

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Two-State Solution in End-Times Prophecy

by Greg Deuble, Australia

Ever had the experience that something you have read “a thousand times” in the Bible all of a sudden leaps out at you? We all revel in those “light-bulb” moments, those “Aha!” moments when the Spirit of God arrests and rivets our attention. I had one such moment lately. It concerns the centrally important prophetic words of Revelation 11:1-2: “I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, ‘Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.’”

Positively, the specific command is to measure the Temple, its altar and its worshippers. Negatively, the command is also precise — the outer court is *not* to be included in the measuring for “it has been given to the Gentiles” and will be trodden down. Then the famous words of Zechariah 12:3, LXX (Septuagint, Greek OT) are remembered as fulfilling this end-time prophecy — words also quoted by Jesus concerning the last days of this evil age (Luke 21:24): the area outside the Temple and its altar will be trampled by the Gentile nations for 42 months. God has promised to make Jerusalem “a trodden stone” by all the Gentile peoples of the earth and she will be “utterly mocked” (Zech. 12:3, LXX). You must read the LXX here. It is a grim picture for Israel.

Why did this suddenly grab my attention? Well, this sounds like a “two state solution,” the very thing the governments of the world are pressuring for right now! Jewish and Gentile jurisdiction on the Temple mount together! We know the Islamic mosque on the Dome of the Rock stands where the second temple of Solomon stood before the Romans burned it. So how can there be a third Jewish temple to be “measured” with its “altar” and “worshippers” there on the Holy Mount? How can they exist in peace side by side with the Gentile peoples in the “outer” precincts?

I seem to recall reading the prophets foretelling that the Man of Sin (the Anti-Christ, Daniel’s “little horn,” the “Beast,” “the lawless one,” “the Assyrian” are just some of his designations, Isa. 11:4, 2 Thess. 2:8) will have a penchant for brokering a covenant of peace in the Middle East. He will be able to “solve” what the world’s leaders so far have not been able to solve in all their

machinations — an initial peaceful solution for two nation-states, Israel and Palestine.

This event, the covenant of peace, will cause the world to “wonder after, be amazed at the Beast,” to adore his political and religious genius and to cry, “Peace! Peace! At last.” Jesus warned that this will be an undeniable sign that the Great Tribulation will be about to be launched upon the inhabitants of the world (Matt. 24:15, 21).

I am not being sensational to report what is common knowledge, namely that the Jews have for some time been making serious preparations to rebuild their third Temple. Many of the great stones are pre-fabricated — already cut! And the Temple furniture, such as the golden candlestick, the brass (bronze) lathe, the table of the presence, and even the ark, is ready. (These facts can be verified by a simple Google search.) But with the Temple site being so venerated by Muslims it will probably never be surrendered to Israel for them to build their new temple without the danger of world war erupting. The Mosque on the Rock is Islam’s third holiest of sites.

Enter the current push by the United Nations for “a two state solution.” How long and hard has this solution been worked on by the world’s nations! How many Camp Davids have we had?

Just in the last few weeks the papacy has declared its official support for a Palestinian state to stand alongside Israel. Indeed, as I write this very day, the Senate in the United States has just legislated that Jerusalem is *not* the capital of Israel! Yes, you read this right. Jerusalem is *not* the capital of Israel! And the recent United Nations vote for official Palestinian state recognition fell short by just one vote, yes, one vote! It was with the *proviso* that Israel come to this “solution” herself “voluntarily” (!) — otherwise it will be legislated upon her.

