

Focus on the Kingdom

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Are You Washed in the Blood of the Lamb?

by Shelly Hostetler, New York

The title of this article is the name of an old hymn most of you are familiar with. It's a jewel among many other hymns like "There Is Power in the Blood" and "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood." The trend I am aware of in some of today's congregations is exhibited in "worship teams" whose goal is to "lead" churchgoers in worship via repetitive chorus-songs. Though the topics of repentance and the infilling of YHWH's Holy Spirit can still be found in the lyrics of these choruses, something very sad stands out to me: the subject of baptism in water is notably non-existent in them. Why is this?

The unvarnished truth is that believers in times past possessed a much more biblical understanding of the importance and, I contend, the *absolute necessity* of water baptism than do the overwhelming majority of professing believers today! Baptism is a topic that is of utmost importance to anyone hoping, as I do, to rise to meet Y'shua¹ at his triumphant return. Because the Messiah and the Apostles gave baptism as a command, it is a *nonnegotiable necessity* for anyone preparing for that great event!

Tragically, there are multitudes of people who read their Bibles, attend church, profess to follow Messiah, etc. who are oblivious to the fact that they're suffering from a serious lack of sound biblical teaching on the greatly important topic of baptism! I am grateful to my friend, Anthony Buzzard, for his invitation to share the things Father-YHWH has been speaking to me, as the matter of baptism has been weighing heavily upon my heart for many months.

As I was sharing with friends the need we all have to be immersed in the name of Y'shua for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38), the "man of the house" (who had been eavesdropping nearby) countered my claim with the adamant declaration that "if a person truly understands the New Covenant Scriptures on baptism, they'll know that the only baptism we need today is

¹ With the exception of some hymn lyrics in the final paragraph I will, throughout this article, exercise my preference to use Y'shua as the name of the Messiah, for it was this Hebrew name which was conferred upon him by his Father, YHWH, through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-31; Matt. 1:21). [Editor: The Greek NT refers to Jesus by the Greek equivalent *Iesous*, pronounced Yeesous.]

baptism in the Word!" My host then began to remind me: "The thief on the cross next to Y'shua wasn't baptized; and *he* was saved!"

Amongst the many New Covenant scriptures which cement the requirements for salvation, I find the simplest "formula" for beginning the walk that can lead to salvation in Acts 2:38. It is in this passage where we read how the remaining eleven Apostles stood in agreement with Peter when he made the proclamation: "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Y'shua Messiah for the remission [forgiveness] of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Despite the very simple clarity of this statement, its literal baptism command has been dismissed by many — "explained away" by many who believe they've found a more "spiritual" understanding for this verse. This is very dangerous since any explanation a person gives as a means to circumvent a clear command is outright disobedience, not "enlightenment" (Mark 7:13).

I return our attention now to the thief, mentioned earlier, who made two highly important statements. Responding to the insolent, self-interested comment directed at Y'shua by the unrepentant thief, the other thief said, "Do you not fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds: but this man has done nothing wrong!" (Luke 23:41). In the next verse, he followed his rebuke with this statement to Y'shua: "Master, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." In these two passages, we find evidence of the contrite thief's repentant heart and his faith in Y'shua as the promised Messiah. These statements, together, were sufficient for Y'shua to assure the thief that there will, indeed, be a place for him in YHWH's Kingdom when Y'shua returns to establish it in its fullness and authority over all the earth (Luke 23:43).

About ten years ago, I differed with a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor who (like my friend) insisted that baptism (though given as a command by Y'shua and the Apostles), is "only a preferential ritual for every believer" as "an outward expression to the world of one's inner faith and salvation." In concluding his comments to me, the SDA pastor asserted that baptism "is a greatly misunderstood topic if it is taken to be an outright *requirement* for salvation." To justify his claim he cited (you guessed it!) "the thief on the cross." I could not relent from my claim that baptism is an indispensable element of salvation, so the gentleman asked that I

present the information supporting my position at the next week's Bible study. I accepted the invitation.

As I spent preparation time in the Scriptures, I became absorbed, again, with a question of mine that had, for many years, remained unanswered in regard to baptism: "How is it that one's sins are forgiven when they get baptized in Y'shua's name? After all, what they're going down into is only water!" Invariably this query brought the same response: The forgiveness and cleansing of sins one receives when one is baptized come in response to one's obedience to the command to be baptized. Peter gave us the answer. "Eight persons were rescued through water. That water is a symbol of water baptism, which now saves you, not the removal of filth from the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Messiah, who is now at the right hand of God" (1 Pet. 3:20-25).

