

Focus on the Kingdom

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20th Theological Conference

I have put these thoughts together on *various* topics which seem highly relevant to our current scene, in view of travel in different places and a large email correspondence. The main point, I think, is our shared commitment to the Great Commission. This 20th conference is special in view of the exciting developments which have taken place since last year and particularly since the advent of the miracle of the Internet. One year at this conference we were exhorted to “publish” and I think we have done this. With our websites we are much more public. The combined outreach effect of what we might call Abrahamics is vast compared with 20 years ago. But we need much more “presence” out there, if **the Gospel of the Kingdom** is to resound to the far corners of the globe. Only then, Jesus said, can “the end come.” Only “when *this* [well-known to the NT] Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached everywhere, internationally” can the end come (Matt. 24:14). Christians are called “disciples of the Kingdom” in Matthew 13:52.

There will be one single Parousia, and Paul described it as the event at which the saints living at the time, or sleeping in death (Ps. 13:3; Dan. 12:2; 1 Thess. 5:5) will be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus, to escort the royal personage as he heads towards the earth (1 Thess. 4:13ff.). “Whether we are sleeping or awake [at his coming] we will live together with him” (1 Thess. 5:5). In order to *begin* to live with him at his return, we must be dead before that time! As in Daniel 12:2, and as in the case of the dead, sleeping Lazarus, resurrection always means the coming back to life of formerly dead persons. Bishop Tom Wright gets this wrong when he speaks of “life after life after death.”

Unlike the JW’s at your door we hope to gain immortality at that point of time in the future. They hope only for continuing life, as long as they don’t fall away (i.e. even in the future Paradise!). JW’s do NOT consider themselves as now born again, or members of the body of Christ, or saints, yet they have taken on the Great Commission! There are seven million of them hard at work as we speak. Is anyone planning a mission to them?

Hal Lindsay has caused a considerable confusion by forgetting that that great event in 1 Thessalonians 4 is called by Paul the Parousia, THE Second Coming, and there is no other (1 Thess. 4:15). Jesus gathers the saints as he said, “immediately *after* [post] the tribulation of those days” (Matt. 24:29-31). And Christians, Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8, must expect affliction and

trouble *until* “the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed in flaming fire taking vengeance on his enemies.” That is not secret event. Paul could not have written this if he expected a relief from suffering 7 years earlier! Nor would Jesus advise fleeing to the hills, if “lift-off” is promised.

Although Harold Camping of Family Radio says that the end of the world will occur on May 21, he will be proved wrong very soon, after selling lots of books, as he also did in the 80’s with another failed prediction. Abrahamics have been wise enough not to set dates. The SDA’s were sure that 1844 was the Second Coming and JW’s knew that 1914 was the date! But the mathematics behind these failed prophecies are now seen to be quite unintelligent!

On a humorous note, we get emails sometimes which begin, “I have read what you say about God and Jesus, but, Anthony, have you ever read John 1:1?”

On site after site one finds this (and this shows what we are up against): “Jesus was God. He was in the beginning with God. He actively participated in the creation of this world (John 1:1-5). He was the true Light, the Light of the world, but the world did not know Him (John 1:6-11). The disciples beheld His glory, but the vast majority of those who saw and heard Him did not really see Him for who He was; they did not behold His glory. This matter is taken up later on in John’s Gospel, but let me briefly turn your attention to an important text in John: ‘I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me at your side with the glory I had with you before the world was created’ (John 17:4-5). Our Lord had great glory in heaven, and this visible glory He set aside to come to the earth in human flesh. He glorified God by His humility and obedience, which culminated in His sacrificial (and humiliating) death. Because of this, the Father has given Him even greater glory. That glory will be openly and visibly manifested at His Second Coming, and in heaven (“glory”).”

All this I think is not descriptive of the Jesus Messiah, born in Bethlehem. It describes an essentially non-human Jesus, and John’s Gospel is being twisted to support this “from outer-space visitor,” who is not really the Messiah of the Bible, and he is certainly not the Father! Martin Luther, raised on a Jesus who did not begin IN Mary, actually mistranslated 1 John 4:2 to read “come INTO the flesh” instead of “come in flesh.” German translations today have corrected Luther’s mistake.