No one has any exact dates until the final 7 years begin when a treaty is made with the one who turns out to be an evil person.¹ It seems to me the Muslim mosque on

¹Dan. 9:24-27; note the Hebrew “his end” in Dan. 9:26b, cp. 11:45; “his end” is wrongly omitted in some versions. This was not fulfilled in AD 70, when no evil person came to “his end” in that judgment. Titus died naturally and was not the final antichrist (“you have heard that Antichrist is coming,” 1 John 2:18, in addition to the already present spirit of antichrist). The single antichrist, Beast, is a person, standing where **he** (Mark 13:14; see the Greek masculine pronoun, not clear in all versions) ought not to. Jesus reads the 70th “week” as very close to his Parousia in Matt. 24:15ff.

the Dome of the Rock may stand alongside a rebuilt Jewish Temple, and the world will rejoice that peace has come at last, and they will revel initially in their two-state man-made solution. The antichrist in a rebuilt temple was seen to be truth by many early premillennialists (believers in the future 1000-year reign of Christ on earth), and lost only when a theory of “days=years” submerged it.²

Thus the reason Revelation 11:1-2 screams out to get our undivided attention. It says there will be a “two state solution” — one jurisdiction for the Jews and one jurisdiction for the Gentiles. For the Jews this will lead to an imposition, a trampling, an utter mocking of God’s holy mount and city, a desecration and defiance of their God-bequeathed heritage.

But it is clear God will eventually punish those who “divide” His land (Joel 3:2). The proposed two-state solution is an attempt to “divide” the holy land. Zechariah goes on to prophesy that God will in the end strike this Gentile trampling and mocking with a judgment causing “madness” and “astonishment” (Zech. 12:4).

Alas for Jerusalem! Just as the prophet predicted, Zion has become “as trembling door posts” to the people round about her and is like “a trodden stone” of the Gentile nations who “utterly mock” her (Zech. 12:2-3, LXX). It has become fashionable to squeeze Israel more and more. Friends and allies are increasingly cool towards her. Israel is at a rapid pace becoming more and more isolated and hemmed.

Alas for Israel! Such a tiny, tiny nation 260 miles long and about 70 miles wide, with Arab (Palestinian) enclaves pocketed throughout and surrounded by a billion Muslims whose aim it is to wipe her out of existence.

Yet as the prophets foretold long ago, God will, after refining them through severe discipline (Zech. 13:9), eventually draw His ancient covenant people back to an acceptance of and faith in the Messiah. As I write there is a large influx of Jews streaming back (but still in unbelief!) to Israel from France, indeed all of Europe, the Ukraine and Russia. When Hitler ruled in Germany Europe’s population was approximately 3% Jewish. Today it is less than 0.2%!

Prime Minister Netanyahu was asked about Israel’s “homeland security.” He said that the President of the USA is rightly concerned to secure the borders and protect the homeland against terrorists. “Every day the President may well ask, ‘Is the United States safe?’ But when I wake up in the morning I ask my wife concerning Israel, ‘Are we still here?’”

He also reads the final half of the same final week as future in Revelation 11:1-3; 12:6, 14; 13:5.

² For a refutation of the day-year theory, see Milton Terry, professor of OT exegesis, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1890.

The United Nations has struggled for decades to solve “the Palestinian problem.” The UN is now within a whisker of legislating that Israel accept “the two-state solution,” or it will be forced upon them by the governments of the world!

Current events in the Middle East are crying out for the predicted false “covenant of peace.” As we know, the prophets also tell us that mid-way through this “solution” the Antichrist will double-cross Israel and “break” his covenant with them (Dan. 9:27). It is at this point that those who are in Judea in those days must not enter their houses and gather their goods, but flee hastily for their very survival. At this point there will be a fearful holocaust launched against the Jews, in one final Satanic burst of pure hatred, designed to wipe out those who will then cry out for their Messiah to come and save them in the Name of the LORD (Matt. 23:39). Yes, Satan hates the prophecy of Jesus’ Second Coming, his *Parousia* and is not going to stop short (again) of an attempt at total annihilation of every Jew to stop their Messianic invitation! (Zech. 13:8-9; 14:1-2).

The other amazing current development is that the national alliances the prophets speak of at the end times are now clearly forming — specifically, Iran and Russia to the north and the Sunni Arabs and Egypt to the south. The troubles come from “the north” (Dan. 11:31). When the predicted Antichrist is plainly on the scene, we should lift up our heads, for our redemption draws near (Luke 21:28), and we are going to see our King Jesus. The call to his disciples is to prepare and get ready to inherit his Kingdom and to rule this world with him (Rev. 2:26-27; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27, RSV; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4).

