

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## The Amazing Shift away from Jesus in the Popular Gospel

“Jesus came to do three days work”— Billy Graham

Protestants have inherited a Gospel from their Protestant heritage. The question is, does this Protestant Gospel do justice to the Bible’s and particularly **Jesus’** definition of the Gospel? Jesus was the initial preacher of the saving Gospel: Hebrews 2:3: “How then can we escape if we take no notice of an offer of salvation so important that God announced it *first through the Lord himself*? Those who heard him confirmed it to us....” (see also Matt. 4:17, 23; Luke 4:43). I Timothy 6:3 warns that any departure from the words of Jesus is a grave mistake. Jesus’ own definition of the Gospel is therefore the foundation of biblical faith.

Commentators on the history of Christian ideas point out that Luther and Calvin arbitrarily excluded Jesus’ own preaching of the Gospel. Current evangelicalism is unknowingly dominated by a dogmatic and fundamentally confusing approach to the question “What is the Gospel?” Creating his own dogma, Luther decided arbitrarily to define the Gospel by taking texts from John and Paul and ignoring the other accounts of Jesus’ ministry. The first casualty of this procedure was the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the saving Gospel presented by Jesus himself as the model for all subsequent Gospel preaching (Mark 1:14, 15, etc.).

G.F. Moore wrote (our comments in square brackets):

“Luther created by a dogmatic criterion a canon of the gospel within the canon of the books [he chose some books and ignored others, using a selective and misleading procedure]. Luther wrote: ‘**Those Apostles who treat oftenest and highest of how faith alone justifies, are the best Evangelists. Therefore St. Paul’s Epistles are more a Gospel than Matthew, Mark and Luke. For these [Matthew, Mark and Luke] do not set down much more than the works**

and miracles of Christ [this is quite false: the gospels constantly describe the very Gospel as Jesus preached it]; but the grace which we receive through Christ no one so boldly extols as St. Paul, especially in his letter to the Romans.’ In comparison with the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul, and I Peter, ‘which [says Luther] are the kernel and marrow of all books,’ the Epistle of James, with its insistence that man is not justified by faith alone, but by works proving faith, is ‘a mere letter of straw, for there is nothing evangelical about it.’”

Moore comments perceptively: “It is clear that the infallibility of Scripture has here, in fact if not in admission, followed the infallibility of popes and councils; for the Scripture itself has to submit to be judged by the ultimate criterion of its accord with Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith. [Luther, in other words, replaced one dogmatic system with another, making the Scripture submit to his own process of selection.]” (Moore, *History of Religions*, Scribners, 1920, p. 320).

C.S. Lewis reflects exactly the same tendency. He does not seem to think that Jesus preached the Gospel! The following quotation points to a fundamental and amazing misconception of the heart of Christianity: C.S. Lewis: “The epistles are for the most part the earliest Christian documents we possess. The Gospels came later [but Jesus preached the Gospel long *before* the epistles were written]. *They are not ‘the Gospel,’ the statement of the Christian belief...[so Christ’s words are not the statement of Christianity?]. In that sense the epistles are more primitive and more central than the Gospels* — though not of course than the great events which the Gospels recount [what about the great *words/teachings* of Jesus which are the saving Gospel?]. God’s Act (the Incarnation, the crucifixion, and the Resurrection) [what about the preaching of the Gospel by Jesus?] comes first: the earliest theological analysis of it comes in the epistles: then when the generation which had heard the Lord was dying out, the

### In This Issue

Hearing the Text of the Bible .....	7
Comments .....	7

Gospels were composed to provide the believers a record of the great Act and of some of the Lord's sayings. [Matthew, Mark and Luke in fact record *the Gospel*, as does John.]” (Introduction to J.B. Phillips’ *Letters to Young Churches*, Fontana Books, pp. 9, 10).

What about Jesus’ saving gospel of the Kingdom? Luther and C.S. Lewis rather skillfully bypass the gospel according to Jesus.

