

Focus on the Kingdom

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Mathematics Gone Mad: When One is Supposed to Mean Three

Many of our readers will be aware of popular slogans which really do not bear careful examination. They are patently untrue. They may promote a cause, and the unthinking will swallow them whole. But others, more analytically minded, will detect foul play — insinuations, half-truths, propaganda, suppression of evidence. In your own field of expertise, your profession or hobby, you may be aware of axioms which “everybody believes to be true” but which turn out to be suspect.

We want to suggest to you that in the field of theology also there are some real “whoppers.” These unexamined “truisms” are hard to detect. And they are backed by years of history and tradition. When questioned they may be hammered home with threats of excommunication or even loss of salvation. “Arian” or “heretic” are epithets apparently meant to frighten the questioner or dissenter back into line.

One of these explosive issues has to do with who the God of the universe is. I am referring to the argument that the Hebrew word for “one” in the Hebrew language — the word *echad* — really means “compound one.” Imagine it! Your bill at the store adds up to eleven dollars. This is exactly ten plus one dollars, but wait — the “one” in this case is really “compound one.” That being so, you owe in fact twelve dollars or perhaps thirteen or any other figure you like to think of.

This would be grist to the mill in the world of “Candid Camera.” “One dollar,” says the cashier in a matter-of-fact tone, “really means ‘compound one.’ You see, if I say ‘one tripod,’ do you realize that ‘one’ in that case really means three? Or if I say ‘one centipede,’ is it not clear that by ‘one’ I really mean a hundred? What about one square? Surely it is obvious that ‘one’ in that case means four, because a square has four sides? ‘One cricket team’ evidently implies that one is the same as eleven.”

Or again, if I say “one cluster of grapes,” would it not be proven that one can mean a whole lot more than one? What about “one family” or “one team”?

You will see here that we have entered the world of Humpty Dumpty, who in *Through the Looking Glass* replied to Alice “in a rather scornful tone”:

“When I use a word, it means exactly what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.” With that piece of mindless stupidity Humpty Dumpty put himself above the law, above the laws which rule all communication.

Alas, under a pretense of learning, a number of authorities continue to convince the churchgoing public with argumentation alarmingly similar to our examples above. Bible students have been told that when it comes to God being one (Deut. 6:4: “The Lord our God is one Lord”) “one” really means “compound one.” And from that “fact” it is supposed to follow, with equal lack of logic, that the “compound one” in this case means three. Therefore the God of the Bible is really three Persons.

What’s wrong with this stunning proposition?

Echad in Hebrew — one — functions very much like the English word “one.” It is the numeral one. When you count in Hebrew, you begin “*echad* (one)...” Often it actually translates the indefinite article in English. You can have “a large statue.” The Hebrew word corresponding to “a” is *echad*, one.

Take a standard lexicon of the Hebrew language and the first definition of the word “*echad*” is “a single...” “A single day” is *yom* (day) *echad* (one). In several cases *echad* is translated as “unique,” one of a kind. It appears also in English as “only one.”

The *Brown, Driver and Briggs Lexicon of the OT* says nothing about “one” meaning “compound one.” What in fact is “compound one”?

“Compound one” is not to my knowledge found in any lexicon as a *definition* of *echad*. The numerical adjective “one” can of course, in English and Hebrew, modify a *collective noun*. A collective noun is a word like “family” or “cluster” or “team.” We sense at once that these words suggest one and many at the same time. But note carefully “one cluster of grapes” is still *one* cluster and not two or more clusters. If someone tells you that the word “one” contains *in itself* a notion of plurality, point out to them that it is the *noun* cluster and not the word “one” which signals plurality. The word “one” continues to describe a single object — one

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single cluster. Should that *noun* contain the notion of plurality (cluster, family, etc.) it is the *noun* in question which conveys the plural idea. Thus when Adam and Eve became “one flesh,” you know from the context that the *two* of them were combined in “one flesh.” But this was precisely “one flesh,” and not “two fleashes.” “One couple” means a *single* couple and not more than one. One just means one.

