

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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Sold Out to Truth

by Barbara Buzzard

“A wise person is hungry for truth, while the fool feeds on trash” (Prov. 15:14).

It seems that truth is in short supply in our world. Let’s consider what is popularly believed about truth. We speak of the unmitigated truth, the unvarnished truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We say that truth is stranger than fiction.

Some also say that “your truth is as good as my truth,” indicating that it is impossible to have objective truth. This mindset would prevent one from searching for truth, and also the *responsibility* to search for truth. It would *alienate* a person from the very high praise given in Scripture to a truth-seeking individual. Science has taught us that all truth is relative. The Scriptures say the opposite. What if God speaks of *absolute* truth? A worldview without objective *absolute* truth is, I think, an incoherent one.

Let the Scriptures Speak

“Truth stands the best of time; lies are soon exposed” (Prov. 12:19).

“Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth” (John 17:17). This is a fascinating Scripture but **not** a common perception of how one becomes pure and holy.

“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

“This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). And since we are the church that is a challenging job description!

“Get the truth and don’t ever sell it” (Pro. 23:23a).

So we are to have truth as our top priority and to freely bless others with it. It would mean: 1) that we *recognize* truth (and this would necessitate recognizing lies that masquerade as truth); 2) that we *engage* in truth and *pursue* it; 3) that we *internalize* it; 4) that we *honor* it (perhaps by a passionate desire to give it away!); 5) that we are willing to publicly (ouch!) own it and bear witness to it.

And yet...

We are strangely *estranged* from truth. How odd it is that a baby, almost as soon as he is born, has as his greatest desire to find out all there is to learn about the world. That desire soon becomes jaded as we learn to accept the status quo. There is always a price for challenging conventional wisdom. We soon learn to

keep our heads down and go with the flow. We learn to deny the appeal of truth. We easily lose the ethic that says if you care for truth you must follow it, wherever it leads. It is true that truth **can be** terrifying if it butts up against established traditions. Nowhere is this more true than in religion.

One would think that a Lutheran might be curious as to who Luther was and what he believed. Not so, in my experience. Those who heartily espouse Calvinism more than likely have never heard of Michael Servetus, one of several whom Calvin had *murdered*. Baptists do not know that there were Baptists who believed in conditional immortality, and that there were unitarian Baptists! Jehovah’s Witnesses do not know that their founder Russell did not believe that Jesus was an angel! Seventh Day Adventists generally do not know that their founder, Ellen White, said that only Satan would be left on the earth during the millennium!

Church of Christ members who are strongly amillennial in the U.S. are generally not aware that their brothers and sisters in Australia are firm believers in the coming Kingdom! And on and on it goes. What place does truth hold for them? One *should* wonder why there is such precious little interest in or emphasis upon looking at church history. Have you ever heard of a church which advises members to look into their history? In England we would say, “Funny, that” — which is to say that it is as obvious as the nose on your face that they **cannot** do this. If one knew a little church history, it would give the game away. One only has to read, for example, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* by Philip Jenkins (review at 21stcr.org).

A Riddle and a Parable

What can give of itself and not be diminished? The answer is truth (and love, of course). As I perceive it, truth always comes with a responsibility — that of blessing others with it. This is exactly as you would with other great news, of prizes won, windfalls, inheritances, etc. Truth as portrayed in the Parable of the Sower needs an incubation period. Before an idea can “take root” there is a gestation period. When you plant a seed of truth, you never know when it will sprout and emerge. *But it is your job to do the work* — to plant the seed and to stay patient, watering and tending as needed. Consider 1 Timothy 4:10 and honestly evaluate yourself: “We work hard and suffer much in order that people will believe the truth.”

The Power of Truth

“He will use every kind of wicked deception to fool those who *are on their way to destruction because they refused* to believe the truth that would save them” (2 Thess. 2:10). Absolutely amazing statement. If one eliminates all words except the subject and verb, one is left with: *Truth saves*. Again, this is not the popular thinking on the matter, but it certainly reveals the startling emphasis Scripture puts on truth. And Titus 3:11 echoes this emphasis: “For people like that have turned away from the truth. They are sinning, and they condemn themselves.”

