

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Synoptic Gospels, Lecture 12, Synoptic Theology

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Let's get that going, and then go back to this. Then I'll just do it that way: pull this out. Okay, we're continuing our Synoptic Gospels course here. Twelve units, if you like.

We're just about ready to start the tenth unit, and that is Biblical Theology of the Synoptics. Well, a little introduction to Biblical Theology first, before we jump into the subject here. The phrase Biblical Theology has two rather different uses.

One use, Biblical Theology, is in contrast to Unbiblical Theology. Biblical Theology is that doctrine which is in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, with the teaching of Scripture. In this sense, Biblical Theology is Orthodox Theology.

But another use of the term is in contrast to Systematic Theology. Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology. In this sense, Biblical Theology is the study of how a part, usually, or even the whole, of Scripture, presents theology in its own terms, its own vocabulary, images, structure, that sort of thing.

In this sense, Biblical Theology is trying to see what terms, pictures, etc., John used to proclaim God's Word in the Gospels, or in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, or what terms Paul used in his epistles, or what terms Isaiah used in his prophecy, etc., because God worked through the individuals, and often, well, he created them with different abilities and such, and put them in cultures and with their various temperaments and such, so they had different styles, and put them in different time periods in history and such, and so you wind up with different terms sometimes being used. We're here interested in this second usage, though, of course, we want our study to be Biblical Theology in both senses. The subject of Biblical Theology is really a vast one, and here we have time and space just to look at a sample.

So, the first thing we want to do, if you like, is to look for some unifying themes in the Synoptic Gospels. The terminology of the Synoptic Gospels is often different from the rest of the New Testament, even from the Gospel of John, which covers the same events. One way to get a feel for some of the emphases of the Synoptics, as distinct from the rest of the New Testament, is from a study of word statistics, comparing the relative frequency of usage of various words in the Synoptics with the frequency of those words in the New Testament as a whole.

As our sample study, we're going to consider the following word frequencies in the Synoptics relative to the whole of the New Testament. For this purpose, remember that the length of the text of the Synoptics is about one-third, or let's say 0.33, of the

entire New Testament. So, if the words occur way more than a third of the occurrences in the New Testament, they are especially common in the Synoptics, and if they're way below a third, then they're rather rare in the Synoptics.

So, I've got a chart here, and I'm looking at the topics of Christology, love, faith, salvation, forgiveness, and kingdom, and then looking at various terms that occur under these. So, take Christology, first of all. Well, take the relevant words, Christ, the phrase, Son of Man, and the phrase, Son of God.

Well, the term Christ occurs 40 times in the Synoptics, but occurs 750 times in the whole New Testament. So, if you work out the fraction, that's 0.05, which is very low compared to 0.33. So, the term Christ is actually rare in the Synoptics compared with the rest of the New Testament. On the other hand, the term Son of Man occurs 70 times in the Synoptics, and only 87 in the whole New Testament, so 0.8 of the occurrences are in the Synoptics, which is quite high, and it turns out almost all the rest of them are in John.

The term Son of God occurs 26 times in the Synoptics, out of 79 in the whole of the New Testament, and that works out to 0.33, which accidentally happens to be right on the average.

So here's an example. Christ is a rare Synoptic term, Son of Man is an unusually common Synoptic term, and Son of God is about the same as it is on the rest of the New Testament taken as a whole.

Take the two terms for love. I'm here not thinking of the various verbs for love, but the verb *agapao* and the noun *agape*. *Agapao* occurs 23 times in the Synoptics, out of 126 in the whole New Testament, so it's low, 0.18 against 0.33, we think of.

And *agape* only occurs twice in the Synoptic Gospels, out of 107 in the whole New Testament, so 0.02, so it's very low. Although Jesus is frequently seen doing very loving things in the Synoptics, that terminology is not a standard Synoptic terminology. If you were to think about John, you'd immediately realize that's a very high-frequency word there.