There is nothing in the word “one” which speaks of plurality. It still means “a single...” never “more than one.” Evening and morning formed “a single day” (*yom echad*). It is therefore completely misleading to say that “one” means more than one, that it is “compound”! There is as little logic in the claim that God being “one” means that He is really more than one as in saying that “one pentagon” proves that one really means five!

In a long section entitled “The Word Echad” Robert Morey (*The Trinity: Evidence and Issues*, Word Publishing, 1996, pp. 88-103) states that “the word *echad* refers to compound oneness in which a number of things are described as ‘one’” (p. 88). Morey footnotes this remark to the entry in the standard *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver and Briggs. But the lexicon offers no such definition of *echad* as Morey proposes. Nothing at all is said about “compound oneness.” *Echad* is defined as one, each, every, a certain, and as a substitute for the indefinite article “a.” Listed also as possible meanings are “only,” and such usage as “the one...the other,” “one after another,” “one by one, eleven (one plus ten).”

Morey’s illustrations of “compound unity,” which he claims is the real and only meaning of *echad*, are startling: “Day one.” Morey thinks that this combination of one and day proves that one means more than one, because “one day” is a combination of evening and morning. Adam and Eve were “one flesh.” Morey contends, “They were one, but two, and two, but one” (p. 88). “The people were one” is supposed also to mean that one means “compound one.”

In response to Morey’s case for plurality in the word one, it is necessary to point out that he has simply listed cases where the numerical adjective “one” *modifies a collective noun*, a noun, that is, whose meaning, either in itself, or from the context, contains the idea of plurality. Note that it is *the noun*, and not the word “one” which signals the idea of plurality. One congregation is still only one congregation, no matter how many members it may have. One flesh is still one flesh though two are

involved as *a single* couple. “One day” is still one single day and not two or more days. When we read that God gave the people one heart, the meaning of one is still “one single” and not more than one heart.

To repeat: The Hebrew numeral “one” functions, in fact, just like the English word “one.”

Morey’s listing of a fraction of the evidence does no sort of justice to the facts. *Echad* appears about 960 times in the OT. Listing a handful of examples in which “one” modifies a collective noun proves absolutely nothing in favor of the Trinity. It invites readers into a sort of smoke screen, leaving the actual meaning of “one” in multiple biblical examples unexamined. Morey does not include in his analysis the fact that there are hundreds of occurrences of *echad* modifying a noun which have no suggestion at all of plurality. “Abraham was one (*echad*)” hardly suggests that there was plurality in Abraham (Isa. 51:2; Ezek. 33:24). In the second example the NIV translates: “Abraham was *only one* man, yet he possessed the land.” The Hebrew says that Abraham was *echad*, “one.” The proper English for *echad* in this case is “only one,” “only one man.” Thus when Deuteronomy 6:4 says that “God is one Yahweh,” it means exactly that: “only one Yahweh.” That is the biblical view of God throughout both Testaments. It is the heart of the greatest of all commandments and any deviation from that strict monotheism threatens the core of biblical revelation — which amounts to a theological disaster. Jesus expressly confirmed the central tenet of Judaism that “God is one Lord” (see his discussion with a Jewish scholar in Mark 12:28ff). Jesus was not a Trinitarian and nor was the Jewish scribe who engaged him in the discussion. Jews do not believe in the Trinity and are offended that anyone could try to force the Hebrew Bible into a Trinitarian mold.

Since Jesus could not have believed in the Trinity, it makes little sense that those desiring to follow him would teach anything other than the strict unitary monotheism of both Testaments. As a leading NT scholar states:

“No responsible NT 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 intelligent doctrine of God” (A.T. Hanson, *The Image of the Invisible God*, pp. 87, 91, 92).

