

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 5 No. 3

Anthony Buzzard, editor

December, 2002

An Invitation

This is to announce details of our twelfth annual Theological Conference to be held here at Atlanta Bible College from February 7th 2003, starting at 9:00 am on that Friday until Sunday, February 9th (ending with lunch together here at the college). We extend a warm invitation to you and any of your friends to be with us here in Georgia for this special occasion. Details of accommodation and costs are given at the bottom of this page.

Thanks to the Internet and other means of outreach, Atlanta Bible College's circle of friends of the Truth of the Abrahamic faith has been extended. A large amount of literature promoting the Messianic faith of Jesus and first-century understanding of God and the Gospel is circulating. Advertising locally has brought many new students to the college. If you can make the journey to be with us, we think you will enjoy rich fellowship and be strengthened to continue the battle for truth in which we are involved. The conference is a place to make brand new acquaintances as well as to renew old ones.

The tragic state of the world compels us all to tighten our grip on faith and above all to become better informed about what we believe. This will lead to a greater confidence and influence for good in the world in which we are all responsible to be lights.

We plan to devote three sessions on Friday to matters of history. Dr. Hillar, who is the author of the standard work on the life of Servetus and is an expert on our Socinian Christology, will address the crucial issue of the Greek influence on original Christianity from the second century. Dr. Snobelen will visit us from Canada and present material on the radical theology of Sir Isaac Newton, who we think would have fitted in well at our conference. Jan Stilson will remind us of the roots of the Abrahamic Faith in the Age-to-Come movement beginning in 1844. We need to develop a sense of what we owe to the past so that its lessons may never be lost.

The remainder of the weekend we will devote to issues of Abrahamic faith and the principal doctrines we hold dear. Since last year a small congregation led by Alex Hall has been preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom vigorously in London. Pastor Hall will bring us news of his work in the UK. Robert Hach will

pursue the topic of the relationship of the spirit to the word and the nature and content of faith. His book on the subject has already created much interest. From a former Worldwide Church of God pastor we will hear of the progress of the doctrine that God is one amongst those coming out of the Binitarian teaching of H.W. Armstrong.

A visitor from Israel, Uri Marcus, will present a unique report of his work amongst Jews and Jewish Christians as he brings the doctrine of unitary monotheism to them. John Cunningham of Ireland will examine the biblical doctrine about the future of Antichrist. Pastor Dan Gill will bring us important material on the issue of baptism and its connection with discipleship. Dan Mages of California will speak to us on the ultimate sovereignty of God.

There will be an impressive unity amongst our speakers and ample opportunity for many of you to present your "faith story" from any angle you choose. These mini-presentations (15 minutes at the most, if possible!) provide some of the most delightful parts of our conference. If you have any questions at all, please phone Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or email me at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com

Please let your friends from all over know about this gathering. For some this is the only opportunity of meeting with others of like-minded faith. We all benefit so much from the insights and talents of other members of the body of Christ.

Here are the details of accommodation. Please note that transportation from Hartsfield International Airport should be arranged directly with Hampton Inn when making reservations. The cost of the shuttle is included in the cost of the room.

Accommodation is available at the Hampton Inn, Morrow, GA. The block rate of \$69 per night (1-4 persons) may be reserved by calling 770-968-8990 by **January 30** and mentioning Atlanta Bible College. The rate includes continental breakfast and shuttle service from Atlanta airport. Please arrange airport shuttle directly with the hotel. Shuttle from Hampton Inn to ABC will be provided. The conference will begin Friday, Feb. 7 at 9 a.m. and end Sunday with lunch. Cost of the conference is \$59 **before January 15th**, \$69 after. This price includes 3 lunches. Questions, please call 800-347-4261.

Jesus and His Gospel of the Kingdom

Rachel Lockett, a student at Atlanta Bible College, dedicated one of her research papers in Basic Bible Doctrine to Jesus' favorite theme.

The purpose of this paper is to explain to the reader the meaning and importance of the Kingdom of God by attempting to answer the following questions: What does the actual word “kingdom” mean? When will it be established? Is it important? Who will reign in it? What will it be like? How can one inherit it?