Jesus' Long-Form Birth Certificate Released by Luke and Matthew, 2000 Years Ago

If we all worked tirelessly day after day to correct this bizarre picture of a non-human Jesus we would barely make a dent in the gargantuan problem, built into the DNA of the churchgoing public. Some of the public seem terribly exercised about the right of President Obama to be in office. The issue is where was he born? Where is he from? The public seems unconcerned about the angel Michael-Jesus (promoted by 7 million JW's) or the God-Jesus offered them by standard forms of the faith, propagated weekly by the slogan that Jesus IS God. How many YHVH's does that make, since the Father is certainly Yahweh? Sounds like two, which is one too many. Matthew provides basic information about the ORIGIN of Jesus, genesis of Jesus. This is not just his birth, but his **origin**. Who was Jesus originally? We can know about the origin and the birth certificate of Jesus by reading Luke and Matthew.

The JW's invited us recently to take part in the celebration of their annual Passover, and their tract told us that Jesus "came down from heaven" as a transformed angel. What they did not say was that "every good gift comes down from heaven" (James 1:17; 3:15). What they did not say is that Jesus said his "**flesh, which is bread**, came down from heaven" (John 6:51). Is this not obviously non-literal language?

Can You Spot the Amazing Trick?

"The word *echad*, 'one' in Hebrew, often means a multiple unity, such as 'one cluster of grapes' or 'one bunch of sticks'" (Stern, *Jewish NT*, p. 97).

"The word 'One' in Hebrew is inherently a plural word" (recent book by SDA's to promote the Trinity, *The Trinity* by Whidden, Moon and Reeve, p. 76).

Who is the Blessed Seed of Abraham?

I am challenged by the repeated and persistent mail I receive from a Michael Evans who wants me to contribute dollars (different amounts will bring various rewards, like a lapel pin, or a DVD or beautiful pewter plate). His point is that we all ought to be helping Jews return to the land. What I think he overlooks is **the golden key verse in Galatians 3:29** that "if we are biblical Christians, we are reckoned as Abraham's children (seed) and are thus heirs to the promises." This verse is a backbone to NT theology and when neglected or rejected leads to the collapse of much of NT theology. Without this text firmly in place all sorts of chaos results. Some lost track of Galatians 3:29 when they misapplied "I will bless those who bless you" to the *physical* descendants of Abraham. But that is to misunderstand Galatians 3. The Christian concern is not with the politics of this age. Galatians 3:29 defines who for the moment are the true seed of Abraham. Jesus spent a lot of his time trying to persuade hostile Jews that unless they accepted

him as Messiah they no longer counted as the true people of God. The time is coming, Hosea says, that Israel, now reckoned as "not My people" (Hos. 1: 9-10) will one day repent and be restored. But that has not happened yet.

I personally find verses like Matthew 19:28 and Galatians 3:29 absolutely thrilling as well as humbling. Imagine that! We, whoever we are in terms of national background, are now honored by the great God with the status of Abraham's sons and daughters, because we have believed and obeyed the unique and final agent of God, the Lord Messiah Jesus (Luke 2:11). And if we are now constituted the children of Abraham then we are going to inherit the very promises made to Abraham and to Jesus. "The promise to Abraham," we remember, was that "he would inherit the world" (Rom. 4:13). Sounds awfully like the almost entirely ignored saying of Jesus that the meek are going to **inherit** the earth (quoting about 6 passages in Ps. 37). And Matthew 19:28 spells out in the plainest terms the role of the Apostles in the future Kingdom on earth, when Jesus comes.

Dispensationalism which underlies most American "fundamentalist" churches has given away the promise of Matthew 5:5 to unconverted Jews and thus robbed true Christians of their inheritance and Abraham's. The meek will inherit the land — not "go to heaven." Unconverted Jews must accept the Messiah who has come, in order to inherit the land and be true children of Abraham.