Faith. Again, we take two words, the verb *pisteuo*, to trust or to believe, and *pistis*, trust, trustworthiness, belief, etc. *Pisteuo*, 34 out of 223, so 0.15, so low.

And then *pistis*, 24 out of 233, so 0.10, and also low. So, surprisingly, faith is not a real common Synoptic term, though again, if you're familiar at all with the Bible, you realize that's a big Apolline term, and that's a big Johannine term as well, but not in the Synoptics. Salvation.

Here we pick three words, the verb *sozo*, to save, the abstract noun *soteria*, salvation, and the actor word *soter*, savior. *Sozo*, 4 out of 42, so that's 0.09, low. *Soteria*, 45 out of 103, 0.44, high.

And *soter*, 2 out of 24, 0.08, low. So, the Gospels talk about rescue, deliverance, and salvation rather frequently, but they don't talk much about the verb itself nor the actor spoken of at this point, which is, again, a little surprising, except you remember my remark back in the discussion of literary features of the Synoptic Gospels, that they do not bring in their post-resurrection perspective. They're trying to help you look at Jesus as he appeared to the people before his death on the cross, and its significance became apparent, even though the writers obviously know something of that sort, but they're trying to let you feel what it looked like.

Forgiveness, the verb *aphiemi*, to forgive, and forgiveness, *aphasis*, forgive, 114 out of 144, 0.79, so that's high. And *aphasis*, 8 out of 17, 0.47, which is high, but nowhere near as high as *aphiemi*. So the Gospels appear to be about forgiveness.

And then kingdom, *basilea*, *basileus*, the king, and *basileuo*, to rule, *basilea*, 119 out of 160, 0.74, so that is high. Kingdom is a theme in the Gospels, Synoptic Gospels particularly, and one might have guessed that if you've read them before in any way. *Basileus*, 44 out of 110, 0.40, a little high.

And *basileuo*, to reign, 4 out of 19, 0.21, a little low. So, I ask my students, you know, why do you think Christ is relatively rare in the Synoptic Gospels so that Son of Man is enormously common? And you get various responses, but this is part of what Vreda's messianic secret is based upon. Jesus did not walk into towns and say, Hello, fellows, I'm the Messiah.

He did not, as Satan suggested he do, make a soft landing in the temple and say, Hello, fellows, the Messiah has arrived. That is not the way God planned to have Jesus come. And that would have immediately polarized everything, and the authorities would either have to give in to him without repenting and obviously interfere somewhat with his substitutionary death as well.

So, we can't work all that out. God is back there working out all the strands of the plot and the various plots as they weave together. But that is at least part of it.

Why is Son of Man enormously common? Not easy to see, but it's Jesus' choice of the term he's going to use for himself. And it's a term that, if you hit on the right passage, it basically says, I'm the Messiah. But there are a bunch of other passages.

And so, it might just mean I'm a human, which, of course, he is. Or you might think, Well, what does God mean when he calls Ezekiel the Son of Man? And does it mean

just human, which it might? Or does it mean some person has chosen to carry out God's commands or something?

So, it's ambiguous. And that, I think, was the intention there. Herman Ridderbos's book *The Coming of the Kingdom*, a biblical theology of the Synoptics, picks up these and other features well by seeing the major theme of the Synoptics as the coming of the kingdom.

As a sample study of biblical theology, we want to summarize Ridderbos' main points here with occasional suggestions where I disagree with him and things of that sort. The kingdom has a major theme in biblical theology of the synoptics. There are 31 passages in the synoptics where the phrase kingdom of heaven is used, and they're all in Matthew.

Plus, another 49 passages with the kingdom of God. And only four of these are in Matthew. We're going to study all these passages plus others that use the term kingdom without either of those endings, but where the context makes it clear that it's God's kingdom that is in mind rather than Herod's kingdom or Caesar's kingdom or something like that.

