Biblical Theology of the Synoptics

The Coming of the Kingdom

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What is Biblical Theology?

- Two rather different meanings…
- In contrast to un-biblical theology:
  - Theology in agreement with the Bible's teachings
  - That is, orthodox theology
- In contrast to systematic theology:
  - How a part (or all) of Scripture presents theology in its own terms rather than in the standard terms of theology.
  - For example, what terms, pictures, etc., are used by John, or Isaiah, or Paul?
- This second usage is our concern here, how the Synoptics present their message.
Unifying Themes in the Synoptics

- Terminology of Synoptics differs from rest of NT, even from John.
- These differences may give clues to the emphases of the Synoptics relative to the rest of the NT.
- Consider word statistics for the Synoptics compared with the NT as a whole.
- The Synoptics make up about 1/3 of the NT, so about .33 of the whole.
Christology

- Christ
  - $\frac{40}{750} = .05$ (low!)
- Son of Man
  - $\frac{70}{87} = .80$ (high!)
- Son of God
  - $\frac{26}{79} = .33$ (average)
Love

- Agapao (verb)
  - $23/126 = 0.18$ (low)
- Agape (noun)
  - $2/107 = 0.02$ (very low!)
Faith

- Pisteuo (verb) "believe"
  - 34/223 = .15 (low)
- Pistis (noun) "faith"
  - 24/233 = .10 (low)
Salvation

- **Sozo (verb) "save"
  - $4/42 = .09$ (low)

- **Soteria (act)
  "salvation"
  - $45/103 = .44$ (high)

- **Soter (actor) "savior"
  - $2/24 = .08$ (low)
Forgiveness

- Aphiemi (verb) "forgive"
  - 114/144 = .79 (high!)
- Aphesis (noun) "forgiveness"
  - 8/17 = .47 (high)
Kingdom

- Basileia (noun) "kingdom"
  - 119/160 = 0.74 (high!)
- Basileus (ruler) "king"
  - 44/110 = 0.4 (high)
- Basileuo (verb) "rule/reign"
  - 4/19 = 0.21 (low)
Summary on Word Frequency

- Some Distinctive Terms in Synoptics:
  - Son of Man
  - Forgive
  - Kingdom

- Herman Ridderbos captures something of this in the title of his biblical theology of the synoptics, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, which we will here sketch.
The Kingdom in the Synoptics

- 'Kingdom of heaven' occurs 31x
  - All in Matthew
- 'Kingdom of God' occurs 49x
  - Only 4 in Matthew, rest in Mark or Luke
- 'Kingdom' also occurs frequently by itself, where context indicates God’s kingdom is in view.
The Kingdom Characterized

- Theocratic – rule by God
- Dynamic – rule, not just territory
- Messianic – God rules thru His Messiah
- Future – eschatological kingdom (not yet)
- Present – but also begins at Jesus’ 1st coming (already)
The Kingdom as Present

- Satan is already overcome.
- Jesus' miraculous power already displayed.
- The Good News already proclaimed.
- Jesus' followers already possess the kingdom.
- Jesus the Messiah is already here.
The Kingdom as Provisional

- The time of the Evil One continues.
- Jesus' miracles are merely signs.
- Jesus speaks in parables.
- Judgment is delayed.
- During this delay:
  - Kingdom at work thru Jesus & followers
  - They labor to seek that which is lost.
The Kingdom as Provisional

- Synoptic Christology has 2 focal points:
  - Son of Man
    - Emphasizes Jesus’ kingship; the eschatological kingdom
  - Servant of the Lord
    - Emphasizes Jesus' obedience & suffering; the kingdom as not yet

- What is relation between Jesus' kingdom & the cross?
  - Only minor outworking of kingdom before cross
  - Cross postpones last judgment
The Gospel of the Kingdom

- Salvation
  - Remission of sins
  - Antithesis of (rabbinic doctrine of) reward
  - God as Father

- Commandments
  - What constitutes righteousness
  - All other values lesser than kingdom
  - Our good works mark presence of kingdom
The Kingdom & the Church

- Kingdom – God's work of salvation
- Church – God's people
- Lord's supper
  - Looks back to Jesus' death
  - Looks forward to consummated kingdom
  - Provisional in nature
  - Pictures sacrifice which inaugurates kingdom
The Future Consummation

- Liberals claim Jesus taught a 1st century return
  - This involves selective use of data
- Actually 2 themes in Jesus' predictions
  - Passion statements – Isaiah's Suffering Servant
  - Parousia statements – Daniel's Son of Man
  - Disciples don't understand until after resurrection
The Future Consummation

- End of the Age becomes the goal for the interadvent period.
  - Great task precedes Jesus' return
  - No hint of timespan involved
- Disciples to discern the times.
  - 2\textsuperscript{nd} coming to be sudden.
  - But signs not excluded.
Jesus' Olivet Discourse

- Beginning of sorrows
- Great tribulation
- Fall of Jerusalem
- Parousia/Second Coming
Jesus' Time-Limit Statements

- "this generation shall not pass away until all these things have happened" Matt 24:34
- "some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" Matt 16:28
Jesus' Time-Limit Statements

- Ridderbos (I think) is weak here; his view:
  - 'This generation' – certainty without any time indication
  - 'Some standing here' – resurrection

- My take on these:
  - 'This generation' – will wind up quickly when crucial signs occur
  - 'Some standing here' – transfiguration & eschatological visions of apostles
Synoptic Eschatology

- Don't be deceived by false messiahs.
- Signs are:
  - Beginning of sorrows
  - Abomination of desolation
  - Great tribulation
  - Cosmic catastrophes
- Both Jewish & universal elements
- Some living at Jesus' time will see him as Son of Man.
- Don't give up praying.
- Be watchful.
- Don't forget the great task!
The End

Is Already!
and Not Yet!