The Second Coming and Christian Destiny

Yes, indeed, we have seen "apocalyptic" scenes in Japan and startling evidence of the awesome power of God even at the St Louis airport. Yes, indeed there is now, since 1948, a nation of Israel in the Middle East. Yes, indeed, Jesus is coming visibly. He is really coming **back**. But the NIV gets it all wrong when it says that Jesus went **back** to heaven at the ascension (John 13:3; 16:28; 20:17). The NIV misleads badly in Philippians 2 and cleverly when it has Jesus preaching "Good News" and Paul preaching "the Gospel"!

The Second Coming is not a "drive through" by which the Messiah swoops down in the clouds only to do a U-turn and disappear again into heaven. That would not be a Second Coming at all. This non-second coming would mean that 23 million SDA's are right (and I fear they have been misled here on a large scale), when they say that only the Devil will be on earth for a 1000 years. It is the Devil who does not want Jesus back on earth. That will be the time when he is bound and imprisoned not on earth but in the abyss, and his crippling present "deceiving of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9) will come to a screeching halt (Rev. 20:3).

It is fascinating to me that A.T. (not J.A.T.) Robertson in his famous word pictures (available with BibleWorks software) says that it is unclear what Jesus meant in Matthew 19:28. Unclear? Jesus had just been

asked the worthy question by Peter: “What can we expect to receive as reward at the end of this titanic struggle against the forces of popular religion? What’s in it for us?” Jesus was fully responsive and certainly not rebuking with his forthright answer. “Let me tell you on the authority of the God I serve, Amen, amen I tell you: at the rebirth of the world, when the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you too will be seated on 12 thrones to administer the 12 tribes of Israel.”

How many sermons are you hearing on these shattering interesting words of Jesus? My impression is that in church people would just like to think that Jesus died and rose, but not much else in the teaching of Jesus seems to get the sort of publicity it deserves. This text of course is repeated in Luke 22 where the new administration, with the 12 tribes regathered in the land, is said to be **the core of the New Covenant**. The apostles are promised seats at the dinner table with Messiah! And positions of administrative responsibility with Messiah. Acts 1:6 arises out of this major topic of course. “Is this the time for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” This is the question, I remind you, and do tell all your friends, where Calvin commented, “There are more errors in that question [about the restored national sovereignty to Israel] than there are words.” About 16 errors! And people continue in their droves to name themselves by the name of Calvin who also murdered our unitarian brother Servetus (for interesting history, do read *Did Calvin Murder Servetus?* by Stanford Rives, reviewed by Barbara at Dan and Sharon Gill’s wonderful site at 21stcr.org).

“Jewish Roots”

Much time has been wasted on a false attempt to get at the Jewishness of Jesus in areas where no challenge to mainstream is necessary. I mean the emphasis by some on the Jewish calendar and especially the claim that the fourth commandment is now binding on us all in the letter.

The NT seems quite content with the use of “Lord” (*Kurios*) for God and, as Joe Martin points out, stresses the use of “Father,” now that the Son has come. This is the wonderful new thing in the New Covenant. The NT actually takes the *idea* of the name of YHVH, “the one who is and was and is to come,” and puts it into Greek for us in Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5.

What is not always noted is that when Jesus is called “lord” (following the *adoni*, “my lord,” of Ps. 110:1), the Greek very frequently has the definite article “**the** Lord (Jesus).” When *Kurios* is without the article it very often (not invariably) designates the LORD GOD (*Kurios*, *Yahweh*). One cannot say “the *Yahweh*,” or “my *Yahweh*.” It is a proper name.

Another question which keeps surfacing is the effort of some to force us into a Saturday resurrection. Garner

Ted Armstrong wrote that one could not be saved unless he believed that the crucifixion was on Wednesday and resurrection on Saturday. My reply to one recent inquirer goes like this:

Thanks, but your “easy to explain” is I think more easily explained like this:

1) The fact that Jesus kept the Passover on the same day as the nation, not with some private calendar. Jesus did not die when the Passover was being eaten. He also ate it and died the next day. The Friday of Passover week was the Preparation day not “FOR the Passover” but “of Passover week.” See the fine analysis in Robertson’s *Harmony of the Gospels*, in an appendix.