Plus, other passages seem to be talking about the kingdom but do not use the term at all. That's the trick you get into when you think about word studies as trying to figure out what they tell you about a book or something. You really have to find the places where the phrase is used, places where synonyms are used, and that sort of thing.

Well, first of all, the kingdom is characterized. It seems to be a mistake to make any huge distinction between the phrases kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God. Mark and Luke never use the former phrase, never use kingdom of heaven, but use the latter, kingdom of God, in places where Matthew uses kingdom of heaven.

For example, Matthew 4:17 versus Mark 1:15 or Matthew 5:3 versus Luke 6:20. In fact, Matthew himself uses both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven in parallel in Matthew 19:23 and 24. The standard guess today is that Matthew follows the pious Jewish practice of sometimes using substitutes for explicit references to God. So, among modern Orthodox Jews writing in English, you'll see them write G-D instead of God.

Or if they're using a pseudo-Hebrew, they use Elohim instead of Elohim. They put a K instead of an H, etc., Or other things like that.

And that's a modern way, if you like, of avoiding using the name of God. And we think the name Jehovah comes from something of this sort as well, where the

consonants for Yahweh are given the vowels for Adonai, and you get Jehovah. We'll not run into the explanation of that.

Well, one of the substitutes used in New Testament times for God was Heaven. There were a bunch of other substitutes as well. The name, the place, and things of that sort.

Well, Riddabos suggests that the kingdom spoken of by Jesus in the Synoptics can be characterized by the following terms. The kingdom is theocratic. The kingdom is dynamic.

The kingdom is messianic. The kingdom is the future. But the kingdom is also present.

So, let's say a word or two about each of those. Theocratic is pretty straightforward, huh? The kingdom is ruled by God. That's seen in the terminology, kingdom of God, that is God's kingdom, and kingdom of Heaven, as well as by what is said about this particular kingdom.

So, Jesus is talking about how God ruled in some way. It's dynamic in the sense that the term kingdom is primarily used excuse me, the term is not primarily used as our English word kingdom is. Our English word kingdom is used primarily to refer to a spatial territory.

So, the United Kingdom is the territory ruled by the king or queen of England, and in this case, that's England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom. But rather, the term kingdom is used to refer to the king's activity. So, it's the rule of God.

The rule of Heaven, if you like. And that kind of rule can take place among God's followers in a world that is otherwise in rebellion against Him. So the kingdom of Heaven, what we might say in the well, we're going to come back and talk about the already and not yet, but in the already sense is in the hearts, if you like, and the lives of His followers, but one day it will be universal in this other sense.

The kingdom of God, then, is not only theocratic and dynamic, but it's also messianic. It's messianic in that God rules through His mediator, the Messiah. Messiah is a term that comes from the Hebrew word to anoint, and Christos comes from the Greek term to anoint, and they both have the idea that God has selected someone to function as His mediator or agent in some type of activity.

As we've already seen in the synoptics, Jesus uses the term Son of Man to refer to this but to do so in an ambiguous way. But Son of Man has a very important background in Daniel chapter 7, where the four kingdoms representing the

successive kingdoms of humans on earth are represented as wild beasts. And then one like a Son of Man, so one like a human, comes before God, and He receives from God the eternal, universal kingdom.

So, the Son of Man is the one who's going to be the eternal, universal ruler. And the eternal, universal ruler is basically a definition of Messiah, if you like. Although the term is not used there, that's what it means in that passage.

So, Messianic. The kingdom is future in that it is regularly described in strongly eschatological terms and as not yet having come. Yet it's present in some real sense as the kingdom also comes in in Jesus' first coming.

This solution seems to me to be better than the old traditional dispensational emphasis of the kingdom that was offered to the Jews and rejected, so the kingdom was withdrawn, and then it didn't come back again until the millennium. I think when you work through the passages, you see that they are already here in some sense. And that brings us then to Ridderbos' discussion of, on the one hand, the kingdom of God is present, and then this kingdom is provisional.

