

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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2009 Theological Conference

April 26-29, 2009

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA

Registration Deadline: March 30, 2009

Please make plans to be with us for this conference. There will be ample opportunity for you to offer the group a “faith story,” and these are perennially interesting. In addition some 10 speakers will present encouraging and edifying material based on subjects close to their hearts. Our aim is to solidify our faith in the One God of Israel and His Kingdom plan through the virginally begotten Son. It is customary for us to have some baptisms at the conference and this can provide a welcome opportunity for those seeking that aspect of the obedience to the commands of Jesus (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 28:19-20, etc). I am thinking, too, of Hebrews 10:25 which encourages fellowship, “not forsaking,” and the conference does offer such an opportunity. Your excitement over the faith is a tonic for the other participants! You will make new friends and hear how God has brought them through varied faith journeys to their present understanding.

For information about others intending to be at the conference please go to the Christian Monotheism group on Facebook. To register call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 or mail the form on the back page by **March 30**. The minimum deposit is \$50 per room.

Conference Cost

Includes 3 nights, all meals, snacks, conf. fee, and tax

Single	Double (per person)	Triple (per person)	Quad (per person)
\$275	\$227	\$222	\$195

Transportation

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Simpsonwood for \$25 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

Airport to Simpsonwood			
Sunday, April 26	1:00 pm	3:30 pm	
Simpsonwood to Airport			
Wed., April 29	1:00 pm		

Please arrange your arrival time on Sunday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Wednesday, April 29, we will provide one (1) shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you not book your return flight prior to 3:30 p.m.

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Sunday and ends with lunch on Wednesday. Driving directions to Simpsonwood Conference Center are at www.simpsonwood.org

Post-conference Class

Anthony Buzzard will teach “From Abraham to the Kingdom, in Christ: God’s Marvelous and Largely Unknown Story” from Wednesday afternoon, April 29 to Friday, May 1. The cost for the class is \$320 for credit and \$160 for continuing education. The total cost for room/meals at Simpsonwood for Wed. and Thurs. nights is \$170 single, \$138 double (per person). Please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 before **March 30** to register.

A Muddle over God and Man

This article is designed to bring clarity to our Bible reading. Why is this important? Our thinking is to be shaped by the inspired words of Jesus and of Scripture. We are to develop the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). We are to be Bible readers who seek to be Bereans (the Bereans became true believers when they wisely examined the Scriptures on a daily basis to see if “what they were hearing was true,” Acts 17:11). We do well to realize that tradition can have a blinding and binding effect on us. Very often we are not aware of this. An honest examination of “received” teachings is really the starting point for a successful and necessary growing in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18).

Within the last year, we were told (kindly but firmly) that if we meet for church on Sunday and not on Saturday (the Sabbath) we are into witchcraft! (For a reply to this see at our site *The Law, Sabbath and New Covenant Christianity: Christian Freedom under the Teaching of Jesus.*) I remember well — and this was my first exposure to the chaos of denominationalism and party spirit in religion — how my own mother was strongly reprimanded, in her own home, by a dedicated “Plymouth Brother.” Addressing my mother with a wag of the finger she said, “You Jezebel!” My mother had on a modest necklace for a social occasion. More recently I have been told that unless I speak “in tongues” (biblically, “in languages”) I cannot by definition be a part of the Bible’s “body of Christ.” I am not born again and do not have the spirit of Christ. All this is said in the mildest and gentlest tones. Such beliefs are held with an absolute conviction. This however does not make them true! They *seem* true, but would be contested by a mass of serious Bible students, who are not less eager to have the spirit of God in the biblical sense.

Recently I have come across some who are abandoning a good “tradition.” They now think that Jesus was not what he claimed to be and that salvation is to be gained by adhering to the laws of Moses. One correspondent was confident that by keeping the New Moons he was assured of a closer walk with God. But what might that tradition do to his witness for the Gospel?

The first golden rule of progress in the faith is to recognize the possibility that things learned from beloved teachers, and learned at an early age, will seem to be right, so right! But this may be because *we have never been exposed to the opposite opinion*. Until both sides of a question are examined prayerfully and conscientiously, allowing for adequate time for change to take place if necessary, we are not really good Bereans. We need a multitude of counsel. The fatal thing is to say “God told me so” and so my opinion cannot be wrong. What if God told another believer the opposite of our opinion?