A serious weakness of Morey’s proposal is the fact that *echad* appears in English frequently in situations where plurality is as far as possible removed from the

meaning: “a single (*echad*)¹ stalk,” “a single (*echad*) house,” “a single year,” “a single cluster of grapes,” “a single donkey,” “a single witness,” “a single flea,” “a single scroll,” “a single great statue” (citations from NASU, New American Standard Updated). Furthermore, Job 23:13 says that God is **unique** (b’*echad*, NASV, NASU). The Song of Solomon celebrates a young virgin as “unique” (*echad*): “She is unique. She is the only one of her mother” (Song 6:9). In Ezekiel 7:5 a unique (*echad*) disaster is coming. Zechariah 14:7 describes “a unique (*echad*) day.” It is therefore completely fallacious to argue that a different word (*yachid*) would have to be used if God is a single Person. As we see, *echad* itself bears the connotation of “unique” or “single” frequently. *Yachid* is anyway a rare word in the OT and carries a meaning which would be quite unsuitable for God, i.e. “lonely” or “desolate,” “only begotten.”

In His revelation the One God has in fact exhausted every device of language to tell us that He is one single Person. The word “three” occurs in no biblical text describing the God of Israel. On the contrary God is said to be “a single Yahweh” (Deut. 6:4), and a single God. He describes Himself as “by Myself,” and having “no one besides Me,” and as being “alone.” Language has no more effective ways than this of conveying the notion of God as a single undifferentiated Divine Individual. Constant singular personal pronouns denote this stupendous fact — known to the Jews throughout their history and to the Christians of the New Testament. Thousands of times the God of Israel and the God of Jesus speaks of Himself as “I,” “Me,” and “Him” — never “We three.” No occurrence of the word God in the Bible can possibly mean “God in three Persons.”

Some 1325 times in the New Testament and thousands of times in the Old, God (in the Greek NT *ho theos* — the God) means the Father.

Morey states that the word *echad* is “the only way that the Hebrew language has to indicate to the reader that God is a composite unity of several Persons and not just a solitary Person.” He has abandoned the grammatical and lexical fact that “one” is correctly translated in the English Bible as “a single,” “only one,” etc. *Echad*, in itself, never points to plurality or “compound oneness.” It is ironic that Morey cites Genesis 3:22 where God says that “man has become like *one* of us.” Could *echad* possibly mean “two or more”? Was man like “two of us,” or “three of us”?

Morey’s analysis omits mention of the fact that the personal name for the One God, Yahweh (the tetragrammaton), occurs all 6,823 times with a singular verb and pronouns. Despite this Morey is convinced that there are two Yahweh’s. He cites Genesis 19:24 in proof of his point (where is the third Yahweh to complete the Trinity?). “Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Yahweh out of heaven.” Morey adds Luther’s comment on this verse: “This mode of speaking greatly irks the Jews and they try in vain to explain it. Moses mentioned Yahweh twice to show them that the Lord is One God, but that in this One God there are two distinct persons.”

Such attempts to read the Trinity or Binity into the innocent text of the Hebrew Bible have been relegated by modern scholars to past ignorance. The contemporary evangelical commentary on Genesis notes rightly that the text merely emphasizes the fact that the brimstone was sent by Yahweh. Even Calvin, Luther’s fellow Reformer, sees no sign of a plural Deity in Genesis 19:24: “I know that the ancients explain these words ‘the Lord rained brimstone from the Lord’ as signifying that the Father rained from the Son, but this sense is by no means suitable to the passage. By repeating the name Yahweh, Moses designed rather to point out more strongly the dreadful vengeance of God.”

The celebrated *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* assembled in 1912 the worldwide scholarship of leading biblical experts. It is sad that popular evangelical writers do not pay attention to the wisdom of such writers. Otto Kirn wrote the article on the Trinity in those volumes. He exposes the major error of second to fifth century Church Fathers who were “of the opinion that so essential doctrine as that of the Trinity could not have been unknown to the men of the Old Testament. However, no modern theologian who clearly distinguishes between degrees of revelation in the Old and New Testament can longer maintain such a view. Only an inaccurate exegesis [explaining the text of the Bible] which overlooks the more immediate grounds of interpretation [i.e. which ignores the actual meaning of the text] can see references to the Trinity in the plural form of the divine name Elohim, the use of the plural in Gen. 1:26 [“Let us make man...”] or such liturgical phrases of three members as the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24-26) and the “Thrice Holy” of Isa. 6:3” (Vol. 12, p. 18). The writer goes on to speak of God and His wisdom and word. But this is no basis for the Trinitarian doctrine of three coequal and coessential Persons who are each “God in Himself.” The whole point of the title “Son of God” is that the one who bears it is *not* God, but a created agent of God. Adam, Israel,

¹ For simplicity I have cited the word in its masculine form.

angels, and believers, as well as Jesus Christ are called “Son of God.” Jesus of course is the ultimate Son of God, because of his begetting and origin by a supernatural miracle effected by God in the womb of Mary (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35).