Just before his crucifixion Jesus told his disciples he was leaving them. In order to inform and to comfort them Jesus explained why he forewarned them: “Now I have told you before it comes to pass, so that when it does take place you may believe” (John 14:29; Mark 13:23). When we see prophecies unfolding before our very eyes it increases our faith in “the spirit of prophecy which is the spirit of Jesus” (Rev. 19:10). These teachings are not optional extras for believers in Jesus, but the very heart of his mind and spirit. Paul taught them to his congregations nearly 2000 years ago (2 Thess. 2:5).

Watching the promised props fall into place on the world’s stage fills me with increased faith in the prophetic word of Jesus as we approach the end of this “evil age.” King Jesus will enter center stage of history and rule as this world’s only rightful king and lord Messiah! (Luke 2:11: “lord Messiah”; Ps. 110:1: “lord,” *adoni*). The stone that is supernaturally cut out will in God’s time fall and crush the colossus of Daniel’s vision (Dan. 2:44), and “the times of the Gentiles” will have been fulfilled.

God announced long ago that Jerusalem would be “a trodden stone” and that all the Gentile nations would

trample upon her and “utterly mock” Zion (Zech. 12:3, LXX). Watch “the two-state solution” unfold before your very eyes. Measure the Temple and its altar and those who worship there! But leave out (probably “throw down” of Dan. 8:11) the outer precincts for the unbelieving Gentile nations. Jerusalem will be **trampled on, trodden on**, but for a limited time, just as Zechariah and Jesus who read him (Luke 21:24; Rev. 11:2-3) have prophesied! ✧

Are You Listening to Jesus?

In the state of the art *New Century Bible Commentary* on Mark, Dr. Hugh Anderson says of Mark 12:29: “Jesus stands foursquare within the orbit of Jewish piety [i.e. affirming the Shema]” (p. 280). D.E. Nineham in his commentary on Mark notes that Mark 12:29 “drives home” the fact that Jesus was absolutely orthodox in his belief in one single, undivided Yahweh.

My question points to this important concern: Are we paying attention to Jesus? God commanded close attention to his unique Son: “This is My Son: Listen to him!” (Luke 9:35). Are we listening to Jesus when defining GOD and any other truth? We must be on guard against being deceived.

Note the assumptions read *into* the text! For example, when the *NET Bible Commentary* reflects on John 17:5, it jumps to the conclusion it expects to find there, that the Son was alive before his coming into existence in Mary:

“The use of ‘with’ (*para*) twice in this verse looks back to the assertion in John 1:1 that the Word (the *logos*, who became Jesus of Nazareth in John 1:14) was with God (*pros ton theon*). Whatever else may be said, the statement in John 17:5 strongly asserts the preexistence of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that although Jesus prayed for a return to the glory he had at the Father’s side *before the world was created*, he was not praying for a ‘de-incarnation.’ His humanity which he took on at the incarnation (John 1:14) remains, though now glorified.”

But who said Jesus asked for a *return* to glory? John did not. NET assumes that he had that glory literally before he began to exist in Mary. But you can have glory in the plan and promise of God, and you find just that sort of glory *in promise* in the very context, in verses 22, 24. You as a believer also *had that same glory before you were born!* You can *have* (present tense) a reward *with* God, even now (Matt. 6:1). You already *have* an immortal body *now* in 2 Corinthians 5:1, but have not got it yet. You will get it in the future at the resurrection.

Then note this: The commentary said that Jesus did not ask for a “de-incarnation.” The commentary assumes then that when Jesus “returned” (John nowhere said “go back” or “return”) to heaven, he took with him his

humanity recently gained! This would give us a changed Godhead. The original Trinity, in which NET believes, would become a 3 ½ Godhead, with an added *human nature*, not there before!

