not the proper Parousia itself. Adventists see the apocalyptic synoptic prophecies (Matt 24; Luke 21; Mark 13) as precursors of Jesus’ second coming. In these prophecies, it is understood that some events had not yet taken place at the time Christ lived in Palestine hence the promise in Matthew 16:28 could not have been referring to the eschatological Parousia. Otherwise, insisting on the interpretation of the second coming defeats Christ’s messianic claims and His reliability in matters of predictive prophecy. Instead, the transfiguration prefigures His Parousia which is yet to happen.

Thirdly, the manner of the Parousia is also demonstrated in the transfiguration. Adventists do not subscribe to the rapture theory and the transfiguration episode upholds the view that the Second Coming will be a visible, bodily, and audible return with no group preceding the other. The presence of the three (Jesus the redeemer, Moses the righteous resurrected, Elijah the living righteous) offers a complete

panoramic view of what will happen at the Parousia. Both groups, the resurrected and living righteous, will simultaneously witness the return of Christ and ascend to heaven concurrently (1 Thess 4:16-18; 1 Cor 15:51-58).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This segment comprises the summary of the study. A summary of each chapter has been given followed by the conclusion and recommendations. In Chapter 1, the statement of the problem and the significance of the study were stated together with the relevant introductory matters. There were three objectives which directed the study, namely a) identification of the proper literary setting of the present passage b) discovering what Jesus meant by coming in His βασιλεία and c) identifying the theological implications of the text on Christianity and Adventist theology.

Chapter 2 reviewed literature on the various interpretations offered on Matthew 16:28. The study identified 6 views i.e. transfiguration, second coming, destruction of Jerusalem, Pentecost, early church expansion, and the passion and resurrection. Those who advocate for the transfiguration base their stance on contextual evidence. Additionally, they argue on the basis of the indefinite pronoun τινες that the limitation of witnesses (e.g. Peter, John, and James) to such an event properly fits the transfiguration. Accordingly, the transfiguration is seen to be a specimen of the Parousia. There are also those who support the second coming interpretation. Their understanding is based on the close connection they see between Matthew 16:27 and 28. They contend that since v. 27 speaks of a last judgement, then v. 28 should be a reference to the same event.

Further, there are those who support the destruction of Jerusalem view. The destruction is seen to be a preview of the last judgement. Proponents also maintain that the prediction of Christ can only be fulfilled in an event that occurs after a long period of time i.e. 40 years. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the fourth view. Advocates hinge their understanding on the parallel text in Mark 9:1 where they see the kingdom as having come with power on the day of Pentecost resulting in the unprecedented spread of the gospel. On the other hand, there are those who support the expansion of the early church after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their view, some of the disciples would witness the phenomenal growth of the gospel before encountering death. Finally, we have those who advance the passion and resurrection interpretation. Proponents see unity between the resurrection and the Parousia. The weaknesses of each of these views have been shown in details in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 discussed the passage in its context. Isagogical matters were considered. The first unit deals with the historical background. Politically, the Jews were under the Romans in the days of Christ and this bondage was unwelcome. The second unit is that of the religious setting. Judaism, the religion of the Jews was centred on the temple services. However, after the temple was destroyed, synagogue communities and study of the Torah took centre stage. Among the theological undercurrents of the time was apocalypticism, literature which encouraged them to persevere in cataclysmic moments and looked to God's intervention. There was also an element of the messianic expectation. They continuously looked forward to the fulfilment of Old Testament messianic prophecies. Even so, most Jews anticipated a deliverer in the Davidic order, one who would defeat their earthly adversaries and subdue them. Nevertheless, Christ was not a political Messiah but a spiritual one.