We invite our readers to reflect on the further statement of the learned writer on the Trinity: “Even in the New Testament the doctrine of the Trinity is not enunciated.” He goes on to say it is deduced from a collocation of passages and from the logic of their premises.

But is that really right? Our author is candid enough to say that “Son of God” is the name for the historical Jesus. “Thus the doctrine of the eternal generation [of the Son]...lacks support in the Bible” (p. 21).

But without this doctrine of a begetting of the Son *in eternity* there is no Trinity. Since the creeds of 325 (Nicea) and 381 (Constantinople) millions of churchgoers have assembled under the umbrella of a Triune God, of which the Second Member is the Son who was “**begotten** before all worlds.”

The extraordinary linguistic gyrations necessary for making one into three are unnecessary once we pay attention to three primary facts. The Father of Jesus Christ is called by Jesus “the only One who is truly God” (John 17:3). Jesus also confirmed the central tenet of biblical religion in both Testaments, the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:28ff). Paul imitated Jesus perfectly by stating in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 that there is for believers “One God, the Father.” That should be clear. No one else, then, can be so called. Secondly “Son of God” means in the Bible a person given existence or appointed to a special relationship with God, either Adam, an angel, Christians at their rebirth as believers, the nation of Israel (Exod. 4:22) and supremely the uniquely originated Son of God Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:20, Luke 1:35; I John 5:18; Acts 13:33, not KJV).

Thirdly, Jesus is the Lord Messiah, not the Lord God. There cannot be two Lord Gods! Such a confession moves us into paganism and polytheism. Once we utter the words “the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God” we have uttered words which according to our lifelong use of language mean that we believe in three who are God.

The Bible urges no such confession on us and in fact warns us against the insidious dangers of importing alien notions of God into the biblical creed.

Be on the alert at the checkout counter. If you are told that the package of three candy bars, marked one dollar, really costs three or more dollars, because

“one” means “compound one,” be suspicious. It may be that you have just been caught on “Candid Camera.” The same critical and analytical approach is highly recommended in regard to the creeds uttered or tacitly assumed when entering churches. ✧

The Vindication of God as a Single Divine Person

James Yates, *Vindication of Unitarianism*, Boston, 1816

The unity of God, as **one individual Person**, is denoted throughout the Bible by the almost constant use of **singular pronouns**, whenever any thought, action, attribute, or condition, is ascribed to the Supreme Being. In all languages the personal pronouns of the singular number are understood to apply only to **one person**.

Thus, if I were writing a letter, by employing the pronouns of the *first* person and singular number, *I, Me, My*, I should confine my assertions to myself as one individual person. By using the pronouns of the second person and singular number, *Thou, Thee, Thy*, I should indicate that my assertions were addressed to my correspondent as **one individual person**. By introducing the pronouns of the third person and singular number, *He, Him, His*, I should denote that it was **one person** only I was speaking of. If on the contrary, I were writing a letter in conjunction with any other intelligent being, we should use the pronouns *We, Us, Our*; and if I were writing anything of more than one person, I should say *They, Them, Their*. Such being **the universal application of pronouns**, it is evident, not only to those who have studied Greek and Hebrew, but to all who know the use and meaning of human speech, that **throughout the whole Bible God is almost uniformly mentioned as one person, this being implied in the almost constant use of singular pronouns**.

The doctrine of the Unity of God is implied in every passage in which the personal pronouns of the singular number are used to denote the Supreme, Deity...Thousands and tens of thousands of passages imply, by the use of **the singular pronouns, that God is one person**.

Examples: God appears to Abraham: “I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect, and I will make My Covenant between Me and thee” (Gen. 17:1-2). (Not, “We are Almighty God; walk before Us and be thou perfect, etc.”)