How very much easier to believe the accounts of the *origin* of the Son in Matthew 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; 1John 5:18 (not KJV). The glory which Jesus asked to receive at his ascension was the glory promised by God, in His great plan, before the world was created. The creed of Jesus is perfectly obvious in John 17:3 and Mark 12:29: Jesus was a Jew, agreeing with Deuteronomy 6:4 (the great commandment) and a fellow Jew who also believed that God is one Person (*eis*). There cannot be *two* who are both Yahweh! Psalm 110:1, the most favorite verse in the NT from the OT, settled all that long ago, along with countless references to God as a single Person (I, Me, Myself, Thou, Thee, Thyself, He, Him, Himself, I alone, Him alone). “The Lord our God” is clearly one single Person, not more. ✧

The Seed of Immortality and the Elixir of Life

spora = seed, sowing

I give you above the key Greek word found in 1 Peter 1:23 — *spora*, seed. This is central to the saving Gospel as Jesus preached it (Heb. 2:3: “salvation was first preached by the Lord Jesus”). Before defining the seed in the teaching of Jesus, we note that Christian sermons do not show constant interest in the staggering and stupendous words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:10. Let me give you this below in several versions, for impact.

Presumably every believer in God would want to be sure he or she has obtained **the immortality seed**. This is the one and only key to living forever and ever, gaining immortality, obtaining indestructible life. Paul stated that immortality is found in the Gospel and that this immortality was brought to light in the Gospel preaching of Jesus! **No Gospel of the Kingdom, no seed!**

2 Timothy 1:10: “...through the appearance of our savior, Christ Jesus. He destroyed death and brought life and immortality into clear focus through the good news.”

“But made [salvation] public only now through the appearing of our Deliverer, the Messiah Jesus, who abolished death and, through the Good News [Gospel], revealed life and immortality” (CJB).

“This has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (CSB).

Peter, who spent hours listening to Jesus as the Savior and teacher (Isa. 53:11: Messiah’s “knowledge makes us right”), naturally also explained the secret of immortality to the public:

1 Peter 1:23: “You have been born again by means of the **living word of God**. His word lasts forever. You were not born again from a **seed** that will die. You were born from a **seed** that can’t die” (NIRV).

“For you have been born again, not of perishable **seed**, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring **word of God**” (NIV).

“For your new birth was not from any perishable seed but from **imperishable seed**, the living and enduring Word of God” (NJB).

So where is the secret of **immortality** to be found? In the Gospel-words of Jesus and the words of all the apostles. Quite simply: go back to the precious Gospel words of Jesus in Luke 8, Mark 4 and Matthew 13 — the parable of the **sower**. In Luke 8:11 we have this from Jesus: “**The seed is the word of God.**”

“The word of God is the word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19; Mk. 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 5:1).

By no means be deceived by the idea that “word of God” is a vague synonym for the Bible! It is not. The “word of God” as preached by Jesus is defined by him as “the word about the **Kingdom**” (Matt. 13:19), which is equivalent in Mark and Luke to “the word” and the “word of God.” It is this word/Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it (cp. also Acts 8:4, 5, 12, 14), which is the “seed of immortality” — the key to living forever, the means to indestructible life, which all of us desire!

Peter had heard Jesus preach this supreme saving truth everywhere, and he relayed it to us in 1 Peter 1:23-25. Here we find the same key words (*spora*, **seed**, **word**, *logos*) and **gospel**: “preached to you as Gospel” (1 Pet. 1:25). Peter understood from Jesus that being born again (“having been born again,” 1 Pet. 1:23) **depends on the intelligent reception of the seed message/Gospel of the Kingdom, which Jesus said was the whole point of his whole Christian mission (Luke 4:43).**

In churches today we do not hear the phrase **Gospel of the Kingdom!** This should be cause for alarm, The saving Gospel has not been rooted in Jesus’ own words. (Heb. 2:3 states that Jesus was the first and original preacher of the saving Gospel.) A subtle shift has taken place — away from Jesus. Tract after tract misleadingly convinces the public that the death and resurrection of Jesus was **the entire** Gospel.

But Paul said that Jesus’ death and resurrection were “among things of first importance” (1 Cor. 15:3), which is obviously true. They are not the whole Gospel. Jesus preached the saving Gospel for 12 chapters in Matthew, introducing his death and resurrection only in Matt. 16:21: “he began to say...” This is a staggeringly interesting fact, little known.