“It is customary to speak of a kingdom (*basileia*) as being made up of two component parts: [1] an authority to rule and [2] the realm or territory over which the king’s reign is exercised. Vine, for example, speaks of the kingdom as being [1] sovereignty, royal power, dominion and [2] the territory or people over whom a king rules. Strong similarly states that the kingdom consists of ‘royal power, kingship, dominion, rule’ and ‘the territory subject to the rule of a king.’ Bauer, Gingrich and Danker call the kingdom [1] ‘kingship, royal power, royal rule’ and [2] ‘the territory ruled over by a king.’¹

These statements provide a clearer picture of what the Bible means when it speaks of the Kingdom. “Because it will be in every physical and political sense a real kingdom it will have a king, a government, a capital, and an international system of laws. God has already delegated ‘all power in heaven and in earth’ to His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.”²

When will the Kingdom of God be established? The disciples asked Jesus this question in Acts 1:6. He answered in verse 7: “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own authority.” No one knows, not even Jesus, the exact time the Kingdom will come. God has kept this secret to Himself. Luke 21:25-31 says that when one sees the signs of the end of the age he will know “that the Kingdom of God is about to come.” The critical sign is the coming of the Son of Man (Jesus) in a cloud. This is called the *Parousia*, the second coming of Christ. In Acts 1:11 a promise is given by two angels: “Why do you stand gazing up to heaven? This same Jesus, now being taken from you into heaven, will come exactly as you have seen him go into heaven.”

Is the Kingdom of God important? It is the center of all that Jesus taught. John Bright states, “The

concept of the kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible” (*The Kingdom of God*, p. 7). Sir Anthony Buzzard, in his book *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah*, says:

“The Kingdom of God is the center of Jesus’ entire mission. It is his watchword and the nucleus of all his teaching. He announced that it was ‘at hand’ (Mark 1:14, 15), demonstrated its power in his ministry, promised it as a reward to his disciples (Luke 12:32) and urged them to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10).”

John the Baptist also preached the Kingdom of God, summoning the public to a new life: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt. 3:2).

Who will reign in the Kingdom of God? Jesus the Messiah will be the King. Buzzard states that the Messiah, God’s agent, will administer an ideal world government. In Luke 22:29, 30 Jesus says to his apostles, “I appoint to you a Kingdom, as my Father has appointed it to me; that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom, and sit on thrones administering the twelve tribes of Israel.” The apostles will also reign. I Corinthians 6:2 states, “Don’t you know that the saints will govern the world?” All the saints of all the ages will reign with Christ.

What will the Kingdom of God be like? According to Isaiah 65, it will be a place where there will be no weeping or crying (v. 19), people will fill out their days (v. 20), houses will be built and lived in, vineyards will be planted and enjoyed (v. 21). The wolf and lamb will eat together, lions will eat straw, serpents will eat dust, and none of them will harm or destroy. Ezekiel 34 states that in the Kingdom of God there will be “showers of blessing.” The earth will yield her increase, and the tree of the field will yield her fruit. There will be no more hunger.

How does one inherit the Kingdom of God? Oswald Chambers, in his book *My Utmost for His Highest*, writes:

“The entrance to the Kingdom is through the panging pains of repentance crashing into a man’s respectable goodness.”³ Then the Holy Spirit — God in action — forms a brand new life in the believer.

Matthew 5:3 says that the “poor in spirit” will inherit the Kingdom. Verse 10 says that those who are persecuted for righteousness will also possess the Kingdom of God. Acts 14:22 speaks of trial: “We must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God.” In John 3:3, Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Truly I

¹ <http://bible.org/docs/nt/books/mat/kgdm.htm>

² <http://www.christadelphia.org/pamphlet/kingdom.htm>

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 1963.

tell you: Unless a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." I Corinthians 6:9-11 warns, "The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God." If we have all sinned and are therefore unrighteous how can anyone inherit the Kingdom? Verse 11 answers this question: "You were washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." The only way to inherit the Kingdom is through believing His Son Jesus Christ. In Matthew 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me." The Kingdom of God is available for all those who will realize their sinfulness, confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, believe in their heart that God hath raised him from the dead, and repent of their sins. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life [the life of the age to come — life in the Kingdom]."

