

Focus on the Kingdom

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Recovering the Gospel as Jesus Preached It

“The Kingdom of God is in fact, as John Bright has shown in his book by that title, the great unifying theme that binds the whole Bible into a connected story, with a beginning, middle and end: a drama of ‘salvation’ that leads from creation through sin and grace to the glory of ‘everlasting life’ [life in the coming age of the Kingdom].”¹

Since this is so, the Kingdom of God provides the “glue” which holds the entire Bible story together as a unified account of God’s purpose for us and for the world. That “glue” is more precisely the Abrahamic, Davidic and Jesuanic Kingdom covenants (see Luke 22:20, 28-31). God promised the Land to the faithful forever (Gen. 12; 13; 15; 17). He then provided a royal dynasty for that Land (II Sam. 7; I Chron. 17), and these grand promises converge on Jesus who is the heir of the oath-bound covenant made with the patriarchs. Jesus therefore promised the land to the meek (Matt. 5:5) and that he and his followers would rule as kings in that land forever (Rev. 5:9, 10).

These passages of Scripture provide the key to grasping the overall Plan of God for the destiny of mankind. II Samuel 7:19b states in reference to God’s Kingdom promise to David: “This is the charter for the direction of the destiny of man.” David is overwhelmed, as we should be, by the amazing, unfolding Design of God for our earth and our immortality.

The promise to David of a royal throne in perpetuity appears also in 2 Chronicles 7:18: “Then I will establish the throne of your Kingdom, according as *I covenanted with David* your father, saying, ‘There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel’” (cp. Luke 22:28-30 and promise to Jesus in Luke 1:32).

The Loss of the Gospel of the Kingdom

When *Christianity Today* invited a number of evangelicals to define the Gospel, there was a striking absence of any reference to the Gospel as “the Gospel of the Kingdom.” This means that Christians have lost track of the royal Plan of God. Matthew, when reporting the mission of Jesus, qualified the word

“Gospel” with the phrase “of the Kingdom,” providing the essential label for the Gospel, a label which is so conspicuously missing from contemporary preaching (see Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). To verify this fact, simply examine offers of “gospel” and “salvation” by way of radio, television, tracts and internet. Is the “Gospel of the Kingdom” the habitual title of the Gospel for churchgoers today?

This loss of the vital definition of the Gospel provoked dismay and amazement from a professor of world mission.² He rightly complained about the no-Kingdom Gospel of evangelicalism:

“I read with the greatest interest the nine statements attempting to answer the question, ‘What is the Good News?’ I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ Gospel in three of the four accounts: The Kingdom of God. Every one of these statements reflects the individualistic reduction of the gospel that plagues American evangelicalism. In addition to being biblical, founding one’s understanding of the gospel on the Kingdom of God bypasses two false dilemmas that have needlessly troubled theologians for several centuries: the either-or between individual and systematic salvation, and the either-or between grace and works. On the one hand God intends to rescue the entire cosmos from the bondage to decay; on the other hand how can one claim to be saved who does not make every effort to do God’s will?”

It makes no sense that Christians should speak of the Gospel in language other than that of Jesus, who is the master evangelist (Luke 4:43; Heb. 2:3, etc.). What has caused this uncertainty and vagueness about what the Gospel is? The answer is clear. A disastrous systematic error of definition has been provided by so-called “dispensationalism.” According to the theology of that school (widely promoted by the Scofield Bible) the Christian Gospel is *not* the Gospel which Jesus preached!

In This Issue

Light on the Christian Gospel	5
Joy at New Biblical Understanding	6

¹ W.M. Horton, *Christian Theology*, 1955, p. 252.

² Charles Taber, Professor Emeritus of World Mission, Emmanuel School of Evangelism, Johnson City, Tenn.