So, let's look first of all at the idea that the kingdom of God is present, it's already fulfilled, it's already come. The present aspect of the kingdom can be seen in a number of themes. For instance, Satan, the wicked one, has already been overcome.

He's defeated by Jesus' temptation, which is pretty crucial when you think that Jesus' temptation is obviously in some sense parallel to Adam and Eve's temptation, but theirs was in the garden; he's in the wilderness. And to Israel's temptation, they were in the wilderness, he's in the wilderness, etc. So, it's seen in his defeat at Jesus' temptation, in Jesus and even his disciples casting out demons, so he's overcoming, and even they, through his power, are overcoming Satan's power.

The rather fawning behavior of the demons, and perhaps even in the fall of Satan, is narrated for us in Luke 10:8-19, Luke 11:21, and the other parallels in the Gospel. I'm inclined to put at least one of those as probably viewing the future rather than actually having occurred yet, but that's one of the places where Ridderbos and I would differ. Jesus' miraculous power is already being displayed at his first coming, making visible the restoration of creation, and that is, in fact, one of the themes, if you like, as you look through the healing miracles and the nature miracles and such.

Restoration of creation and fulfilling Messianic prophecy, as we see in Matthew 11:5 and Matthew 8:17. In the work of Jesus, God is visiting his people as the crowd shouts out in Luke 7:16. The good news is already being proclaimed, as predicted in Isaiah 52:7.

Good news, your God reigns, etc. And Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue and proclaimed as fulfill this day, Luke 4:21. Jesus' followers, in some sense, already possess the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3-10, for theirs, is the kingdom. Similarly, blessed are you because you see, whereas these others didn't see. Matthew 13:16, Matthew 13:17.

For this day, salvation has come, Luke 19:9. For your names are written down, Luke 10:20. And Jesus the Messiah is already here.

The Messiah has come. He's identified as Messiah. My son at his baptism, Matthew 3:17, in parallels at his transfiguration, Matthew 17:5, in parallels.

And they pick up the theme, my son, in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2. The Son of Man is present in lots of passages. Jesus' eye sayings are a powerful testimony to who he is. Matthew 11:28, 12:30, Matthew 10:32-42.

So, the kingdom of God is present. But, this present kingdom is provisional, not yet complete. That is not the whole story.

The biblical presentation is really more complex than just a present kingdom or just a future kingdom. I remember when I was taking a required course in the Bible at Duke back in the early 1960s, the liberals would regularly say, well, there were two different views. Some people thought Jesus and the kingdom had come, and some people thought it was eschatological, and somehow, the sources mixed these together.

But, in fact, the tension between the two is a very biblical theme. The kingdom is both present and future. Both elements occur.

Though the Gospels do not use our distinctions between present-future or first-coming, second-coming, they rather use the distinctions of this present age and the age to come. For example, see Mark 10-30. Here we see a unity with tension which is reflected in the problem bothering John the Baptist when he sends messengers to Jesus in Matthew 11:6.

Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? Jesus gives him a response. Look at these things that are happening, and John already knows these are things that are predicted about the Messiah. So, the time of the evil one still continues.

Satan still has power. This is one sense in which the present kingdom is provisional. So, in the Lord's Prayer, deliver us from the evil one, is what we pray.

He desires to have Peter, Luke 22:31. The tares are growing with the wheat, and the tares are the sons of the evil one. The demons are afraid that Jesus has come to torment us before the time.

Matthew 8:29. So, the time of the evil one continues. The miracles Jesus does are merely signs.

They're real miracles, but they're not immediately followed by the consummation. Jesus limits their use. Even their use as evidence is restricted and connected in one way or another with faith.

So, Jesus... Think of the pool of Bethesda. There's this whole crowd of people there. Jesus heals one person.

So, the signs indicate the coming of the kingdom. They point to the end, but they are not even the beginning of the end, which is sketched for us in the Olivet Discourse. These things are the beginning, etc.

