

135:5 (“The Kingdom of God”)

Paper 135 —John the Baptist

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Source for 135:5

- (1) Charles **Fiske** and Burton Scott **Easton**, *The Real Jesus: What He Taught: What He Did: Who He Was* (New York and London, Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1929)

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and the UB writer pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) **Blue** indicates original (or “revealed”) information, or UB-specific terminology and concepts. (What to highlight in this regard is debatable. The highlights are tentative.)
- (f) **Light green** indicates Bible passages or fragments thereof, which are not paralleled in the source text.

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PAPER 135 — JOHN THE BAPTIST

II: THE BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIANITY (Fiske & Easton 6)

[Compare F&E 6-7.]

For something like two centuries

a new school of prophets—today we call them “apocalyptists”—had been striving to solve these problems.

Israel was suffering for her sins: this was the all but universal answer.

5. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

135:5.1 In order to understand John’s message, account should be taken of the status of the Jewish people at the time he appeared upon the stage of action. For almost one hundred years all Israel had been in a quandary; they were at a loss to explain their continuous subjugation to gentile overlords. Had not Moses taught that righteousness was always rewarded with prosperity and power? Were they not God’s chosen people? Why was the throne of David desolate and vacant? In the light of the Mosaic doctrines and the precepts of the prophets the Jews found it difficult to explain their long-continued national desolation.

135:5.2 About one hundred years before the days of Jesus and John

a new school of religious teachers arose in Palestine, the apocalyptists.

These new teachers evolved a system of belief that accounted for the sufferings and humiliation of the Jews on the ground that they were paying the penalty for the nation’s sins.

They fell back onto the well-known reasons assigned to explain the Babylonian and other captivities of former times.

But she might take heart.

But, so taught the apocalyptists, Israel should take heart;

the days of their affliction were almost over;

Her discipline was nearly completed.

the discipline of God's chosen people was about finished;

God's patience with the ruthless foreigners was almost at the end, and Israel had but little longer to wait.

God's patience with the gentile foreigners was about exhausted.

The end of Roman rule was synonymous with the end of the age and, in a certain sense, with the end of the world.

These new teachers leaned heavily on the predictions of Daniel, and they consistently taught that

Creation was about to pass into its final stage;

creation was about to pass into its final stage;

the kingdoms of this world were soon to become "the Kingdom of God" (F&E 7).

the kingdoms of this world were about to become the kingdom of God.

To the Jewish mind of that day

[contd] This was the origin of the phrase that meets us everywhere throughout the Gospels.

this was the meaning of that phrase—the kingdom of heaven—which runs throughout the teachings of both John and Jesus.

To Jewish ears it had but one meaning:

To the Jews of Palestine the phrase "kingdom of heaven" had but one meaning:

a perfectly righteous state, in which God would rule as completely as He rules in heaven (F&E 7).

an absolutely righteous state in which God (the Messiah) would rule the nations of earth in perfection of power just as he ruled in heaven—

"Your will be done on earth as in heaven."

135:5.3 In the days of John all Jews were expectantly asking,

[contd] How soon would the Kingdom come?

On every side voices were raised, predicting that it could not be long delayed;

perhaps the greater part of the nation expected to see the great consummation within their own lifetime (F&E 7).

[contd] What would the Kingdom be like? Here many opinions were held, many views elaborated. All men agreed that it would be given up to the service and worship of God; no true Jew could hesitate in this belief. But the unanimity went no further.

In accord with the literal predictions of the Old Testament, many looked for the Kingdom on this earth;

a rejuvenated Palestine, saved from its enemies forever, fertile and prosperous, a land where all would live long and happy lives, and die peaceful and contented deaths.

At the opposite pole of expectation,

“How soon will the kingdom come?”

There was a general feeling that the end of the rule of the gentile nations was drawing near.

There was present throughout all Jewry a lively hope and a keen expectation that the consummation of the desire of the ages would occur during the lifetime of that generation.

135:5.4 While the Jews differed greatly in their estimates of the nature of the coming kingdom,

they were alike in their belief that the event was impending, near at hand, even at the door.

Many who read the Old Testament literally looked expectantly for a new king in Palestine,

for a regenerated Jewish nation delivered from its enemies

and presided over by the successor of King David, the Messiah who would quickly be acknowledged as the rightful and righteous ruler of all the world.

Another, though smaller, group of devout Jews held a vastly different view of this kingdom of God.

others sought the Kingdom **not in this world**—

which was about to be brought to an **end**—but in the world to come;

[Isa. 65:17, Isa. 66:23, Rev. 21:1.]

[Dan. 8:14.]

in a heaven where all would be **immortal** and would enjoy for all eternity the vision of God (F&E 7-8).

The actual coming of the Kingdom must bring with it a **drastic purging** process which would leave as its citizens only the worthy.