In contrast, Moore, as a historian with less of a theological axe to grind, recognizes that the teaching of Jesus recorded in the gospels is absolutely essential for the new birth:

“The idea that the entrance into the new and higher life, the immortal life, must be by a spiritual or intellectual rebirth, or rather regeneration, meets us often in the mysteries [mystery religions], and especially in the intellectual mysticisms of the age. *Anagennasthai* (to be born again) and *paliggenesia* (rebirth) are familiar terms in them. In John rebirth is the *sine qua non* [absolute essential] of salvation. Flesh breeds flesh; spirit alone can engender spirit, and only he who is begotten by the divine spirit can enter the ‘Kingdom of God’ (John 3). In the thought of the time spirit was not only the principle of divine life but of the higher knowledge; so Paul conceives it (e.g. I Cor. 2:14). In John [recording Jesus] the two are inseparably connected, or rather they are the same thing” (Moore, *History of Religions*, p. 142).

### Billy Graham and the Gospel

A widely circulated tract entitled “What is the Gospel?”<sup>1</sup> which contains no reference to the Kingdom of God, declares that Jesus “came to do three days work, to die, be buried and raised” and that “**He came not primarily to preach the Gospel...but He came rather that there might be a Gospel to preach.**” It is difficult to reconcile these statements with Jesus’ declaration that he was commissioned for the very purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43).

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that Christianity which is not rooted and anchored in the historical Jesus may turn out to be just another faith. If people are asked to “accept Christ” without being told about the Message of the historical Christ, how can we be sure that “Christ” is not just an abstract symbol? The real question then is, in the words of Jon Sobrino, “whether this Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus or some vague, abstract Spirit that is nothing more than the

sublimated embodiment of the natural ‘religious’ person’s desires and yearnings. If it is the latter, then it is not only different from, but actually contrary to, the Spirit of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup>

### More from the Billy Graham Association

“The word Gospel occurs over one hundred times in the New Testament...What then is the Gospel of the grace of God? Let us ask Paul. He would point us to I Cor. 15:1-4: ‘I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you...that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day’...Paul never discussed the earthly life of our Lord...The fact that the Lord Jesus died to save is one half of the Gospel. The fact that he rose from the dead...is the other half of the Gospel.”<sup>3</sup>

Is that true? Why is there not a single sentence about the Gospel which Jesus preached, i.e., the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God**? Why are we not pointed to Paul’s own definition of the Gospel of God given in the very next verse after he speaks of the “Gospel of the grace of God”?

Paul: “The ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus [was to] testify solemnly of the Gospel of the grace of God...to you among whom **I went about proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom**” (Acts 20:24, 25; cp. Acts 19:8; 28:23, 30, 31).

The Gospel of the grace of God *is* the Gospel of the Kingdom. There is no difference. God’s grace is proclaimed in the proclamation about the Kingdom of God — that great world government which Jesus has promised to establish, with his followers, on earth when he returns (see Dan. 7:13, 14, 18, 22, 27). Jesus was and is preparing for that great coming day in which he and the immortalized saints will take charge of the renewed earth.

### Jesus’ Saving Gospel of the Kingdom

The Christian Gospel of salvation was proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles. It was (and is) the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The death and resurrection of Jesus are essential elements included in the Gospel, but they do not constitute the whole Gospel.

The saving Gospel — “the Message about the Kingdom,” “this Gospel about the Kingdom” (Matt.

<sup>1</sup>Published by The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>*Christology at the Crossroads*, Orbis Books, 1982, p. 384.

<sup>3</sup>Roy Gustafson, Billy Graham Association.

24:14) which Jesus stated is the basis of salvation (see Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12; cp. Acts 8:12) — was the center of all biblical preaching. It is the Message which Satan hates (**Luke 8:12; Matt. 13:19**). It is called throughout the New Testament “the word,” or “the word of the Lord.” The term “word” is positively not just another way of saying “the Bible.” “The word” is the core of the Bible and that core is found in the saving words of Jesus — his Gospel of the Kingdom.

