
Focus on the Kingdom

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“Pay close attention to yourself and your teaching. Persevere... You will ensure salvation both for yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16).

What’s Missing in the Popular Gospel?

Jesus came with a Message. He came to *save* with his Message as well as by his sacrificial death for the sins of all mankind.

With this simple statement we introduce the first edition of “Focus on the Kingdom,” a journal designed as back-up for our radio broadcasts under the same title (for radio schedule of programs available worldwide on shortwave and also on the Internet, see the back page). This publication also replaces our former publication **ROC** (“Recovering Original Christianity”).

The driving conviction behind this publication includes our recognition of an appalling fact. The public in general has been lulled into thinking that salvation in the New Testament consists in believing that Jesus died and rose again — believing, in other words, facts about what *happened to* Jesus, to the practical exclusion of what Jesus preached and taught.

A very popular evangelist, in a tract circulated in thousands of copies in various languages, tells us that “Jesus came to do three days work — to die, be buried and rise from death.” This we believe to be a stunningly misleading statement.

Jesus made his own intentions crystal clear in a kind of “John 3:16” encapsulation of the reason for his whole mission. The neglect of Jesus’ words when he unpacks his own mind and

purpose is nothing less than a theological disaster, requiring urgent attention and repair. Jesus announced in Luke 4:43 (a verse, surely, deserving prominence in any discussion of Christianity) that he “*must* proclaim the Gospel about the Kingdom of God: That is the reason why God sent me.”

“As God sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21) were the words of the Great Commission as John recorded it. Quite simply and obviously, then, Christians are those who, like Jesus, will be found proclaiming the Gospel about the Kingdom of God: That is the reason why they are sent. While confusion reigns about what the Kingdom of God is, a paralysis has afflicted the Great Commission. We want to do our part to rectify this very unfortunate situation.

While uncertainty reigns as to what the Gospel *is*, how can Jesus’ gospel summons to repentance and belief *in the Gospel* succeed (Mark 1;14, 15)?

For too long Christians have uncritically accepted the status quo. And that cherished status quo dictates, in the form of an all-pervading dogma, that the death and resurrection of Jesus comprise the *whole* Gospel.

If that is so, we argue, what do we make of those scores of chapters in Matthew, Mark and Luke which tell us with brilliant clarity that Jesus was preaching *the* Gospel, but which contain not a word (at that stage) about his death and resurrection? That is the question Christians of all levels of understanding are invited to face — and face squarely and honestly.

Let us make the point clear: Matthew, Mark and Luke, three independent and corroborating accounts of Jesus and his ministry, persist in telling us that Jesus came announcing the saving Gospel.

But that Gospel for a large part of Jesus’ ministry contained no information whatsoever about the

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upcoming death and resurrection of Jesus. You see the point: Jesus *preached the Gospel* and, what's more, sent his chosen disciples out to preach the Gospel. Yet that Gospel contained no word about death and resurrection.

This must prove to the honest investigator, the noble Berean so highly commended in Acts 17:11, that the Gospel is *not* confined to facts about death and resurrection. Now do not misunderstand us. We are not suggesting that the death and resurrection of Jesus are minor components in the Gospel. Not at all. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus there is no Gospel. But what of that part of the Gospel which did *not* concern the death and resurrection of Jesus?

For over forty chapters in Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus and his circle preached and proclaimed the Gospel. Late in the ministry of Jesus, not long before his crucifixion, Jesus made a repeated declaration that his death and resurrection was impending. We find this dramatic statement in Luke 18:31ff (NASV): "Then Jesus took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon. And after they have scourged him, they will kill him, and the third day he will rise again.'"

Now observe the reaction of the inner circle of friends as co-workers for the Gospel: "The disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said."

There it is. Those Gospel preachers, who had worked side by side with Jesus in the preaching of the Gospel, did not yet understand even the basics of the death and resurrection of the Savior.

The Gospel they had preached with Jesus had been the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the bedrock foundation of the Gospel, to which were *added* later, as they happened, the crucial facts about Jesus' death for sins and his resurrection to immortality.

Logically, then, the Gospel has as its major, foundational component the Kingdom of God, and secondly its companion facts about the death and resurrection of Jesus. These latter facts make possible our entrance into the Kingdom of God. But without the Kingdom of God basis in the Gospel, the

death and resurrection float in the air. Jesus did not come "to do three days work." (Was he on vacation for those 3 ½ years of arduous preaching of the Gospel?).

He came to preach the saving Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the heart of the New Covenant, and then he graciously died, shedding his blood to ratify that Kingdom covenant (Luke 22:28-30), which entails the gift to you of life forever in the coming Kingdom of God.