The Battle for Truth

And so if we are to be successful in the battle for truth, we must have a warrior-like mentality, i.e. truth warriors. We must foster, feed and satisfy a hunger for truth. Truth is in crisis with the collective psyche believing in relativism. But the battle will be won by the vigilant. And we must fight on two fronts: in our culture where tolerance and acceptance have come to rule the day and in the religious world where manmade creeds rule. And it is even harder now as we face alternate facts and fake news in a culture where we have seen the collapse of standards of fairness and balance. The assault on free speech is new to our society, but *the assault on independent thought is not*.

Any who have dared to challenge orthodoxy know what it feels like to have one’s cherished beliefs derisively dismissed, one’s strongest beliefs ridiculed and challenged. It is as if there exist “thought police.”

Perhaps this insight will be comforting:

“All truth passes through three stages:

First, it is ridiculed.

Second, it is violently opposed.

Third, it is accepted as being self-evident” (Arthur Schopenhauer).

And this too is an interesting insight: to those who hate truth, truth sounds like hate.

It is a despicable plan of Satan to diminish the truth about God and His Plan for humanity, about the Messiah and his purpose, about the Gospel of the Kingdom, about immortality. But he has mastered the deception. Only he could warp such straightforward and life-saving teaching. Not to see that there is an agenda at work to dissuade you from asking questions, to prejudice you against “overthinking,” to quiet an investigative spirit, to steer you away from questioning the received package of creeds, is frightfully naïve.

You Have to *Join* the Side You Are On!

Truth, in all aspects, is rapidly becoming a despised entity. The strongest of warnings is given in Romans 1:18 about wicked people *suppressing* the truth. And so we deduce that since it is wicked to suppress the truth, it

is *good* to reveal it. It is not so much a case of unspeakable truth as *unspeakable* truth.

I have heard it said that finding truth is an *event*. If, in God’s providence, you have “stumbled” upon it — give it your all. Give it pride of place. After all, it is the New Covenant way of being right with God!

Truth must be deployed. Then it becomes the *engine of motivation*, the power plant and giver of energy. Ideally we should be deployed by the church to fight the giant. (This is not happening.) And yet Scripture promises us strength and courage to do this. Paul’s prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 is heartening and encouraging and challenging: “And so we keep on praying for you, that our God will make you worthy of the life to which he called you. And we pray that God, by his power, will fulfill your every desire for goodness and every work of faith.”✧

Your View of the Future — Having the Mind of Christ

Revelation 20, as the words of Jesus (Rev. 1:1), is merely the last of a whole lot of facts about the resurrection of believers to immortality. It adds the information that only true believers will be in the first resurrection. They will all rule with Messiah, and the martyrs are singled out for special mention. The remainder will not come alive again in resurrection until the end of the thousand years (Rev. 20:5).

Revelation 11:15-18 is the center of the book and shows the resurrection of the dead, as did Paul, at the last (seventh) trumpet. Jesus did not say that there are no signs to mark the future Parousia! He said the opposite: he was asked about the sign of his future coming and end of the age (Matt. 24:3). He gave those signs and made the Abomination of Desolation the key sign (Matt. 24:15). So then we have to see what Jesus and Daniel said about the A of D.

The A of D is always associated with the daily sacrifice in a temple. The A of D is always an event close to the resurrection of Daniel 12:2. That is why we expect that! You cannot take away the daily sacrifice or stand in **the temple of God** as Paul said the Antichrist, Man of Sin, will, if there is no temple (2 Thess. 2:4)!

Jesus in Revelation 11:1-2 spoke of the future trampling of the temple for 3 1/2 years. This is simply Daniel and Zechariah 12:3 (LXX). Jesus is reading the last half of the 70th week from Daniel 11:31; 9:27; 12:11 and 8:13.

If one says that “generation” means 40 years, then one is committed to saying that Jesus was very wrong! In Acts 1:7 Jesus said, in answer to the question about time, that God has not revealed times and seasons. He could have said “40 years” if he had meant that in Matthew 24. In Luke 16:8 *genea* means “type of

person.” Jesus spoke of the evil generation of hostile scribes. Jesus said that **the ones standing in front of him had killed Abel!** (Matt. 23:35). But they had not been alive with Abel! This way of speaking is very Hebrew. Jesus defined “this generation” as the present world order, “heaven and earth” (Matt. 24:35).

Jesus said that those who are asleep spiritually will be overtaken by the Parousia. Paul expressly said that the Parousia will *not* overtake the believers who have listened to Paul’s teaching (1 Thess. 5:4) and know that the Man of Sin comes first, standing in the Temple, the holy place, as Jesus said.