It appears that we have abandoned Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom. To abandon Jesus’ Gospel is to abandon him (Mark 8:35, 38; 10:29). We have claimed, by proof-texting from one passage in Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, that the Gospel is a message *only* about the death of Jesus for our sins and his resurrection. That this is untrue is proved by the fact that Jesus and the disciples preached the Gospel, calling it “the Gospel about the Kingdom” and “the Gospel,” long before a word was said about his death for sin and his resurrection!

The “evangelical Gospel” in contemporary America leaves out Jesus’ own Gospel and distorts the Gospel of Paul, dividing the Apostle from Jesus and omitting vital information. Without the right facts, how can we successfully believe for salvation?

A well-known evangelical tract is right: “Faith must have an object. We must believe some fact” (Billy Graham, “Facts, Faith and Feeling”). But it must be the right facts! The question is, what facts are we going to believe? It is a question of obedience and the Lordship of Jesus. Are we willing to obey his first commandment: “Repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14, 15)?

### **The Loss of the Jesus of History**

The history of Christianity ought to give churchgoers cause for alarm. Because of an anti-intellectual approach to faith, many remain in ignorance of the great issues affecting their relationship with God. When theologians ponder the condition of the Church over the centuries, they often expose an extraordinary departure from and neglect of the historical Jesus. David Kaylor writes:

“*Christian faith has not centered on the historical Jesus.* The Apostles’ Creed demonstrates the truth of this statement, for it moves from ‘born of the Virgin Mary’ to ‘crucified under Pontius Pilate.’ The Creed’s omission suggests that the intervening years and activities of Jesus were of no real consequence to faith...Theologically and ethically, it is not enough to say that a death and resurrection have occurred. Who Jesus was whom the Romans executed and God raised

from the dead matters not only for the historian but for the theologian and believer. The historical character of Jesus, and not merely a spiritual Christ, provides Christian faith with its reason for being and its power to bring about change in personal social life.”<sup>4</sup>

If the Jesus claimed as Savior is not anchored in the historical figure recorded in the New Testament, who knows what kind of Jesus may be embraced? It seems to us clear that Satan could well play on the weakness of the religious spirit of man by presenting a Jesus who is only vaguely and superficially the Jesus of the Bible. The counterfeit could, however, be most subtle. Satanic strategy would work hard to separate Jesus from his own teachings (laid out in their clearest form in Matthew, Mark and Luke). “Jesus” might then be only a religious symbol offered as a spiritual panacea for the world’s and individuals’ ills. The Jewish, apocalyptic Jesus, preacher of a coming just society on earth, might then fall into disrepute and obscurity. His reappearance in preaching would probably appear strange and unwanted even to churchgoers who have been fed a diet missing the New Testament Hebrew ingredients.

The safest policy against deception would be to reinstate the Gospel about the Kingdom at the heart of all preaching. This would ensure against the tendency to make Jesus up out of our own minds.<sup>5</sup> It would also safeguard believers against the extravagant assertion of a leading theologian who remarked: “What can be said about the historical Jesus belongs to the realm of the ‘Christ according to the flesh.’ *That Christ, however, does not concern us.* What went on within Jesus’ heart I do not know, and I do not want to know.”<sup>6</sup> This

<sup>4</sup>R.D. Kaylor, *Jesus the Prophet, His Vision of the Kingdom on Earth*.

<sup>5</sup>Unitarian Universalist theology seems to have fallen into the very trap against which the Bible warns (II John 7-9). A tract on Unitarian Universalist views of Jesus says: “It is not possible to describe the historical Jesus, yet many descriptions of Him exist...Each of us may imagine the historical Jesus as we wish...The important aspect of personal reality with which we must come to terms is not the historical Jesus, but the idea of Jesus as it exists in our contemporary culture...I find it exhilarating to believe that the perfection we have poured into the figure of Jesus has come from the minds of human beings, from human imagination and ethical aspiration...I’m for a better and better Jesus, born from the aspiring heart of humanity” (J.G. MacKinnon).

