CHAPTER TWO

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

Almost simultaneously, Gösta Lundström and Norman Perrin wrote books with the same title and the same basic undertaking—reviewing and analyzing the interpretations of NT scholars concerning the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus.1 Lundström began his survey with Ritschl, whereas Perrin began with Ritschl’s earlier contemporary, Schleiermacher. Ritschl was strongly influenced by Schleiermacher and continued working at some of the same problems Schleiermacher undertook. The principal problem was presented still earlier by Reimarus, whose work received no attention from Lundström or Perrin. Both followed the example of previous scholars in keeping the skeleton hidden in the closet. Schweitzer, however, began his review of NT opinions about the historical Jesus with Reimarus, whose views he described as “makeshift” and “mistaken.” But Schweitzer conceded that “Reimarus was the first, after eighteen centuries of misconception, to have an inkling of what eschatology really was.” 2 What were the views of Reimarus that were ignored by Lundström and Perrin, on the one hand, but on the other hand, held to be original by Schweitzer? Reimarus began correctly by noting that Jesus nowhere explained what the Kingdom of Heaven was or in what it consisted. Reimarus therefore concluded that the expression must have been already known by Jews of that time, and the Jews must have understood the same meaning that Jesus expressed. If this were not the case, the idiom would not have been an effective term to use in communication.3 The Jews, according to Reimarus, understood that the Kingdom of God would be revealed in the days of the Messiah on Mt. Zion when all the heathen would be gathered

Reactions to Reimarus

After the first hundred years.—Schleiermacher’s attempts to spiritualize the kingdom were resisted by Strauss but generally followed by NT scholars who wrote more liberal lives of Jesus. In 1892, however, Weiss wrote not only in opposition to Reimarus, but also to NT scholars who had composed the “liberal lives of Jesus.” Reimarus had been previously opposed by Holtzmann, Ritschl, and other nineteenth century authors who denied any affiliation of the Kingdom of God with a political kingdom. They believed that Jesus spoke of an inner, ethical kingdom, and they explained the eschatological passages in the NT as views of the early church which had been written back into the life of Jesus. Weiss held that these sayings were genuine and that Jesus had anticipated a wholly future, other-worldly kingdom, completely dissociated from a political messiahship, which he conceded continued in Judaism and was reflected in Rabbinic literature, II Baruch, and IV Ezra. Weiss’s theory was further supported by Schweitzer. After depicting the futile attempts of the nineteenth

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2 Ibid., 86.
3 D. F. Strauss, Der Christus des Glaubens und der Jesus der Geschichte (Berlin, 1865). Schleiermacher was not the first to spiritualize the concept of the kingdom. That had been done long before Reimarus, but Schleiermacher’s anti-rationalistic emphasis made it seem much less necessary to pay any attention to Reimarus than was previously the case.
4 J. Weiss, Die Predigt Jesus vom Reich Gottes (Göttingen, 1892; 1900), 58-59.
5 H. J. Holtzmann, Die synoptischen Evangelien, Ihr Ursprung und geschichtlicher Charakter (Leipzig, 1863).