A false distinction has been imagined in the mind of many. The truth is that “the Gospel of the grace of God”

(Acts 20:24) is identical with the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 20:25). I must repeat this, if I may. The Gospel of the grace of God is precisely the same for Paul as heralding the Gospel of the Kingdom! Acts 20:24-25 puts this point beyond argument. There is absolutely no difference between the Gospel of the grace of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom! There is one saving Gospel given first to Jews and then to the whole world. We mortals all need to find and believe in that “seed” which is the vehicle of immortality, being the very seed of the immortal God (“God’s seed,” 1 John 3:9).

Isn’t it fascinating that the word *spora* (seed) in 1 Peter 1:23 is found uniquely in the OT Greek in 2 Kings 19:29: “**sowing**, planting, reaping, eating fruit”? Jesus with his Gospel of the Kingdom was the ultimate sower, planter of immortality. His seed and sowing was the sowing of the germ of immortality. Sound interesting?

We do not have immortality; we have to gain it through seeking, finding and taking in the seed of immortality. Tell your friends about this Good News discovery in the Gospel teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom (Luke 4:43; Acts 8:12). ✧

Caution for Would-be Sabbath-Keepers

In Colossians 2:16-17 the feasts, new moons and Sabbath are a typical OT expression (occurring some ten times) for **annual, monthly and weekly celebrations**. Whenever the OT mentions new moons and Sabbath together, it is always the *seventh-day Sabbath* that is understood. Since the annual “Sabbaths” (called feasts or holy days) are already included in Paul’s “feast days” it must be the **seventh-day Sabbath** that is in view as the third item in the list in Colossians 2:16. Although the word *sabbata* there is plural, it frequently (as for example in the ten commandments) has a singular meaning. **The weekly sabbath is every bit as much a shadow as the annual and monthly celebrations.** Paul speaks of one single “shadow.” The shadow is replaced by the Messiah who has come. This means that *obligatory* weekly sabbath-keeping (which may cause you to lose your job!) reintroduces the shadow of the Old Covenant and interferes with the work of the now risen Christ, who has *replaced* the temporary shadow. The weekly sabbath was the heart, core and sign of the **Old Covenant** with Israel (Ex. 31:16; Deut. 5:2-3), and does not belong in the New Covenant. We must not be drawn back away from Christ into a destructive mixture of two covenants. (For further information, see our *Law, Sabbath and New Covenant Christianity* at restorationfellowship.org)

Surprised by Water! (The Pilgrim Perplexed)

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

Maybe a brief story would help illustrate the dilemma faced by many serious students of Scripture. I'll call this "The Pilgrim Perplexed." "Christian" arrived at a fork in the road where two equally beautiful paths diverged. It was not so easy to see which path was more compelling for being "less travelled." He desired to go quickly and happy-go-lucky along his merry way. Then Faithful, Hopeful, and Charitable met up with him to offer excellent advice.

All three had been avid Bible believers since youth. None of the three would speak badly of the other two in order to motivate "Christian," and none of the three had proud or deceitful desires to control or coerce Christian's choice. All three could quote Scriptures masterfully and weave some apparently very reasonable threads of thought regarding Christian's options. Nevertheless, Faithful recommended path A, Hopeful recommended path B, and Charitable recommended plodding through the wild underbrush between the paths. All three were humble enough to admit to being humans, capable of making mistakes. All three shared many areas of solid agreement about Biblical themes; notwithstanding, all three expressed thoughts that Christian had not yet ferreted out in his own investigations. He decided to camp out at the area near the fork for a while to study things *diligently* for himself. He had no doubt about the sincere, good intentions of each potential advisor.

One of the things "Christian" might have needed to think through is how each of his companions learned what they learned. **Who were their teachers?** From which traditional or non-traditional schools of thought did certain perspectives develop? All three pointed to Scripture itself as the only reliable source for determining the truth. None claimed to have some sort of special license to interpret Scriptures according to his own authority.