2) Luke, unless a madman, could not write “Sabbath was coming and on the Sabbath they rested” and mean TWO different days! (Luke 23:54-56). Sabbath in the NT is the word for Saturday.

3) Luke shows his inclusive reckoning: “today, tomorrow and **the third day**.” “Today, tomorrow and the next day” (Luke 13:32-33).

Sunday is “the third day since Friday” in Luke 24:21. The resurrection was on that “third day.” I think that there is no need to oppose what has long been clear to the majority. Luke 24:21 is absolutely a fixed datum and “two sabbaths” is a sheer impossibility in Luke 23:56. He would be a rotten historian to be so confusing!

Then the important issue of the future and final restoration of national Israel (Rom. 9-11). “The deliverer will come and remove ungodliness from JACOB.”

Paul has “great sorrow about my natural kinsmen, who are **Israelites**” (not the church). Happily there presently is an Israel not limited to physical Israel, i.e. true believers, the Israel of God of Galatians 6:16, the true circumcision, which is us (Phil. 3:3; Gal. 3:29, as distinct from the “**Israel of the flesh**” (1 Cor. 10:18). The real international children of Abraham are now drawn from both Jews and Gentiles, via Isaac and Sarah, and the promises. The children of the flesh are not currently the same as the Israel of the spirit. The New Covenant has included us all, Americans, Brits, Australians and people of every nation in the true people of God, what Paul calls the “true circumcision” (Phil. 3:3).

Then Paul goes on: The Gentiles not pursuing righteousness attained the right way and Israel (i.e. Israelites) seeking it **with Law** did not. My prayer is for THEIR salvation (not the church). They (not the church) have a zeal for God but without the right knowledge. Israel knew, but did not respond. “I stretched forth my hand to a disobedient and obstinate people” (not the church).

There is currently a remnant, however; the rest (not the church) are hardened and are enemies of the Gospel. They do not now count as God’s true people. If they do

not continue in hardness they can be grafted in again. A partial hardening has happened to them (not the church) UNTIL the full quota of Gentiles has come in and so “all Israel,” the ones now partially hardened, will be saved: **i.e. “blindness will be removed from Jacob.”** From the point of view of the Gospel THEY (not the church) are enemies for your (the church’s) sake. So now, in the “now” of that future, they will be shown mercy.

This leads to Matthew 19:28 and Acts 1:6 and Micah 2:5 and Isaiah 19. Here we have whole nations who are God’s people, a thing impossible today since the kingdoms of this world are not yet the Kingdom of God.

Denominations

It is interesting to challenge audiences with the rather bewildering state of disagreement by major blocs of those claiming to believe:

How did the Watchtower Society manage to convince millions that Jesus is Michael the archangel? In Hebrews 1 there are two passages which absolutely exclude the idea that Jesus was ever an angel. Listen! “Jesus is far superior to the angels, for to which one of the angels did God ever say ‘You are my Son; Today I have begotten you’?” Then, “To which one of the angels did God ever say, ‘Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool’?” (Heb. 1:13). To no angel did God ever say the things he said only to his SON, Jesus. Very convincing also is the fact that Michael is said to be “**one of the chief angels**” (Dan. 10:13). One of a category of archangels. Jesus is not **one of** any category. Jesus is unique in his category as the sole Messiah, Son of David, of God and of Mary. JW’s claim to be “one of Jehovah’s Witnesses” — and they mean just that. Show them then that Jesus cannot be “one of the archangels.” He cannot therefore be Michael. Anyway a holy angel is immortal, and so Michael could not have died for the sins of the world as the Son of God who died!

How is it that 1 billion people, not more nor less intelligent than ourselves, can believe that Mary was sinless, that she never had normal relations with her husband and was taken physically to heaven at death? That she and other “saints” respond to the lighting of candles and to prayer?

