

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Prophets, the Assyrian and the Coming Kingdom

What View of the Future Do the Prophets Present?

Experts in the Old Testament, many of them professors of Hebrew, have consistently reported that in the prophets' vision of the future, the Kingdom of the Messiah is to be erected *on the ruins of a fallen Babylon-Assyria*. If we take these terms for what they naturally mean, would this not lead us to believe that the final onslaught on Israel will come from the geographical area inhabited by Babylon-Assyria?

"It was the normal expectation of a prophet that his visions of the End would be fulfilled within a measurably short time. It is hard to resist the impression that Isaiah looked for the **end of the age** with the fall of **Assyria** (Isa. 7-9, 10-11), that Habakkuk looked for it to follow the overthrow of **Babylon** (Hab. 2:2ff), that Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah anticipated its coming at the close of the exile (Jer. 29-31; Ezek. 36; Isa. 49, 51), and Haggai hoped for it when the temple had been reconstructed (Hag. 2). To shirk this conclusion by regarding *the Day of the Lord* as a day of the Lord — any act of judgment — is as inadmissible as the many evasions of the plain language of Mark 13..." (G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future*, p. 170).

"Isaiah's scheme of history: he conceives the overthrow of **Assyria** as followed *immediately* by the Messianic age" (J. Skinner, D.D., *Isaiah 1-39*, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1905, p. 104).

"The prophet Isaiah is convinced that the **Assyrians**, the instruments of God's punishment, will overthrow not only Samaria but *Jerusalem*. As a state Judah will be destroyed" ("Remnant," *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. II, p. 315).

"The very earliest Messianic prophecies of the OT represent **the golden age** as preceded by a time of conflict — the conflict which will destroy the particular oppression of Israel at the time and wipe out the ungodly in Israel itself. The power to be overcome is in each case an actually existing empire, **Assyria**, **Babylon** or Persia whose downfall will immediately usher in the glorious reign of peace" ("II Thessalonians," *Ibid.*, p. 572).

"Isaiah uniformly regards the intervention of Jehovah in the **Assyrian crisis** as the supreme moment of human history and the turning point in the destinies of the Kingdom of God, **to be succeeded immediately by the glories of the Messianic age**" (J. Skinner, D.D., *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1930, p. 303).

"When **Assyria's** work is done her haughtiness and braggart arrogance will be punished. Then, when she is destroyed and Judah is free, the era of blessedness will begin. **There will be stable government and a righteous administration under the Messianic king, who passes through victory to an abiding peace. Agriculture will flourish, the land will be very fruitful, prosperity will abound. Judah's reliance will be placed on no earthly power but on Yahweh alone**" (*Peake's Commentary*, p. 436).

The Fate of the Assyrian

Of paramount interest is Isaiah 30:27-32:20. The **Assyrian** falls when God intervenes to set up the Kingdom. Why does Revelation 19:20 (the fall of the Beast) reflect the fall of **the Assyrian** at the end of Isaiah 30? This suggests strongly that the **Assyrian** is the Beast. Isaiah 30:33 pictures the **Assyrian king** going into the fire of brimstone, ignited by God. This is the Tophet (see Jer. 7:31, valley of the son of Hinnom) which became the "Ge-Henna" or hellfire of the NT prophecies. Historically, the king of Assyria did not die in the events of 701 BC. He survived and returned home and was murdered 20 years later by his sons (Isa. 37:36-38). The Beast is destroyed in the Lake of Fire in Revelation 19:20.

Paul sees in **the Assyrian** of Isaiah 11:4 the Antichrist of II Thessalonians 2:8: "whom the Lord [Jesus] will destroy with the breath of his mouth." The *Word Biblical Commentary* by F.F. Bruce, p. 172, says, "This clause is based on Isa. 11:4, LXX, where the coming prince of the house of David is to 'smite the earth with the word of his mouth (*tou stomatos autou*) and destroy (*anelei*) the wicked one (*asebe*) with the breath (*pneumati*) through his lips.'"

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What Is Micah's View of the Future?