When it comes to defining who God is, Christian denominationalism is evidently in a state of confusion. A giant muddle has somehow hit us, inviting the mockery of the atheist and agnostic. “Orthodoxy” goes to enormous lengths (consult the Christian bookstores and popular evangelism for evidence) to insist that you *must* believe that the only God worthy of worship is a “Being,” or if you prefer “Essence,” existing as three distinct Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At your door however are equally impassioned and dedicated Jehovah’s Witnesses who adamantly maintain that God is not a Trinity but is one Person, the Father of Jesus, while Jesus is originally Michael the Archangel. This super-angel was mysteriously born of a virgin and appeared in history as Jesus of Nazareth.

There is another option in the theological market, known as Modalism. This theory proposes that the Father and the Son are the same one Person. Jesus, the Son, is just one of three modes in which God is expressed. This view of God is held by some Pentecostals, namely the United Pentecostal Church. To other Bible believers, it appears utterly incredible that a Father and a Son can be the same Person. Fathers and sons are by definition not the same person!

The Muslim world of course boldly proclaims that God *cannot have a Son*, and that God would not allow any of His prophets to die, and so Jesus, whom Islam recognizes as a prophet, cannot have died. Rather, Muslims believe, God put the face of Jesus on Judas and had Judas die, not Jesus.

The Worldwide Church of God founded by Herbert Armstrong taught with complete conviction that God is a family of two — the Father and the Son. And that family of “Gods” will be augmented when true believers

at the future resurrection become part of that God (*Elohim*) family.

The tragedy about all this division and muddle over fundamentals is that none of these theories pays attention to some of the **most elementary laws of language and word-meaning**. Correction could be applied by simply observing the Bible’s repeated declarations about God and how many He is.

God in the Bible is one Person. How do we know this? Simply by following massively repeated statements about his name Yahweh, and *the singular personal pronouns which designate Him*.

Pronouns are very useful language tools. We all use them all the time, and have done so very effectively since we learned to speak. Pronouns save us the trouble of constantly repeating nouns. They make for variety and easy reference. They point back to a noun and carry our conversation forward. They are excellent connectors making for coherent communication. They are wonderfully simple and clarifying indicators for effective speech or writing. Pronouns provide us with a marvelous “reference chain,” and they enable us to keep track of good sense. They mostly produce no more problem than the recognition that a dime is worth ten cents. “The angel appeared and *he* said...” The angel is now described as “he” and with no fuss or argument at all we all understand.

But when Bible readers embark on Scripture, common sense and logic are sometimes abandoned immediately. Tradition, what “we have always known” (but not really examined) takes over. How wisely one of the commentators on a TV documentary on God said: “Logic and language did not much trouble the architects of the post-biblical doctrine of the Trinity” — that God is in some sense one and three at the same time. But language and logic are essential to intelligent communication. The Bible is meant to reveal truth, not present baffling problems about how many God is.

In the Greek New Testament the word “God” (*o theos*) designates the Father of Jesus about 1317 times. This means that the brain is bombarded over and over again with a constant and simple message: God is a single Person. God and Father are insolubly linked by this constant connection (*o theos* = “the [one] God”). These unitarian statements about God teach us to connect GOD with the Father of Jesus. Some 18 times in the New Testament the Father is given the title “God-Father” (*theos pater*: see Rom. 1:7, etc.). The title “God-Son” occurs nowhere.

Jesus was so taken with this fundamental fact of the universe, that his Father is the One God, and its crucial value for true worship that he said, “This is eternal life: that they recognize You [he was talking to the Father] as **the only one who is truly God**, and Jesus Christ as the one You sent” (John 17:3). Paul said the same thing

exactly, discussing the Christian creed: "There is one God, the Father." He was reflecting in that passage about pagans who believed in "many gods and lords." But we Christians, Paul reminded his audience, believe that "there is no God except one... There is one God, the Father, from whom all things come" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). Combining Paul's phrases here we have this proposition: "There is no God except the One God, the Father." That is biblical unitarianism.

Paul went on, of course, to speak of Jesus as the one Lord, but he said nothing about Jesus being the one God. If he had, of course he would have conveyed to his readers that there are TWO who are God. If Jesus is God and the Father is God, that makes TWO who are God, that is two Gods. Jesus and Paul knew that this was impossible. Why? Because the singular personal pronouns for God (denoting *YHVH*, *Elohim*, *Adonai*, *Theos*) had told them thousands upon thousands of times that God is a single Person. We learned this in elementary school, didn't we? A singular personal pronoun tells us about a single person. "I" does not mean "we," and "he" does not mean "they."