Levites address God: “**Thou**, even Thou, art **Lord alone**; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are

therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worship Thee” (Neh. 9:6).

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that comes to **God** must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6) (pp. 66, 153).

*There are thousands and thousands of similar passages throughout the Bible. Singular pronouns prove that God is a single Person. In three passages, God says “Let us...” These passages tell us that He was speaking to someone **other than Himself**, just as when we say “let us...” we are referring to someone other than ourselves. So the note in the NIV Bible: “God speaks as the Creator-King announcing His crowning work to the members of His heavenly court (see Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 15:8; Jer. 23:18).” ✧*

The Rapture: The Christian’s Entrance into the Kingdom of God on Earth, not “Heaven”

by William M. Wachtel

A term frequently heard in Christian circles today is “the rapture.” When it is mentioned, other terms are often attached to it, such as “pre-tribulational,” “mid-tribulational,” and “post-tribulational.” The present study is not intended to discuss these adjectives and their meaning, but simply to find out what is meant by the term “rapture” itself, in the way that the Bible connects it to Christ’s second coming.

The word “rapture” does not occur in the common versions of the English Bible, but the idea is based on a Greek word found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where the Apostle Paul used the word *harpazo*, a verb meaning “to snatch away, to take away, to rob, to steal, to carry off” — actions that imply forcefulness or even violence. The same Greek word is found in Acts 8:39, where we are told that “the Spirit of the Lord *caught away* Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more.” In this account, Philip was suddenly and bodily removed from the presence of the Ethiopian eunuch, whom he had just baptized, and was transported miraculously to another location. He was “snatched up” or “carried off.”

The English word “rapture,” in fact, is based on a Latin word that means “to seize.” We see this same Latin root in our words “raptor” (a bird that seizes its prey and carries it off) and in the words “rapid,”

“rape,” and “rapine.” These all contain the idea of force and even violence.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the subject is clearly the return of the Lord Jesus and the resurrection of his people at his coming. (The same subject is found in 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23; Philippians 3:20, 21; Hebrews 9:28 and other texts.) Verse 13 reveals Paul’s concern about those believers in Thessalonica who had lost loved ones to the enemy Death (1 Cor. 15:26). He did not want them to grieve hopelessly, as the pagans did. He wanted to show them that there was a promise of future life for those who had died, who were “asleep in Jesus.”

In verse 14 he uses the illustration of Christ’s own example. Christ died and God raised him again from death (1 Cor. 15:15; Acts 2:24, 32; 17:30, 31; Rom. 10:9). Likewise, says Paul, God will bring forth (from death) those who have fallen asleep in Christ. The verse is speaking to two *parallel* occurrences — Christ’s death and resurrection and his people’s death and resurrection. The “bring” has nothing to do with being “brought from heaven” when Christ descends, as often misinterpreted, but rather has to do with being brought forth from the dead, as Christ was. Compare 2 Corinthians 4:14, where Paul says we are raised “with” Christ. He is the “firstfruits” of the First Resurrection. He and his people are all part of the same resurrection!

Verse 15 mentions the “coming” of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is *parousía*, the term that is used constantly in the New Testament for the return, the second coming, of Jesus. Paul shows that the resurrection cannot occur until Christ returns. He states that the believers who are still alive at that time do not take precedence over those who have already fallen asleep in Christ. He explains why in the next two verses.

Verse 16 tells us that the first step in Christ’s return is for him to “descend from heaven.” When this happens, he will no longer be “in” heaven. He will then have *departed* from heaven, as implied in the words “descend from heaven.” But the Apostle Peter declares in Acts 3:19-21 that Christ *must remain* in heaven until the time comes for all things to be restored as the Old Testament prophets have foretold. When Peter says that God will “send” Jesus from heaven, he implies that Christ not only will not then be in heaven any longer, but also that it will then be time for the promised restoration to begin. We see, thus, that Christ’s bodily departure from heaven at his second coming brings about — *of necessity* — the “times of restoration.” The two events are linked together inseparably!