“While Isaiah beholds the rise of Messiah's **Kingdom** in connection with the fall of **Assyria**, Micah sees the Kingdom of the Messiah established after the **Babylonian** exile” (T.K. Cheyne, *Micah, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1895, p. 13).

“The chief predictions of the book of Micah are: Destruction of Israel; complete destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (3:12; 7:13); deportation of the Jews to **Babylon**; return from exile; peace and prosperity in Canaan; victories and spiritual primacy of Israel (4:1-8, 13; 7:11, 14-17); a ruler in Zion (4:8), born at Bethlehem of the family of David” (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

“It would be easy to show in detail, particularly from Isa. 9 and Micah 5, how the Messianic kingship is expressly represented by the prophets as the institution by means of which the **theocracy** of the perfect time is able to exalt itself in victorious defiance of the **Assyrian world power**” (Dr. Edward Riehm, *Messianic Prophecy*, 1891, p. 188).

“For Micah does not refer to the captivity of the Jews by the Chaldeans, which happened about 130 years after the date of the prophecy, but to a deportation of them to **Babylon** by the **Assyrians**. **Even in the Messianic time Assyria is the world power which has to be overthrown** (Mic. 5:4ff)... Babylon belonged at the time of Hezekiah to the Assyrians...**Assyria** is in his eyes the land of Nimrod (5:6) and the first capital of Nimrod's dominion was Babel (Gen. 10:10)...There in the first seat of world power, the distress of the people of God was to reach its extremity...It must be frankly conceded that Micah's threat — in its concrete historical interpretation — was not fulfilled” (*Ibid.*, pp. 146, 147). It remains to be fulfilled.

Isaiah

“Nothing but the complete shattering of the **Assyrian power** could pave the way to the erection of the perfect **Kingdom**. This latter event Isaiah sets in the closest and most immediate connection with the impending deliverance of the people from the **Assyrian** tyranny...The triumph of the theocracy over the Assyrian supremacy lies on the border of Isaiah's times-horizon, and he sees it transfigured and glorified by the dawn-light of the Messianic salvation” (*Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161).

“All the prophets represent the consummation and perfect condition of the **Kingdom of God** as at hand...[cp. Mark 1:14, 15] the early chapters of

Isaiah, for example, placing it close behind the **Assyrian** devastations” (*Ibid.*, p. xii).

“**The spiritualizing evaporation of the entire concrete matter of messianic prophecy is the just consequence of Hengstenberg's failure to fulfill the first duty of an exegete, that of placing himself on the standpoint of the OT and in particular of the several prophets, so as to judge of the sense which they themselves attached to the their words**” (Riehm, p. 152).

“The stroke that slew 185,000 Assyrians in one night (Isa. 37:36-38) cannot be anything more than a shadow of the final fulfillment of this prophecy in Isa. 30:27-33. There was nothing, in that quiet single blow, in the silence of the night, to correspond to the terrific words here used; and this becomes more clear as the prophecy draws to a close” (F.C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, p. 370) [compare Isa. 30:33 with Rev. 19:20; Dan. 7:11, 26, Matt. 26:41].

The Future Peace of Zion (Micah 5:5-6)

“The placid picture vanishes for a moment, and the tramping boots of the invader are heard (v. 5). The events described here are difficult to place historically. Those who place this pericope [passage] in the context of the conquests of Antiochus III have great difficulty with the word ‘Assyrian’; yet if the passage is understood to describe a coalition of leaders who would successfully withstand the Assyrian invasion, the difficulties remain because the Jews offered no successful resistance at that time. If, however, ‘Assyria’ is understood as a figure of speech for all the world powers that oppress Israel, both present and future, the problem disappears... The prophet used the word ‘Assyria’ typically in 7:12 where in the restoration people came to Israel from ‘Assyria.’ If this is understood as a description of the millennial period, then ‘Assyria’ designates the godless nations from which the final regathering is to take place...Isaiah used the term ‘Assyria’ in similar fashion in 11:11, where the Messianic age is described (v. 10). He saw the eschatological restoration as being from ‘Egypt,’ ‘Assyria’ and beyond.