<sup>6</sup>R. Bultmann, “Zur Frage der Christologie,” in *Glauben und Verstehen*, cited by G.R. Beasley-Murray in “The Kingdom of God and Christology in the Gospels,” in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, ed. J.B. Green and M. Turner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, p. 23.

tendency, less blatantly expressed, plagues a number of theological schools of thought, not least the school which relegates the teaching of Jesus to a ministry to Jews only and applies his ethical instructions to the future millennium.

### Confessing Jesus as Messiah, Son of God

It is with good reason that Christology, the study of the identity of Jesus, has always engaged the attention of theologians. When Jesus inquired of Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15), Peter's truthful response that he was the Messiah was greeted with the highest praise. The correct answer to the question, so Jesus said, can only be supplied by divine revelation. To recognize Jesus as the Messiah is to grasp the secret of Christianity and open the way to possession of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19). To acknowledge Jesus as something other than the Messiah, Son of God, is to miss the point of the Christian faith. John echoes his Master when he says: "There is no falsehood so great as the denial of the Messiahship of Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

### Luther, Calvin and the Gospel

*Luther and Calvin arbitrarily excluded Jesus' Gospel, as though Jesus did not really preach the Gospel!*

It is reasonable to ask why the Kingdom of God features so little in modern evangelism. The answer is to be found in a long-standing de-emphasis on the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, dating from Calvin and Luther. An unconscious offense at the Messianic Jewish Jesus caused these two Protestant leaders to express a curious preference for the Gospel of John over the other three Gospels. Luther, writing the preface to his translation of the New Testament (1522), stated: "John's Gospel is the only Gospel which is delicately sensitive to what is the essence of the Gospel, and is to be widely preferred to the other three and placed on a higher level."<sup>8</sup>

He was followed by Calvin in this opinion. Calvin even ventured to suggest a different order for Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, making John the ideal introduction to his three fellow reporters of the life of Jesus: "The doctrine which points out to us the power

and the benefit of the coming Christ, is far more clearly exhibited by John than by the [synoptics]. The three former [synoptic Gospels] exhibit [Christ's] body...but John exhibits his soul. On this account I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door for understanding the rest...In reading [the four Gospels] a different order would be advantageous, which is, that when we wish to read in Matthew and others that Christ was given to us by the Father, we should first learn from John the purpose for which he was manifested" (foreword to Calvin's commentary on John).

Christians should awake to the fact that their various traditional systems, claiming to be based on Scripture, have not served them well. Scripture nowhere says that John's Gospel is to be preferred over Matthew, Mark and Luke. Nor does it teach that Jesus preached a Jewish Message up to the cross; whereupon Paul then took a different Message of grace to the Gentiles.

The fact is that the Gospel as Jesus preached it is so essential for our salvation that it is repeated in no less than three complementary versions (Matthew, Mark, Luke), with John only confirming the very same teaching, often in different vocabulary. The *New Scofield Bible*, read by millions, says that a "strong legal and Jewish coloring is to be expected up to the cross" (p. 987). The fact is that the whole New Testament faith is Jewish in character and consistently makes strong demands for obedience.

### Jesus and the Promise of the Land

We are at the crux of the problem which afflicts current versions of the faith. A false distinction and division is being created by the so-called "dispensationalist" school. The teachings of Jesus do not remain at the center of the scheme of salvation proposed by dispensationalists. John Walvoord says that the Sermon on the Mount "treats not of salvation, but of the character and conduct of those who belong to Christ...That it is suitable to point an unbeliever to salvation in Christ is plainly not the intention of this message...The Sermon on the Mount, as a whole, is not church truth precisely...It is not intended to delineate justification by faith or the gospel of salvation." Rather ambiguously he adds that it should not be relegated to "unimportant truth" (*Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, Moody Press, 1984, pp. 44, 45).