Time and again YHWH instructed that the blood of sacrifices had to be applied to the base and horns of the altar, to the right ears, right thumbs and right big toes of priests and others in the Old Covenant Scriptures, to the doorposts and lintels of His people's homes on the night of the Passover, etc. In any of these instances, if YHWH's instructions for the blood to be applied had not been carried out, the consequences would surely have been tragic! This being true, why *wouldn't* the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of sins also have to be *applied to us*? In an earnest prayer, I asked YHWH to show me how it is that the water of baptism brings about the cleansing from sin that we all need so much. Should YHWH choose to shed light upon this matter for me it would not only render the position that baptism is "only a ritual" indefensible, it would — far more importantly — reveal a great cleansing power made available through Y'shua's blood. I realized the answer upon discovery of another question posed to me from within: "When they pierced My Son, what was it that flowed from His side?"

Blood and water! In the silence when the blood and water flowed from Y'shua's side it was the single moment YHWH had been waiting for since the beginning of His great eternal plan! Therefore, not to understand the significance of the blood and water and what they each accomplish for us is to fail to comprehend a most critical aspect of YHWH's salvation plan, and makes His Son's life, teaching, death and suffering all in vain!

When a repentant person complies with the command to be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38 et al), Y'shua's blood brings *forgiveness* of sins while the water of baptism *cleanses* from sin all in a single act of obedience! Blood also ratifies the New Covenant (Heb. 9:22; 10:29; Mark 14:24). Through Messiah, the dim light (the Old Covenant) came to its end, superseded by the New Covenant ratified through the covenant blood of him who is the True Light (John 1:9). In Y'shua we truly find "the

more excellent way" alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:31. (Paul also contrasts the letter of the old with the spirit of the new in Romans 2:29; 7:6.)

Scriptures I knew well began to come alive with new meaning in my freshly-opened understanding: "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (YHWH, Exod. 12:13); "if I do not wash you, you have no part with me" (John 13:8), and I understand something written by the Apostle Paul much better now than I ever would have imagined before. When I went down into the waters of baptism, when his precious blood was applied to me, it was this event and means by which my life became "hidden with Messiah, in God" (Col. 3:3). You see, from the time when a repentant person is immersed in Y'shua's name, whenever YHWH looks upon that one, He sees the blood of His Son covering them, since immersion would be similar to how a person would look after being immersed in a vat of red paint. When YHWH sees Y'shua's blood covering a person, He is reminded that the price of sin has been paid. Thus, He is able (as He says in Exod. 12:13) to "pass over" us, averting death; the inevitable consequence of sin. So it is that one's life becomes "hidden with Messiah in God." It's so comforting to know this.

The lyrics of another old hymn come to my mind. Its title asks the question: "What can wash away my sins?" What follows is a flow of praise: "Nothing but the blood of Jesus! Oh, precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow!" I will never, ever be able to sing any of the old "baptism" hymns, discarded and outdated to so many, in the same way! They are precious reminders of the blood that still covers me, cleanses me and keeps my life hidden with Messiah in the eyes of my God. YHWH's answer to the earnest question of my heart gave me "new eyes" to the all-important role that Y'shua's blood *and* water baptism play in His great salvation plan. Years of faulty teaching on this topic have created a mass of people who are dangerously ignorant (I mean this in the kindest sense), of their need to be baptized "in the name of Y'shua for the forgiveness of sin" (Acts 2:38; 4:12; 10:48, 19:5; Luke 24:47). ✧

Resurrection Check: Are You Clear about the Christian Goal?

Resurrection in the Bible refers to the coming back to life of a person who has died. I am referring to the *literal* resurrection here. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (Luke 1:35) and Messiah was put to death by hostile unbelieving Jews and Romans. God, the Creator, restored him to life three days later, early on a Sunday morning. Proof of this is from witnesses "who ate and drank with him after he came back from death" (Acts 10:41).