With renewed enthusiasm we call on the Christian community to beseech the God of Heaven to "Let your Kingdom come," and to follow Jesus' terminology by speaking always of the "Gospel about the Kingdom."

At the same time laborers for the Kingdom of God (Col. 4:11) are needed everywhere. We will all do well if we adopt the slogan of Jesus himself: "I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God...That is the whole reason for my mission" (Luke 4:43).

So it should be the mission of everyone who loves Jesus and his Gospel. ✧

On the Chronology of Prophecy

"There are many other numbers which the Bible student can study carefully: one, three, four, seven, ten, forty, seventy, etc. The apocalyptic expressions 'time, times and half a time,' '1260 days,' and 'forty-two months' all designate a period of three and one half years. This expression has both a temporal as well as a symbolic import" (A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, p. 274).

The study of biblical prophecy has often been seriously derouted by the introduction of a 1260 year period of time. Daniel and Revelation are largely concerned with the famous 1260 DAY period. Hunting through the history books for periods of 1260 years is not profitable from the biblical point of view. What Scripture reveals is a critical period of 1260 days, just before the future return of Jesus in power and glory to gather the elect of all nations and appoint them to rule with him in the coming Messianic Kingdom (Rev. 5:10).

Defining the Gospel

Like all carefully written documents the New Testament contains its own keys to its understanding. To read the New Testament intelligently we must take full advantage of the those precious keys. One of the great “open sesame” of Bible study is grasping “equivalents.” This means observing that one writer uses one phrase and another a slightly different phrase to define the same object. Both writers mean the same thing but their vocabularies may vary. If we only had Mark’s Gospel to inform us, we would read of Jesus’ prediction that “the Gospel will be heralded in all the world” (Mark 13:10) before the end of the age (the future return of Jesus to inaugurate his worldwide Kingdom).

If we do not know what the Gospel is, Mark has not helped us *in this verse* to define it; he assumed that we knew what that Gospel was about. But Matthew comes to our rescue. He amplifies and clarifies Jesus’ famous statement: “*This Gospel about the Kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end [of the age] will come” (Matt. 24:14).

When Matthew later recorded Jesus’ statement about the unforgettable act of faith on the part of the lady who anointed him with a view to his burial, we read, “wherever *this Gospel* is preached...” We gather, then, that “this Gospel” = “the Gospel” = “This gospel about the Kingdom of God.” All references to the Gospel in the NT should be related to Matt. 24:14: “This Gospel *of the Kingdom*.” This procedure is no more complicated than the realization that all references to “the US” should be referred to the full expression “United States of America.”

We have laid out all Gospel terminology in chart form, tracing all the variant phrases back to the master-teacher’s famous phrase “The Gospel of the Kingdom.” We hope to publish this in our next issue. Meanwhile, as you come across the words “gospel,” “Gospel of salvation,” “Gospel of Jesus Christ,” etc., try linking these titles to the master-title. It will throw a brilliant light on your Bible study and your understanding of Rabbi Jesus. ✧

On 1 John 2:18

“Someone might assume that ‘many’ antichrists implies there is no personal, individual Antichrist. But this was not John’s thought. His readers had been taught that the Antichrist is coming. This is what they heard. To show that this was no vague generality, John adds ‘even now many antichrists have come.’ He looks at the plurality of antichrists — those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah and thereby put themselves unequivocally against Christ — as proof of the eventual emergence of one supreme foe of Christ. The Antichrist who was already present and who was *the* liar was in his day much like the later model except that the latter will have greater power and destructiveness. In attitude they share the same outlook” (A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, p. 373).

A considerable confusion has been introduced into the study of the Bible’s prophecies by the theory that John (above) discounted the idea of a single, future antichrist and wanted his readers to understand “antichrist” to mean only a present, ongoing threat. John said: “You have heard that antichrist is coming.” He then went on to speak of the spirit of antichrist already active in advance. We misunderstand John’s intention if we attempt to make him say: “You have heard that antichrist is coming, but there will be no such final individual tyrant.” John did not contradict the many passages in Daniel and elsewhere which speak with brilliant clarity of a future, ultimate exponent of evil in the form of a single personality. It is a question of “both...and” not “either...or.”

“The battle for the minds of men is in the world of ideas.”

Francis Schaeffer

Who Is Jesus? God, or unique Man?

What's in a vowel point? The Difference Between God and Man

by Anthony Buzzard

“Adonai and Adoni are variations of pointing to distinguish divine reference from human” (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, Briggs, under *adon* [= lord]).