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8 in fact gives us exactly the information we need to define the Gospel and how it must be accepted. Jesus made it very clear that acceptance of his own preaching of the Kingdom of God is the first step in

<sup>7</sup>I John 2:22 as rendered by J.W.C. Wand, *The New Testament Letters, Prefaced and Paraphrased*, Oxford University Press, 1946.

<sup>8</sup>Cited by D. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, p. 160.

salvation: “When anyone hears the Gospel of the Kingdom and does not understand it, the Devil comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart so that he cannot believe it and be saved” (Matt. 13:19 and Luke 8:12).

**The Land/Kingdom Promise, which is the heart of Jesus’ Gospel, has been lost. The 77% of our Bible which is the Old Testament has been detached from the New Testament. We have forgotten that God preached the Gospel to Abraham (Gal. 3:8) and that the New Testament Gospel preaching by Jesus is based on the covenant made with Abraham. God promised the land to Abraham and his seed. Jesus promised the land to Christians (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10).**

The “murder of the [Old Testament biblical] text” by critical scholarship<sup>9</sup> has been equally responsible for the suppression of the covenant hope of “life in the land.” Fragmenting the Hebrew Bible in the interests of a theory of composition, scholarship lost sight of what James Dunn has called the Pauline presupposition about the authority of Scripture, “that a single mind and purpose [God’s] inspired the several writings [the Bible].”<sup>10</sup> After nearly two thousand years of uncomprehending Gentile opposition, the promise to Abraham of progeny, blessing, greatness, and land must be reinstated in the churches’ teaching as the coherent and unifying theme of biblical faith in God and Christ and the essential core of the Christian Gospel about the Kingdom of God. There could be no greater rallying point for fragmented Christendom. No other theme than that which ties together all of divine revelation can provide the churches with the unified Message they so desperately need.

As James Dunn says: “The idea of **‘inheritance’** was a fundamental part of Jewish understanding of their **covenant** relationship with God, above all, indeed almost exclusively, in connection with **the land** — the land of Canaan theirs by right of **inheritance** as **promised** to Abraham...[This] is one of the most emotive themes in Jewish national self-identity...Central to Jewish self-understanding was the conviction that Israel was the Lord’s inheritance...Integral to the national faith was the conviction that God had given Israel the **inheritance of Palestine**, the promised land. It is this axiom which **Paul evokes and refers to the new Christian movement as a whole, Gentiles as well as Jews.** They

<sup>9</sup> *The Gospel and the Land*, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Commentary on Romans*, Word Books, 1988, p. 202.

are **heirs** of God. Israel’s special relationship with God has been extended to all in Christ. **And the promise of the land has been transformed into the promise of the Kingdom...**That inheritance of the Kingdom, full citizenship under the rule of God alone, **is something still awaited by believers.**”<sup>11</sup>

Again we must insist on the direct link between early Christianity and the covenant with Abraham. As Dunn says: “The degree to which Paul’s argument is determined by the current self-understanding of his own people is clearly indicated by his careful wording which picks up four key elements in that self-understanding: the covenant promise to Abraham and his seed, the inheritance of the land as its central element...It had become almost a commonplace of Jewish teaching that the covenant promised that Abraham’s seed would **inherit the earth** [cp. Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10]...The promise thus interpreted was fundamental to Israel’s self-consciousness as God’s covenant people: It was the reason why God had chosen them in the first place from among all the nations of the earth, the justification for holding themselves distinct from other nations, and the comforting hope that made their current national humiliation endurable...