A believer's great objective is to be resurrected from death when Jesus returns to the earth. 1 Corinthians 15:23, part of Paul's impassioned sermon against some "believers" who astonishingly were losing faith in resurrection, says: "Christ the firstfruits [was resurrected], then those who belong to Christ will be resurrected at his Second Coming" (Parousia). This will be the "resurrection of **the just**" (Luke 16:16). It was predicted as the awakening from the sleep of death of those now sleeping in the dust of the earth (Dan. 12:2). The resurrection of the faithful of all the ages will happen at the 7th or last trumpet (1 Cor. 15:52). "The time will come for the rewarding of the dead" (Rev 11:15-18). This is the same marvelous event as the coming to life of "those who had been beheaded...They came to life and began to reign as kings with the Messiah for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). That will be the time when the Devil who is currently deceiving the whole world (Rev. 12:9; 1 John 5:19) will be imprisoned "so that he can deceive the world no longer" (Rev. 20:3). Never ever lose sight of the Christian objective! Never ever substitute for it a vague non-biblical transportation to heaven at death! Why do you want to "go to heaven" when Jesus, who is coming back to the earth, won't be there?! This would be as nonsensical as thinking that in a soccer match the objective is to kick the ball as high as you can in the air, rather than into the goal in front of you. ✧

The Biblical Blueprint

"That the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:14).

"May God give you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham" (Gen. 28:4).

Those who make confident assertions about "what the Bible says" frequently overlook the presuppositions which they bring to the biblical text. James Dunn makes the excellent point that to read the Bible intelligently we must reckon seriously with "the taken-for-granted" of both author and addressees. Where a modern reader is unaware of (or unsympathetic to) these shared assumptions and concerns, it will be impossible to hear the text as the author intended it to be heard (and assumed it would be heard). In this case (Romans, though the principle applies to any part of the New Testament), **"a major part of that context is the self-understanding of Jews and Judaism in the first century...Since most of Christian history and scholarship, regrettably, has been unsympathetic, if not downright hostile to it, a proper appreciation of Paul [or Jesus] in his interaction with that self-understanding has been virtually impossible."**² We

should not miss the amazing point that "most of Christian history and scholarship has been downright hostile" to the Jewishness of the Bible! A new approach would seem to be in order. This magazine attempts to offer you just that.

This failure to attune ourselves to the background themes of the New Testament will account for the consummate confusion that prevails about what Christianity is. Unfortunately many who approach the Bible bring to it an inbred antipathy to the Jewishness which saturates the Christian documents. Light will come when we first recognize that Gentiles have "made a hash" of trying to understand Jesus and the Apostles because of the un-Hebraic set of assumptions we start with. The Bible condemns these as "traditions learned by heart," yet unbiblical!

Let us instead begin with a major presupposition drawn from the Old Testament: God has been working with His people to bring about a world in which justice and peace will abound (Isa. 2:1-4). To Abraham the land (and the world, Rom. 4:13) is promised forever (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:7-8; 17:8) — though **he has not yet inherited it** (Acts 7:5; Heb. 11:8, 9, 13, 39). To David (2 Sam. 7:13-16) the promise of a permanent dynasty, with the Messiah ruling over Israel and the world, was assured (though this has never yet been realized). The angel declares that Mary's son is destined to assume "the throne of his father David and rule over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32). No promise could be more to the point than this simple summary of the national hopes of Israel, based squarely on the heritage they had received from the Hebrew Scriptures, uniting the promises to Abraham and David (Luke 1:55, 69, 73). The great promises of **land and kingship** (Gen. 12:1-5; 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:8; 2 Sam. 7:12-16) converge in Jesus as Messiah, King of Israel (John 1:41, 49; Luke 2:11: "Messiah lord"). The fulfillment of both strands of the promise will occur when Jesus returns to establish his Kingdom on the earth and take the meek to rule with him (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10; 3:21; 2:26; 20:1-6, etc).

Daniel 7

In addition to these bedrock foundations of Christianity, Daniel, as a whole, and particularly his seventh chapter, supplies us with an invaluable blueprint for the New Testament story. The picture is not difficult to grasp. Hostile powers culminating in a final Antichrist will continue to persecute and wear out the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:8, 19-21). Yet those saints will be vindicated. The time will come when the saints receive the worldwide Kingdom of God and all nations and peoples will serve and obey the saints (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27). It is against this backdrop of the divine plan in history that the New Testament drama is worked out. If we do not take

emphasis added.