“Zechariah also used ‘Assyria’ and ‘Egypt’ (10:10) to refer to the nations God's people will be gathered from when the Kingdom is to be established. That the prophecy of Zechariah was written long after the fall of the Assyrian empire is significant because it indicates that, in the mind of Zechariah, Assyria (no longer a nation in his time) represented more than the empire that brought down the northern kingdom” (*Expositors Commentary*, Vol. 7, pp. 429, 430).

If the people return from Egypt, does not this really mean Egypt?! Then does not Assyria mean Assyria, especially as the river Euphrates is mentioned in the same context! (Isa. 11:11-16).

Isa. 10:28-32: March of the Assyrian to Jerusalem

From the *Commentary on Isaiah* by Keil and Delitzsch (p. 276): “Knobel regards this as a prophecy, because no Assyrian king ever did take the course described...Now, no doubt the Assyrian army, when it marched against Jerusalem, came from the southwest, namely from the road to Egypt, and not directly from the north. Sennacherib had conquered Lachish; he then encamped before Libnah, and it was thence he advanced towards Jerusalem.”

Isaiah 10:27b-32: The Advance of the Enemy

“The description of an approach of hostile forces against Jerusalem and their encampment close to the city, has several difficult features...[The passage] suggests that the reference is to an **Assyrian** advance. This could have been either that of Sargon II in 711, or that of Sennacherib in 701 BC. Yet the difficulty occasioned by this latter interpretation is that the route described was certainly not that taken by the Assyrians at that time. The historical reality then was of an advance from the south, whereas the prophet’s visionary description is of an advance from the north...Duhm and Marti would deny the description to Isaiah altogether and apply the prophecy to a final eschatological attack by Gentile powers against Jerusalem. Certainly the visionary element of the description must be taken fully into account so that it is not necessary to regard it as recording an advance as it actually happened” (Clements, *New Century Bible Commentary*, pp. 117, 118). This suggests, then, that it will yet happen.

“Every prophet predicts the return of Israel to her own land in the latter days. In the final state of the Kingdom of God on earth, the people will again dwell in the ancient heritages. Now this idea of the prophets must certainly be taken literally, if we desire to understand what *they* mean. They are not when they so speak using an elaborate system of symbolical language, according to which Israel is a symbol of the Church or people of God, and the land of Canaan a symbol of those spiritual blessings which God shall richly bestow on His people, when the Kingdom is the Lord’s. To suppose so is entirely to misunderstand the prophets; it is to make wholly inexplicable the ideas prevailing even [!] among the disciples of the Lord — ideas which they express when they put such questions to him as this: ‘Are you going at this time to restore the

Kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6). We must read such language in the prophets literally, if we are to comprehend their meaning, and the sense in which all who heard them understood them” (A.B. Davidson, D.D. LL.D., Litt. D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1904, pp. 188, 189).

The Assyrian Coalition of Psalm 83

Psalm 83 predicts a confederation of ten nations with **Assyria** as its leader: “History transmits no record of the national crisis when the nations enumerated in this psalm formed a league to wipe out Israel” (*Anchor Bible, Psalms*, II, p. 273).

Note how commentators try to avoid the literal Kingdom described in Isaiah 2:1-4: “Christians cannot simply take over these expectations in the concrete forms in which they are expressed here [*Why not?*]. The conceptual material of this promise [Isa. 2:1-4] is based upon a belief in the enduring significance of Zion as the sole place of the revelation of God (cp. Ps. 132:13ff), and this belief has been superseded by John 4:19-24 and Heb. 13:14 [The city to come is precisely the Zion of the future anticipated by all the prophets]. For Christians, there is no other manifestation of God within time than the preaching of the crucified and risen Christ (cp. I Cor. 2:2)” (Otto Kaisar, *O.T. Library Comm on Isaiah.*, p. 24). [This does not mean that Christ will not come back to rule in Jerusalem! Only a gnostic spirit prevents commentators from seeing the “concrete” hope of a real Kingdom to come on earth as presented by the Bible.]