Jesus gave a specific sign of the end of the age (Matt 24:3, 15). This was the answer to the good question about “the Parousia and end of the age.” If one does not define the A of D and the Great Tribulation as Jesus did, then Jesus cannot help us.

The A of D triggers the *unique* Tribulation of Daniel 12:1 (cp. Jer. 30 and 31; Rev. 7:14), and **immediately after that** Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:29) Jesus will come back. These are the bits of data to be dealt with, the pieces of the puzzle to be assembled into a coherent whole. AD 70 as it turns out was not the final event at all. There is no such thing as the “end of a Jewish age.”

So what do you expect for yourself? What is **your hope for the future** and what do you expect to happen before Jesus comes back? Hope is the basis for love and faith (Col. 1:4-5), so hope and the content of hope are most important.

I add the good words of Henry Alford as an impassioned protest against the efforts of the amillennialists to get rid of Jesus in Revelation 20:

“It will have long ago been anticipated by the reader of this commentary that I cannot consent to distort words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy on account of any considerations of difficulty, or any risk of abuses which the **doctrine of the millennium** may bring with it. Those who lived next to the apostles, and the whole church for 300 years, understood them in the plain, literal sense; and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence for antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual or amillennial interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls came to life at the first and the rest of the persons came to life only at the end of the specified period after the first — if in such a passage **the first resurrection** may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave — **then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.** If the

first resurrection is spiritual, non-literal, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain: but if the second is literal then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive it as an article of faith and hope.”¹ ✧

Prayer Priority

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

Since early narratives in Genesis, the vivid reality of praying to God has been associated with an intimate partnership between Yahweh and His people. Abraham, the friend of God, pleaded earnestly with YHWH (Genesis 18:17-33) about the proposed destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Though there were not enough righteous ones there to rescue those cities, his prayer was not in vain: “Thus it came about, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow” (Gen. 19:29).

Shortly afterwards, in order to resolve the confusing situation involving Abraham, Abimelech, and Sarah, the first use of the word “prophet” in the Bible is closely connected with the word “pray” (in Gen. 20:7). Thus, according to God’s communication given to Abimelech, Abraham, a “prophet” (one who speaks **for** God), would also be one to speak **to** God in prayer, as a witness of His promised, protective intervention. When Abraham prayed to God, there was healing in Abimelech’s household as indicated in Genesis 20:17-18.

Not only prophets like Abraham participated in such marvelous partnerships with Yahweh. One can view events forty years after Isaac’s birth (Genesis chapter 24) in the beautiful record of Abraham’s servant who walked with God in prayer. As a result, Rebekah, who was the right choice according to Yahweh’s perfect guidance, became Isaac’s wife.

These records are merely part of a beginning focus on a major Scriptural emphasis: God’s people are truly invited to be people of prayer. A faithful prayer life is one of the consistently effective ways in which believers, who are children of Abraham, can be **doers** of the Word. It is the powerful means to have God’s peace prevailing, instead of worrying. It is a practical avenue by which one casts all his or her cares onto Yahweh, knowing that He cares for us. Although this vital subject is as vast as the Scriptures themselves, which are replete with powerful examples, honest exhortations, detailed priorities, and clear models, a perusal of a few relevant factors could always be helpful.

The new covenant emphasis on having **access** to God (through Messiah Jesus the high priest and

¹ Henry Alford, *Commentary on the Greek NT*, Vol 4, pp. 75-181.

mediator) encourages such open confidence to approach God Himself! “This is the bold confidence we have before him: if we ask for something according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we already possess the requests we have asked from him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Careful scrutiny of the Bible will help believers to avoid the selfish, human tendencies that **impede** prayers “according to his will.” The following list contains a few obstacles that are Scripturally pointed out: praying to put on “a show” (hypocrisy); praying while full of doubts; praying wrongly to obtain something for one’s own pleasures; praying with a proud, self-justifying attitude of boasting (“I fast twice in the week,” etc.); praying without concentration (as a thoughtless, repetitive ritual); or failing to persist in prayer. By contrast, the repentance-rooted antidote to these negative impediments is clearly revealed in models of honest, humble requests and careful instructions on how to persevere in godly prayers.