I conclude with a beautiful picture of the Kingdom of God that I found on the Internet:

"Use your imagination for a moment. Think of a world at peace, its inhabitants healthy and well fed and doing rewarding work. Imagine a world in which there is full employment, where people are not exploited and where a man can live a long and prosperous life; a world in which famine and pestilence no longer kill one quarter of the population and where the full resources of the land and the seas are harvested. Already you are getting a picture of the Kingdom of God.

"Now ponder the absence of religious bigotry or sectarian strife; imagine the benefits of internationally accepted laws, with justice administered by fair-minded yet uncompromising judges. Conjure up a mental picture of life without terrorism and child abuse; where good-negborliness prevails and evil tendencies are discouraged, where governments establish good standards of behavior, and implement just forms of retribution. That will be the kingdom of God on earth!...The Kingdom has to do with a real, tangible world empire which will be set up when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth from heaven in the near future."⁴♦

Jesus and the Elixir of Life

Part 1

Most human beings would give anything to be able to prolong life indefinitely. Jesus' mission to humanity implied the astonishing claim to be in possession of the secret of living permanently. He came to bring "life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). That priceless information is accessed only by intelligent belief in his *teaching/word/Gospel* of the Kingdom as well as belief in his death and resurrection. Churchgoers talk somewhat vaguely about "eternal life." This phrase does not fully represent the original idea. It means more precisely "the life of the Age to Come." The expression is a Jewish one that Jesus loved and used frequently. He found it in Daniel 12:2 where there is a grand promise of resurrection for the sleeping dead. When multitudes awake from their sleep of death in the dust of the ground (Dan. 12:2), they will attain to the "Life of the Age [to Come]." It is the Age to Come because it is the age of world history which follows the future resurrection of the dead. That resurrection of all the faithful happens when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:23). That precious verse in Daniel 12:2 tells us also with marvelous simplicity what the dead are now doing, and where they are doing it. It is one of the Bible's most lucid testimonies to the present condition of the dead prior to the resurrection. They are sleeping — unconscious. Such truth ought once and for all to demonstrate the futility of "prayers" offered to Mary or any other "departed Saint."

That Life of the Age to Come, of which Daniel first and the New Testament after him spoke, is indeed life in perpetuity, but it is life to be gained finally and fully in the Age to Come. That means that there is going to be an "Age to Come." Time will continue in that coming age, and the earth will be renewed under the administration of the Messiah Jesus who will return in power at the beginning of the New Age — not seven years before that time to perform a *secret* rapture, as some popular schemes have proposed and propagated.

Translators of the Bible sometimes make it difficult for us to gather the sense of the original. The King James Version (beautiful in its way but badly corrupted in certain verses) makes you think that there will be "no more time" when Jesus comes back! That verse in Revelation 10:6 actually states nothing of the sort. It means only that there is to be "no more delay." The Second Coming will follow immediately. But time

⁴ www.christadelphia.org/pamphlet/kingdom.htm

will continue: it will be the Age to Come of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Churches have tended to make the Bible in many respects hard to understand. While they go on talking about “heaven” as the goal of the Christian, the Bible says the opposite. Jesus promised *the earth* as the future inheritance of his followers. Quoting Psalm 37:11 Jesus defined the destiny of his followers as the inheritance of the land or earth (Matt. 5:5). He announced this at the very heart of his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount, and all the teachings of Jesus, are given to us as necessary instructions for the present life, as we prepare to enter the Kingdom of God on earth when it comes at the Second Coming. At the Second Coming the faithful dead of all the ages will awake from their present sleep of death in “dust-land” (Dan. 12:2) and they will then “inherit the earth” as Jesus promised (Matt. 5:5) and, in fact, “rule as kings with Jesus *on the earth*” (Rev. 5:10; cp. Rev. 20:9 which describes the residence of the saints as on the earth). Jesus, according to the verse preceding (Rev. 5:9), has died to ratify the Kingdom covenant with his blood and to secure our forgiveness by his reconciling death. At the last supper Jesus spoke of this “blood of the covenant,” and the covenant is God’s arrangement/contract/promise to give Christians (Jesus spoke to the Apostles as representing the faith) the Kingdom of God with Jesus. “Just as my Father has *covenanted* with me to give me the Kingdom, so I *covenant* with you to give you the Kingdom...and you will sit on twelve thrones to administer the [regathered] twelve tribes” (Luke 22:29, 30). Some translations now correctly, we think, remind us that the word “grant” is really the verb “covenant.” The word is indeed related to “covenant.” Jesus had just been talking about shedding his “covenant blood” (Luke 22:20).