How do you get 23 million SDA’s to believe that when the millennium comes the earth will be vacated of human beings and only Satan will remain on the earth? You achieve this amazing feat when a single lady, Ellen G. White persuaded them all that she was “more than a prophetess.” But did anyone note what she did with Isaiah 24:6 which states that after a vast depopulation of the world effected by the Day of the Lord, the great and terrible day of the LORD’s wrath, “few men are left.” Ellen White, if you will look at her tome *The Great Controversy* (p. 769), you will find that she simply left out the words “few men are left” in Isaiah 24:6. This

persuaded her millions of followers of an empty earth for 1000 years. She also predicted the Second Coming for 1844, and when it did not happen, she constructed a theory which stated that a special new event happened in heaven in that year. Later SDA scholars who challenged this were dismissed.

Now fresh from my recent trip to Indonesia and Malaysia. How do you get 1½ billion Muslims to believe that Jesus is **Isa al Masi**, Jesus the Messiah, that he was born of a virgin, but that Allah has no Son! The death of Jesus is at least unclear in the Koran, but it is clear that Mohammed had 11 wives, allowed others to have 4 and as many concubines as desired. How to make this fit with New Covenant Christianity is beyond me. The Koran forbids the use of all alcohol. How well would the Jesus of the wedding at Cana fare, or the Lord’s supper which foreshadows the Messianic banquet at which fine wines will be consumed? Happily the Koran does say “Believe in Isa al Masi, Jesus the Messiah.”

Do Evangelicals Preach the Gospel?

Following Steve Katsaras’ challenging and radical appeal for belief in the right Jesus and not a threatening “another Jesus,” may I ask kindly a similar radical question?

I start with a fascinating quote from the mammoth three-volume tome by G.N Peters, *The Coming Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. I am still thrilled and impressed with one of his opening statements:

“The New Testament begins the announcement of the Kingdom in terms expressive of its being previously well-known...The preaching of the Kingdom, its simple announcement, **without the least attempt to explain its meaning and nature**, the very language in which it was conveyed to the Jews —all presupposed that it was a subject familiar to all. John the Baptist, Jesus and the Seventy all proclaimed the Kingdom in a way without definition or explanation that indicated that their hearers were acquainted with its meaning” (Vol. 1:181).

The Testimony of John the Baptist and Jesus to the Kingdom of God

“Jesus frequently appealed to the Old Testament as a divine revelation whose meaning he and his audience held, or ought to hold, in common [“If you misunderstand the OT you will automatically misunderstand the New.”] Moses, according to Jesus, had written about the Messiah. But if one were not prepared to believe what Moses wrote, it would be impossible to believe what Jesus said (John 5:46-47). After the resurrection Jesus chided the disciples for their failure to grasp what the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:25-27). This implies that what the prophets wrote was intelligible. There existed already clear evidence of the trustworthiness and factuality of the prophets’ predictions. Micah had predicted the birthplace of the Messiah. Isaiah had

foreseen the Messiah's activity as a miracle worker and healer (Isa. 35:5-6)." (Micah had predicted the details of the origin of the Messiah as being from ancient times. The translation "from everlasting" in the KJV is very misleading.)

Peters again: "The meaning Jesus attached to the word Kingdom of God can only have been the meaning given to that phrase in the Old Testament. If another concept were intended by 'Kingdom of God,' some explanation would be required at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry to avoid misunderstanding. The facts are that John makes his announcement of the Kingdom on the presumption that his audience knew what the Kingdom was. They reacted by coming to John for baptism. They could not have done this in the absence of information about what the Kingdom was."

Jesus spoke to Israel, to whom the oracles of God had been entrusted (Rom. 3:1-2), and according to Paul he came to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8; Acts 13:32). The Kingdom was itself the subject of the divine promise as "the kingdom which God has promised to those who love Him" (James 2:7). It is impossible therefore that Jesus could have opened his ministry in Galilee by announcing the Kingdom of God in any sense other than that which was intelligible to himself and his audience.

Now what was that sense? Though the phrase "Kingdom of God" does not appear exactly in that form in the Hebrew Bible, the idea is so ubiquitous that John Bright declares that the whole Bible might rightly be called the book about the coming Kingdom.