As well as making continuous petitions for certain realities pertinent to the physical and spiritual needs of all fellow believers, there are wonderful opportunities to pray reverently and meaningfully for **all** human beings: “So, then, this is my very first command: God’s people should make petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings on behalf of all people — on behalf of kings, and all who hold high office, so that we may lead a tranquil and peaceful life, in all godliness and holiness. This is good; it is acceptable with God our savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to know the truth...So this is what I want: the men should pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, with no anger or disputing” (1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8).

Interestingly, in this panoramic context, focused on people coming “to know the **truth**,” some basic, central **truths** of genuine faith are mentioned:

“There is one God,
And also one mediator between God and humans,
King Jesus, himself a human being;
He gave himself as a ransom for all,
And this was testified when the time was right”
(v. 5-6).

This prayer’s main focus for **all** human beings is very compatible with the prayer priority revealed in requests for fellow believers in several of Paul’s other epistles (Ephesians 1, Philippians 1, Colossians 1, and Ephesians 3). None of these particular prayers even mentions “daily bread” needs, requests for protection, health, etc. Though many Biblical petitions **do** address various physical and circumstantial needs, there are certain prayers honed in exclusively on the **greatest** need for believers: to lovingly grow in knowing God in a better way!

“Paul sees this fuller knowledge of God as a more critical thing to receive than a change of circumstances. Without this powerful sense of God’s reality, good circumstances can lead to overconfidence and spiritual indifference. Who needs God, our hearts would conclude, when matters seem to be so in hand? Then again, without this enlightened heart, bad circumstances could lead to discouragement and despair, because the love of God would be an abstraction rather than the infinitely consoling presence it should be. Therefore, knowing God better is what we must have above all if we are to face life in any circumstances.”²

So let us keep this foremost priority in mind as we humbly continue praying **for all** people with the persistent tenacity of one who keeps asking, keeps searching, and keeps knocking (like a guy who shamelessly persists in asking for three loaves of bread from a neighbor when it’s too late to open the door, or like a widow demanding justice from an unjust judge)! As well as continuing to deeply honor Yahweh and His name; as well as asking that His Kingdom arrive (and His will be done perfectly on earth); as well as taking time to ask for “daily bread” needs, forgiveness (as we forgive others), and deliverance from evil; Christians are wholeheartedly welcome to keep asking for this supreme, spiritual concern during the present time: that people come to know the truth of God — and grow in it! Answered prayers regarding this pervasive goal align an individual’s present life with the ultimate goal of entering into God’s Kingdom!

“And this is what I’m praying: that your love may overflow still more and more, in knowledge and in all astute wisdom. Then you will be able to tell the difference between good and evil, and be sincere and faultless on the day of the Messiah, filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living, fruit that comes through King Jesus to God’s glory and praise” (Phil. 1:9-11).

“For this reason, from the day we heard it, we haven’t stopped praying for you. We’re asking God to fill you with the knowledge of what he wants in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This will mean that you’ll be able to conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Lord, and so give him real delight, as you bear fruit in every good work and grow up in the knowledge of God. I pray that you’ll be given all possible strength, according to the power of his glory, so that you’ll have complete patience and become truly steadfast and joyful” (Col. 1:9-11).

We undoubtedly live in a world in which possibly fast-paced dangers and distractions bombard not only us — but also **all** for whom we pray. Nevertheless, the One to whom we pray is as fully capable as ever in opening

² Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (2014), 21.

floodgates for spiritual insight, working within believers to accomplish both the willingness of heart — and the energy to do what pleases Him! He can also open mighty doors so that those who do not know Him at all get a real chance to hear the truth, believe, and change.

As the current age progresses in ways predicted by Scriptural pictures of latter days, with abounding selfishness (2 Tim. 3:1-5) in which the love even of many believers will grow cold, our prayer challenges are always urgent. We can pray that Yahweh “look on the threats” of opponents, and that God’s kids everywhere “be rescued from evil and wicked people.” May God’s message itself run freely! We can pray for increased boldness, as well as for open doors to speak that message. Simultaneously, we can pray that any “enemies” of believers come to change!