A Disastrous Misunderstanding of the Gospel

We received this letter from one correspondent promoting the extraordinary idea of more than one Gospel:

“We and all evangelicals should **not speak of the Gospel of the Kingdom** because that is not our message today. That was the message that John, the Lord and the 12 preached until the time Israel was set aside at the stoning of Stephen. Then the risen Lord from glory revealed **a new message**, the gospel of the grace of God, from heaven to his chiefest enemy, Saul of Tarsus, whom he saved by matchless grace and sent forth to preach the message to the nations. Even Paul’s commission was the opposite of that given the 12. They were to go to Jerusalem (the guilty city), then to Judea (wherein were the 2 tribes) and then to Samaria (representing the 10 tribes) and lastly, after all these were won to Christ, they were to go to the Gentiles.

“But since neither Jerusalem was won to Christ, nor Judea, nor Samaria, Israel’s Messiah was still rejected, and that commission never got to first base. But it was **replaced by the commission given to Paul** from glory, which addresses the Gentiles first, then kings, and lastly the children of Israel. Failure to see the changes God made in His program causes much of the confusion in the church today. **We do not, because we should not, refer to the gospel today as the ‘gospel of the Kingdom.’**”

This theory is destructive of the integrity of the New Testament which says nothing at all about two Gospels and repeatedly urges us to follow Jesus, obey his Gospel *of the Kingdom* (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; Acts 1:3; 1:6; 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31), and relay that same Gospel worldwide until the end of the age, the second coming (Matt. 28:19, 20).

John’s Summary of the Preaching/Teaching of Jesus (John 12:37-50)

Jesus could not have made himself clearer. He declared at the conclusion of his public ministry that we are to be judged by our obedient reception of his words. The words of Jesus are the criterion by which our service of him is to be assessed. Rejection of the words/Gospel of Jesus puts us in the category of unbelievers.

Leon Morris comments on John 12:39, 40 as follows: “But when John quotes ‘He has blinded their eyes’ he does not mean that the blinding takes place without the will or against the will of these people. So with the hardening of their hearts. These men chose evil. It was their own deliberate choice, their own

fault. Make no mistake about this. Throughout his gospel John has insisted on the seriousness of the decision forced on the Jews by the presence of Jesus, on their responsibility and guilt” (*Commentary on John*, p. 604).

The words/Gospel preaching of Jesus are presented throughout the New Testament as the gold standard against which we are to be measured. Would not then a decision to speak of the Gospel as the Gospel of the Kingdom be a wise response to the Messiah’s claim on our lives?

The New Schaff Herzog Religious Encyclopedia (“Soteriology”) has some interesting reflections on the tendency of evangelicalism to ignore the Gospel as Jesus preached it:

“In [Jesus] himself, **as well as in his message [Gospel] was light**. It may be queried whether in consequence of the strong inclination of Evangelical Protestantism to exalt the *priestly* work of our Lord as central, **that this prophetic mission has not been relatively too much ignored**, and more specifically, whether the Biblical view of him as the true norm and example of our humanity has not been surrendered to the uses of those who altogether reject his priestly character and mission...Unquestionably vital are the facts that the Lord both suffered *as well as taught*...He is King because he has been prophet and priest.”

The biblical facts demanding our attention are these: 1) Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and is thus the model of Gospel preaching (Luke 4:43). As he was sent, Christians are sent (John 20:21). 2) When he preached the Gospel he said nothing initially about his death and resurrection. There are some 28 chapters in Matthew, Mark and Luke in which Jesus is seen preaching *the Gospel* and yet saying nothing about his death and resurrection. Only later he “*began* to speak of his death and resurrection” (see Matt. 16:21).

No one has any difficulty with this proposition: “If people believed that Jesus died for them and rose, they could repent and be forgiven.” But this is not all that the Bible defines as Gospel. Jesus said: “If people understood and accepted my Gospel of the Kingdom, they could repent and be forgiven” (see Mark 4:11, 12 and parallels). This is exactly what Jesus had said in Mark 1:14, 15: Repent, believe the Gospel of the Kingdom.

There are thus two fundamental contingencies on which repentance and forgiveness hinge: Belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom and secondly, belief in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. It appears that

the first of these conditions has been bypassed in traditional orthodox evangelicalism.

Edwin Lutzer wrote to us on Oct. 30th, 1996: “I believe that the gospel of the Kingdom *is different from* the gospel of the grace of God. The gospel of the Kingdom has to do with the preparation of the people of Israel for the coming millennial Kingdom...The gospel of the grace of God has nothing to do with the Kingdom *per se* but is a message of repentance which makes us members of God’s family. I hope this helps.”