Other Comments

Isa. 30:33: “The breath of the Lord kindles it...” “The assertion reaffirms that the final destruction of the **Assyrians**...would come about as the direct action of God. Such an overthrow was viewed by them as foretold by Isaiah (10:5ff) and was held to mark the final stage of the encounter between Israel and **Assyria** which formed the basic context and subject of Isaiah’s preaching” (R.E. Clements, *New Century Bible, Isaiah 1-39*).

“Sennacherib’s armies had withdrawn, but the danger of another attack still hovered on the political horizon. Thus the portraiture of the Messiah in Isa. 7-9 is that of a Divine Warrior hero who would break the **Assyrian yoke** in a great battle” (Owen Whitehouse, D.D. *Ibid.*, p. 61).

This quotation bears repetition: “It is hard to resist the impression that **Isaiah looked for the end of the age with the fall of Assyria** (Isa. 7-9, 10-11), that Habbakuk looked for it to follow the overthrow of **Babylon** (Hab. 2:2ff), and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and

Deutero-Isaiah anticipated its coming at the close of the exile (Jer. 29-31, Ezek. 36, Isa. 49; 51)...To shirk this conclusion by regarding the Day of the Lord as a day of the Lord — any act of judgment — is as impossible as the many evasions of plain language of Mk. 13 which J.S. Russell [not the Russell of J.W.'s] and his followers so severely castigate" (*Jesus and the Future*, Beasley-Murray, p. 170).

"The national regeneration of Israel is to follow upon the overthrow of **Babylon**. All culminates in a new Palestine, **a very heaven on earth**...The eschatology of the prophets is almost always concerned with the life of the nation [Israel], and with *what shall befall it in the latter days*" (Archibald Robertson, D.D., Bampton Lecture, 1901, *Regnum Dei*, p. 24).

We recommend these fine statements about what the prophets see as the prelude to the grand arrival of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God on earth at his future Parousia (Second Coming). ✧

John Chapter 2

Our translation of John from the Greek began in the Oct., 2004 Focus. We continue here with chapter 2.

Now on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When they ran out of wine, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." Jesus said to her, "What do you and I have in common, lady? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever he tells you to do, do." There were six water jars standing there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding about 20 or 30 gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." And they filled them to the brim, and he said to them, "Now pour them out and bring them to the head steward of the wedding," and they did this. When the head steward had tasted the water which had become wine and he did not know how this had happened, (but the servants who had poured out the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said, "Everybody serves the good wine at the beginning and when everyone has drunk sufficiently, poorer wine. But you have kept the best wine until now." Jesus performed this, the first of his signs, at Cana in Galilee, and he displayed his glory and his disciples believed in him. After this he, his mother, his brothers and his disciples went down to Capernaum and they stayed there for a few days. And the Jewish festival of Passover was approaching and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and he found in the temple those selling cattle, sheep and

doves. He made a little whip and drove them out of the temple and overturned the tables and said to those selling the doves, "Take these things out of here. Do not make my Father's house into a market place." And the disciples remembered what Scripture had said: "A passion for your House consumes me." So the Jews answered Jesus with these words: "What sign are you going to show us, that you are able to do these things?" Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews answered, "This temple was under construction for 46 years and you say that you are going to raise it again in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. When Jesus was later raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said these words and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival many believed in his name [his claims and his Gospel teaching] when they saw the signs which he was doing. But Jesus did not commit himself to them because he knew the nature of every man. And he did not need anyone to testify about man, because he knew what was in man. ✧

Baptism: Necessary Obedience to Jesus

by **Eddie K. Garrett, II**

An unfortunate development in some forms of Protestantism has caused an erosion of the importance of water baptism. Many who desire with all their hearts to be Christians, and who are passionate about their study of the Bible, have never been immersed. Some have set their hearts against it. Yet, what do the Scriptures say?