The only real creedal statement of Jews, to whom the Hebrew Bible was entrusted (Rom. 3:2), had instructed them to believe that there is one YHVH. "The LORD our God is one LORD" (Jesus in Mark 12:29, quoting Deut. 6:4). He is "the only one who is truly God" (John 17:3). So that the matter would be put beyond all doubt, Mark 12:28-34 describes how a Jewish scribe examined Jesus (the founder of the biblical Christian faith) on this very point. The Jew wanted to test Jesus' orthodoxy on the most important of all questions, the right definition of God.

Jesus and the scribe were in perfect harmony on the right definition of God. Deuteronomy 6:4 was still a great unifying truth. That same God, Paul said, is the God of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3:29). Jesus' own claim about his identity was "I am the Son of God" (John 10:36), and at the very beginning of the New Testament "Son of God" comes with a brilliant definition of what it means (Luke 1:35). Mary was told by the angel, "The one to be begotten holy will be called the Son of God." This is the biblical definition of Son of God as the title for Jesus. "The holy spirit will come on you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, and for that reason precisely (*dio kai*) the one to be begotten holy, will be called the Son of God."

This verse provides the Bible's own "dictionary" definition of a basic term. "Son of God" is the right title for Jesus, based on and defined by the miracle in Mary. Jesus is the Son of God precisely for the single reason that he was supernaturally brought into existence, procreated in Mary. He is uniquely the Son of God, the uniquely begotten Son of God, the new Adam (Adam was also Son of God by direct creation, Luke 3:38).

But God the Father alone is the true God (John 17:3). Denominational division and fragmentation can come to an end only when believers agree to agree on the meaning of a singular personal pronoun. God is a "He," "I," "Me," "Himself" or "Myself" thousands and thousands of times, including both Testaments. Every one of those singular personal pronouns for God informs us that God is a single Person.

The pronouns "I," "Me," "Him" to define the God of the Bible have suffered an amazing perversion at the hands of post-biblical religion. Language at its simplest and plainest level has been distorted and thus abandoned for "tradition," making it impossible for God, using language and grammar, to speak to us. Simple communication has been blocked, drowned out by tradition and threats of heresy, apostasy and excommunication! This is a very unhealthy situation, and will be changed when intelligent church members rise in protest (carrying on where the Protestant Reformation failed to complete its task) and demand better of their leaders. Let sermons be given on who God is, and let the singular personal pronouns for the single-Person God restore the right definition of God. God in the Bible is never a triune Essence. Yet Bible-carrying church members seem unperturbed by the discrepancy between the Bible and their own faith declarations.

A.H. Newman's dictum may well become commonplace, admitted by all: "It is a contradiction, indeed, and not merely a verbal contradiction, but an incompatibility in the human ideas conveyed. We can scarcely make a nearer approach to an exact enunciation of it [the Trinity], than of saying that one thing is two things."¹

A leading evangelical spokesman of our times finds himself equally embarrassed: "**When pressed we may have to admit that we really do not know in what way God is one and in what different way He is three.**"²

Do we really not know what "I," "me" and "he" mean? Is this really so fearfully complicated?

Michael Durrant in his well-named book *Theology and Intelligibility* says "no intelligible account can be offered of the Trinitarian formula and hence of the doctrine of the Trinity [or similarly of the Binity]."

While clinging relentlessly to the Trinity, Erickson is candid enough to admit: "It simply is not possible to explain the Trinity unequivocally. What must be done is to offer a series, a whole assortment of illustrations and analogies with the hope that some discernment will take place. We must approach the matter from various angles 'nibbling at the meaning of the doctrine,' as it were... It may also be necessary, in order to convey the unusual

¹ Cited in Sadler's *Gloria Patri*, p. 39.

² Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons*.

meaning involved in the doctrine, to utilize what analytical philosophers would term 'logically odd language.' **This means using language in such a way as intentionally to commit grammatical errors.** Thus, I have sometimes said of the Trinity, 'He are three,' or 'They is one.' For we have here a Being whose nature falls outside our usual understanding of persons, and that nature can perhaps only be adequately expressed by using language that calls attention to the almost paradoxical [contradictory] character of the concepts."