With respect, it does not help at all, but throws the New Testament into confusion. Thankfully there are clear witnesses to the point we are attempting to make in this magazine:

F.F. Bruce states correctly: “It is evident from a comparison of Acts 20:24 with the next verse that the *preaching of the Gospel of grace is identical with the proclamation of the Kingdom*” (*Commentary on Acts*, Tyndale, 1952). On that simple truth about the saving Gospel may Christians everywhere unite.

Some have tried to advance I Corinthians 15:1-3 against the obvious fact that both Jesus and Paul were career preachers of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43; 9:11; cp. Acts 28:23, 30, 31). But what do those verses in I Corinthians 15:1-3 really say?

“Paul declared that he received (*en protois*), as one of the fundamental tenets of the Apostolic faith, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. I, p. 377, “Covenant”).

“For I delivered to you **among the most important things** (*en protois*) that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins...” (*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. I, p. 472, “Gospel”).

David Wenham (*Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*): “It seems sometimes to be assumed that the Gospel that Paul preached was something like I Cor. 15:3, 4, that is, a brief declaration of the fact that Jesus died and rose for our salvation. But it is certain that I Cor. 15 is only an extremely compressed summary of *some of the main points* that Paul preached, quite probably also a *selective summary focusing on the point at issue* in I Cor. 15, namely Jesus’ resurrection” (p. 403).

Henry Alford comments: “‘I declare to you...’ The *whole* Gospel, not merely the death and resurrection of Christ which were *en protois* **parts of it.**”

Forgiveness of sin is offered in the New Testament on the basis of more than the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, vitally important though that

is. Jesus said very little about being forgiven by his death. That aspect of the Gospel was developed after Jesus had died:

“The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins on the basis of the atonement through the death of Christ is *not properly speaking revealed by Christ himself...* The nearest approach to such teaching is found in the institution of the Lord’s supper and the reference to his blood shed for the remission of sins in Matt. 26:28, also perhaps in the directions given to the Apostles in Luke 24:47...the Apostles could not in Christ’s lifetime understand at all the need for his death and the full meaning of the shedding of his blood on the cross” (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. I, p. 618, “Forgiveness”).

But Jesus *did* speak of forgiveness as dependent on an intelligent response to his Kingdom Gospel:

Mark 4:11, 12, New Century Version: “Jesus said, You can know the secret about the Kingdom of God. But to other people I tell everything by telling stories. So that: they will look and look, but they will not learn. They will listen and listen, but they will not understand. **If** they did learn and understand, they would come back to me [repent] and *be forgiven.*”

Mark 4:13: “Don’t you understand this story [of the sower]? If you don’t, how will you understand any story?”

Mark 4:24, 25: “Think carefully about what you hear [the parable of the sower, Jesus’ theology of salvation]. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you, but God will give you even more. Those who have understanding will be given more. But those who do not have understanding, even what they have will be taken away from them” (so they end up with nothing!).

Matt. 13:15: “For the minds of this people have become stubborn. They do not hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might really understand what they see with their eyes and hear with their ears. They might really understand in their minds and come back to me [be converted] and be healed [forgiven].”

The Bible in Basic English (based on a vocabulary of 850 words, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1956): “To you is given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but to those who are outside all things are given in the form of stories. So that seeing they will see and **it will not be clear to them, and hearing it they will not get the sense; for fear that they may be turned again to me and have forgiveness.** And he said to them: If you are not clear about this story, how will you be clear about the others? The seed is the word.

And these are they by the wayside, where the word is **planted; and when they have given ear the evil one comes straight away and takes away the word which has been planted in them**” (thus spoiling their opportunity to gain immortality).

Matt. 13:13: “For this reason I put these things in the form of stories; because they see without seeing and give ear without hearing and **the sense is not clear to them**. And for them the words of Isaiah have come true: Though you give ear you will not get knowledge; and seeing you will see, but the sense will not be clear to you. For the heart of this people has become fat and their ears are slow in hearing, and their eyes are shut; for fear that they might see with their eyes and give hearing with their ears and become wise in their hearts and be turned again to me, so that I might make them well.”