Verse 17 lets us know that any believers still alive at this time, having been changed and given immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-57), will be caught up (“snatched away,” “raptured”) together with the resurrected “dead in Christ” to meet the Lord in the air. This could be called the Grand Reunion of all the faithful with their Lord! (Compare Heb. 11:39, 40.) The result of this reunion, Paul tells us, is that *from then on* “we shall ever be with the Lord.” Wherever he is, his people will be also. The notion that believers can be with the Lord the moment they die, i.e., *before* the second coming, is demonstrably false.

Verse 18 declares the purpose of this whole passage: to give Paul’s readers comfort and encouragement. These promises are for us as believers today. The truth of Christ’s return and the resurrection of his people to immortality should give us comfort, reassurance, and hope in times of sorrow and each day of this mortal life.

There is nothing in this passage that teaches or implies that we meet Christ in the air *so that he may take us to heaven*, after that meeting takes place in the air. Rather, since it is his “coming” that is in view, we know that the Bible teaches that he will *return to this earth* when he comes. Jesus promised, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Matt. 25:31). Christ’s “throne of glory” is the throne of David to be given to him at that day (Luke 1:32, 33), a throne to be established in Jerusalem, as it once was, long ago (Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6, 7). Meanwhile, during his stay in heaven, Christ is seated with his Father on *God’s* throne, distinct from Christ’s *own* throne (Rev. 3:21). God’s throne is in heaven; Christ’s throne will be on earth.

This means that after our meeting with Christ in the air, *he will continue his descent down to the earth*, accompanied by all his saints and all the holy angels. Our going out to meet him is to allow his saints to be the first to welcome him back and to accompany him to his inheritance and ours — **the earth** (Heb. 1:2; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10).

An interesting parallel to this meeting is the one in Acts 28:13-16. The Apostle Paul was on his way to Rome, and the believers there had heard of his coming. They went out to meet him before he got to their city, so that they could welcome him and accompany him the rest of the way. In daily life, we often use the same custom, to go to the airport to meet a coming visitor and to take him or her home with us. The Bible represents the saints going out to meet Christ, not Christ going out to meet the saints! There

is an important difference between the two ideas. (The writer’s tract, *The Parousia of Jesus*, contains further information on this question and can be requested from wwachtel@lightening-isp.com)✧

The Kingdom of God: Primarily a New Society Coming on Earth at the Parousia of Jesus

The teaching of Jesus begins with a command to us all to “repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God” (see Mark 1:14, 15; Mark 4:11, 12). Jesus makes repentance a matter of believing the word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:11, 12). He makes forgiveness *conditional* on our acceptance of his Kingdom Gospel preaching. The heart of biblical faith is laid out by these immortal words of the Savior:

“To you the **secret of the Kingdom of God** has been given, but to those who are not my followers everything comes in parables, in order that ‘they may see indeed without perceiving, and hear indeed without understanding; for **if** they were to perceive and understand they might repent and be forgiven.’ He said to them, ‘Do you understand this parable [of the sower]? How then will you understand any parables? The sower sows the message [of the Kingdom, see parallel in Matt. 13:19].”

Salvation, according to the theology of Jesus, is based on an intelligent reception of his seed Message of the Kingdom. (Note: not a seed faith donation of finances to the preacher!) The whole New Testament is really an expansion of the summary statement of the Christian faith provided by Jesus in Mark 1:14, 15. But what is the Kingdom of God?

The objective analysis of the Kingdom of God in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ teaching, provided by the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ought to serve as a much-needed guide to all our thinking about the Kingdom, and thus about the gospel:

“The Kingdom — **the central subject** of Christ’s doctrine. With this He began His ministry (4:17) and wherever He went He taught it as Good News [Gospel] (4:23). The Kingdom He taught was coming, but not in His lifetime. After His ascension He would come as Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (16:17, 19:28, 24:30) and would sit on the throne of His glory (25:31)...Then the twelve Apostles should sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). In the meantime He Himself must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. How else could He come on the clouds of heaven? And the disciples were to **preach the Good News [Gospel] of the coming Kingdom** (10:7, 24:14) among

all nations, making disciples by baptism (28:18). The body of disciples thus gained would naturally form a society bound by common aims. Hence the disciples of the Kingdom would form a new spiritual Israel (21:43)" (W.C. Allen, MA, Christ Church, Oxford, Vol. II, p. 145).