May such aggressive opponents “see” examples they need to see; may they “hear” words of truth they need to hear; may they **remember** previous reminders, either **seen** or **heard**! May they receive divine intervention (whenever God wills it) such as Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus. (Saul of Tarsus had been quite a ruthless enemy!) May any such people (who see real Christian examples) end up glorifying God as believers on the day of “visitation.” The distinct possibilities mentioned here could be carefully considered in faithful prayers. That way, love-based truth can grow and prevail among God’s people — and be generously extended toward others, even **enemies**!

Let’s not give up! When Jesus taught the parable about the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), he ended his presentation with a wonderful assurance — and a solemn challenge. Remember that “**faith**” in this context refers specifically to perseverance in determined prayers, as modeled by the widow’s constant clamor for justice.

“And don’t you think that God will see justice done for his chosen ones, who shout out to him day and night? Do you suppose he is deliberately delaying? Let me tell you, he will vindicate them very quickly. But — when the son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:7-8).✧

Bishop N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*

How Scholars Admit to Truth

Bishop Tom Wright, the most celebrated current Evangelical scholar, finds in Scripture what Abrahamic people have long known. He affirms our central emphasis on the Kingdom of God as the heart of the Christian Gospel as Jesus preached it (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Acts 8:12; 28:30-31, etc.). Bishop Wright also recognizes the Jewish unitary monotheism of Jesus as reflected in Mark 12:29. Ironically what Jesus

believed and taught is now regarded by many churchgoers as heresy! The quotations below strongly suggest that a major reformation of the church and its teachings is long overdue.

“First, the early Christians spoke of the kingdom quite frequently, and apparently with an assumed reference. Kingdom-language seems to have functioned as a kind of **shorthand summary for the preaching and apologetic message of the church, or indeed for the whole of what Christianity was about.** To this extent, it almost functions like ‘the Way’ in Acts: it was a means whereby Christians could identify themselves and their very *raison d’être*. (Acts 9:2; 16:17; 19:9, 23; 22:4, 2 and passages where the Kingdom reference is thought to be **obvious**, Acts 28:31 and Rom. 14:17).

“Second, this language still possesses the major features it had had in Judaism. **The ‘God’ in question, in the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ and its cognates, is still, without a doubt, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one true God of Jewish monotheism,** who claims an allegiance that excludes the worship of idols and the absolute claims of pagan rulers. The people of the kingdom are called to holiness: what we would call the **‘ethical’ claims** of the kingdom loom large in several of the relevant early Christian passages (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5. Second Clement 9:6. Ignatius Philadelphia 3:3. Polycarp Philippians 5:3. Barnabus 4:13). The God who was thus becoming king had a true people, **who would be vindicated when the kingdom finally appeared;** for the moment this chosen people would suffer, but their God would win a mighty victory in which they would be vindicated (Acts 14:22; 1 Cor. 15:23; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; James 2:5; Rev. 1:6, 9; 12:10; 17:14; 1 Clement 50:3). They would then be established, as Israel had hoped to be, as **the vicegerents of the creator God, ruling over his world** (cf. Acts 1:6; 22:5; Rom. 5:17, 21; 1 Cor. 4:8ff; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5; 1 Cor. 6:2). This familiar combination of **monotheism** and election gave rise, as naturally as did the Jewish expressions of the same beliefs, to eschatology: the creator would act again within history, to bring the kingdom fully to birth (1 Cor. 15:23-28; 2 Pet. 1:11; 1 Clement 42:3). All of this locates early Christian kingdom-language firmly on **the first-century Jewish map**” (p. 215).

[Note that Rev. 2:26-27 is absent, but should be included!]

“Jesus’ beliefs, therefore, remained those of a **first-century Jew**, committed to the coming kingdom of Israel’s God. He did not waver in his loyalty **to Jewish doctrine.** But his beliefs were those of a first-century Jew who believed that the kingdom was coming in and through his own work. His loyalty to Israel’s cherished

beliefs therefore took the form of critique and renovation from within; of **challenge to traditions and institutions** whose true purpose, he believed (like prophets long before, and radicals in his own day), had been **grievously corrupted and distorted...**

“We can summarize Jesus’ beliefs in terms of the three most fundamental Jewish beliefs: **monotheism**, election and eschatology.

“Jesus believed that there was **one God** who had made the world and who had called Israel to be his people; that this one God had promised to be with his people, and guide them to their destiny, their new Exodus; that his presence, guidance and ultimately salvation was symbolized, brought into reality in and through the Temple, Torah, wisdom, word and spirit. **He was a first-century Jewish monotheist** (p. 224).