The reception of the Gospel teaching of Jesus is the first step in Christian discipleship. What then did he mean by the Kingdom?

Ridderbos on the Kingdom of God (*Commentary on Matthew*): Matt. 3:2: “The content of John’s preaching is summed up in the words ‘Repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.’ This announcement of the coming of the Kingdom implied nothing less than *that the complete fulfillment of prophecy* was at hand. This coming was the essence of the **great future that Israel’s prophets had foretold**. God would once again reveal Himself as Israel’s King and His kingship would extend throughout the whole world (see Mic. 4:7; Zech. 14:9). [This has obviously not yet happened]...The thought of an effective kingship (*basilea*) is naturally accompanied by the notion of *a territory or realm* where that kingship is manifested. The dynamic (kingship) and the spatial (kingdom) alternately stand in the foreground...Kingdom of Heaven does not mean that it is manifested only in heaven. On the contrary one of the glorious privileges of this kingdom is that, in Jesus’ own words, **‘the meek will inherit the earth’** (Matt. 5:5). [This has also not happened.]

“The qualification ‘of heaven’ denotes in the first place the *origin* of the Kingdom. It does not arise from earth but descends from heaven. Nor is it a product of earthly evolution or of human striving; on the contrary it is entirely dependent on divine intervention. In the second place, ‘of heaven’ qualifies the Kingdom as to its nature; it is a Kingdom that is divine, glorious, and invincible...We must remember that in OT prophecy the coming of the Kingdom has two contrasting sides: it brings both salvation and

judgment...The Greek verb ‘repent’ literally denotes a change of mind.

“Matt. 4:17: The evangelist now discloses the content of Jesus’ preaching. ‘From that time on,’ i.e. from the time of his arrival in Galilee, Jesus preached repentance and **the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven**. That Jesus began this way does not mean that his preaching later took another turn, but that from then on he announced the coming of the Kingdom. The Greek literally says ‘began to preach and say.’ The first verb refers to a solemn announcement, the second to further instruction about it. The content of Jesus’ preaching is reported **in exactly the same words as were used in connection with John the Baptist (3:2)**. Jesus thus aligned himself completely with John. Like him he proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom, the imminence of the great **Day of the Lord** [this, again, has not yet happened] which meant judgment for the wicked and salvation for those who served God.

“The coming of the Kingdom is nothing less than God’s **final, decisive intervention** into world history. Jesus therefore only said that the Kingdom was *near, but it had not yet arrived*. The nearness of the Kingdom was thus not merely Jesus’ distinctive message at the beginning of his ministry. It remained the content of his preaching [Gospel] to the very end (see 10:7; Luke 22:18 [**and Matt. 24:14**]). Just like John, he always pointed **to the future**...His teaching revealed that this Kingdom would fall into two dispensations and that there would still be a delay in the judgment. Because of the unbreakable connection between the provisional and final comings of the Kingdom, however, he, like John, placed all the emphasis on the kingdom’s imminence and on the urgent need to repent, before the final judgment arrived. The word ‘near’ here should be understood in the intensifying or condensing sense in which the prophets often use it.”

Ridderbos has this to say on Matthew 24:14: “Jesus here revealed that the church’s missionary mandate is one of the factors that determines when the world [age] will end. **‘This Gospel of the Kingdom’** is the Gospel **that Jesus had preached repeatedly in connection with John the Baptist’s message** (4:17, 23) and that he had committed to his apostles (10:7). Now it had to be preached in the whole world everywhere that people live and ‘as a testimony to all nations’ — to deprive them of all excuse if they fail to repent (see 8:4; 10:18; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5). Only then will the end come. Jesus’ words here reveal one reason why the end must be delayed. Just as on the

one hand, wickedness must reach its peak and become ripe for final judgment, so, on the other, the gospel must complete its course through the whole world. Before that time God's work on earth is unfinished and the Christ cannot yet return."