“Paul’s case reveals the strong continuity he saw between his faith and the fundamental promise of his people’s Scriptures...**Paul had no doubt that the Gospel he proclaimed was a continuation and fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham [cp. Gal. 3:8].** But he was equally clear that the heirs of Abraham’s promise were no longer to be identified in terms of the law. For Genesis 15:6 [‘Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’] showed with sufficient clarity that the promise was given and accepted through faith, quite apart from the law in whole or in part.”<sup>12</sup>

“The first task of exegesis [explaining the Bible] is to penetrate as far as possible inside the historical context(s) of the author and of those for whom he wrote. So much of this involves 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, a major part of that context is the self-understanding of Jews and Judaism in the first century and of Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism. **Since most of Christian history and**

<sup>11</sup> *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 213, 463, emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 463, emphasis added.

**scholarship, regrettably, has been unsympathetic to that self-understanding, if not downright hostile to it, a proper appreciation of Paul in his interaction with that self-understanding has been virtually impossible** [cp. Peter's warning about the danger of misunderstanding Paul!]"<sup>13</sup>

### The Eclipse of the Jew Jesus

Canon H. Goudge warned of a disaster in preaching and practice. The replacement of Jewish ways of thinking (the ways the Bible writers thought) by Gentile ideas has been a disaster affecting the denominations: "[After New Testament times] the great people of God's choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic [universal] Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, came to dominate its outlook: From that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or practice. If today we are again coming rightly to understand the Old Testament and thus far better than before the New Testament also, it is to our modern Hebrew scholars and in part to Jewish scholars themselves that we owe it. God meant, we believe, the Jews to be His missionaries; the first great age of evangelization was the Apostolic age, when the missionaries were almost entirely Jews; no others could have done what they did. If today another great age of evangelization is to dawn, we need the Jews again."<sup>14</sup>

Let us finish by reminding ourselves of the startling difference between popular definitions of the Gospel and Jesus' and Paul's definition:

C.S. Lewis: "The Gospel is not in the gospels."

Billy Graham: "Jesus came to do three days work. Jesus came not primarily to preach the Gospel."

[Our function in heaven will be] "to prepare heavenly dishes," "play with children, "tend gardens" or "polish rainbows."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus: "I am duty-bound to preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. That is the reason God sent me" (Luke 4:43).

<sup>13</sup> *Commentary on Romans*, pp. xiv, xv, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> "The Calling of the Jews" in the volume of collected essays *Judaism and Christianity* (London: Shears and Co., 1939), quoted by Lev Gillet, *Communion in the Messiah*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1942, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> "What Heaven Is Really Like," *Hope for the Troubled Heart*, Word Pub. Co., 1991.

"They [believers] shall reign as kings upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

Paul: "I went around preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom" (see Acts 20:25; cp. v. 24).

"Don't you know that the saints will manage the world? And if the world is to come under your jurisdiction..." (I Cor. 6:2, Moffatt).

**Note also:**

**"Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying"** — Cambridge biblical scholar, J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, p. 108.

**"No Bible text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at death"** — the celebrated *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 803).

William Strawson, a tutor in systematic theology and the philosophy of religion, made a detailed study of *Jesus and the Future Life* and dedicated 23 pages to an examination of the word "heaven" in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He concluded:

"In few, if any, instances of the use of the word 'heaven' is there any parallel with modern usage. The gospel records of our Lord's life and teaching *do not speak of going to heaven*, as a modern believer so naturally does. Rather the emphasis is on that which is 'heavenly' coming down to man...Our modern way of speaking of life with God as being life 'in heaven' is not the way the gospels speak of the matter. *Especially is there no suggestion that Jesus is offering to his disciples the certainty of 'heaven' after this life.*"<sup>16</sup>

"Heaven as the future abode of the believers is [a conception] conspicuous by its absence from St. Paul's thought. The second coming is always from heaven alike in the earliest (I Thess. 1:10) and the latest (Phil. 3:20) of Paul's letters...Possibly he so takes it for granted that believers will have their place in a Messianic earthly Kingdom that he does not think it necessary to mention it."<sup>17</sup>

"Jesus was not thinking of a colorless and purely heavenly beyond, but pictured it to Himself as a state of things existing upon this earth — though of course a transfigured earth — and in His own land."<sup>18</sup> ✧

<sup>16</sup> p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> "Heaven," *Dictionary of Christ and the Apostles*, Vol. I, p. 531.