²Commentary on Romans 9-16, Word Books, 1988, p. xv,

account of the Messianic presuppositions of the New Testament writers, based on the covenant made with Abraham and David, we run the risk of inventing a false story, to which we add the name of Christ, but which Jesus would not have recognized as the faith.

Jesus fits into the picture quite obviously when he appears as the Son of Man, the predicted Messianic figure of Daniel 7:13, who is an individual human being representing a corporate body of saints, those destined to possess rulership of the world (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27). Rooted in the promise of Daniel 7, the entire New Testament is geared to the future triumph of the saints in a renovated earth (“the Kingdom **under** the whole heaven,” Dan. 7:27). Jesus sums up the promise of a glorious future when he announces the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; Matt. 4:17; 9:35; see also Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

The New Testament describes the career of the “chief saint” (“holy one”), the Messiah, who gathers around himself a circle of disciple-friends. Together they announce the coming Kingdom in the face of acute opposition mostly from established religion. But other rulers are no more friendly. Existing systems of government do not wish to yield to the government of the Messiah and his followers. The theme of suffering in view of future glory pervades and permeates the New Testament: “**Through much tribulation we are destined to enter the Kingdom of God**” (Acts 14:22). “If we suffer with him we will also become kings with him” (2 Tim. 2:12). The saints, according to the plan laid out in Daniel 7, must expect persecution, even to death (“some are martyred,” Luke 21:16). “The horn [antichrist] wages war with the saints and overpowers them” (Dan. 7:21). The book of Revelation is the fitting summary of the Messianic story, culminating in the establishment of Messiah’s Kingdom on the earth (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10, 20:4, etc.).

Suffering prior to triumph at Christ’s return is reflected in the experience of Jesus and the leaders of the early Church. They are prepared to bear ignominy and shame at the hands of hostile authorities in view of the glorious prospect of being vindicated **when the Messiah returns to rule**: “Don’t you know that the saints are going to manage the world?” is the encouraging cry of Paul as he urges the troops forward. “And if the world is to come under your jurisdiction...” (1 Cor. 6:2, Moffat). “But the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9). This is the awful penalty which awaits the disciple who fails the test. “The inhabited earth of the future has been subjected to the saints” is the clear message of Heb. 2:5. That is what the Gospel is about (Heb. 2:2-4). On no account should the saints miss out on their destiny (Heb. 2:1). They are now to conduct themselves in a manner fitting their invitation to kingship,

or as Paul puts it, “walk worthy of the God who is calling you into His own Kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12).

Throughout the gospels there are glimpses of the sparkling, brilliant future assured to the disciples. “When the world is reborn,” says Jesus, “when the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you who have followed me in my trials will also sit on thrones to rule over the [restored] tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). “Just as my Father has covenanted a Kingdom for me, so I covenant a Kingdom to you so that you may eat and drink at my table and sit on thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30). James and John, sons of Zebedee and cousins of Jesus, recognize the nature of the Kingdom as a real government, when they hope for chief places in the Kingdom (Mark 10:35-40; Matt. 20:20-23). Jesus does not discourage their faith in the Kingdom nor rebuke them for misunderstanding the future reign and the reality of responsibility in it! He only warns them (again with Dan. 7 in mind) that these offices will be won at the cost of service and a bitter cup of suffering.

In Revelation the drama reaches its climax. The power of Antichrist-Beast is at full strength. Yet the lamb has purchased the saints from all the nations (not just the Jews) and has formed them into a band of royal priests (following the covenant promise made originally in Ex. 19:6). “They will reign as kings on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). The same exhilarating theme reappears in Revelation 20:1-6. Even death at the hands of Antichrist cannot hinder the blessed rule of the saints. They come alive again in resurrection after being beheaded and “begin to rule with Christ for a thousand years,” while the rest of the dead, all those who were not Christians, remain in their graves (Rev. 20:5) to await the second resurrection (Rev. 20:12).

The theme of royalty and of meteoric rise to fame and immortality at the first resurrection drives the New Testament and accounts for its irrepressible excitement. Such fervor has been dampened by the most unfortunate substitution of disembodiment in heaven at death as the Christian prospect (playing harps on clouds!). If that is what Christians may expect, there is no hope for the earth, no prospect of the nations ever beating their swords into farm implements (Isa. 2:1-4) and no hope of reigning with Christ in the new society of the coming Kingdom.