Confirmation of Jesus' Jewish view of the Kingdom is provided by the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels'* article on eschatology by Anderson Scott: "In the Synoptic Gospels it may be generally postulated that the fundamental conceptions are those of the OT...we may assume that the language of Jesus and the synoptics, which are the most accurate accounts of this teaching, in its natural implications represents current Jewish belief."

The Coming Kingdom: "It is clear that Jesus addressed people who had a perfectly distinct, though not accurately defined, idea of an *age* or kingdom to come, which would follow on the consummation (Matt. 13:29ff) of the present age. Jesus speaks of reward to the faithful 'in this time' (*kairos*) and of **eternal life in the age to come** (Mark 10:30); and the phrase Kingdom of God which was constantly on his lips, while doubtless subjected to expositions which charged it with new meanings for His followers, yet rested on a view of things common to him and to even irresponsible hearers. *It means the perfect form of the Theocracy of which all the prophets had spoken.*"

The Jewish supremacy: "It was generally believed that the Kingdom would come through *an act of power* in which God would visit His people, the Jews, delivering them from all their enemies, so that they might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness for ever (Luke 1:74). Men of the type of Simeon, Zechariah, and Joseph of Arimathea waited for the consolation of *Israel*. Such persons doubtless believed with the prophets (e.g. Isa. 11:1ff; 9:4ff; Zech. 9:9) that the supremacy of God's people would be maintained if not actually accomplished, by methods of peace, and even in the spirit of brotherly alliance among the nations (Isa. 19:24ff) who would receive the Law from mount Zion (Isa. 2:1-4). Yet obviously both they and the general populace *and even the disciples after the resurrection (Acts 1:6) thought of a state of things in which the position of God's people would be central and supreme.*"

Biblical Christianity fully supports these "concrete" conceptions of the Kingdom as a real empire to be established on this planet by the returning Messiah. ☩

Light on the Christian Gospel

The Kingdom of God Defined by Daniel 7 and a Standard Lexicon

The term "Kingdom of God" is perhaps the most important word in the Bible. As someone has said, the whole genius of the Christian faith is concentrated in the words "Kingdom of God." Jesus said that the whole point of his mission was to proclaim the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; cp. Acts 8:12).

This means that Bible readers should make every effort to define the Kingdom of God accurately. The saving Gospel, according to Jesus and Paul (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31, etc.), has a descriptive title. It contains information requiring a response of faith. That label is "the Kingdom of God." In the parable of the sower it is "the Message about the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:19) which a potential convert must embrace, so that the saving process can begin. The devil knows this well. That is why Luke reports Jesus as saying: "Whenever anyone hears the Message [about the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] the Devil comes and snatches away the Message sown in his heart, so that **he may not believe [the Message about the Kingdom of God] and be saved**" (Luke 8:12).

So what is this Kingdom of God? What, in fact, is the Gospel which Jesus commands us to believe (Mark 1:14, 15)? Sometimes Christians would do well to go back to a standard Bible lexicon to find a proper definition. Consulting the famous lexicon by Thayer under the entry "Kingdom of God," we read:

"Relying principally on the **prophecies of Daniel**, the Jews were expecting a kingdom of the greatest felicity, which God through the Messiah would set up, raising the dead to life again and **renovating earth and heaven**; and that in this kingdom they would bear sway over all the nations of the world. This Kingdom was called the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of the Messiah; and **in this sense these terms must be understood in the utterances of the Jews and of the disciples of Jesus when conversing with him, as Matt. 18:1; 20:21; Mark 11:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11.**" The lexicon then provides the important Gospel-defining information from Daniel:

"Daniel had declared it to be God's purpose that after four vast and mighty kingdoms had succeeded one another and the last of them shown itself hostile to the people of God, at length its despotism would be broken and the empire of the world would pass over forever to the people of God (2:44; 7:14, 18, 22, 27)."