“The form ADONI (‘my lord’), a royal title (I Sam. 29:8), is to be carefully distinguished from the divine title ADONAI (‘my Lord’) used of Yahweh” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Lord,” p. 157).

“Lord in the OT is used to translate ADONAI when applied to the Divine Being. The [Hebrew] word...has a suffix [with special pointing] presumably for the sake of distinction...between divine and human appellative” (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, “Lord,” Vol 3, p. 137).

Please consider how language works. In English you have no difficulty in recognizing the difference between HE and SHE. One letter S makes a big difference. You recognize also a big difference between god (lower-case g) and God (upper-case G). What about “employer” and “employee”? One letter makes all the difference. In Hebrew the words for he and she contain only a difference in the vowel sound — *hoo* (he) and *hee* (she).

Few questions could be of greater importance than knowing who in the Bible is entitled to be called God (capital G).

In Hebrew there is a word for “lord.” It is ADON. This word refers 300 times to human lords (superiors) and 30 times to THE Lord, i.e. God Himself.

There are two very special forms of this word ADON. Sometimes the letters -AI are added to the end, giving you the word ADONAI (sometimes written ADONAY). This word is known to the public because it rhymes with El Shaddai in the well-known song. El Shaddai is another name for the One God. ADONAI means “the Supreme Lord.”

The word ADON may also have the letter -I added to it, giving the form ADONI (pronounced *Adonee*).

Now in Psalm 110:1 we have a unique verse. This verse appears in the New Testament 23 times. (Ps. 110:4 is quoted or alluded to another 10 times.) The importance of these verses is shown by the fact that no other verses come near to that number of allusions/quotations in the New Testament. Many verses are cited once or twice in the New Testament. But these verses — Ps. 110:1, 4 — are mentioned **33 times!** Ps 110:1 is a key to the identity of God and Jesus, and to the coming Kingdom (the heart of the Gospel, Luke 4:43, Acts 8:12, etc.)

Jesus quoted this verse (as reported by Matthew, Mark and Luke) to put an end to the counter-arguments of the religious authorities of his day, the Pharisees (see Matt. 22: 41-46).

Psalm 110:1 is quoted in the NT as follows:

Jesus: Matt. 22:44; Matt. 26:64; Mark 12:36; Mark 14:62; Mark 16:19; Luke 20:42, 43; Luke 22:69.

Peter (Luke): Acts 2:33; Acts 2:34, 35 (in this verse Peter introduces Christianity to the crowd at Pentecost and tells us that Jesus has been made “Lord” on the basis of Ps 110:1); Acts 5:31; Acts 7:55-56.

Paul: Rom 8:34; I Cor. 15:25; Eph 1:20; Eph 2:6; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; Heb 1:13; Heb 8:1; Heb. 10:12-13; Heb. 12:2.

Peter: I Pet. 3:22.

Jesus (John): Rev. 3:21.

This Psalm covers the whole range of the New Testament and Jesus is recorded as quoting it no less

than eight times. It is a favorite “proof-text” of the NT Christians.

The Psalm is a special divine oracle. The text reads (Ps. 110:1): “The oracle of YAHWEH (LORD) to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’”

The first “lord” is the word YAHWEH which appears in many English versions as LORD (all capitals).

The second lord is **ADONI (my lord)**. We have already noted that the Hebrew word ADON (lord) has a special ending on it when it refers to the One God — **ADONAI** (449 times in the OT). But when the word has the ending ‘I,’ i.e. **ADONI (adonee)**, it never refers to God but always to a human superior (occasionally an angel). So we know that the Messiah is distinguished from **ADONAI (God)**, as the human superior of David, David’s lord, *Adoni*.

This Psalm was believed to be a Messianic oracle both by Jesus and by the rabbis of his day. Jesus knew that he, the Messiah, was David’s lord as well as David’s son. The Pharisees were not prepared to recognize Jesus as the lord of David, though they knew he was a descendant of David.

The Hebrew language is precise and the rabbis always held the name of the One God in the highest reverence. That is why they reserved the form ADONAI for God alone. (Jews to this day read the word ADONAI when they come to the personal name for God — Yahweh. No one knows with complete certainty how that word is to be pronounced. The Jews gave up saying it about 300 BC.)

Another Example

The OT has little ways of distinguishing words, which have **momentous** importance in terms of their meaning. Let me give you another example: the word AVEER (=strong or powerful). From the *New International Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 1, p. 232: “It is widely believed that the reason why the OT has two forms of the adjective AVEER is that the guardians of the text (Massorites) wished to distinguish the use of the word when applied to Yahweh from its use in other contexts.”