All this made his task more fascinating and essential. One thing he would need to consider is which explanations allowed for *clear understanding* of the *majority* of Biblical texts with a minimum of apparent contradictions. Are the majority of texts really allowed to speak for themselves? Or are conclusions drawn from a very few verses and then **imposed** on the other passages about the same subject? Of course, this might be easiest to see regarding subjects in which "Christian" had already experienced a changed point of view. "Christian" retraced some of his previous learning back down memory lane.

Christian (as I) had been a Trinitarian once for a relatively short while, less than a year. He had engaged in

systematic attempts to pray to each of the three "Persons" of the Deity in an effort to give each equal attention. When feeling confused, he naively thought to himself, "Well, I haven't even read the whole Bible yet. I'm sure the three-in-one concept will be clear once I read it in the Scriptures." Well, about a year later he had "unlearned" such an unbiblical paradigm; he could honestly say he had "tried tritheism" and found it lacking in "substance" and truth.

One day he talked to another Christian named Sincerity, a young lady who insisted that the statement "I and my Father are one" was a clear identity-marker, not to be questioned. When Christian gently showed her John 17:11, 21 (about disciples and future believers being **one in the same way** that Jesus and the Father were one), she didn't "get it." She was not mean or insulting at all, but from that day forward she carefully avoided crossing paths with Christian. As it turns out her "defenses" were not doing her any good!

As years turned into decades, Christian never regretted his path regarding the Biblical distinction between God and Jesus. He was **never** again confused about trying to distribute worship, prayers, attention, etc., in a mystical maze of shadily divided co-equal, co-eternal conundrums. Furthermore, he learned a lot more depth from the Scriptures; he viewed without "highly filtered sunglasses" thousands of Scriptures and hundreds of clear statements about Yahweh, the God and Father of Jesus, being one divine Person, and Jesus himself being His wonderful Son, the human mediator described consistently in the Bible (1 Tim. 2:5).

He was not tempted to allow a mysterious theological spin given to a few verses (seen through really "dark shades") to topple the clarity of thousands of passages in their contexts. He also was able to study about the roots of ancient philosophical schools that produced Sincerity's teachers, as founded or developed in the years 325 and 381 AD. Thus he knew more about the need to avoid the paths of Greek-filtered idolatry masquerading as Christianity. He was able to do this without losing real compassion and respect for Sincerity and all her millions of friends; he would never write off sincerely mistaken folk as being *intentional* pagan idolaters.

One thing Christian had learned in all this is that he could still be in the dark about other subjects; he might even *need* to grow and perceive something true and Biblical that Sincerity herself had already learned! Indeed, he should stay extremely humble and teachable!

Here is a quick rundown of just a couple of areas of important re-evaluating, unlearning, and new learning for Christian. He realized that his previous idea about salvation came in part from dismissing the teachings of the gospels as "not addressed to him," but only directly pertinent to Israelites before the day of Pentecost. He

perceived later that the combining of ideas from Romans 10:9 with a mention from 1 Peter (about incorruptible seed) had become a dark filter in his mind to **impose** a quick and easy salvation formula on all Scriptures. This led to a real, chronic spiritual blindness as Christian and many of his friends had meandered widely from the way. Their carelessness had steered many into a murky, mind-numbing bog and fog. The detour had been costly, and it seemed that only a few were able to awake to the importance of **obedient responsibility** to persevere in Jesus' teachings along a straight, narrow way. This fact, it turned out, was the brilliant key to the Bible.

Along with that erroneous view of salvation, he had become aware of having had very distorted ideas about the Christian hope. By previously dismissing the gospels and other Scriptures (as if they were not directly relevant to his life), his hope had become based on a couple of verses that were interpreted in dubious ways. The word apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 was given a twist so as to mean the "departure" of Christians from the earth in a "fly-by" scenario. Being "saved from coming wrath" (Rom. 5:9) was equated with being "out of here" **before, pre-** "the great tribulation." A pre-tribulation rapture was then **imposed** on all Scriptures and thoughts about the future hope. As with the salvation issue, *hundreds* of clear verses had been twisted by conclusions drawn from the misinterpreting of a few verses. Instead of the clearly delineated hope of God's Kingdom arriving on earth and the coming reality of the New Jerusalem ("whose architect and builder is God"), he had set his sights on vague, nebulous thoughts about "the celestial city" floating in space, a separate hope from Israel's hope. The teaching of Jesus about his one future coming had been submerged, almost beyond recovery.