Thayer then speaks of the foundation of the Kingdom which has already been laid in the preaching and miracles of Jesus in his ministry on earth. Then he refers to **the primary meaning of the Kingdom of God:**

“But far more frequently the kingdom of Heaven/God is spoken of as **a future blessing**, since its establishment is to be looked for **at Christ’s solemn return from the skies, the dead being called to life again** and the ills and wrongs which burden the present state of things being done away, the powers being hostile to God being vanquished (Matt. 6:10, “Thy Kingdom come,” 8:11, Luke 13:26: “When you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom,” “until the day when I drink the wine new with you in the Kingdom of God,” Luke 22:28: “I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom shall come,” Mark 9:1: a reference to the second coming. See 9:2-9 and Peter’s interpretation of the transfiguration as a vision of the Second Coming, II Pet. 1:16-18; Mark 15:43: Joseph was waiting for the Kingdom of God, just as Jesus is still now waiting for his enemies to be put under his feet, Heb. 10:13; Luke 9:27 with its fulfillment in the transfiguration in vv. 28-35; Luke 14:15; II Peter 1:11: “everlasting Kingdom”; also in the phrase “enter the Kingdom of God,” Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23, 24; Mark 9:47; 10:23, 24, 25; Luke 18:24, 25; John 3:5; Acts 14:22; James 2:5: “heirs [not yet inheritors] of the Kingdom”; “inherit the Kingdom of God,” Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 6:9; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).”

Thayer speaks of the Kingdom of God as occasionally a description of persons (Christians) preparing now for admission into the Kingdom of God when it comes (Rev. 1:6). But it should be noted that **the first and dominant meaning of the Kingdom of God** is the one given us by Daniel 7, from which the whole idea of the Kingdom of God, and thus of the Gospel, is derived.

Note carefully the time sequence given us by Daniel. In the vision of chapter 7, we see four beasts and a final tyrant (“horn”). Following these four beasts and the “horn” the Kingdom of God is introduced. It will be governed by the Son of Man (Dan. 7:13, 14). The sequence of events is of crucial importance. Where does the Kingdom come in relation to the other elements of the story? The answer is very simple. First the Beast power (antichrist) is slain and his body is destroyed by being given to the flame (the lake of fire) (see Dan. 7:11: “I watched until the Beast was slain...”). At that same time the dominion of the rest of the beasts was taken away (Dan. 7:12). Only

after this is the Kingdom given to the Son of Man and to the saints.

The interpretation given to Daniel reinforces a proper understanding of the Kingdom as the climax of the series of events. **First** there are four Beasts (Dan. 7:17). **After that**, the Kingdom is given to the saints (Dan. 7:18). No less than three more times, this sequence is emphasized. **First** the 10 horns of the fourth Beast appear, as does the little horn (7:20, 21). And **then** (and here we have our answer about the timing of the Kingdom of God) “the time comes that the saints possess the Kingdom” (Dan. 7:22). The same point is made again: 7:23-25 **first** describe the rule of the Beast power which culminates in the arrival of a final tyrant (horn) who persecutes the saints. But this is only for a limited time (v. 25). The dominion of the little horn is removed, and he is consumed and destroyed (v. 26). **Following the removal and destruction of the Beast, the Kingdom of God on earth, “under the whole heaven,”** is given to the saints and “all nations serve and obey them” (Dan. 7:27, GNB, RSV, etc.).

This essential background in Daniel enables us to understand that the Kingdom of God is, as Thayer says, “far more often spoken of as *a future blessing*.” ☩

Joy at New Biblical Understanding

by Bill Lavers, England

For more than a year now, I have been blessed with what I consider to be the capstone of scriptural enlightenment, the uniqueness of the Father. No longer are the eyes of my understanding blind to the fact that the One whom we are to love with all our heart, soul, and might is *one Lord*. I now know, with absolute conviction, that He alone is God; that He alone made the heavens and the earth, and created man upon it; and that there is no other God besides Him. (Isa. 44:24 is a key verse. God was *not* accompanied by His Son at the creation.)

During my adult life, from my early thirties when I first began to realize that the Bible was the word of God, right down to the close of my 72nd year, a full forty years later, I had lived, studied, and sought to love, honor and obey the Lord my God; and from the many blessings that my wife and I have received throughout that length of time, we have both lived with the quiet assurance that He has never ceased to lead us in the way of life.