Their purpose is subservient to the preaching of the gospel. They are to attract people. They're to tell us something about who Jesus is and to get people to listen to the gospel.

People don't always use them that way. You can see they're using the feeding to get fed and come back for another course if you like. Jesus speaks to the crowd in parables to reveal and conceal for those who do and don't understand the mystery of the kingdom.

Namely, the king is here, but the kingdom is not yet as expected. The parables of the kingdom also show us that the sowing begins with Jesus coming, but the harvest is not until we enter the age that the kingdom's advance is pictured not in terms of military conquest but in terms of growth.

The judgment is thus delayed. The tares are allowed to grow together along with the wheat until the end of the age. The master, in the parable of the pounds, will go away to receive his kingdom and then return.

Meanwhile, what people have done to others is treated as equivalent to what they've done to Jesus in the sheep and goats material in Matthew 25. During this delay, the kingdom is at work through the word of Jesus and the labors of the disciples. Several growth parables, not all of them, picture the growth of the word.

The parable of the pounds and the talents picture a time for servants to use what has been entrusted to them. This labor that they are to do involves seeking what is lost.

The parable of the fig tree in the vineyard that the gardener is going to dig around it and put more fertilizer in it, in Luke 13 indicates there's still time for repentance.

The seeking is pictured in the lost sheep materials in Matthew 9, Matthew 10, Matthew 15, and Luke 15, and the parables of the lost, and coin, and son in Luke 15. In contrast to the harvesting done by the angels at the end of the age, Matthew 13, here the harvesting is done by Jesus' followers in this age, Matthew 9:35-38. It is to the provisional kingdom that the servant of the Lord materials belong.

The Christology of the Synoptics has two focal points: the son of man and the servant of the Lord, so pick up the Daniel passage and the Isaiah passage if you like. The former is emphasized by means of Daniel 7, but with ambiguity, Jesus' kingship, the latter, servant of the Lord, stresses his obedience and suffering. The temptation of the wilderness shows us that the path of glory lies through obedience, hardship, and suffering.

Jesus refuses to take the quick, spectacular way, the soft landing in the temple, or bowing down to Satan and getting all the kingdoms of the world. This is in fulfillment of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah 40-55. The messianic secret is necessary to rejection.

So, what's the relationship between Jesus' kingdom and Jesus' cross? Well, there's obviously only a minor outworking of the kingdom before the cross. The crucifixion, in some sense, postpones the last judgment, opening space for the provisional present kingdom, and the preaching of the gospel really only develops after the resurrection. So that brings us to Ridderbos' discussion of the gospel of the kingdom.

What is this good news of the kingdom? How do we know that the kingdom Ridderbos sees two aspects of good news? Salvation and that certainly sounds like good news and commandments, which doesn't sound like good news to most of us in this rather lax age. Strictly speaking, the good news is not news.

It's the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. It's good news for the poor, especially for the godly who are oppressed. The Beatitudes, particularly in Luke's presentation of them, are clearer with the blessings and curses set beside each other.

The godly who are oppressed are seen as the unjust judges. It involves a new covenant. It involves a new Israel of the people of God's pleasure.

What salvation is being offered? What rescue is being offered? Well, Ridderbos says it's remission of sins. It's fulfilled in Jesus' coming and work. His good news of salvation is the antithesis of the rabbinic doctrine of reward.

And this gets us into a little bit of the old view of Paul versus the new view of Paul, etc. And I'll have to say, in most lines, I come down with the old view of Paul on this particular thing. Jesus' good news of salvation is kind of the opposite of the rabbinic view of reward.

Think of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. God, I thank you, I'm not like other guys. Particularly, this tax collector indicates the tax collector.

It's pictured in God being our Father both as a present relation and the future bliss. It gives us assurance of the certainty of salvation. It's fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, the true Son of God.

While it's not earned, not earned by us, those who are saved are characterized by doing the Father's will. Of course, it is earned by Jesus, so he earns it for us. And yet those who are saved are characterized by doing the Father's will.