Jesus, as the “new Moses” and the “new Joshua,” promises the Land or the Kingdom of God on earth to the faithful. It is the confirmation of the ancient “Land Promise” made to Abraham. When Jesus spoke of “this Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 24:14) he provided a comprehensive title for his plan for human immortality in the coming Kingdom. Just as “this book of the Law” (Torah) was communicated through Moses (Deut. 30:10), the one greater than Moses delivered the New Torah summarized as the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The patriarch Abraham is known in Scripture as the father of the faithful. His faith is the model of Christian faith. Believers are described as following in

the footsteps of the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:16). They are heirs, Jews and Gentiles alike, of exactly the same promises made by God to Abraham. To Abraham the Christian Gospel had been preached in advance (Gal. 3:8). The divine promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the rock-foundation of the New Testament Gospel. Abraham was promised the land of Canaan (property) and offspring (posterity). God’s unilateral proposal to him was a guarantee of both “seed and soil.” The seed or descendants were to be many and in a special sense one individual, that is Christ (Gal. 3:16). The “soil” was the Promised Land, or more exactly the Land of the Promise (Heb. 11:9). In that promised land the patriarchs resided as “resident aliens” (Heb. 11:9), believing, based on the divine word, that their country of residence would one day be transformed into the “heavenly” Kingdom of God on earth. This means that the Land was really theirs by divine promise, but during their lifetime they owned none of it. (Abraham had to purchase from the actual owners of the land a small plot in which to bury his wife Sarah.)

The vitally important Gospel truth is that Abraham actually lived in the Land of the Promise (Heb. 11:9). This proves beyond any argument that the Promised Land is not “heaven,” as a place removed from this planet. The Promised Land was a territory in the Middle East. That territory remains the Promised Land. It will be the scene of the coming Kingdom. Its rightful King, the Messiah, will return to take over that country and extend his rulership across the globe. The Promised Land is thus nothing other than the promised Kingdom of God — the heart of Jesus’ saving Gospel. Jesus could say equally, “Blessed are the gentle. They will have the Land as their inheritance” (Matt. 5:5) or “Blessed are the humble in spirit for the Kingdom of Heaven⁵ belongs to them” (Matt. 5:3) by divine promise. In order for the promise to be fulfilled for Abraham, the patriarch must return to life by resurrection. Only then will he receive the promised reward and inheritance on which the divine covenant was based (see Heb. 11:13, 39, 40).

When the Kingdom comes (as we pray in the Lord’s prayer, “Thy Kingdom come”) Abraham and

⁵ The Jewish expression “Kingdom of Heaven” (used only by Matthew) means exactly the same as the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom’s origin is divine, heavenly, but this does not mean that it is to be *located* in heaven. It is now reserved with God in heaven pending the return of Jesus to the earth to inaugurate it in Jerusalem (1 Pet. 1:4; Col. 1:5).

Isaac and Jacob and the Old Testament and New Testament faithful will arise in resurrection (from their present sleep in the dust of the ground, Dan. 12:2) and sit down at a grand celebration to inaugurate the New Age of the Kingdom of God on earth (Matt. 8:11). Many others will assemble from the four corners of the compass and join them at that spectacular banquet (Luke 13:28, 29). In order to qualify for a place at that banquet, we are urged by Jesus to prepare now with all urgency and diligence. That is in fact what the Gospel is all about. Jesus exhorts us to make the Kingdom of God and gaining a place in it our first priority (Matt. 6:33). All other ambitions and activities must take second place. Jesus called his Message “the Gospel about the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15), and Matthew, when he used the noun Gospel, always qualified it as “the Gospel *about the Kingdom*” (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; cp. 26:13). Jesus declared his mission statement in Luke 4:43: “I am duty bound to preach the *Gospel about the Kingdom of God* to the other towns: that is the reason why God commissioned me” — that is what I was sent to do. Since he dispatched his followers to continue the same commission (Luke 9:2, 60; Matt. 28:19, 20; Luke 24:47), we would expect churches everywhere to be concerned with the Gospel of the Kingdom. This phrase, however, has apparently disappeared from contemporary presentations of “the Gospel.”