The third unit discussed the themes which are found in the book of Matthew. The dominant one seems to be the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah, a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. There are also other themes to do with discipleship, the church, apocalyptic pronouncements pertaining to eschatological events as well as the Parousia itself. Salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles is another motif. The fourth unit discussed the authorship of Matthew. The early church fathers and a majority of New Testament scholars suggest that Matthew the disciple of Christ is the one who wrote the gospel. The fifth unit dealt with the issue of the date of the gospel. Some critical scholars who hold to the Markan priority concept set Matthew's date after 70 AD as a way of slighting the concept of predictive prophecy. This study settled for an earlier date as promoted by other scholars who think that Matthew wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The sixth unit identified Matthew's target audience to be mainly Jewish and probably those at Antioch which became a major Christian centre after Jerusalem. Lastly, the setting of Matthew 16 was also considered.

Chapter 4 is the exegetical section which considered a number of elements in an attempt to resolve the first objective of the study on the literary setting of the passage. First of all, the literary analysis has shown that the narrative *Τότε* (Matt 16:24) introduced a new unit (Matt 16:24-27) which cascaded into the cost of discipleship and the subsequent reward of *τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ* (his disciples) at the Parousia (Matt 16:27). Then we have the attention getter and forward-pointing device *ἀμὴν* (Matt 16:28) which works together with *μετὰ* (Matt 17:1) to break the flow of the discourse that started with *Τότε*. In this light, it is proper to consider Matthew 16:28 together with Matthew 17:1-13 as a new pericope separate from Matthew 16:24-27. This would entail that the pronoun *τινες* is in sync with the prepositional

phrase μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ (after six days) in Matthew 17:1, which introduces the main clause “Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother.” Therefore, the transfiguration would be part of Matthew 16:28 and would serve as a fulfilment of the promise.

The second task on textual analysis was an attempt in clarifying the second objective of the study on the meaning of βασιλεία. A number of parallel phrases and clauses were considered. One of such is found in 16:28 ἕως ἃν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ (till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom). This one is a type of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔρχεσθαι ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ (the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, Matt 16:27). The first coming is witnessed by the three disciples while the second is witnessed by all the disciples at the end of the world. While the two phrases are found in concurrent verses, it does not necessarily mean that the one found in Matthew 16:28 is a reference to the same event of Matthew 16:27 in terms of participants, location and time. This understanding rejects the second coming interpretation and reinforces the transfiguration as a miniature of Matthew 16:27. The next phrase is μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ (after six days, Matt 17:1). Although this phrase together with καί look back to 16:28, there is no doubt that the mentioned trio in Matthew 17:1 parallels the indefinite pronoun τινες.

Furthermore, the pronoun τινες parallels the prepositional phrase κατ' ἰδίαν (by themselves) in Matthew 17:1. In like manner, τινες τῶν ὧδε ἐστῶτων οἵτινες (some who are standing here) parallels the clause παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ (Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, Matt 17:1). The subjunctive aorist ἴδωσιν can be paralleled with

ὄραμα (Matt 17:9) as its fulfilment. That would imply an experience that was not far off.

Consequently, the pronoun *τινες* has introduced a significant benchmark in arriving at the correct interpretation i.e. the event should have limited witnesses. On this basis, a number of proposed interpretations fall off. For example, the passion and resurrection were witnessed by all the disciples except for one, Judas. In fact, one can even contend that Judas caused and witnessed part of the passion but mainly missed the resurrection due to his commission of suicide (Matt 27:5). Again, the other views of Pentecost and the expansion of the early church were witnessed by all the disciples except for one, Judas Iscariot. It is unlikely that Jesus would make such a prediction to the exclusion of one person.

At the same time, the view of the second coming as a possible interpretation would be difficult to accept based on the understanding of *τινες*. As it is, none of Jesus' disciples is yet alive and the Parousia is still to come. Insisting on its validity would lead to classifying Jesus as a false prophet. As it has been pointed out, relying on 16:27 as the text that supports such a view would be failure to recognize the fundamental difference between the two phrases (Matt 16:27 and 28) and what they represent. The other view of the destruction of Jerusalem receives minimal consideration due to the obscurity of the disciples' precise dates of death even though some think that John the beloved apostle was the only one alive in Jerusalem in 70 AD.¹ If this is taken, *τινες* cannot apply to him alone since it is a plural pronoun.

