

Avhandlingar framlagda vid Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria
och religion, Göteborgs universitet, nr 64

THE MEANING AND USES OF ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑ IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Semantic Monosemy and Pragmatic Modulation

Academic dissertation in religious studies, to be publicly defended,
by due permission of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at University
of Gothenburg, on December 11, 2020, at 1.15 p.m., in Lilla
hörsalen, Humanisten, Renströmsgatan 6, Göteborg.

Tobias Ålöw



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

ABSTRACT

Ph.D. dissertation at University of Gothenburg, 2020.

Title: *The Meaning and Uses of βασιλεία in the Gospel of Matthew Semantic Monosemy and Pragmatic Modulation*

Author: Tobias Ålöw

Language: English, with a Swedish summary.

Department: Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, 405 30 Göteborg.

Series: Avhandlingar framlagda vid Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion, Göteborgs universitet, nr 64.

ISBN: 978-91-89284-01-2.

This study examines the meaning and uses of the term βασιλεία in the Gospel of Matthew. Contrary to the predominant scholarly view, according to which the pertinent term is a verbal noun signifying God's exercise of kingship, it argues that this so-called dynamic usage is merely one aspect of a much fuller concept and multifaceted utilization of the term. Taking its theoretical point of departure in C. Ruhl's notion of semantic monosemy and pragmatic modulation, the study instead suggests that the term βασιλεία has a single, abstract, general, and diversity-unifying meaning – viz. that which pertains to royalty – which is pragmatically modulated by co- and contextual factors, to the effect that senses relevant to the respective settings in which the term occurs are engendered. More precisely, the study submits that the pragmatic range of the term in Matthew's Gospel covers both five distinct categories of use – personal (king), abstract (kingly status), dynamic (kingship), collective (people/kin-ship) and spatial (kingdom) – and their integration into a coherent concept.

After discussing the variegated use of βασιλεία in the literary and linguistic environment of Matthew's gospel as exemplified by the Greek Book of Daniel, all fifty-five occurrences of the term in the first Gospel are examined by means of a composition-critical method, with the objective of identifying which particular category of use each occurrence belongs to. As the analysis demonstrates, although Matthew occasionally uses βασιλεία dynamically concerning God's exercise of his "kingship" this usage only plays a rather nominal role vis-à-vis the overall account. It is instead the collective use of βασιλεία as "kin-ship" that emerges as the most frequent and significant category in Matthew. Moreover, though not as frequently attested as the former, the personal use of βασιλεία as "king" also plays a relatively prominent role in the Matthean account. Together these two uses attest and contribute to Matthew's overarching dual focus on the Messiah and his people, and the gradual shift in attention from the former to the latter.

From the centrality and significance of βασιλεία, and how it is entangled with virtually all other themes, literary and/or theological, in Matthew's gospel, it follows that in-depth study of how the pertinent term is used is not only of importance in order to appreciate the Matthean Zentralbegriff in-and-of-itself, but is also incumbent for an accurate apprehension of the nature and aims of the Matthean narrative as a whole as well as the theological sentiments it aims to communicate.

KEYWORDS: Bible, New Testament, Gospel of Matthew, Book of Daniel, the kingdom of heaven/God, Charles Ruhl, semantic monosemy, pragmatic modulation, composition-criticism.