DANIEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: VISIONS OF GOD’S KINGDOM

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1. INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is one of the books of Scripture that is quoted or alluded to in most of the New Testament writings. According to the indexes in the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (4th ed.), Daniel is quoted five times (cf. Matt 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27)1 and alluded to, or echoed, some 130 times. The index in the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (27th ed.) which combines quotations and allusions, lists some 200 references. Proportionately, this puts Daniel in the same category as Isaiah and the Psalms, the books most frequently quoted and alluded to in the New Testament.

For New Testament christology the book is enormously important, for the curious epithet, “son of man,” drawn from Dan 7:13, is found on the lips of Jesus many times (and, with one or two exceptions, on the lips of no one else) and may provide a major clue to his self-understanding. The usage and meaning of this epithet are treated in the present volume by James Dunn.2 But there are other important themes and images in this book that have contributed to New Testament theology in significant ways. Probably the most important of these are visions of throne(s) and kingdom. The present study will be principally concerned with these elements, only mentioning the “son of man” in passing. Our focus primarily will be on Jesus, the evangelists, and Paul.3

1 In fact, only two of these are independent quotations: those in Mark 13:26 and 14:62, which are then picked up by the Matthean and Lukan evangelists.
3 Drafts of this paper were read and discussed at the Graduate Religious Studies cluster of the University of Surrey Roehampton and at the Senior New Testament
2. THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In recent studies Burton Mack has argued that Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God is better understood in the light of Hellenistic wisdom traditions, perhaps “without any allusion to Jewish ideology at all.” He bases this surprising judgment on the observation that the exact Greek phrase, ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, is only found in Hellenistic texts (i.e. Philo, Spec. Leg. 4 §164; Wis 10:10; Sentences of Sextus 310-12). Now even if Mack’s observation were correct (and it is not, for this Greek phrase also appears in the Palestinian Pss. Sol. 17:3; cf. T. Benj. 9:1: ἡ βασιλεία κυρίου), it has little probative value when we remember that the bulk of Jesus’ teaching was in all probability uttered in Aramaic. Aramaic sources, such as Daniel, which pre-dates Jesus by nearly two centuries, and the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah, which post-dates Jesus by one to three generations, speak of God’s kingdom in such a way that urges comparison with Jesus’ proclamation. Mack’s Hellenistic hypothesis is surely destined to become, along with Rudolf Bultmann’s contention that the background of the christology of the Fourth Gospel is to be found in a gnostic redeemer myth, another curiosity of scholarship.

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5 It should be pointed out that Mack’s three examples of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in Hellenistic texts evince important affinities with interpretive traditions found in rabbinic (largely Palestinian) traditions. For parallels to Philo, Spec. Leg. 4 §164, see Midr. Pss. 45.6 (on Ps 45:3-11); to Wis 10:10, see Gen. Rab. 69.7 (on Gen 28:17) and Midr. Tanhkh. Wayyese §9; to Sentences of Sextus 310–12, see m. Ber. 2:2, 5; see also discussion of these texts in C. A. Evans, “Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in P. W. Flint and J. C. VanderKam (eds.), The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 1998-99) 2.573–98, esp. 578–79.