Jesus according to Luke 24:47 declared that “repentance and forgiveness” are offered only on the basis of Jesus’ name, that is, his own Gospel revelation. As in Mark 4:11, 12 reception of the Kingdom Gospel (Matt. 13:19) is the essential element in the acceptance of Jesus himself. Jesus made the same point often. He warned that “those who are ashamed of me *and my words*” will fare disastrously in the judgment (Mark 8:38). The separation of Jesus from his words is *the* major theological disaster to be avoided at all costs. Satan really has only one trick, in various guises: to detach Jesus from his teachings/Gospel (see also 2 John 7-9; 1 Tim. 6:3).

With his urgent call to repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15 — a summary of Christianity according to Jesus), Jesus was in fact inviting people everywhere to a place in that coming, covenanted Kingdom as co-executives with himself. Jesus, as Messiah, planned to “fix” the world, but he knew that he must first die, be resurrected and leave the world for a time. He is currently with the Father at His right hand, and he will depart from the presence of the Father and return to

the earth when the time comes for the Kingdom to be inaugurated on the earth.

In this connection Psalm 110:1 is a most useful verse. It is the Apostles’ and Jesus’ favorite “proof-text.” It is referred to in the New Testament 23 times — and is thus quoted much more often than any other verse from the Old Testament. Its importance is massive. It is also a revolutionary Psalm since it tells us about the relationship of God and Jesus. Psalm 110:1 is a divine utterance (poorly translated if your version leaves out the original word “oracle”). It is “the oracle of Yahweh” (the One God of the Hebrew Bible, of Judaism and New Testament Christianity) to David’s lord who is the Messiah, spoken of here 1000 years before he came into existence in the womb of the virgin Mary.

I call attention to the simple fact that David’s lord is not David’s Lord. There should be no capital on the word “lord.” The Revised Version of the Bible (1881) corrected the misleading error of other translations which put (and still wrongly put) a capital L on lord in that verse. What is at stake here? An enormously important truth about who Jesus is. He is not the Lord *God*, because the word in the inspired text is not the word for Deity, but the word for a human superior — a *human* lord, not a Lord who is himself God, but a lord who is the supremely exalted, unique agent of the One God. You may have to check this fact with a rabbi or friend who can read the Hebrew of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for the status of the Son of God in Psalm 110:1 is *adoni*. This word occurs 195 times in the Hebrew Bible and never refers to God. When God is described as “the Lord” (capital L) a different word, *Adonai*, appears. Thus the Bible makes a careful distinction between God and man. God is the Lord God (*Adonai*), or when His personal name is used, Yahweh, and Jesus is His unique, sinless, virginally conceived human son (*adoni*, my lord, Luke 1:43; 2:11). *Adonai* is found 449 times in the Old Testament and distinguishes the One God from all others. *Adonai* is not the word describing the Son of God, Jesus, in Psalm 110:1.⁶ *Adoni* appears 195 times and refers only to a human (or occasionally an angelic) lord, that is, someone who is *not* God. This should cut through a lot of complicated post-biblical argumentation and creed-making which in subtle ways obscured the simplest and most basic biblical truth, that God is a single Person and that the Messiah is the second Adam, “the man Messiah” (1

⁶ Unfortunately a number of authorities and commentaries misstate the facts on this point.

Tim. 2:5). That “man Messiah Jesus” so perfectly and consistently reflected the character and will of his Father that he could say, “He who has seen me has seen my Father” (John 14:9). Nevertheless by himself he could do nothing (John 8:28). He was always dependent on and subordinate to his Father, God. (*To be continued.*)◊

“In order to understand the doctrine of the Trinity it is necessary to understand that the doctrine is a development, and why it developed...It is a waste of time to attempt to read Trinitarian doctrine directly off the pages of the New Testament” (A. and R. Hanson, *Reasonable Belief, A Survey of the Christian Faith*, 1980, p. 171).