It is not surprising that Jesus concentrates his **entire Gospel Message in the theme of the Kingdom of God**. It was his mission to announce the Kingdom (Luke 4:43). Paul likewise sums up his whole ministry as a “**proclamation of the Kingdom**” (Acts 20:25). The Message has not changed. But Gentile philosophies and ideologies have continued to obscure the Davidic-Messianic faith of Jesus and the early Church. Nevertheless the call of the Gospel of the Kingdom still goes out, summoning whoever wills to prepare for the

privilege of ruling with Jesus in the Kingdom. “The sufferings of the present time [foreseen in the program laid out in Dan. 7] are not worthy to be compared” with the glory of the Kingdom to be “revealed in us.” A saint in the Bible is one appointed to rule with Messiah — an awesome destiny laid out in Daniel 7 as the culmination of all the Old Testament promises.

Try re-reading the New Testament with this royal motif and narrative in mind and see how it comes to life. God is one single individual (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29-34; John 17:3). Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16; Luke 1:35). The Gospel is about the Kingdom of God and Jesus (Acts 8:12; Luke 4:43; Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31). Christians are invited to reign with Messiah in the coming Kingdom. They are destined to inherit the land and the world (Matt. 5:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 4:13). Converts were baptized in water when they received this knowledge of these basic building blocks of the Faith (Acts 8:12). This information will help to prevent us bringing our own imagined but false preconceptions to the study of Scripture. ✧

I believe the most important fact in the universe is that we all know for certain how Jesus understood the Shema, and he did not “interpret” it as Trinitarians do. Jesus was required to obey the Shema command. We know how he understood this commandment by how he obeyed it — by serving only one Person as his God. He shows us that the Great Commandment is about one single Person, his God and Father. The King of the Jews showed his subjects how to obey this command. This is highly significant, since it shows us how every Israelite was expected to obey this commandment. We who claim to be Christians claim also to be obeying Jesus.

The Shema commands, “Hear, **O Israel**, the Lord **our** God is one.” Jesus obeyed this command as earnestly as his fellow Jews. For Jews, including Jesus, this commandment was about “**our** God,” and Jesus demonstrated beyond any doubt that the one God of Israel is just one single Person, his one Father. We know this because for him “**our** God” was the Father alone, the only Person he recognized and served as God, in order to obey this first commandment. This fact is all we need to know to demonstrate that there is no such thing as a three-Person God. It amazes me that people can ignore the simple fact that a Trinitarian God is excluded by Jesus’ definition of God as one Father, one Lord God. Christians claim to be following Jesus. Are you doing this, by following the God of Jesus in Mark 12:29; John 17:3? Why not make the Great Commandment great again?!

An Easy, Uncomplicated Lesson in the Word “Only”

Children will find this easy too! The word “only” excludes all others and in John 17:3 “**only**” defines the Father as “the **only** Person who is true God.” This is the monotheism of Jesus and the Bible (Mark 12:29; Deut. 6:4).

Luke 24:18: “**One** of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, ‘Are you **the only one** visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?’”

Romans 16:27: “to the **only** wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.”

Galatians 3:2: “This is **the only thing** I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”

Colossians 4:11: “These are **the only** fellow workers for the Kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.”

1 Timothy 1:17: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, **the only God**, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Jude 1:25 “To **the only God our Savior**, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

John 17:3: “This is eternal life, that they may know You [Father], **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Word Tricks to Be Aware Of

For those who know no Hebrew (no blame!), it is easy to be taken in by dangerously false information about simple language. Some say that the word for God in Hebrew is plural (*Elohim*), and thus could imply a Trinity. The statement misleads. *Elohim* indeed has a plural ending (-*im*), but when used of the one God its meaning is singular. The verbs which follow are singular: “God [He] created” (Gen. 1:1). The word “news” has a plural ending in English, but as we all know the sense is singular. Do you say “the news *is* good” or “the news *are* good”?

The word *Elohim* (Hebrew for God/god) is used of a singular pagan god like Chemosh or Dagon. It is used of Moses as representing God. Do you think that Moses was plural? *Elohim* can also mean “gods.”