Are singular personal pronouns denoting God thousands of times so obscure? Or has tradition exercised its blinding and binding influence? Was Jesus so unclear when he declared "I am the Christ, the Son of the living God"? Was God so confusing when **He** said, over and over again, "**I** am God and there is no other besides **Me**"?

Evangelicals loudly claim that the Bible is to be understood by means of the grammatical historical method, by which words have their natural and normal meanings. The method, however, goes by the wayside when it comes to defining God. Singular pronouns are divested of all meaning; "I" becomes "We" and "He" loses its obvious and clear reference. "*You are He, God,*" declared David, and he knew what he was saying (2 Sam. 7:28). "For *You* are God, O Sovereign LORD. *Your* words are truth, and *You* have promised these good things to me, your servant."

God in Hebrew is *Elohim* and in Greek *Theos*. **When describing the One God *Elohim* is singular in meaning. *Theos* is likewise a singular noun.** These words when used of God are not plural in meaning. Much less are they collective nouns like "family" or "team." It is a fact as clear as the difference between black and white that ***Elohim* is not a collective noun, not a "family" word.** God in the Bible is a party of one. "God is only one Person" (Gal. 3:20, Amplified Version). Christian worship is to be within the sphere of that "spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

The Trinity depends on a further illogicality. Jesus, the Son of God, it is said, had no beginning of existence. He has always existed. The Son is eternal. He is "the eternally begotten Son." This is what the creeds, under whose umbrella churchgoers gather week by week, propose. Matthew 1:18 states the opposite: "The origin [*genesis*] of the Messiah was as follows." Then follows the account of the begetting of the Son in Mary's womb. The Messiah is identical with the Son of God. That Son is generated some six months later than John the Baptist. That Son of God comes into existence — is begotten — in Mary (Matt. 1:20). One cannot come into existence if one is already in existence! That really is not so hard to understand. In Luke 1:35 Gabriel instructed Mary in the theology of the Son of God. Because of the miracle wrought in her, a biological miracle, "the holy one being

brought into existence (begotten) will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Shatteringly, the tome on theology emanating from the highest halls of evangelicalism, at Dallas Theological Seminary, contradicts the Bible flat out: Speaking of the "eternal Son," they say: "When the term 'Son of God' is used of Christ, *it has nothing to do with his birth to Mary* [my emphasis]. As the Son of God he was not born; he was given. That is precisely what the prophet Isaiah said of him: 'For a child will be born to us, a son will be *given* to us' (Isa. 9:6). The term Son of God refers to Christ's eternal relationship to the Father."³

But Luke 1:35 says precisely the opposite: "The holy spirit will come over you [Mary] and for that reason precisely the one to be born holy will be called the Son of God." Jesus is the Son of God because God brought him into existence in the womb of Mary. Jesus is the Son of God, and of David, and of Mary.

It is astonishing that writers on the Bible can declare (above) "Son of God has nothing to do with his birth to Mary." Does this not strongly suggest that something is seriously amiss with current attempts to explain the Bible, at a basic level?

Defining Man

A parallel muddle over simple language has afflicted many denominations when it comes to defining who man is. In the Bible a man is a psychosomatic whole, a body/soul unity. He was created "a living soul," animated by God's breath or spirit of life (Gen. 2:7). When he dies, he is no longer alive. He returns to the dust, because he was formed from the dust (Gen. 3:19).

That ought not to be so hard to grasp, but again the blinding and binding effect of tradition dogs our path as we read the Bible. The Hebrew Bible says that at death everyone one goes to a common "gravedom" (Hebrew *Sheol*, Greek *Hades*). This is the world of the dead, good and bad alike. Hades is down, not up. Hades is below, not above. In Genesis 15:15 **Abraham and everyone else joined their ancestors in what is called the sleep of the dead.** "O Lord, enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep in death" (Ps. 13:3). Man's life departs from him with his last breath (the same breath/spirit which first animated Adam). The condition of man in death is stated with equal clarity by both Testaments. "For the living know that they are to die, **but the dead no longer know anything.** There is no further recompense for them, because all memory of them is lost" (Ecc. 9:5). "Whatever comes to your hand to do with all your power, do it because there is no work, or thought, or

³ *Understanding Christian Theology*, eds. Swindoll and Zuck, p. 570.

knowledge, or wisdom in the place of the dead to which you are going” (Ecc. 9:10).