Upon relearning the hope in a Biblical way, he also got some historical background on the "dispensationalist" movement (since about 1820). He saw how other similar Protestant movements sincerely but wrongly had pitted certain Scriptures against others, to try to explain apparent difficulties with easy formulae. He realized how deeply such errors had dominated his life.

Over the years, Christian had been slowly but carefully corrected from wrong thinking about many subjects without thinking harshly of sincerely misguided Bible teachers. He forgave anyone for making mistakes, hoped to help them do better, while staying thankful for any good things he had learned from anyone! None of his fellow believers, as far as he knew in his experience, had been intentionally misleading, any more than Faithful, Hopeful, and Charitable were out to misdirect him now. He was not, however, going to remain naive about Biblical warnings concerning **false prophets** and teachers who did things out of greed and pride. So while walking the balance of trying to "discern them by their fruit" and

simultaneously **not** harboring judgmental thoughts about sincere but weak people (like himself), he stayed as focused as possible on trying to allow the abundance of **clear Scriptures** to speak for themselves. He knew that misguided loyalty or desire to please others should not be the factors in his decisions.

A common pattern emerged from his musings. It was not a pattern focused on the intelligence or expertise of people. As far as he could remember, every false paradigm he had previously embraced had involved fixating on a few verses while inferring a definite doctrinal structure, and then, unwittingly, **imposing** that narrow paradigm onto a whole body of Scriptures. Very often, the logic might seem to stand up through multiple analyses of quite a few passages, but eventually, such structures would need to rely on some "creative" explanations. He perceived that the natural tendencies of sincere Bible teachers to use proof-texting arguments and pound on them repeatedly, paradoxically, were apt to *augment* spiritual darkness while purporting to shed light! The essence of deception!

Once again, Christian entertained no evil thoughts about anyone. He knew that he himself had often erred and affected others with wrong thinking, as well being responsible for the damage caused by being a shoddy example. If anything, he was more amazed than ever at Yahweh's overwhelming mercy to forgive him, correct him, and get him steered back again to lucid thinking and responsible behavior!

Now this story could end with one path leading to A or another to B, etc., with beautiful water imagery combined with holy spirit imagery to boot! But it will end with memories and reflections in a tent near the fork in the road.

When Christian had decided many years ago that spirit baptism had replaced water baptism, it was due to an explanation by Dedicated, who made a **conclusive and very false** doctrinal case on the basis of expounding one verse: Acts 1:5. "Out with water, in with spirit" was the clearly inferred mantra from this **one verse**. Later, Peter's memory of Acts 1:5 was related in a highly "creative" exposition of Acts 11:16, and the latter falsely used to *alter* the very clear meaning of the wording in Acts 10:47-48. Contrasting John's baptism with Messiah's in Acts 18:24-19:6 was added, with some already strongly established and assumed inferences. Simply put, a **complete doctrine** was established by inferring an idea from *one verse*. That idea was reiterated with some further "creative" explaining of a couple of other passages. It was then assumed to be true, and thus imposed onto practically every other Scriptural reference to baptism! This is a fair assessment of the teaching scenario in which Christian initially accepted these ideas.

Those ideas were further refined, developed, **defended** and explained in the writings of Dedicated, Convinced, and Eloquent (a couple of Dedicated's old students). Christian did not doubt the sincere convictions of any of these men, but he did have doubts about how this doctrine was developed and propounded. His doubts did not mean that Dedicated, Convinced, and Eloquent were intentionally wrong, but it *did* mean that their method of inferring doctrinal thinking fit the model of his remembered observations about other questionable doctrines. An inferred one-verse conclusion was undoubtedly **imposed on** a broad subject!