Never once, throughout that generation of time did I have the slightest intimation that I was failing to honor Him as the One and only true God, even though I had come to believe that the actual God of the Old

Testament was, in fact, the being (the Son of God) who was later to *become* Jesus Christ. Every indication, both in the Old and the New Testament, appeared to confirm that conviction. But the Father was still the ever-existent One, while Christ, as I then firmly believed, was, according to Revelation 3:14, the beginning of His creation, the firstborn of every creature, as Paul clearly recorded in Colossians 1:15, and the one by whom the Father brought everything else into existence in Genesis – His Son, whom He had not *only appointed heir of all things*, but the One *by whom also He made the worlds*, as was revealed in the second verse of Hebrews.

Then, just about 16 months ago, the unbelievable happened. A friend here in England, whom I had not heard from for several years, sent me a book entitled *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. No specific mention was made of its contents. It was simply understood that I would find it to be extremely interesting and doctrinally enlightening. When I saw the names of the two authors, I felt sure that my friend's discernment of my presumed interest would be justified. It was under Anthony Buzzard's professional and patient tutelage in Ambassador College about 37 years earlier that I had come to learn the rudiments of the Hebrew language; and just two or three years before that, during my freshman year at Bricket Wood, I learned of the life and ministry of Christ, as Charles Hunting took us on a year-long course through a harmony of the Gospels.

I used the word *unbelievable* in the opening sentence of my last paragraph. It characterized my mental reaction to the opening pages of the book. From the contents of those initial pages, I sensed that what I had believed for more than four decades — for the entire period of time I had devoted to the study of the Bible — was now coming under scrutiny. A careful examination, in the light of the scriptural evidence presented, proved me mistaken.

My initial reaction I can only describe now as a justifiable confusion of mind. Here were two men whom I had long known to be clear rational thinkers, setting out to prove that Christ had not existed before his human birth in the womb of Mary. I felt I had to understand what had led them to their present conviction. Even more compelling was an intense curiosity to find out how they were going to explain the seemingly obvious scriptural references to the Son's literal preexistence. It was a challenge I could not resist. Either they were wrong, or I was wrong. I had to know. Nothing else seemed of any great consequence in comparison at that time.

As I read, a number of facts I had never previously considered to any great depth made me realize that there were fundamental issues at stake here with which my existing ideas were completely at variance. Christ himself recognized the Father as “the one and only true God.” The Father Himself had emphasized this time and again throughout the Pentateuch. The word *elohim* could in no way be considered a “uniplural” word. The word *echad* could mean one, and one only. It was totally untrue to consider it as pointing to “compound unity.” The Jews, to whom were committed the oracles of God, staked their very lives on His uniqueness.

Chapter by chapter the intellectual bastions I had so long considered impregnable proof of my understanding of the Godhead were systematically destroyed. I realized how blind I had been for so long, and thanked God from a heart now deeply humbled but so very appreciative of His mercy in finally opening my eyes to this new and wonderful truth. I found myself thinking of the Bereans, and esteeming their nobleness of mind as I had never done before. In spite of their deeply entrenched views of the type of Messiah they had expected, they earnestly searched the Scriptures to prove that what Paul had preached to them was indeed the truth.

There has certainly been a vast and insidious cover-up of this wonderfully liberating knowledge. But the day is not far off when, as the gospel of the Kingdom is preached as a witness to the nations (Matt. 24:14), so the true, unique nature of the Father will also be clearly defined together with the pristine truth of Christ's Messiahship, which required him “to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17). ☩

Comments

“I just wanted to write to congratulate you on the outstanding quality of the last 2 Focus magazines. In particular, the article in Jan. ‘We Have a Law: A Perspective on the Death of Jesus’ brought into relief further aspects of the position of Jesus. It highlights the need to listen to Jesus, who spoke the direct words of God, and how Moses pointed to him. This is so well supplemented by Professor Wendt's article in the December edition. And also the outstanding article on Jesus and the Elixir of Life.” — *Australia*

“Just finished reading your Jan. *Focus on the Kingdom* and wish to tell you how beautifully it is written, especially ‘Jesus and the Elixir of Life.’ The parable of the sower seemed to just come to life for me. Thank you for your continued work.” — *Texas*