That is clear enough, and commentators on the detail of the Old Testament observe that this (Ecc. 9:5, 10) describes the state of the dead throughout the OT. The life-giving power of an animal or man departs, and the man or animal thereupon dies, and ceases to know or experience anything. “Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the spirit of the breath of life died” in the flood (Gen. 7:22). Mortal man and animal alike.

But traditional teaching attempts to derail this precious information. “The dead” who die and know nothing are said to be only dead bodies, but not dead souls. Thus it is imaginatively thought that only bodies die, but people do not. People are supposed to go on living when they die. They are supposed to change address and go to a “better place,” fully conscious. But this disrupts the Hebrew Bible’s clearest teachings. It also obstructs the words of Jesus, who was well schooled in Scripture. “The time is coming,” Jesus said, “when all *those* who are in their tombs will awake, some to the life of the age to come” (John 5:28-29). With this saying Jesus gives us the same truth as the well-known classic resurrection texts: “Many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the ground will wake up, some to the life of the coming age” (Dan. 12:2). That tells us *what* the dead are doing and *where* they are doing it!

And in Isaiah 26:19 the same promise: “Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.” Jesus never once said that the dead are alive now — nor that the dead, as conscious spirits, will be rejoined to their bodies at the resurrection. That would not be resurrection at all.

The biblical doctrine of resurrection means the coming **back to life** of persons who have died and who are dead until they are resurrected. It has always been Satan’s ploy to disturb this fundamental truth. Paul complained about and named publicly two would-be church members who said “that the resurrection was past already” (2 Tim. 2:18). Less directly, some may say that so and so is now alive and embodied, conscious in heaven or hell. Others think of the dead as already alive as disembodied spirits or souls. But both views interfere in a dangerous way with the sublime teaching of Jesus: “Lazarus is asleep...Lazarus is dead...I am going to wake him up” (John 11:11, 14). I am going to resurrect him. And Lazarus came out of the tomb, where he had been sleeping the sleep of death (Ps. 13:3) for four days. He brought not a word of reports about a condition in “heaven.” Lazarus had been well and truly dead. That is the biblical story of what happens when we die. We sleep; we know nothing. We are unconscious. To replace all this language with another story like “only

bodies sleep, only bodies know nothing, but people themselves remain fully conscious at death” is to take in a deep draft of pagan philosophy celebrated by Plato and many others who have been influenced by him. Scholars of all denominations have rightly complained about the fatal mixing of Plato and Jesus. They come from different worlds. (For full documentation, see *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* by Edwin Froom. See also our booklet *What Happens When We Die?* free download at <http://focusonthekingdom.org/books.html>).

It is important for Christians to confess that *Jesus, the Son of God died*, and died for each of us. As we have seen in the case of the origin of Jesus, he as the unique Son of God cannot have “come into existence” (as Luke and Matthew say so clearly) if he was *already* existing.

So also a person cannot be “made alive” if he is already alive! Divide God into two or three, and chaos results. To divide Jesus into two “natures” — a person who is the eternal Son of God and another (nature?) whom Mary brings into existence — is to bring in a massive misunderstanding about who God and Jesus are. The human race has labored under this fearful complexity and contradiction for too long.

But it is equally conflicted (with best of intentions no doubt!) on the question of the meaning of death and resurrection. Resurrection is the only way out of the death condition. There is no other way. A person is a “nobody” if he does not have a body. To be “anybody” we need a body. And the new resurrection body will be granted to all the faithful believers of all the ages, **when Jesus returns to this earth — and only then (1 Cor. 15:23)**.

Paul is a hundred percent clear and would have died for this truth. Here is his matchless teaching on resurrection, our only way back from death: “In Christ all will be **made alive**...Christ the firstfruits, later those who are Christ’s [Christians] **at his coming**” (1 Cor. 15:22-23). There it is in all its simplicity and beauty. Christians will be **made alive** at the future coming of Jesus. Paul is of course discussing the great central teaching about resurrection. Christ the firstfruits has been resurrected. The next stage (Paul uses a military battle order word) will be the resurrection, coming back to life of those who are Christians. This event will happen at the future coming (Parousia) of Jesus.

Paul said that if there is no resurrection then the dead believers have perished (1 Cor. 15:18). That would patently not be true if in fact they had survived as disembodied persons in heaven or hell.