When NOT used of the One God, the form has an extra dot inside the “V” and is then pronounced

ABEER. ABEER (with the dot) often refers to a mighty man, sometimes to the “stout of heart,” once to an angel and sometimes to a bull or a mighty steed.

The lack of a dot makes a huge difference. AVEER refers to God. ABEER is a non-divine reference.

So with the forms of Lord, **ADONAI** and **ADONI**. **ADONAI** is reserved for the One God alone. No human is addressed as **ADONAI**. On the other hand **ADONI (adonee)** is reserved for *human* superiors. The Messiah is called **ADONI**, the lord of David, but never **ADONAI**, the One God.

Now note this interesting fact. The KJV always wrote **ADONAI** as Lord (with initial capital “L”). It wrote YAHWEH as **LORD** (all capitals).

On 193 occasions it wrote **ADONI** as lord (lower-case “l”), sir, or master. But on **two occasions only** it broke its own rule and put a capital on Lord, in Psalm 110:1 and Dan 12:8 (angel). But the word is not **ADONAI**, but **ADONI**. The RV and RSV and the NEB corrected the error and wrote “lord” (lower-case letters), preserving the correct title for the Jesus.

Jesus is **ADONI** the Messiah, not **ADONAI**, the One God. The One God is one person only. How do we know this (apart from Ps. 110:1)? The One God of Hebrew monotheism (the monotheism of Jesus, Mark 12:28ff.) is described by personal pronouns **IN THE SINGULAR** (“I, me, him, thou, thee, thy, my, his”) thousands upon thousands of times. Singular pronouns tell you that a person is one individual, not more. There are thus thousands of testimonies in the Bible to the unity of God, what scholars would call “unitary monotheism.”

The One God is distinguished as ADONAI (449 times) from Adoni, a human lord (195 times). This gives you 644 hundred opportunities to see the difference between God and man, based on the word “lord.” The Messiah, Son of God, is designated as Adoni, not Adonai.

Singular personal pronouns always tell you a simple fact. They describe a being who is **ONE PERSON**, not three. God is One singular and single Person.

“There is **One God**, the Father” (Paul, I Cor 8:4, 6). There are **two Lords** (Ps. 110:1). The Father is the One Lord God and Jesus is the Lord **MESSIAH**, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16). Belief that Jesus is **the Messiah, the Son of God** is the whole point of John’s Gospel (John 20:31). It is also the whole point

of the whole Bible. Note how Luke introduced Jesus as the **Lord Messiah** (Luke 2:11)

And Jesus describes the One God, his Father, as “the only true God” (John 17:3) and “the one who alone is God” (John 5:44). “The one who alone is God” is another way of saying “the only one who is God.” Jesus was talking about the Father. If the Father is “the only one who is God,” and Jesus is a different person, Jesus is distinguished from the One God.

Do you believe with Jesus that the Father is “the only one who is God” (John 5:44)? The Father is called God 1326 times in the NT. The word “God” is used of Jesus twice for certain. But don’t forget that in the first century AD elevated humans were sometimes called “God.” This is also true in the Bible. The judges of Israel were called “Gods” (Ps. 82:6). Jesus used that verse to demonstrate that he was claiming to be the Son of God, not God Himself (John 10:34-36). The Roman emperor was also called “God.” This is a use of “God” to which we are not accustomed. But the Bible must be understood in its own context, not ours. Without that basic key to interpretation we are likely to misread the Bible at the most fundamental level.

Psalm 2 is a perfect parallel to Psalm 110:1. In that psalm the One God Yahweh speaks to MY KING/ MY SON. That person, who is as distinct from Yahweh as any son is distinct from his father, is also called “the Lord’s Messiah” (Ps. 2:2) (Note the valuable key provided by equivalent phrases: the one defines the other to tell us who Jesus is.) That King/Son/Messiah is the Jesus of the Bible: the Son of the One God, “the Lord Messiah” (Luke 2:11), “the Lord’s Messiah” (Luke 2:26).

Note that in the NT God is called “the *God of our Lord* Jesus Christ.” That should tell you that they are not coequal! There is One Lord God and one Lord *Messiah*. In Scripture they are separate individuals, working in the closest harmony. The Messiah is the obedient Son of his Father. The Father is the One God. The Messiah functions as the perfectly obedient agent of his Father who “begat” him. To be “begotten,” of course, is to have a beginning *in time*, quite contrary to popular theories, dating from the “Church Fathers,” that the Son had no beginning. If he had no beginning he could not, by simple definition of words, be “begotten” by his Father, God.