“Speaking of Jesus’ ‘vocation’ brings us to quite a different place from some traditional statements of gospel Christology. ‘Awareness of vocation’ is by no means the same thing as Jesus having the sort of ‘supernatural’ awareness of himself, of Israel’s God, and of the relation between the two of them, such as is often envisaged by those who, concerned to maintain a ‘high’ Christology, place it within an eighteenth-century context of implicit Deism where one can maintain Jesus’ ‘divinity’ only by holding some form of docetism. **Jesus did not, in other words, ‘know that he was God’** in the same way that one knows one is male or female, hungry or thirsty, or that one ate an orange an hour ago (p. 652).

“I suggest, in short, that the return of YHWH to Zion, and the Temple-theology which it brings into focus, are the deepest keys and clues to gospel Christology. Forget the ‘titles’ of Jesus, at least for a moment; **forget the pseudo-orthodox attempts to make Jesus of Nazareth conscious of being the second person of the Trinity**; forget the arid reductionism that is the mirror-image of that unthinking would-be orthodoxy. Focus, instead, on a young Jewish prophet telling a story about YHWH returning to Zion as judge and redeemer, and then embodying it by riding into the city in tears, symbolizing the Temple’s destruction and celebrating the final Exodus. I propose, **as a matter of history**, that Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of a vocation: a vocation given him by the one he knew as ‘Father,’ to enact in himself what, in Israel’s scriptures, God had promised to accomplish all by himself. He would be the pillar of cloud and fire for the people of the new exodus. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God” (p. 653).

“What, then, is central to the understanding of the kingdom? That which we saw a moment ago: the Jewish expectation of the saving sovereignty of the covenant God, exercised in the vindication of Israel and the

overthrow of her enemies. As far as first-century Jews were concerned, most of the **redefinitions offered in modern scholarship** would have been simply irrelevant. Inner peace of mind would not enable one to eke out a living under heavy taxation. The end of the space-time universe could scarcely be the sign that YHWH, the creator of heaven and earth, had vindicated himself and his people, and cleansed their land. Jewish hope was concrete, specific, focused on the people as a whole. **If Pilate was still governing Judea, then the kingdom had not come. If the Temple was not rebuilt, then the kingdom had not come.** If the Messiah had not arrived, then the kingdom had not come. If Israel was not observing the Torah properly, then the kingdom had not come. If the pagans were not defeated and/or flocking to Zion for instruction, then the kingdom had not come. These tangible, this-worldly points of reference (the strength of those who present Jesus as a Jewish revolutionary) are all-important. Most modern scholars who have attempted redefinitions of the kingdom have considered such essentially Jewish ideas to be already moribund, and have passed them by on the other side, anxious to avoid contamination [by the Gospel!] as they hurry to worship at the shrine of intellectual respectability.

“The question is *not*, did ‘kingdom of God,’ for Jesus, still mean ‘Israel’s God, the creator, at last asserting his sovereign rule over his world,’ with the connotation of the return from exile, the return of YHWH to Zion, the vindication of Israel by this covenant God, and the defeat of her enemies? That simply *was* its basic, irreducible meaning within first-century Palestine” (p. 223). [This is what the Church of God Abrahamic Faith taught 150 years ago!] ✧

Nicaragua

We (myself, Sarah and Carlos, our intrepid driver in horrifyingly scary traffic), had a remarkably interesting full week in Managua, Nicaragua in June. Our fine evangelist and translator Alex Davila, along with Carlos my son-in-law, had skillfully arranged for me to speak in three universities. I was to address students of journalism and tackle the issue of their duty to speak the truth. A recent outrageous event had occurred in a charismatic church. A lady had been burned to death by a fellow church member. She had been judged to be demon possessed. I reassured our audiences that this sort of treatment is not remotely connected with the teaching of the New Testament. I was also able to be on “Buenos Dias Nicaragua,” a daily television show. We were invited to speak, in addition, on a radio station. All in all it was a thrilling opportunity to explain the Messianic Jesus. I suggested this to them: if I say that Prince Charles is heir to the throne of England, and will sit on the throne in London and reign over the UK, no one has

the slightest difficulty with those words. However, if I quote Gabriel in Luke 1:33, to the effect that Jesus will be given the throne of his ancestor David, sit on the throne of David and rule forever, a fearful perplexity may overcome the audience. This is because people have been reading the Bible in a non-Messianic, paganized fashion for a very long time. The Bible's story of Messiah and the Kingdom does not resonate well with many. However, the gospel is still about "the kingdom of God and the things concerning Jesus." After believing those truths New Testament audiences were ready to be baptized in water (Acts 8:12). Try dropping all that language about "going to heaven." After all, in the future Jesus won't be there. The Biblical story is about the Kingdom to come on a renewed earth (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10). ✧