<sup>18</sup> W. Bousset, *Jesus*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1906, p. 82.

## Hearing the Text of the Bible

It seems that our human inability to hear the text of Scripture is almost limitless. More precisely, we have difficulty in hearing what the Bible says when we have been propagandized into a different opinion. We then start with a fixed notion and enter a kind of “denial” when we read verses which obviously conflict with our belief. The classic example is this:

While churches and ministries unite under the conviction that “there is One God existing eternally in three Persons,” Paul thought otherwise. It is surprising that Bible readers cannot hear the difference between

“There is One God — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (historic creeds)

and

“There is One God, the Father” (Paul, in I Cor. 8:6).

Paul is quite clear about who God is. “We know that there is no God besides One...To us there is One God — the Father” (I Cor. 8:4, 6).

Jesus said the same thing: “You, Father, are the Only True God.” “You, Father, are the only One who is truly God” (John 17:3). He also affirmed the creed of Israel which, as everyone knows, stated that “Yahweh is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29, NASV). Jesus even said that adherence to this creed is the most crucial issue of all.

The Amplified Version gives us this also from Paul: “We know that God is [only] one person” (Gal. 3:20).

(Would Paul then have agreed with the creed which announces that God is *three* Persons?)

A clever but mistaken argument tries to overthrow this straightforward information about who God is. Paul also said that “there is one Lord Jesus Messiah” (I Cor. 8:6). Quite true.

But Paul has already told us that the One God is the Father. Who then is Jesus? He is a unique Lord, but in what sense? He is the Lord *Messiah* (Luke 2:11 and many texts). He is the one Lord Jesus Messiah (his full title).

He is the one Lord *in the sense given us by the Bible*. Peter said, “God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36). Peter had just quoted Psalm 110:1 (the most often quoted passage from the Old Testament): “The LORD said to my lord...” Jesus is that second lord. But what sort of lord is he?

The Hebrew text tells us that he is ADONI (my lord). This word appears 195 times in the Old Testament and never means God. It describes human (occasionally angelic) superiors of various sorts.

Jesus is the ultimate human superior, the one Lord Messiah.

But remember: “There is One God, the Father” (I Cor. 8:4, 6; I Tim. 2:5).

Do we hear that creed clearly? Or has the massive propaganda of traditional creeds made us deaf to some of the most fundamental words of Scripture?✧

## Comments

“Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am exceedingly delighted to communicate with you. I received the two books written by you from the Atlanta Bible College and I wish to really say thank you. The books have been of great inspiration and a big blessing to me personally. I have been enlightened about the Kingdom of God on reading *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah*.”

— *Kenya*

“I wanted to thank you for the Focus publications that come faithfully. I enjoy them very much and hold on to them for future resources. I don’t always agree with everything in them, as you may expect, but many things delight me.” — *Pennsylvania*

“Please know that what I have been reading of your material thus far has been absolutely overwhelming to me. It is very sobering to see that we have been so influenced by non-biblical ideas. This has been life-changing. Thank you for teaching what you have learned. I am reading your books, your information on the website and listening diligently to your radio program.” — *Missouri*

“Thanks for the great (Theological Conference) weekend! I really enjoyed meeting people of like mind and seeing the excitement in people who are new to the Gospel about the Kingdom.” — *Texas*

“Thanks for inviting me down to the Theological Conference. Did you notice that many of the presentations covered some of the same ground? I know there was a deliberate theme to the program, but the choices of Scriptures (such as the parable of the sower and others which cropped up in every teaching) and the points made seemed to harmonize nicely. Thanks again for orchestrating this annual event. I feel rejuvenated by it.” — *Indiana*