Should anyone be tempted to deny the validity of the vowel points, there is a way to demonstrate that the difference between “the Lord” (*adonai*) and “my lord” (*adoni*) existed in the time of Jesus and before. The New Testament when it quotes Psalm 110:1 renders *l’adoni* as “to my lord” (*to kurio mou*). But it renders *adonai* (v. 5 and very often elsewhere) as “the Lord” (*kurios*). This proves that the difference between *adonai* and *adoni* was recognized and reported in Greek long before the Masoretic vowel points fixed the ancient, oral tradition permanently in writing. Don’t forget, too, the prodigious accuracy of the Masorites who copied the text. Between 600 and 1000 AD they “hedged in” the consonantal text with minute attention to accuracy and detail. Talmud R. Ishmael cautioned: “My son, be careful because your work is the work of heaven; should you omit even one letter or add even one letter, the whole world would be destroyed” (*b. Sota* 2a, cited by Bruce Waltke, “The Reliability of the OT Text,” in the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol I, p. 60). ✧

Points to Ponder

How some scholars do not like or believe in a Messianic Jesus

A NT expert writing about Jesus notes that: “he was not a particularly good political Messiah, but they claimed he was Son of David...It is likely that Jesus saw himself as Davidic Messiah. This was the most widespread of the conceptions of inaugurating figures, and it is the one best evidenced in the gospels. In part it would fit Jesus’ ministry as well, since Jesus saw himself as the leader designated by God over his incipient kingdom. In part it would fit ill, because Messiah was seen as a warrior leader, destined to establish a Jewish Empire to exceed David’s: and this Jesus was not...It is likely Jesus saw himself as Danielic Son of Man. Daniel foretold the overthrow of the heathen empires, pictured as a series of beasts, by God’s Kingdom, pictured as ‘one like a son of man.’ Sometimes in Daniel the beasts are the empires, sometimes their emperors; and this invited the same possibility for both God’s Kingdom

and its ruler, especially as the phrase ‘son of man’ had been applied to the King of Israel in Psalms 8 and 80.”

We call our readers’ attention to this excellent summary of the Messianic hope existing in the time of Jesus. That hope was widespread and based on the Hebrew Bible (the OT). Jesus is the one who steps into the role laid out by Ps. 2, 8, 80 and Daniel 7. This information is an indispensable key to reading the Bible intelligently.

But note now the large degree of unbelief implied in the quotation above: “In part this Messianic picture would fit Jesus badly because the Messiah was seen as a warrior leader destined to establish a Jewish empire on the earth.”

Biblical scholarship is plagued by failure to believe that Jesus is all the more proven to be the Messiah because according to both Testaments (see especially Rev. 19:6-21 and Ps. 2) he will indeed in the future at his return perfectly fill the role of the warrior Messiah who will inaugurate by political force a revolutionary world government in a renewed earth. To deny this is to erase the whole point of God’s plan to bring about peace on earth through the Messiah and his followers. No wonder Christians are called “children of the Kingdom” and “disciples of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:38, 52). They are the royal Messianic family in training — the aristocracy of the future, truly to be servant-leaders, under-sovereigns with Jesus. For this high calling, let us all prepare. ✧

“If we suffer with him, we will reign as kings with him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

“Through much tribulation we will enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

“Do you not know that the saints are to manage the world? If the world is to come under your jurisdiction, are you incompetent to adjudicate upon trifles?”
(1 Corinthians 6:2, Moffat)

Radio Responses from Around the World

I listen to you every day on KPBC in Dallas. I just happened to catch your program and had heard part of it a couple of times. I think it was no coincidence that I tuned in, because God is in control. We must all take our stand on the Word of God in these last days before Jesus comes back to rule. — *Carrollton, TX, USA*

My wife and I are both in the ministry and we have been listening every day to your message on the Kingdom of God over WHRI. You have made simple lots of riddles about the future.— *Nigeria*

Thanks so much for your very instructive teaching on the Kingdom of God. Most teachers are content to exhort, moralize or expound passages. I am very grateful for your repetitive method in teaching because you are dealing with a main theme. — *Ivory Coast*

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I am a regular listener to your program, "Focus on the Kingdom" on World Harvest Radio International. Your programs have been an eye-opener to me concerning the Kingdom of God. I am 33 years old and a teacher in the ministry.— *Nigeria*

Sir, I am very happy to come into contact with this ministry which I know is doing a lot to build the knowledge of the Kingdom of God on earth. On the 6th April I mysteriously caught your preaching on WHRI in the morning. I said mysteriously because I have not received that frequency before. I felt the spirit of the Lord with me as I heard you talk about the Kingdom of God and I still do. Since that time I have been pondering on the sermons. I stay near a school, so I have some small children to have Bible class with after classes. They love it. — *Ghana*