A most important aspect of water baptism is that Scripture connects it directly with the "forgiveness of sins." This fact should attract the attention of all Bible lovers. Certainly, forgiveness of sin is important to those of us seeking to be reconciled with God. But there is a danger that Satan will call into question what God has commanded. He used just this technique on the unsuspecting Eve: "Did God say...?" Let us look at what God says about water baptism.

On the day of Pentecost, when his audience asked how they could be forgiven for the terrible crime of having crucified Jesus, their Messiah, Peter commanded them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*." If you had been among those seeking forgiveness from God, and had heard these inspired words of Peter, could you possibly have missed the direct connection between baptism and forgiveness? Of course not! Baptism is *for*

— in order to obtain — the remission of sins. Yet, Satan continues to oppose God and the Apostles by raising all sorts of objections and repeating in people's minds, "Did God say...?"

Not only does Peter teach that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, he even makes baptism the sign of Christian "conversion." In Acts 3:19 he admonishes his audience once again to "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," or wiped away. In Acts 2:38 he had said: "Repent, and be baptized *for the forgiveness of sin*," and now in 3:19 he declares, "Repent, and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*." For the apostle Peter water baptism, in obedience to Christ, leads to conversion and thus forgiveness. Yet Satan says, "No, baptism is *not* for forgiveness of sins, and has nothing to do with conversion!"

The phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" in Acts 2:38 had been used also by Jesus in Matthew 26:28. Peter had been present to hear this clear teaching. Jesus holds up the communion cup and says, "This is my covenant blood, which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*." One might simply ask, Is Jesus' blood necessary for the forgiveness of sins? If so, how and when do those seeking forgiveness receive the benefits of the saving blood of Christ? Peter was not mistaken to think that it is at repentance and baptism. Is baptism for the forgiveness of sins? Peter said it was. If baptism is not necessary and *not* "for the forgiveness of sins" then Jesus' blood, equally, is *not* "for the forgiveness of sins."

No one would propose that Paul, formerly the notorious Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the Church, consenting to the death of Stephen, would be confused when he was forgiven and came under the saving blood of Christ. Notice how he recounts his conversion in Acts 22:16. He was admonished by Ananias, who was sent by Jesus, "Now why do you delay? Get up and *be baptized to wash away your sins*, calling on his name." Does water baptism have anything to do with washing away sins? It certainly appears so.

Not only do Peter and Paul link baptism and forgiveness in the blood of Christ, but the beloved apostle John does as well. In Revelation 1:5 he writes, "To him [Christ] who loved us and washed us from our sins by his blood..." The washing away of our sins, or forgiveness, at our conversion, is based on our obedience to the command of water baptism!

As Paul stated above in the context of his own sins being wiped out in baptism (Acts 22:16), he tells the Corinthians that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters,

nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves...will enter the Kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were *washed*, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:10-11). According to Paul's own testimony this was at their baptism. The words, "Such *were* some of you," coupled with the words "sanctified and justified" point to the time when they were initially converted, when they were "*washed*." Certainly this "washing" is necessary to salvation — entering the future kingdom of God.

Peter confirms this when he says in I Peter 3:21 that "baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

He compares baptism with Noah's escape through *water*. Yet Satan comes along and says, "baptism does not save you." We all know that just being dipped in water, without an accompanying change of heart and the reception of saving Truth, benefits no one. Receiving forgiveness of sins at water baptism leads to this good conscience. The author of the book of Hebrews makes the same point: "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). This certainly happens at one's baptism.

In John 3:16 Jesus stresses to Nicodemus the necessity of believing in him and his Gospel for eternal life (the life of the age to come). And what had he just told Nicodemus to believe? Verse 5 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." In verse three he describes this event as being "born from above," or born again. As John stated in Revelation, as we saw earlier, this is when Christ "washes us from our sins in his own blood."

Just as God made Christ alive at his resurrection, so in the same way when we emerge from the waters of baptism we are given life. It is a fact of the New Testament Scripture that Christ imparts this new saving life at our conversion accompanied by water baptism. Paul in Colossians 2:12-13 describes the process of becoming a member of the body of Christ, "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions...He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions."