The strict traditionalists looked for a **war** which would destroy all the enemies of the Lord

and **sweep** the hosts of Israel on to **victory**.

Others pictured the end as a **great judgment**

that would send the unrighteous to **punishment** or **destruction** (F&E 8).

They taught that the coming kingdom was **not of this world**,

that the world was approaching its certain **end**,

and that **“a new heaven and a new earth”** were to usher in the establishment of the kingdom of God;

that this **kingdom was to be an everlasting dominion**,

that sin was to be ended,

and that the citizens of the new kingdom were to become **immortal** in their enjoyment of this endless bliss.

135:5.5 All were agreed that some **drastic purging** or purifying discipline would of necessity precede the establishment of the new kingdom on earth.

The literalists taught that a world-wide **war** would ensue which would destroy all unbelievers,

while the faithful would **sweep** on to universal and eternal **victory**.

The spiritists taught that the kingdom would be ushered in by the **great judgment** of God

which would relegate the unrighteous to their well-deserved judgment of **punishment** and final **destruction**,

at the same time elevating the believing saints of the chosen people to high seats of honor and authority with the Son of Man, who would rule over the redeemed nations in God's name.

Practically everyone believed that some Jews would be excluded for their sins, while many taught that some **Gentiles** might be included (F&E 8).

Some teachers maintained that **God** would bring it Himself, without any agent or mediator.

More common was the belief that God would employ an **intermediary**, that He would send some one to bring earth's history to an end and to establish the final consummation.

To this intermediary the Jews gave the name "**Messiah**" (F&E 9).

[contd] It is of utmost importance for us to note that this is the **only possible sense** "Messiah" ever had or could have on Jewish lips at this time.

"Messiah" could not mean **merely** one who **taught God's will**, no matter how perfectly;

for such a teacher the Jews had a fixed title, "**prophet.**"

The Messiah was infinitely more than a prophet;

a Messiah who did not **bring** the final Kingdom was no Messiah at all (F&E 9).

And this latter group even believed that many devout **gentiles** might be admitted to the fellowship of the new kingdom.

135:5.6 Some of the Jews held to the opinion that **God** might possibly establish this new kingdom by direct and divine intervention,

but the vast majority believed that he would interpose some representative **intermediary**,

the **Messiah**.

And that was the **only possible meaning** the term Messiah could have had in the minds of the Jews of the generation of John and Jesus.

Messiah could not possibly refer to one who **merely taught God's will**

or proclaimed the necessity for righteous living.

To all such holy persons the Jews gave the title of **prophet.**

The Messiah was to be more than a prophet;

the Messiah was to **bring** in the establishment of the new kingdom, the kingdom of God.

No one who failed to do this could be the Messiah in the traditional Jewish sense.

[contd] What would the Messiah be?

135:5.7 Who would this Messiah be?

Once more the teachers diverged.

Again the Jewish teachers differed.

The older tradition clung to the idea of a “Son of David”; that is, just as David of old had rid the Holy Land of all enemies, so “David’s Son” would be a Deliverer; only, of course, on a vastly greater scale.

The older ones clung to the doctrine of the son of David.

If, however, men thought of the Kingdom as heavenly, they naturally thought of the Messiah as heavenly also.

The newer taught that, since the new kingdom was a heavenly kingdom, the new ruler might also be a divine personality,

According to this view he was pictured as sitting at God’s right hand from the beginning of creation, waiting the day when he should descend from heaven to accomplish the final redemption.

one who had long sat at God’s right hand in heaven.

And—to our ears most strangely—when the Messiah was thus conceived, and *not* as a human being,

And strange as it may appear, those who thus conceived of the ruler of the new kingdom looked upon him not as a human Messiah, not as a mere man,

he was given the title “Son of Man.” This seemingly contradictory usage has, of course, its historic explanation, but here we can only state the fact (F&E 9-10).

but as “the Son of Man”—

a Son of God—a heavenly Prince, long held in waiting thus to assume the rulership of the earth made new.

Such was the background of the Baptist’s preaching (F&E 10).

Such was the religious background of the Jewish world when John went forth proclaiming: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

III: THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AT
THE JORDAN (Fiske & Easton 11)

[contd] When John appeared with his proclamation, “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” there may well have been in his preaching a vagueness about the details of the coming age. The central message, however, was unmistakable, and to pious Israelites it was the greatest possible good news: the promised salvation was now at last to be fulfilled (F&E 11).

135:5.8 It becomes apparent, therefore, that John’s announcement of the coming kingdom had not less than half a dozen different meanings in the minds of those who listened to his impassioned preaching. But no matter what significance they attached to the phrases which John employed, each of these various groups of Jewish-kingdom expectants was intrigued by the proclamations of this sincere, enthusiastic, rough-and-ready preacher of righteousness and repentance, who so solemnly exhorted his hearers to “flee from the wrath to come.”