So Christian had to doubt himself also. In four decades, had **he really read the passages about baptism without preconceived, predetermined ideas?** Had he *really* been allowing the Scriptures to speak for themselves on this subject?

Among other things, three glimpses of times in the apostle Peter's life came to mind. (1) After clearly hearing Jesus state the truth of Matthew 28:19-20 and the truth of Acts 1:5, and then receiving holy spirit in Acts 2:3-4, Peter spoke perfectly about this holy spirit outpouring in Acts 2:33 as being from the ascended, seated Jesus. He then commanded as a correct response: (a) repent, (b) **be baptized** on the basis of (*epi*) the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness for your sins — two actions believing listeners were to **do**. As a result they would (c) "receive the gift of holy spirit" (2:38). The result, which is the receiving of holy spirit, is not collapsed into the command to "be baptized." Three separate realities are stated, two commands and one result. Those who believed were obedient to be baptized that very day (v. 41). It does not appear at all that Peter thought that the command (from Matt. 28) about actively baptizing people in the Messiah was in any way contradictory to Messiah's role to pour out holy spirit (Acts 1:5).

(2) Several years later, in the house of Cornelius, the gift of holy spirit was poured out on the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46). **Peter then called for them to be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ** (v. 47-48). Peter's memory in 11:16 of Jesus' prophecy in 1:5 is not contradictory to his actions with water in 10:47-48! We should never accuse Luke of any such obfuscation! Peter was determined he was not going to disturb the work of God which was evidenced by holy spirit being poured out. Since Messiah had already done his job while Peter was speaking, Peter faithfully continued doing **his job as commanded** in Matthew 28:19-20. No convoluted expositions are needed! Peter then obediently commanded water baptism.

(3) Some thirty years after the outpouring of holy spirit, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:20b, 21: "...were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism

now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but the appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." In 1 Peter 4:14 it is perfectly obvious that Peter sees Christians (like "Christian" in this story) as having holy spirit.

In none of these records is there a scintilla of Biblical evidence that Peter (who was present to hear Jesus speak Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:5) thought that Messiah's filling of believers with holy spirit was somehow contradictory to water baptism in the Messiah! On the contrary, they are correlated throughout Peter's life and ministry, as totally congruent realities, matters of essential obedience (Heb. 5:9).

Paul, who baptized a few (others were baptized by his agents) in Corinth, later compared baptism to being buried with Christ, thus fitting the picture of being submerged in water before being raised up (Col. 2:12). This was written, like 1 Peter, about 30 years after the initial outpouring of holy spirit.

Christian stood up outside his tent with a contented sigh. He thanked the Heavenly Father that he could now freely allow many Bible passages to speak for themselves instead of feeling obligated to follow a doctrine drawn from inferences **concerning one verse**. He no longer felt perplexed. As he climbed back into his tent, he remembered being surprised by joy many years ago when Yahweh scraped him off the sidewalk, so to speak, and breathed the reality of Christ into his life. Many years later, the fog lifted from the unclear, vague valley of a nebulous future hope, and Christian was surprised by hope! Now, of all things, he found himself to be surprised by water! And he duly got baptized in obedience to Jesus (Heb. 5:9). ✧

Comments

"Unfortunately, we have wasted over 35 years of our life in the Jehovah's Witnesses' organisation! We devoted ourselves to what we were brainwashed to believe was God's true and only organisation on earth — spending countless hours, days and years going from door to door and attending meetings and big assemblies. We were, as are the majority of the ordinary brothers and sisters, totally oblivious of the corrupt practises being employed by some in the higher echelons of the organisation, and we certainly had no idea that a great deal of what we were being taught was in fact false. We were disfellowshipped towards the end of last year. After delving deeply into the teachings of other organised religions, I couldn't find any that taught the truth of what the Bible said. It was a while after we were disfellowshipped when I discovered Restoration Fellowship on the internet, and I know that I'm now learning true teachings from the Bible. I'd love to get in contact with Christians here who share these beliefs." — *Australia*