Scripture says that salvation is *in Christ*. At Judgment those not found to be "in Christ" will not

enter the Kingdom of God. So, according to the Scriptures, how does one achieve the marvelous privilege of being “in Christ”? Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ.”

To receive the blessings of the cleansing blood of Christ we must understand the significance of Christ’s death for every human being. To benefit from the saving blood of Christ we must “die” with him. It is in this context that Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). One should take note that this “newness of life” in Christ is conferred on us at our baptism.

Many more passages and arguments demonstrating the necessity of water baptism in the process of salvation could be mentioned. It is sufficient to say that Jesus, issuing his Great Commission, commands water baptism until the end of the age (Matt. 28:19). Jesus was himself baptized “to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus baptized others (using his agents to carry out the baptism, John 4:1-2). Peter commanded it (Acts 10:48). Peter later emphasized his apostolic practice of baptism. When recounting the story of the baptism of the first Gentiles, Peter said: “How could I oppose God?” (Acts 11:17). He was referring to his own words in Acts 10:47: “Who can forbid [=oppose] water that they should be baptized?” To oppose water baptism, Peter said, would be to oppose God!

Paul practiced baptism and spoke of it often as the mark of obedience in connection with believing the Gospel of the Kingdom. Baptism is an integral part of obedience, and obedience is a condition of salvation. Jesus grants salvation “to those who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). It is crucial to our gaining entrance into the future Kingdom. We will leave you with the words of Jesus, as he gave the great commission to his disciples, “He who has believed *and* has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Loving Jesus means obeying him. ✧

Letter to *British Church Newspaper*

Recent correspondence shows that the issue of the Trinity evokes powerful reaction. I wrote as follows:

Sirs, I want to thank Hugh Williams for his sensitive remarks concerning the non-Trinitarianism displayed at my website (restorationfellowship.org). I understand the Protestant principle of private

investigation of the Bible to be a very precious heritage. As the Church of England articles state, “councils may err and have erred.” It cannot therefore be wrong for us all to search out what Scripture says about the One God and the Lord Messiah. I do not hold the Historic Creeds to be in any way infallible. They certainly cannot be appealed to as Scripture. As a professor of Scripture in a Bible College for the past 22 years I am not persuaded that the Trinity can be demonstrated from Scripture alone. I would say with many others that when Jesus agreed with the Jewish scribe about the all-important “creed” of Israel in Mark 12:28ff, he was not affirming a belief in the Trinity. In fact Jesus never departed from his unitarian conviction that “the Father is the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3). That indeed is the heritage of Israel.

There is a massive amount of anti-Trinitarian, Socinian material available these days, which, however, does not advertise itself as anti-Trinitarian, though it really is. One does not have to go far to see that there is a great deal of scholarly opposition to the Nicean and Chalcedonian definition of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus. I do not think one can just dismiss this with the labels “modernism” or “liberalism.”

I believe in the authority of holy Scripture, in the virginal begetting of Jesus and in his resurrection and future return to this earth. I believe that the Son of God is the express image of the Father and that to hear him and see him was to see the Father who commissioned him. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” is not quite the same as saying that God *was* Christ, or Christ was God. As William Barclay wrote, “The New Testament nowhere identifies Jesus with Yahweh.”

F.F. Bruce wrote to me many years ago on the question of preexistence. “On the preexistence question, one can at least accept the preexistence of the eternal Word or Wisdom of God, **which** (who?) became incarnate in Jesus. But whether any New Testament writer believed in his separate conscious existence as a second Divine Person before his incarnation is not so clear.” It is unreasonable to rewrite John 1:1 as if it reads “In the beginning was *the Son*...” Thus at Fuller seminary in California the systematic theologian Dr. Colin Brown, whose intense Bible study all of us value, notes that “to be a Son of God in the Bible is not itself a designation of Deity or an expression of metaphysical distinctions within the Godhead. Indeed to be a Son of God one has to be a being who is *not* God. It is a designation for a creature indicating a special relationship with God..It is a common but patent

misreading of the opening of John's Gospel to read it as if it said: 'In the beginning was *the Son*.'