This is a very important part of the gospel which tends to get lost in this Lordship-Salvation controversy by the one side that basically says, well, nothing needs to show up in your life. Whereas the biblical picture is, if you are actually saved these things will show up in your life. How do the commandments fit into the good news? God's intention for his children is that they be righteous.

Why is it all this problem of judgment and hell and that sort of thing? It's because we're not righteous. God didn't save us in order to be unrighteous for eternity. He saved us to be righteous, etc.

God's demands are summarized as righteousness. All other values we might have are to be sacrificed for the kingdom. That's what really counts.

The good works we do demonstrate the presence of the kingdom. We fulfill the law, the Sermon on the Mount, by giving it its full measure. The Sermon on the Mount, in fact, gives the antithesis to the rabbinic interpretation of the law.

You've heard that said, but I say to you, etc. Jesus is not against the law, but against refusal to be fully committed to God's law. A rather different take than is common in an antinomian society.

The kingdom and the church. Ridderbos asks how the kingdom is related to the church. Ridderbos suggests the kingdom is God's work of salvation consummated in Jesus Christ. His rule is that this is going to happen and that this is going to be worked out through Jesus.

The church, by contrast, are the people who are called by God; they share in the bliss of the kingdom, and of course, they participate in Jesus' work of salvation by

spreading the message and by being samples, if you like. Ridderbos asks the question, how is the kingdom related to the Lord's Supper? He suggests that the Lord's Supper displays two themes: the death of Christ and the eschatological kingdom. So, death of Christ, my blood and body, but the eschatological kingdom, I won't eat of this again until I drink it with you new in the kingdom, etc.

And as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do so until the Lord's coming. The Lord's Supper makes a distinction between the commencement and consummation of the kingdom. This is also seen in the provisional nature of the Supper.

Remember Elio Cucarro, one of our grads, did a doctoral dissertation on the Lord's Supper, and one of the Reformation teachers gave a talk at Biblical Seminary, and he says, this is a picture of the eschatological kingdom, but you drink a little cup of supper, or in the chalice, you drink a sip, and you have a little piece of bread, etc. It's designed so you're not to mistake it for the actual Supper itself. So, seen in the provisional nature of the Supper, mere tidbit, and she's remarkable until I come.

It is a picture of our table fellowship through Christ's death. It pictures Jesus as the sacrifice inaugurating the new covenant, the new covenant in my blood. That's interesting there.

When Moses inaugurates the new covenant, he says, this is the blood of the covenant, and he sprinkles it on the people, on the outside of the people. Jesus says, this is the blood of the covenant, and we take it inside ourselves. Interesting contrast there as well.

Against the Roman Catholic position, the Lord's Supper is a sacrificial meal rather than the sacrifice itself. In the Old Testament background, the sacrifice has already taken place, and now the animal is cooked and prepared for, say, a thank offering or a vow offering or something, where you have a meal, etc because the sacrifice itself has already been made once for all time, as we see in the Book of Hebrews, not explicit here in the Gospels.

Lastly, Ridderbos turns to think about the future consummation of the kingdom. Liberals usually claim that Jesus and the disciples thought that the second coming would occur in the first century, but they were mistaken. That's the standard liberal view of the matter.

But Ridderbos says, this is a simplification of a complex problem by the selective discard of inconvenient data. So, it's a good methodological statement there, I think. One of the features you see in the liberal treatment of the Gospels is the very elaborate dividing up of the material and the elaborate discussion of different alleged circles and groups that advocated these different things.

But then each of them advocates a very simplistic view of things, where the biblical picture is you've obviously got lots of heretics, but you've got a unified teaching of the Scripture and of Jesus' true followers trying to follow that. But the teaching itself has some complexities in it. Ridderbos notes two things in Jesus' predictions.

His passion statements basically lead us to and arise out of the picture of Isaiah's suffering servants. And there's the parousia statements, which arise out of and lead us back to Daniel's son of man. These were not put together before the resurrection, so the disciples didn't understand how to put them together.