A person who exists cannot be brought into existence. A person who is already alive cannot be *made alive*! “In Christ all will be made alive,” Paul writes. This magnificent event, the Christian hope, will occur at, and only at, the future coming of Jesus. As long as Christians have not been “made alive,” they are of

course not already alive! You cannot exist before you come into existence and you cannot be *made alive* if you are *already* alive!

May our readers rest in this very fundamental theology of the Bible. Once grasped, that truth will shed beautiful light on a passage in 1 Peter 3:18-20. Peter reminds his readers that Jesus was “put to death in the human sphere” and “**made alive** in the spiritual sphere.” To be “put to death” means just that: The Son of God died. *He* died. He himself died. The Son of God was next “made alive” and he was then in the sphere of spirit (*pneumati*).

What did Peter mean by Jesus being **made alive**? Here is where sound biblical techniques must come into play. Words are defined by their usage in various passages. What else does the New Testament have to say about being “**made alive**”?

“What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15:36). “As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be **made alive**” (1 Cor. 15:22). Paul is referring to the resurrection of all the saints. “Just as the Father raises the dead, so the Son also **gives life** to whom he wishes...Truly I tell you, the time is coming when all who are in their tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will **live**” (John 5:21-29). “The spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

To be “made alive” is to be raised from the dead. To be raised from the dead is to be woken up from the state of death. The word “raise” in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, is the same Greek word as is used for “waking up.” There are some 40 references in that chapter to being “woken up from death,” meaning of course that in death a person is asleep. The sleep of dead persons (souls) comes to an end when the faithful are aroused from their sleep at the resurrection in the future, at Jesus’ return. If the contrary position is taken — that the dead are already alive — then they cannot be made alive at the resurrection. “Whether we are sleeping or awake [alive]” at the second coming, “we will live with him” (1 Thess. 5:10). That will be resurrection life and it will last forever.

In 1 Peter 3:18-20 Jesus is said to have been resurrected, made alive, after being dead (for three days). In his new spirit condition he then went and announced his triumph to the spirits who disobeyed in the days of Noah, when only 8 human beings (souls) survived. “Spirits” are not human persons but fallen angelic beings. Peter refers to the well-known episode in Genesis 6 when the sons of God (that Hebrew title applies only to angels in the Hebrew Bible) had intercourse with human women (see also Jude 6 and 2 Pet. 2:4).

Our Christian confession has as one of its basic teachings the belief that the Son of God died. If Jesus in fact did not die, but rather remained alive as a

disembodied spirit the moment he breathed his last, then he really did not die. We do not believe we are saved by the dead *body* of the Son of God, but by the death of the Son of God himself. Jesus died; the Son of God died. “For if, when we were haters of God, the **death of His Son** made us at peace with Him, much more, now that we are his friends, will we have salvation through his life” (Rom 5:10).

He cannot have been the immortal God! Nor as a human being did he possess an immortal “soul” which is the brain-child of Greek philosophy. That idea belongs nowhere in the very Hebrew theology of both Testaments. In the Hebrew world of thought, God is always a single Person, not three in one or two in one. So also the biblical view of man is psychosomatic. When he dies, he is dead, body and soul. The animated person dies and sleeps and the person will be resurrected to life and immortality.

The classic statement about the coming millennium shows us exactly what happens at “the first resurrection.” “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4). “The souls of those who had been beheaded” means those *persons* who had been beheaded. Having died by execution they came to life in resurrection. In the Bible that is the only way you can come back to life. Until you are resurrected you remain dead. Thus any claim that the dead are alive and conscious now, before the return of Jesus and resurrection of the dead, threatens the biblical scheme. It runs the risk of the false claim condemned by Paul that “some say that the resurrection has occurred already. They are upsetting the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18).

Jesus argued for the future resurrection of the dead when he was confronted by the error of the Sadducees “who say that there is no resurrection” (Luke 20:27). The Sadducees were wrong, “not knowing the Scriptures.” Jesus explained: “But those who are considered worthy to attain to **that age and to the resurrection from the dead** neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:35). The point not to be missed is that Jesus knew that the resurrection belongs to “that [coming] age” of the Kingdom of God. This is exactly what we find taught in Daniel 12:2 and throughout the Bible. Since the resurrection will introduce the future age of the Kingdom, the only way in which God can be “the God of the living” is this: God will resurrect the patriarchs and He will do it in “that age,” the age to which, as Jesus said, the resurrection belongs.