Clearly this is not the place to engage in full this very important question of the biblical creed, but I want simply to say that "Historic Creeds" do not necessarily represent the Bible accurately. Little known to the public, there is massive support for a non-Trinitarian reading of the NT both present and past. I have assembled the evidence from Scripture in my book on this subject. I add that I had not intended to raise this question in the particular forum offered by *BCN*, but I am thankful to Hugh Williams for following up the lead to my website. I had actually forgotten that it had been mentioned in *BCN*.

Finally I think that we should hesitate before writing off such names as Sir Isaac Newton, John Milton and John Locke, and the hymn writer Isaac Watts as misguided "modernists." They too expressed a strong disagreement with the Historic Creeds, while intending only to be as biblical as possible. — Anthony Buzzard, MA Th. MA (Oxon.)

The following was among several letters expressing strong disagreement with me:

Sir, It is unfortunate for Sir Anthony Buzzard, but from the opening words of Genesis through to Revelation it is clear that God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Gen. 1:1-3 "In the beginning God [ELOHIM, literally 'Gods'] created the heaven and the earth...And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said [The WORD]: Let there be light: and there was light."

Then in Genesis ch. 4 Eve begets her firstborn. Thinking he is the seed of the woman of Gen. 3:15 she states in 4:1, "I have gotten a man from the LORD," literally in Hebrew: "I have gotten a man: YAHWEH." She was mistaken as to the identity, but not mistaken that the Messiah would be the God-man. In Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD," literally, Unity [ECHAD] in Hebrew which is not singularity (as Moslems wrongly believe), but the same sense as Gen. 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be ONE flesh" — ECHAD in Hebrew. Then in Isaiah we have the predicted virgin birth and the name of the Messiah: "Emmanuel GOD with us."

Then in Proverbs 30:4 we have the prophecy of Augur: "Who hath ascended into heaven, or descended?...What [is] his name, and what [is] his son's name, if thou canst tell?" Here it is clear that God has a Son. Then of course in John 1:1, 2 & 14 we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."

Then in John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word of Genesis 1:1-3 now becomes a human being. If this were not clear enough, then turn to John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." This along with many other references in John using the Greek EGO EIMI (I, I AM) is an absolute claim to being God (Ex. 3:14) — as the Jewish authorities understood very clearly because they sought to stone him for blasphemy.

I am sorry but Sir Anthony Buzzard is in very dubious company when citing either Barclay or Isaac Newton as his allies, and more appositely: "and Jesus answering said to them, 'Do you not therefore err because you know not either the Scriptures nor the power of God?'" (Mark 12:24). — Rev. Philip Foster

Comment

"I first e-mailed you about a year ago after having read your book on the Trinity. I want you to know that I am no longer a Trinitarian, and I have since gone on to a clearer understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it. It has made a significant difference in my relationship to and with God, as well as how I teach the gospel to others." — *Indiana*

14th Theological Conference

Our guest lecturer will be Harvard graduate Dr. Richard Rubenstein, distinguished author of *When Jesus Became God*. Please plan on attending our next Theological Conference, Friday, April 29 - Sunday, May 1, 2005. This is an international gathering of enthusiastic Bible students and truth-seekers from many different backgrounds, meeting for mutual edification and encouragement. The nature of the conference as a "theological conference" definitely does not mean that it is a heavy "academic" exercise. Papers on important biblical topics are presented, there is opportunity for interaction with the speakers, and there is much scope for enjoying shorter "faith stories" from other participants. The event is held near Atlanta in a comfortable setting with easy access to the airport.

Intensive Class Offered

Atlanta Bible College will offer a three-day intensive course, "The Kingdom of God as Gospel," to be taught by Anthony May 2-4, 2005 following the Theological Conference. The classes will be held at Cornerstone Bible Church, the same location as the Theological Conference. Times will be 9.00-12.30 and 1.30-5.00 Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Tuition \$238 for credit, otherwise \$185, plus textbook.