The Great Commission then, in Matthew 28: 16-20, kind of lifts the veil from this mystery and inaugurates a new period in salvation history. This had previously been implicit, so light to the Gentiles and that sort of thing, but hadn't been made clear. The resurrection discloses an intimate connection between Jesus' role as servant and as son of man.

The events at his crucifixion, the temple veil tore, the earthquake, and the resurrections prefigure the end of the age, the parousia. The end of the age itself is an orientation point, a goal, for the period following Jesus' resurrection. The disciples' work and goals are now viewed in light of the second coming, namely that a great task precedes the eschatological coming of the kingdom.

Jesus, however, gives no hint as to how great a time span would elapse before the parousia. Jesus' disciples are called upon to discern the times. The second coming is to be sudden, but signs are not excluded.

We certainly won't need signs to recognize its occurrence, and so Jesus gives us the example of the lightning flash, which you can be looking in the wrong direction, and you'll see the lightning. You can even have your eyes closed, and you'll see the lightning. And the vultures, there's a carcass three miles away. You'd never see the carcass at that distance, but you see the vultures circling it, so you don't have to be right at the second coming to see it.

There are going to be all these signs that are going to point to it. Jesus' main eschatological teaching, says Ridderbos, is given in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21. It can be outlined as follows.

There's first the beginning of sorrows, then there's the great tribulation, and then there's the parousia, or second coming. Ridderbos points out that the great tribulation refers to the fall of Jerusalem, but not exclusively so. And I agree with him in that particular point.

You're beginning to get some people, some extreme preterists, who say the fall of Jerusalem WAS the second coming, and there isn't going to be any other. And there are others who say that's at least what the Olivet Discourse is about. But I think it's more than that.

My read would be, this is perhaps a little different than Ridderbos', is that the event surrounding the fall of Jerusalem is kind of a dress rehearsal for the second coming. Ridderbos points out that Matthew and Mark coalesce two motifs, the fall of Jerusalem and the second coming. And again, my response would be, there's going to be another fall of Jerusalem in connection with the second coming, as well as the one in connection with the first coming, if you like.

What are we to make of Jesus' time-limited pronouncements? This is kind of a standard theme of liberal theology. Perry Phillips, when he was at Cornell, once went to Sage Chapel to hear Bishop Pike speak. He told me that one of Bishop Pike's statements was that Jesus said he was coming back again.

Where is he? It's been 2,000 years, etc. That, in fact, was already predicted that there would be that kind of reaction. Ridderbos' interpretation of what Jesus meant by this generation, which Ridderbos' read is certainty without any time indication, seems somewhat weak to me.

I favor the reference instead of saying that Jesus is doing what is not uncommon in many of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and that is the listeners are asked to imagine that they're present when some future event occurs. And so, Jacob, in his last will and testament in front of his sons, says you, Reuben, this will happen to you, and this will happen to Judah, etc. But, in fact, they're going to happen to their descendants down the line quite a ways.

And so, I take Jesus to be saying the generation that will not pass away is the generation that sees these signs he's mentioned. The stuff is not going to be spread out over 1,000 years or something of that sort. The distinctive signs will come rather close to the end of the age.

Ridderbos thinks that some standing here refers to the resurrection, so some standing here will see the kingdom coming as power refers to the resurrection. I have no objection to that being one of the references, but all three of the synoptic gospels immediately give the transfiguration of them without even a chapter break and the other two with chapter breaks, but the gospel writers didn't put the chapter breaks in. So, that would be my read on that.

I believe, however, that Jesus' ambiguity in both these is intentional. He did not intend that we know that it's not going to be for 2,000 years or however long it is actually going to be. The Parousia parables, Ridderbos points out, points to a

substantial period between the Ascension and the Parousia, but we can't tell in advance whether it's to be years or centuries.