Thus, very cleverly, Jesus used the only part of the Bible which the Sadducees recognized to demonstrate the necessity of resurrection. There must be one.

Otherwise God would remain the God of the dead, of the dead patriarchs. Jesus was arguing for the future resurrection as a fact. Peter reflected exactly this view when he boldly declared after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, “David is dead and buried and his tomb is with us to this day. **He did not ascend to heaven**” (Acts 2:29, 34). It is utterly impossible on this text to imagine that Peter believed that the patriarch David had been taken from death to heaven. He was still dead, awaiting resurrection at the future coming of Christ. Jesus promised the thief in Luke 23:43, “I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise” (the future Kingdom, Rev. 2:7). Paul made a similar emphatic statement in Acts 20:26: “And so I say to you today that I am clean from the blood of all men.” The thief had asked to be remembered in the future when Jesus came bringing the Kingdom. He was assured right then that his place in that future paradise of the Kingdom was assured.

The condition of David after the resurrection of Jesus is made clear by Peter. “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day...For David has not gone up into heaven, but says, himself, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Be seated at my right hand, till I put all those who are against you under your feet”’” (Acts 2:29-35).

David was still dead and buried when Peter uttered these marvelous words. David is still dead to this day, and with the rest of the dead awaits the resurrection when he will be made alive and given a body of glory fit for the coming age of the Kingdom of God. All the faithful will take part in “that age and the resurrection of the dead” (Luke 20:35). Jesus had to convince the Sadducees of the necessity of the resurrection. Since Abraham was dead, only a resurrection in “that age” would bring him back to life. Only then will Abraham, Isaac and Jacob reappear alive at the banquet to be held in the Kingdom. “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out” (Luke 13:28). Jesus was speaking to hostile Jews who did not accept him as their Messiah.

Extra clarity is gained when we realize that the “eternal life” of our Bibles is itself a vague translation. In its Jewish context, “eternal life” is “the life of the age to come.” It is resurrection life to be gained when Jesus comes back to inaugurate “that [future] age” when the faithful dead come back to life and enjoy life forever in the Kingdom of God.

“We cannot doubt,” says Murray Harris in his *Raised Immortal*, “that the distinction between ‘this Age’ and ‘the Age to come’ found in the gospels (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30) and in Paul (Gal. 1:4; Eph 1:21) and

in Hebrews 6:5 that the New Testament writers inherited from Jewish apocalyptic and the rabbinic formula ‘the Life of the Age to Come,’ caused this adjective [*aionios*, pertaining to the age] to assume qualitative overtones at least when used in conjunction with the word ‘life’ (*zoe*)...This suggests that in the gospels, as in contemporary Jewish thought, eternal life was regarded as the Life of the Age to Come (= the rabbinic *Haye Olam*, the life of the Age of Dan. 12:2) the life belonging to the future era...Those future blessings may be enjoyed proleptically [as an anticipation] here and now.”⁴

The sentence is a bit of a mouthful. The idea is clear, however, that the future of Christians (“eternal life”) is bound up with the “Life of the future age of the Kingdom on earth.” What better confirmation of this do we have than Paul’s magnificently encouraging words about his hope: “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me *on that day*; and not to me only, but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). For Paul his final judgment and reward, his appointment as king with Jesus in the Kingdom, was to be expected “on that day,” the day of Jesus’ appearing. To say then that Christians are already judged and rewarded before the future appearing of Jesus disrupts the apostolic scheme for our final salvation.

God is one Person, Jesus is the Lord Messiah, and the dead are currently dead awaiting the resurrection. We should avoid the complications which make God into two or three and man into a bipartite creature with an immortal soul or spirit. ✧

Comments

“I have been going through a lot of your studies and I find them to be from God. I just read your in-depth study on preexistence ‘John 1:1 Caveat Lector (Reader Beware)’ at your site. Awesome.” — *Florida*

“I have received your magazine *Focus on the Kingdom*, and I was glad to read it. I have discovered with your help, another proof that Yeshua is a man, and not God. I mean 2 Samuel 7:12-14.” — *Poland*

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⁴pp. 183, 200. For those with access to the wonderful *Commentary on the NT from Talmud and Midrash* by Strack and Billerbeck, confirmation of this important link may be found in Vol. 4, pp. 799-976.

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