Professor Wendt on John 8:58 and 17:5

Hans Wendt, D.D., was Professor of Theology at the University of Jena when he wrote *The System of Christian Teaching* (1907). He argued that the Jesus of John’s Gospel did not preexist literally as the Son of God. Texts which might show otherwise can be explained by the Jewish concept that everything of importance in God’s Plan “exists” in His mind. Professor Wendt wrote of John 8:58 (“Before Abraham was, I am he”) and John 17:5 (“Glorify me with the glory which I had before the world was”):

“It is clear that John 8:58 and 17:5 do not speak of a real preexistence of Christ. We must not treat these verses in isolation, but understand them in their context.

“The saying in John 8:58, ‘Before Abraham came to be, I am *he*’⁷ was prompted by the fact that Jesus’ opponents had countered his remark in v. 51 by saying that Jesus was not greater than Abraham or the prophets (v. 52). As the Messiah commissioned by God Jesus is conscious of being in fact superior to Abraham and the prophets. For this reason he replies (according to the intervening words, v. 54ff) that he was superior to Abraham because Abraham had rejoiced to see his Messianic day. Jesus’ reference to his **existence before Abraham’s birth** (v. 58) must be understood in the same sense. There is no sudden heavenly preexistence of the Messiah here: the reference is again obviously to his earthly existence. And this earthly existence is precisely the existence of the Messiah. As such, it was not only present in

⁷ “I am” (*ego eimi*) is elsewhere correctly rendered in our English versions as “I am he.”

Abraham’s mind, **but even before his time, as the subject of God’s foreordination and foresight**. The sort of preexistence Jesus has in mind is ‘ideal’ [in the world of ideas and plans]. In accordance with this consciousness of being the Messiah **preordained from the beginning**, Jesus can indeed make the claim to be greater than Abraham and the prophets.

“In John 17:5 Jesus asks the Father to give him now the heavenly glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The conclusion that because Jesus possessed a preexistent glory in heaven he must also have preexisted personally in heaven is taken too hastily. This is proven by Matthew 6:20 (‘Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven’), 25:34 (‘Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom **prepared for you** from the foundation of the world’), Colossians 1:5 (‘the hope which is **laid up for you in heaven** about which you heard in the word of Truth, the Gospel’), and I Peter 1:4 (‘an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, which does not fade away, **reserved in heaven** for you’). **Thus a reward can also be thought of as preexistent in heaven.** Such a reward is destined for human beings and already *held in store*, to be awarded to them at the end of their life. So it is with the heavenly glory which Jesus requests. He is not asking for a *return*⁸ to an earlier heavenly condition. Rather he asks God to give him now, at the end of his work as Messiah on earth (v. 4), the heavenly reward which God had appointed from eternity for him, as Messiah. As the Messiah and Son he knows he has been loved and foreordained by the Father from eternity (v. 24). Both John 8:58 and 17:5 are concerned with God’s predetermination of the Messiah” (cp. Wendt’s *Teaching of Jesus*, Vol. 2, pp. 151-183).

Things which are held in store as divine plans for the future are said to be “with God.” Thus in Job 10:13 Job says to God, “These things you have concealed in your heart: I know that this is **with You**” (see KJV). “He performs what is *appointed for me*, and many such decrees are **with Him**” (23:14). Thus the glory which Jesus had “with God” was the glory

⁸ Did Jesus say he was going to **return** to the Father? Or did he just say he was **going** to the Father? There is a big difference between going and returning! John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17 should be carefully examined in the King James or RSV as well as in the NIV. You will find a startling difference of translation. Which is correct? You can look in a Greek-English interlinear or search the meaning of the words in Strong’s. The NIV mistranslation is not the only example of “pushing” an idea which is not there — to support what “the Church” may have taught us. Discerning Christians should beware. Believers should be mentally alert.

which God had **planned for him** as the decreed reward for his Messianic work now completed. The promise of glory “preexisted,” not Jesus himself. Note that this **same glory** which Jesus asked for has **already been given to you** — the disciples, even those not yet alive when Jesus spoke (see John 17:22, 24). That glory was given to you and Jesus whom God loved before the foundation of the world (v. 24). You may therefore say that **you now “have” that glory although it is glory in promise and prospect.** Jesus had that same glory in prospect before the foundation of the world (John 17:5). God had it ready for Jesus in His own decree and purpose.