This very easy language fact is reported by all standard lexicons and grammars of Hebrew. *Elohim* meaning the one God “has entirely rejected the idea of numerical plurality.”³

Sometimes, uninformed “authorities” will point to plural forms of words to prove that God is somehow

³ Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, p. 399.

plural. But these “authorities” do not tell you that Joseph is also plural in the Bible! Joseph is called “the **lords** of the land” (Gen. 42:30, 33). What about “a cruel [singular] **lords** [plural]” in Isaiah 19:4? One individual is being described and the adjective, “cruel,” is singular in number, but the noun is plural! These are **very rare** grammatical anomalies, but the public is often defenseless against them.

The easy fact is that YHVH, the one God of the Bible, is always singular, never ever plural, some 7,000 times. Singular personal pronouns for the God of the Bible, the God and Father of Jesus, occur thousands and thousands of times, as I, Me, Myself, Thee, Thou, Thyself, He, Him, Himself. Jesus taught us that the **greatest of all commands** is to believe in the one single God of Israel, his Father. There are some 11,000 occurrences of the various words for God in the Bible (YHVH, God, Father, *Adonai*, *Theos*). **None of these words ever means a Triune God.** Listen to the warning words of distinguished scholars, among many who could be cited:

Dean Matthews, DD, D. Litt.: “It must be admitted by everyone who has the rudiments of an historical sense that the doctrine of the Trinity **formed no part of the original message.** St. Paul did not know it, and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed.”⁴

“The evolution of the Trinity: No responsible New Testament scholar would claim **that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus,** or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writer in the NT. It was in fact slowly worked out in the course of the first few centuries in an attempt to give an intelligible doctrine of God.”⁵

“It might tend to moderation and in the end agreement, if we were industrious on all occasions to represent our own doctrine (the Trinity) as wholly *unintelligible.*”⁶

“The Trinity 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, than of saying that **one thing is two things.**”⁷

The One: In Defense of God
by Pastor Dan Gill
Available at Amazon.com

⁴ *God in Christian Experience*, p. 180.

⁵ Dr. A. T Hanson, Professor of Theology University of Hull, *The Image of the Invisible God*, SCM Press, 1982.

⁶ Dr. Hey, lecturing at Cambridge.

⁷ Sadler’s *Gloria Patri*, p. 39, citing A. H. Newman.

Eternal Hellfire

John Gerstner (1914-1996) taught Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He watched as major thought leaders within Evangelical Christianity turned away from the doctrine of **Eternal Torment.** In his defense of traditionalism, Gerstner wrote *Repent or Perish* against Edward Fudge’s landmark book, *The Fire That Consumes.*

From *Repent or Perish*: “Even now while the evangelical is singing the praises of his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he knows that multitudes are suffering the torments of the damned...The true Christian, aware of this, is happily, exuberantly, gladly praising the Judge of the Last Day, Jesus Christ, who has sentenced to such merited damnation millions of souls” (p. 32).

Edward Fudge’s *The Fire That Consumes* deals well with the issue of punishment. The Bible does indeed say that the wrath of God broods over those who refuse to listen to and obey the Son of God, Jesus. John 3:36 is a fine summary of Scripture. However, the incorrigibly wicked will be destroyed, annihilated in the Lake of Fire (Ps. 37:20). The idea of a continuous conscious torture of the wicked is not part of Scripture, but belongs to Calvinism and other “traditional” systems.

The God of Jesus
in Light of Christian Dogma
by Kegan Chandler
Available at Amazon.com

Comments

• “I was born and raised as Roman Catholic with some church tradition and without any idea about the purpose of life and who is God. Never I called God my Father (till 25 years old), because I did not know Him, like my own father. At the age of 25 (1987) I became a very motivated Jehovah’s Witness and was fascinated about the 1000 year reign to come (Psalm 37:11, 29; Rev. 20:1-6). In a short time I changed completely my life, was very passionate and preached in many countries. Because of all kind of doubts about the JW religion from 2010-2015 it was very hard to stay in this religion, when many teachings and the level of preaching was worldwide extremely low level. No free opinion, no freedom to ask questions and living in fear but not in Faith!” — *Netherlands*

• “I’m a former Jehovah’s Witness and I really excelled in the religion. It was all I knew. I left the religion a year ago after realizing many things that are taught simply are not true. After leaving I realized many people who call themselves Christians believe in the Trinity, and I really tried for about six months to study that doctrine to see if it lines up with Scripture. It failed

miserably. I stumbled across some of your Youtube videos a few weeks ago, and I really enjoy the simplicity of them. Even better I am seeing that it lines up with Scripture! I pray every day not to be deceived again and to understand clearly what Yeshua and the Apostles of old taught. Thank you for your dedication! It's very helpful because I'm still on a learning curve. I try my best to keep focused on the Kingdom. All family and friends shun me now. I have made a stand for truth and have left the Watchtower." — *Georgia*