Obviously, once we're out centuries, looking back, we can tell it's to be centuries, given that Christianity is true. What about the fulfillment and consummation of the eschatological prophecies? The synoptics don't give a systematic presentation of eschatology. Probably Book of Revelation would be the nearest, and you can see all the dispute over that as well.

You basically have a situation of putting together puzzle pieces by looking at the various shapes and colors on each piece and putting them together, but you don't have a full picture that allows you to know where all the pieces go. Ridderbos sees several teachings that he says can be overpressed to produce contradictions, but they're actually consistent. And I think that, in fact, is a nice general principle as well.

There are lots of things that the Bible says if you overpress them, if you try to make them do more than what the writer intended, and I'm here thinking of God as a divine writer as well as the humans writing that you will get things that don't work right. He suggests that these particular features show up and, if not overpressed, are consistent first of all, that we're called to pay attention to signs not to be deceived by false messiahs.

And the signs, he suggests, are there's going to be a beginning of sorrows, there's going to be the abomination of desolation, there's going to be the great tribulation, and there are going to be cosmic catastrophes. So, you need to pay attention to those and not run off in other directions. The abomination of desolation, says Ridderbos, has both Jewish and universal elements.

I agree that that's true. My suggestion is that this probably fits a premill view better than it fits Ridderbos amill view that these things will be going on in Jerusalem because the Jews are back there, etc., which amillennialists in the 19th century did not expect, though certainly some premillennialists in the 19th century did expect. I have an article by Samuel Kellogg in my book on Fulfilled Prophecy and he definitely, in the 1880s, was expecting the return of Israel, and he wasn't going to predict when it would take place, but saw that the biblical materials pushed in that direction.

So, pay attention to the signs. The signs are the beginning of sorrows, abomination of desolation, great tribulation, cosmic catastrophes. The abomination of desolation, as Ridderbos says, has both Jewish and universal elements.

Some living at Jesus' time will witness His powerful manifestation as Son of Man before they die, including His enemies. I suggest that involves, one, the disciples' visions at various times, as we see in the book of Revelation. Two, he would say, His enemies.

Well, one, Paul, thinking of the road to Damascus, but two, the chief priests, these scared soldiers come running in, and what do they do? They stonewall it. They've seen the signs, but they are going to keep being His enemies. Another important point addressed to Jesus' followers is not to give up praying for the coming of the kingdom, for God will speedily fulfill it in His time.

Be watchful. No one knows when He will come. And don't forget the great task in the meantime.

What are we here for? Ridderbos weakest section in his whole book, etc., seems to be this one on prophecy and history. He notes that prophecy lacks time perspective and that, in fact, is very similar to the dispensational mountain peaks of prophecy, and I agree with that. It's not set up so that we can draw a chart and be quite sure that we've got all the pieces in the right place.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't make some attempts in that direction. Ridderbos sees an interweaving of Jewish and universal elements, as in the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, first, and the end of the age, second. This interweaving, he suggests, is not to be solved by form criticism, nor as interpretation after the fact, as though the gospel writers are all writing after 70 A.D. Rather, he says, the prophet paints the future in colors known to him, including his own geographical horizon.

He's poetic, using figurative language rather than allegorical. I have no problem with that, per se, but from much of eschatology, we're going to have to wait and see what happens. Your particular view may require you to interpret this way and this way and this way and this way, but you may be wrong.

We ought, even if we hold a particular view as being more likely than the others, to be ready to make adjustments if it turns out that God has some surprises for us in that direction. There are other themes in the Synoptics by which one could attempt to put together a picture of their theological teachings, but I believe Ridderbos has hit on a very important one in this term: the coming of the kingdom, this phrase, the coming of the kingdom. So, that's a quick tour of biblical theology, the Synoptics, and it picks up some idea of how it's done and some of the things that you can see there, and I think very valuably for that purpose.

Okay, well we'll see you again here later when we move on to look at the eleventh and twelfth sections of our course.