Comments

- "For a long time I thought there was something wrong with me. I was taught that I was being too 'mindy,' trying to 'work God out' by not accepting the truth of the Trinity. It is refreshing to know that there are a growing number of others who have also had the temerity to question this dogma — thanks in no small part to you and your faithfulness to the call. I have enjoyed what I have seen so far in Nicaragua, especially as I am currently learning Spanish. I have used a number of 'Apps' but now need to accelerate my learning, so I have been searching for English/Spanish translated Bible teaching. How much the better that it is you guys!" — *England*

- "I have been in the Christian faith for about 8-9 years or so. Until recently I was a hard-headed Trinitarian — very Calvinistic. It was you and a couple others who debated James White that made me question my own beliefs on the person of God. I'm currently in a place where I'm not really convinced that the Trinity is a biblical concept anymore. I'm not 100% set on rejecting the Trinity doctrine and I'm still doing my research." — *Washington*

- "I have always loved the Bible from my early teens, and searching for the truth I became a JW in 1970. My love of the Bible always came first, so I finally left in 2009. The time I spent as a witness was not wasted. I learned a great deal along with a good framework of God's word. I have felt for a long time I did not fit in to God's family. I did not feel I was anointed. For some years I have felt in a spiritual vacuum. Your articles have helped me to see that being called (Rom. 8:12-17) is not due to dramatic feeling, but is due to obedience and faithfulness. I still have a hard journey." — *England*

- "Thank you for all the energy you invest of yourself to help all of us. As a 'faded' JW, I have

experienced the intensity of the emotional devastation from watching the theological House of Cards we called 'THE Truth,' as in the absolute theological truth of the universe, fall so easily under intellectual scrutiny. Crestfallen, I had sunken into nihilism and moral relativism. It took hundreds of hours reading biology, intelligent design, evolution, atheism, and so on, to graduate back to a desire to know the True God. Had I not come across the one God Restorationist view, I'd have sold myself as a hopeless slave of lust and despair because the Trinity was never going to be coherent to me. I express my deep heartfelt appreciation for you having taken the time to synthesize the competing views with a robust intellectual engagement and provide it so freely online and affordably in your literature. May the Most High continue to bless the proliferation of these simple, life changing, and character transforming Truths." — *Email*

- "I left the Jehovah's Witnesses and their Watchtower organization because, as Ray Franz wrote, 'I'm rather loyal to God than to an organization.' I felt so relieved — at first. Later it felt as if the floor disappeared under my feet. I think I must have been in some kind of shock. Everything I ever believed in was gone, 'the truth' was all a lie. Now all kinds of questions started to arise, like 'What if God doesn't even exist?' It was, to say the least, terrible and I cried out of fear because if God doesn't exist, then what's the point in living, I thought. As always, I prayed and prayed. However, there was one thing that I was absolutely sure of: I did not want to have anything to do with the Watchtower organization — ever! I think that the JWs is the only Christian group in Scandinavia that does not believe in the Trinity. So I felt very lost the first half of the year or so, after I had left the JWs. I was even prepared to believe in anything as long as it was right in the true God's eyes. Even the Trinity, although it felt wrong. To my great despair I also discovered how many ex-JWs have become atheists. So, then finally I found a group last autumn on Facebook, called 'Non-Trinitarian Help for ex-JWs,' and approximately at the same time I found a video on Youtube where Anthony Buzzard is having a conversation with two JWs at the door. Pretty soon, I also found my way to your Restoration Fellowship website, and one day when I was looking around at the website, I clicked on a button called 'LiveStream' and suddenly, to my big surprise, and completely unpredictable, I found myself in a lively chatroom with fellow believers. I was completely overwhelmed and felt so happy! There is so much that I still have to study and learn from the Scriptures — and of course re-learn. As English is not my native language I find it a bit hard sometimes to grasp it all, but I try my best with much joy." — *Sweden*