- "I am a lapsed Jehovah's Witness and along with 2 other lapsed JW's have been studying and researching and cross-referencing the Bible for about 6 months now. I have come to the realization that I had it so wrong for so long. I have come to believe that Jesus didn't have a pre-existence, that he was never an angel, that the 144,000 aren't an exclusive group of JW's, and that Jehovah's covenant with Israel still stands firm (Rom 9-11). I have come across Restoration Fellowship which has been such a blessing and made me realize there are likeminded Christians out there." — *England*

- "I have been praying to Almighty Father God, through His only Begotten Son Jesus Christ to lead me to a church or a group of people who teaches and believes the whole truth in God's Holy Word, and God has led me to your site. I am praying that there is a church here in the Philippines that I can attend and grow and be mature in the love of our Almighty Father God and Jesus Christ, our Brother." — *Philippines*

- "I want first to thank you for your tireless efforts in eloquent and quite elaborate exposition of the concept of 'One.' Sad really that it has come to this...however with you on the side of reason, hope springs. It is in this spirit of wanting to get the truth out, that motivates my letter to you. The reason for my inquiry to you, is that you are exquisitely positioned to have a legitimate idea on this, and though I have read some work on the subject, I have not come across your thoughts on this point. It is by now widely agreed (if not embraced) that the name of Almighty God was formed using the Tetragrammaton (YHVH), and according to Catholic monk Raymond Martini, by combining with vowel points taken from Adonai, formed the name Jehovah. However, it is also widely accepted that this formation represents the *Latinized* version of the 'Divine Name.' So my question is this: Based on these same components, what do you suppose would be the English language version of the 'Divine Name'? I should make it very clear that this to me is a minor point relative to His all-important *character*; however it has arisen as an issue to some." — *California*

Editor: Thanks so much for your fine question. No one knows for sure how YHVH is pronounced. The point I suggest to you is that New Testament *Greek Scripture*

makes no issue at all out of this. There are some LXX (Septuagint OT) manuscripts which try to give the name but no NT manuscripts with the divine name. Jesus and Paul are remembered as addressing God as the intimate Father, *Abba*, as you know. The divine name was banned by Jews from BC times, and I see no reason to believe the Apostles did anything to disturb that. The *meaning* of "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14) is instructive, and we find that in Greek in Revelation 1:4; 1:8; 4:8: "who is and who was and who is to come." The *name* in Hebrew is not there. Jesus said that he had given the Father's name (John 17:6: defined as "word," Gospel) to the disciples, meaning the whole Purpose and Plan of God for us, but this was not remotely connected to telling them how to pronounce a name in Hebrew.

In the hopes of keeping in closer contact with you, our faithful readers, please send us your email address if you have one. There is news from time to time we would like to share with you, and having your email address could save us a substantial amount in postage. Please send an email to anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com or enter your email address at focusonthe kingdom.org

News

As of July 17, 2016 the Restoration Christian Church in Oklahoma City is now open after a successful launch on that date. They meet on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of every month, beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the Elks Lodge, 5550 NW 72nd St. in Oklahoma City. For more information, call Pastor Scott Perciful at 918-863-5656, or sp@scottperciful.com

The first pilot congregation, which is in Washington State, is about to finish its third year. Starting with about a dozen attendees, the Western Washington Church of God now consists of around 50 men, women and children. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Sundays, beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the Columbian Hall, 6794 Martin Way in Olympia. A smaller second group meets on the 3rd Sunday each month at the YWCA, 3609 Main St., Vancouver, Washington. For more information, contact Pastor Robin Todd at 360-701-9219, or robinsings4u@comcast.net.

As we identify areas of the U.S. where God and Jesus are already working through previous and current works of evangelism, we will be planning how we might gather scattered believers together in their communities for the purpose of fellowship, mutual encouragement, spiritual growth, and outreach. Several cities have been identified at this time, and pre-planning activities have begun. As time and resources become available, and as God and Jesus guide us, we will implement those plans in order to establish more gospel sharing centers across the U.S.