The same authority goes on to say: "In view of the needs of this new Israel of Christ's disciples, who were to await His coming on the clouds of heaven, it is natural that a large part of the teaching recorded in the Gospel should concern **the qualifications required in those who hoped to enter the Kingdom when it came**... Thus the parables convey some lesson about the nature of the Kingdom and the period of **preparation for it**. It should be sufficiently obvious that if we ask what meaning the parables had for the editor of the first Gospel, the answer must be that he chose them because...they taught lessons about the Kingdom of God *in the sense in which that phrase is used everywhere in the Gospel of the Kingdom which was to come, when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven*.

"Thus the Parable of the Sower illustrates the varying **reception met with by the Good News [Gospel] of the Kingdom as it is preached amongst men**. That of the tares also deals not with the Kingdom itself, but with **the period of preparation for it**. At the end of the age, the Son of Man will come **to inaugurate His Kingdom**... There is nothing here nor elsewhere in this Gospel to suggest that **the scene of the Kingdom is other than the present world renewed, restored and purified**."²

The last sentence of our quotation makes the excellent point that Matthew does not expect believers to "go to heaven" but that Jesus will come back to rule with them in a renewed earth. The perceptive reader of the New Testament will note the striking difference between the biblical view of the Kingdom and what in post-biblical times was substituted for it: a departure of the faithful at death to a realm removed from the earth.

"The Kingdom He taught was coming, but not in His lifetime." "In the New Testament the Kingdom of God is conceived, *first of all*, as something in the future" (cited above). So say leading analysts of the

² *Ibid.*, emphasis added. The same view of the Kingdom is expressed by the author of this article on Matthew in his commentary on Matthew (W.C. Allen, *The International Critical Commentary, St. Matthew*, T & T Clark, 1907, pp. lxxvii-lxxi).

Gospel records. We add a further statement from a recognized authority on Luke:

"It cannot really be disputed that Luke means by the Kingdom **a future** entity...It is *the message* of the Kingdom that is present, which in Luke is distinguished from the Kingdom itself. He knows nothing of an immanent [i.e., already present] development on the basis of the preaching of the Kingdom" (Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, p. 122). ✧

Comments

"I truly appreciate the *Focus on the Kingdom* newsletters. Each contains many nuggets of gold, which enhance my understanding of important truths in Scripture. God bless your efforts to give many a clear picture of issues vital to all believers." — *Alaska*

"I first heard your Kingdom radio program in Dallas. I happened to catch the very last program in the series of 260 broadcasts. I was intrigued to learn that the Gospel as Jesus preached it is about the coming Kingdom and what we must do now to prepare to enter it. I was moved to tears by the thought that God is going to intervene to straighten out the world's awful problems. Three years later I am more than convinced that the churches have lost touch with this Gospel of Jesus. I need to be baptized, now that I have understood that repentance is about believing the Gospel words of Jesus (Mark 1:14, 15). I want to follow the model given in Acts 8:12. Can you arrange for a fellow believer to baptize me?" — *Texas*

"Things have been happening concerning our fellowship group which I feel I should inform you about immediately. Ever since I first listened to the Focus on the Kingdom radio program and started sharing with the others in our Bible study group, there has been some strong opposition to what we have been learning. Well, lately two groups emerged out of the one fellowship group, one headed by our group leader who say they believe in the Trinity and feel they have heard enough of what the other group has been teaching, i.e. the one to which I belong where we do not believe in Trinity. We had to take our stand on the issue and this cost us our membership in the fellowship group." — *Maximum Security Prison, Zambia*

The annual Theological Conference at Atlanta Bible College will be February 7-9, 2003. We expect participants from various countries. Interaction with truth-seekers. Instruction. Rich fellowship. Please mark your calendars. Information regarding lodging and names of speakers will be provided in the November issue. Any questions, please call 800-347-4261.