A *locus classicus* for defining the Kingdom of God is 1 Chronicles 28. King David addressed an assemblage of officials declaring that God had chosen him to be king over Israel forever (1 Chron. 28:4). Likewise God had selected Solomon to sit on the throne of **the Kingdom of the Lord** over Israel. Solomon was duly crowned king of the united kingdom of Israel. They "anointed him as ruler for the Lord" (1 Chron. 29:22), whereupon "he sat on **the throne of the Lord as king** in the place of David his father; and he prospered and all Israel obeyed him." Subsequently Abijah succeeded to the throne of Judah and when confronted with the opposing armies of Israel under Jeroboam, he reminded the latter that "the Lord God of Israel gave the rule over Israel to David forever and his sons by a **covenant** of salt" (2 Chron. 13:5). It would therefore be unwise for Jeroboam to "resist the **Kingdom of the Lord** in the hands of the sons of David" (2 Chron. 13:8).

There can be no doubt that the Kingdom of the Lord means the Kingdom administered by the royal house of David. It still means that. The Davidic covenant had named the Davidic throne as the Kingdom of God when Nathan had said to David, "I will settle him [David's

descendant] in my house and in my Kingdom forever and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chron. 17:14).

The Kingdom of God therefore meant the empire ruled by the dynasty of David over Israel in the promised land. Its capital was Jerusalem, and it functioned on behalf of God Himself and could therefore be called both God's Kingdom and David's Kingdom.

The **political and territorial** nature of the kingdom is made clear in numbers of other significant passages in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet Obadiah describes the Kingdom of the Lord as a time when Israel rules over former enemies. The supremacy of Israel is achieved when "deliverers ascend Mount Zion to judge [in the Hebraic sense "administer"] the mountain of Esau, and **the Kingdom will be the Lord's**" (Obad. 21). Again the political and territorial character of the Kingdom of God is crystal clear. So it is in Daniel 2:44 where "the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these other [preceding] kingdoms and it will itself endure forever." This empire is further described as a time when "the saints will possess the kingdom and all kingdoms and dominions will serve them" (Dan. 7:22, 27). It is located "under the whole heaven" (Dan. 9:27).

Kingdom data appears in equally unambiguous terms in Isaiah 16:5: "A throne will be established in lovingkindness and a judge will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David." Micah's Messianic prediction foresees a time coming when "the Lord will reign over Israel in Mount Zion...Even the former dominion will come, the Kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem" (Micah 4:7-8). It is a well-known fact that the Targums [Jewish commentary] elucidate these passages with the paraphrase: "The Kingdom of God will be revealed." Zechariah forecasts that the Messiah will "speak peace to the nations and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth." Sounds very much like the promise of the One God, the Father to His Son: "Ask me and I will give you the ends of the earth as your inheritance."

Two further passages are of prime importance for establishing the **territorial and political** nature of the Kingdom as well as its thoroughly spiritual dimension as a kingdom initiated by Yahweh Himself. In Isaiah 40 "the glory of the Lord is to be revealed." This will mean the evangelization of the cities of Zion when the Lord God "will come with might with his arm ruling for him." Once again the Targum recognizes in these events the revelation of the Kingdom of God. Zephaniah reports that following a period of severe judgment, and beyond the Day of the Lord, "the King of Israel, the Lord, will be in their midst." Zion is comforted with the promise that the Lord will be present as a victorious warrior (Zeph. 3:17).

The LORD of course will be there in the presence of His unique Son the returning Jesus.

Finally in Isaiah 52:7 there is a passage saturated with Gospel and Kingdom terminology. The announcement is made to Zion that “Your God reigns,” resulting in **the restoration of Zion** and the comfort and redemption of Jerusalem (Isa. 52:8-9, just what the NT saints were expecting). The Kingdom thus established is viewed by “all the nations” (Isa. 52:10). Appropriately the Targum sees in these events the setting up of the Kingdom of God. The phrase “your God reigns” or more accurately “your God has assumed kingship” marks a definite new era of history *on earth*. There is nothing abstract about the kingdom, nor is the eternal sovereignty of God the subject of these grand prophecies. It is rather a political event marking the intervention of the deity to take control of the Kingdom by installing His ruler as head of a theocracy in Jerusalem. The basis of the concept is found in the Davidic covenant which anticipates a descendant, a member of the House of David presiding over the kingdom in the promised land. Compare Psalm 96: “The Lord has assumed his kingship.” He has begun to reign in a way in which he has not yet ever done. Exactly as Revelation 11:15-18 predicts that at the 7th trumpet, the moment when the now sleeping dead return to conscious existence, the LORD and His Messiah will begin to reign (the aorists are ingressive, meaning that the action begins).