The word *καί*, a connective conjunction in Matthew 17:1, links an idea or adds an additional element to a train of thought. Based on this principle, one may conclude

¹Cotter, 451-452.

that Matthew chapter 17:1-13 is a continuation of Matthew 16:28 so that the transfiguration is the interpretation of the promise. The other important word discussed using the Old Testament and New Testament usage by Christ is Βασιλεία. It has been shown that the word had a wide range of meanings with the primary one being reign as opposed to territory. When viewed this way, it would dispel the notion that Christ intended or expected to set up a geographical kingdom which failed to be actualized during His time in Palestine.² Alternatively, Christ was referring to the kingdom in an abstract sense, a manifestation of His power and dignity as seen in the transfiguration.

Thirdly, contextual evidence has been established in Matthew as well as the parallel synoptic accounts. It has been observed that the material surrounding the text is arranged in a somewhat similar manner as if to suggest that all the three evangelists viewed the transfiguration as the event which fulfilled Christ's prediction. As for the destruction of Jerusalem view, the relevant *Jerusalem language* is not found in the immediate context of the passage to warrant such an understanding. The Pentecost view also collapses since the word is never used in Matthew. Appropriate contextual evidence seems to be lacking in supporting the other suggested interpretations.

Fourthly, intertextual evidence from both Mark and 2 Peter has also been presented. The Markan version seems to add more weight to the transfiguration view since he uses the word δυνάμει which is closely associated with the occurrence of the transfiguration. 2 Peter 1:16-18 is the other significant passage in which one of the three witnesses on the mountain seems to confirm that he was "an eyewitness of his glory" on the holy mountain.

²Schweitzer in Ladd, 55.

The study also considered the theology and message of the passage in response to the third objective of the study. Three propositions were developed. The first theological implication is the certainty of the Parousia. Christ will come at the Parousia and the transfiguration is the primary guarantee of that appearance. The second implication derived from the passage is that Christ has a kingdom. When contrasted to that of the devil, Christ's kingdom is one of salvation and eternal restoration. The transfiguration is a specimen with the two Old Testament figures Moses and Elijah representing the resurrected and the living righteous respectively. The third and final theological implication is the confirmation of Jesus' Messiahship. The title Son of Man has Messianic overtones and also speaks to his humanity. He is the Messiah and a true prophet. Even so, He is the incarnate Son of God.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the meaning of Βασιλεία in Matthew 16:28 is represented by the transfiguration event which immediately followed. The transfiguration was a miniature of the Parousia proper. This conclusion was informed by four elements: the literary analysis of the passage; textual analysis of parallel phrases and clauses including word studies; contextual considerations and lastly intertextual indications. What the three disciples witnessed is indicative of what will happen at the parousia when Jesus the redeemer will come in His glorious splendour and will redeem all those who died in Him (Moses) and translate the righteous living (Elijah). Therefore, a glimpse of heaven was manifested and a foretaste of its splendour demonstrated. Since the word Βασιλεία primarily carried an abstract idea as opposed to a concrete one, this could be what Christ meant by coming in His kingdom.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in this section are twofold: the first two are concerned with Christian faith and practice while the last two are for further study since there is no research which can claim to be conclusive. It would therefore be necessary to have subsequent studies on the passage. The following are the recommendations:

1. There is need to teach Christians on the doctrine of the Second Coming and its certainty as can be understood from the transfiguration.
2. There is need to encourage Christians to prepare for the Parousia by renouncing self so that when Christ comes in His glory, they may be among those who will be rewarded.
3. There is need to investigate the concept of the resurrection as a possible part of what the transfiguration proleptically represents, apart from the Parousia.
4. If the third recommendation is proven to be true, it may be possible to draw additional theological suggestions.

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