Paul can say that we “have” a new body with God in heaven — i.e. we have the **promise** of it, not in actuality. That body will be ours at the return of Christ. We now “have” it in anticipation and promise only (“We **have** a building of God,” II Cor. 5:1). We do not in fact have it yet.

The Christian Reward

Why would you “go to heaven” when the Promised Land, guaranteed to the descendants of Abraham — who are the believers (Gal. 3:29) — is the **Land of Canaan** in which Abraham **lived!** (Heb. 11:8, 9). Can you **inherit the earth** (Matt. 5:5), as Jesus promised, if you go “to heaven”? Can you rule with Christ “on the earth” (Rev. 5:10) if you are not going to be on the earth? Ponder all this carefully and prayerfully. Don’t forget the danger of being “moved away from the *hope* offered in the Gospel” (Col. 1:23). It is vital to know what you are hoping for and where Jesus will be in the future, in order to have a firm grasp on the content of Christian hope, a virtue second only to love.

God promised Abraham and Jesus the Land (Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17; Gal. 3:19), and this should prove that the Land is going to be available for Abraham and all the faithful following the resurrection. You cannot inherit a planet which has ceased to exist!

The almost universal use of the word “heaven” to describe the Christian reward dates from the unfortunate mingling of Platonic philosophy with biblical faith. It was Plato who spoke of “that land which is pure and lies in the pure region of heaven” (*Phaedo*, LVIII, p. 109). Plato expected disembodied souls to reside there. The heavily Platonized Church Father Origen (c. 185-254) shares the same concept of Christian destiny. Amazingly he argues that when Moses and Jesus spoke of the promised land as the reward of the faithful (Exod. 3:8; cp. Ps. 37:11; Matt. 5:5), they intended us to believe that that “pure land”

is located in “the pure region of heaven” (*Origen Against Celsus*, ch. 29). Jesus, in other words, is supposed to have agreed with Plato! Origen was a powerful influence in the formation of post-biblical doctrine. Christians today who speak of “heaven” as their reward are following in the footsteps of Plato and Origen and find themselves in an unfortunate contradiction of Jesus, who, with all the prophets of Israel, promises them the Land (Matt. 5:5), this planet Earth.♦

Comments

“I want to thank you for the books and papers (*The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* and *What Happens When We Die* and the monthly bulletin). I want to be an instrument of God to others because your books have shown me the truth, I mean the ultimate truth about words of God which is life itself. Always before I was searching and seeking for the biblical truth so as to set myself free from the ignorance of not knowing the truth. Half-truth and half-lies or pure lies have placed many souls in bondage rather than pure and unadulterated truth. Many are actually seeking for the truth but they don’t have the means of finding it or cannot identify it. For the word of God has confirmed it: My people die of ignorance because they lack knowledge of the divine truth.” — *Nigeria*

“The books provided to me, including *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*, and *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah* continue to prove themselves as invaluable resources as well as the *Focus on the Kingdom* publication. I purchased *Prophecies of the End of the Age* by James Mattison and it has been beneficial in opening my eyes to another outlook and understanding of prophecy. I always find useful the articles and information contained on the Restoration Fellowship web site and other Abrahamic Faith sites too. Thank you, as always, for what you are doing for God’s coming Kingdom and may He continue to bless your ministry.” — *North Carolina*

“Last week I openly came before God and asked for help in researching the doctrine of the Trinity, since I could not find peace about its correctness. The next day I typed in the words ‘no Trinity’ and ‘one God’ into Google, and I found all sorts of sites that dealt with it, from skeptics to the Unitarians. I also came across your site, to my great pleasure, as I have found your articles refreshing. They simply made a lot of sense, and suddenly I felt like the veil was removed from before my eyes.” — *Australia*