In view of this mass of convergent evidence it must be plain that when Jesus announced the Kingdom of God, he did not need to tell his audience that there was going to be such a thing. It is surprising that commentaries have not made the political, territorial and national aspects of the Kingdom God known to readers. It must be clear that Jesus was not talking into the air when he announced the near approach of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom was something deeply embedded in the national consciousness of Israel and unambiguously defined by the Hebrew text and Targums. What has severely hampered understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of God is the well-worn theory that Jesus must have been speaking of *a spiritual and not a political and geographical kingdom*.

A Jew might legitimately object that a kingdom managed by the anointed Messiah ruling in Jerusalem is utterly spiritual. It is both spiritual and political, both national and universal. The fallacy of so much commentary and unexamined church tradition has been to set spiritual against political as though these are mutually exclusive ideas. However in Scripture this is not the case. A prophecy which spelled out the geographical place on earth at which the Messiah was to be born (Micah 5:2) was no less spiritual than the prophecy of his suffering for the sins of the world (Isa. 53). The prophecy which announced the conception of the Messiah from a virgin

was equally and thoroughly spiritual, though related to a particular Israelite virgin living in a specific location and an exact time in history, 6 months later than the conception of John the Baptist.

It cannot be reasonably argued that Jesus meant anything by Kingdom of God in Mark 1:14-15 than his heritage had transmitted to him. Only on that basis can his opening gospel salvo have been intelligible. Only on that simple basis can he not have wiped out OT Scripture! There is a mass of New Testament evidence to corroborate the local, geographical and political nature of the Kingdom. Two passages in Luke tie the kingdom to geography. There was an occasion during the ministry of Jesus near Jerusalem that his audience thought that the kingdom would appear immediately. Of course, the King was in the proximity of the Kingdom’s capital city, the city of the great King. Their conception of the Kingdom as having its capital in the holy land was absolutely right. Now Jesus did not correct this expectation. The parable he gave was to clarify the fact that the Kingdom would not appear *immediately*. He taught that there was to be an interval during which he as Messiah would be absent. During that time he would acquire his right to rule in the Kingdom. He would then return to rule in the Kingdom, dealing at that time with opponents who resisted his royal authority. Jesus would then be in the position of judge and would be authorized to “slay his enemies” who did not want the Messiah to rule over them! A shattering warning for us all.

Luke reports also that Jesus expected that many would arrive from east, west, north and south and join the resurrected patriarchs in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-29). The picture would naturally evoke in the minds of those familiar with the Hebrew Bible the Messianic banquet described by Isaiah 25:6-7 as a dinner including fine wines. The banquet was to take place “on this mountain,” that is, in Jerusalem.

All this may be obvious to Abrahamically trained people, but it is certainly not clear in the various evangelical circles I have recently encountered. All I heard about was “heaven.” The political and territorial nature of the Kingdom is absent from that “heaven” Gospel. The question is, how far can one misdefine the Kingdom of God and still count the resultant message the true Gospel?

Might not Jesus say to churches today, “You are gravely mistaken, not knowing the Scripture nor the power of God”? Jesus had just explained to them the rather elementary fact that since God is the God of the living and since it was well recognized that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still dead and buried, then that future blessed resurrection was the *only way* that the faithful dead could be reunited in one glorious throng ready to take up their positions in the Kingdom.

Bishop Wright for all his skills and talents still does not get this right! He speaks of the resurrection as “life after life after death.” But then curious blindness leads him to tell us that the Parousia in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 happened in AD 70!

All this about the Kingdom and the Gospel, I think we need to be reminded, is not just “eschatology.” It is the throbbing and life-giving heart of the saving Gospel as Jesus and Paul preached it. The cry still goes out from the risen Messiah: “Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14-15). “I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: that is why God sent me” (Luke 4:43). That cry is summarized in the Great Commission to baptize everyone everywhere who will respond to the Gospel as Jesus and Paul preached it. The command to baptize is not an optional extra! It is part of the handful of very simple and basic commands. Peter is insistent that even after Gentiles had received the spirit they be baptized in water. Who can prevent the water? he asks.

I was disappointed in Indonesia when one breakfast time, some were beginning to deconstruct the public sign which is water baptism and initiation into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). The problem is that if one leaves the Mosque and gets baptized, one is in dire trouble. So, I heard it being said, what if we just invite them to pledge allegiance to Jesus? I must say I have misgivings about any such maneuver. Can we mess with the Great Commission in that way? Baptism in water is one of those very basic simple NT teachings, practiced by Jesus, John, Paul and Peter. It is a NT given, not open to question, if words have plain meanings. So I suggest, Peter commanded them in the name of Jesus to be baptized in water (“Who can forbid the water...?”)

Having sat through a long lecture in Texas about the world being empty during the 1000 years, I would urge us all to be able to defend the truth of the millennium with passion and excitement. It might be good to not get excessively overheated about *an immediate* second coming. Adventists have a record over the past centuries of “knowing that world events show that Jesus is bound to come almost immediately.” This of course never means that we should be asleep. We should be “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

We should pay attention too to both Jesus’ and Paul’s warnings that certain events must happen **first**. I suggest that the Markan “When you see the Abomination of Desolation standing where HE ought not to” (the RV corrected the KJV as early as 1881) was the main sign Jesus gave of the impending end. He was asked, “What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” There is a single Antichrist figure (1 John 2:18), whom Jesus slays with the breath of mouth at his coming in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. This figure for Paul is traced to Isaiah 11:4 where the King of Assyria is the expected final

tyrant. The Beast in Revelation is also seen as a HE, a single person, when John gives him a masculine pronoun in Revelation 17:11 and 13:14 (the word for Beast is actually neuter, so John is making a special point here, as Mark in Mark 13:14: “the abomination standing where HE ought not to”). The Beast/Abomination is a person, just as that wicked person comes to “his end” (Dan. 9:26b) in the final and decisive destruction brought by God in Jesus.

Father and Son

As unitarians I think we have to be careful to remain both Father and Son centered. Paul thanked Jesus for putting him in ministry and Jesus was worshiped not as God but as the human lamb. Jesus is obviously concerned with our prayers. Not only does he now do what YHVH does, he searches the hearts and minds, but he said in John 14:14: If you ask me something in my name, i.e. as a true disciple, I will do it. Jesus is that one man mediator, and comforter. The NIV obscures the easy fact that the Paraclete, Comforter is actually Jesus in 1 John 2:1.

We certainly all have our work cut out to be “steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our toil is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58). Jesus and Paul did not have to face quite the chaos of clamoring religious arguments and divisions we have today. Finding and holding truth may seem rather like finding a needle in a haystack. But I am convinced we have truths to which we must hold fast for our own salvation and in order to pass them on, polished and refined, to our successors. It still remains an overwhelmingly interesting fact that Jesus promised to send scribes, trained Bible personnel (Matt. 23:34), and he interpreted as among the righteous those “instructors” who make many righteous (Matt. 13:43; Dan. 12:2). A very unpopular text is Isaiah 53:11 where the Messiah, servant “makes many righteous by his knowledge.” The Son came “to give us *an understanding* that we might come to know God” (1 John 5:20).

All this is based on Abraham’s and Jesus’ example, so loved by Paul, who twice quotes the amazingly simple truth that Abraham believed God and this was reckoned to him as making him right (not wrong), straight and no longer crooked (Gen. 15:6 cited by Paul in Gal. 3:6 and Rom. 4:3). To Abraham was promised “progeny, prosperity and property.” We become heirs of these promises through the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) and in Jesus. ✧

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