

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Divine Agency in the Scriptures

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*We are delighted to publish these important thoughts from our New Zealand colleague. His subject is far from being a dry, academic exercise. "Agency" provides a key, in fact the key, to understanding the relationship of the Son of God, Jesus, to his Father, the one God of Israel — the God of Jesus' creed (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:28ff). The world is presently torn apart by the inability of billions of religious people to agree on who the One God is and who His Son, the Messiah is. A common biblical understanding of God and Jesus has the potential for bringing mankind to peace and unity. One day it will. Everyone on earth in the Kingdom which Jesus will establish at his return will acknowledge the One God of Israel (Zech. 14:9) and His unique human agent, the Son of God, begotten by miracle in Mary (Luke 1:35). Jesus came as the ambassador of the One God. He claimed not to be God (that would make two Gods!) but to represent the One God. Jesus is the uniquely begotten Son of God. He models the perfect relationship between the Creator and mankind. Jesus is the model human agent of God and our lives should reflect him and our Father. — ed.*

In Hebrew thought, the "first cause" is not always distinguished from "intermediate" or "secondary" causes. That is to say: The principal is not always clearly distinguished from the agent, the one commissioned to carry out an act on behalf of another. Sometimes the agent, standing for the principal, is treated as if he or she were the principal him or herself, though this is not literally so. Principal and agent remain two distinct persons but they act in complete harmony. The agent acts and speaks for his principal.

### The Principle of Agency in Scripture

In the Bible there are examples of human principals using fellow humans for agents, of God as divine principal using angelic agents, and of God using human agents. This notion of principal and agent is the key to understanding the relationship between the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

### Human Principal and Agency in the Gospels

The concept of principal and agency can actually help us to reconcile what appear otherwise to be contradictions in the parallel accounts found in the

synoptic Gospels. So in the account of Jesus healing the centurion's servant, Matthew speaks of a conversation between the centurion himself and Jesus (Mt. 8:5-13). Luke tells us that the centurion did not in fact come personally. He sent some "Jewish elders" and then some "friends" to Jesus with his requests (Luke 7:1-10). The centurion here is the principal; the Jewish elders and the centurion's friends are his appointed, commissioned agents. Remembering that in Hebrew thought, the principal and the agent are not always clearly distinguished, Matthew mentions only the principal (the centurion) without distinguishing the agent (the Jewish elders and friends). Luke mentions both principal and agents. To put it another way, in Matthew's account, the elders (agents) stand for and are treated as the centurion (principal), even though this is not literally true.

Similarly, when Jesus was questioned concerning who might sit next to him in his Kingdom, Mark gives us the impression that James and John themselves personally asked whether they might sit next to Jesus in places of royal authority (Mk. 10:35-40). Matthew tells us that in fact it was the mother of Zebedee's children who actually made the request to Jesus (Mt. 20:20-23). In this case, Matthew gives the agency (the mother), whereas Mark does not. Again, putting it the other way around, in Matthew's account the mother (as agent) stands for and is treated as James and John (the principal), even though this is not literally true.

### Divine Principal and Human Agency

The LORD told Moses that he would be "Elohim [God] to Aaron" (Ex. 4:16). He says, "I have made you Elohim to Pharaoh and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet" (Ex. 7:1). In Exodus 7:17-21 the LORD says: "By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water." The LORD then says to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt — over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs — and they will turn to blood.'" Moses and Aaron did as the LORD had commanded. Aaron raised his staff and struck the water of the Nile "and all the water was changed into blood."

The LORD had said that He Himself would strike the waters with the staff in his own hand. Yet, it was Aaron's hand that held the rod, and Aaron who struck the Nile. Clearly, Aaron is not God. Rather, Aaron stands as God's agent, in the place of God. One might even say he *is* "God," not literally, but in a manner of (Hebrew) speaking. One might even say in this case that God (as principal) was represented by Moses (the agent), who in turn was represented by Aaron!

### **Divine Principal and Angelic Agency**

Genesis 18 begins by saying that "the LORD appeared to Abraham" (v. 1). We read that Abraham "looked up and saw three men" (v. 2). The implication is that *one* of the three is in a sense the LORD. Later it is the LORD who says, "I will surely return to you about this time next year" (vv. 10, 13). When the men get up to leave the LORD speaks yet again (v. 17). Finally, two of the angelic men turn away. As the NIV has it, "Abraham remained standing before the LORD" (v. 22). The alternative, given as a footnote, reads "but the LORD remained standing before Abraham." It was not literally the LORD (the principal) who appeared to Abraham; it was an angel (His agent). As agent of the LORD, however, the angel is treated as the LORD. We know this must be so because the Bible is adamant: No one has seen God (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:16). Note too that the one angel who directly represents God is *worshiped* as God's agent.

When Jacob wrestled with a heavenly being, he is said to have "seen God face to face." So Jacob is said to have wrestled with "God" (Gen. 32:24-30). However, we know from the word of the LORD to the prophet Hosea that Jacob in struggling against God actually wrestled with an angel (Hos. 12:3-4). Jacob did not literally wrestle with the LORD (the principal); it was with an angel (His agent) that he wrestled. However as the agent of the LORD the angel is treated as the LORD. Again, we know this is so because the Bible insists: No one has ever seen God (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:16). So too, when Jacob, as an old man, blessed Joseph's children he said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm — may he bless these boys" (Gen. 48:15-16). Surely, God Himself is not an angel, but the angel as His agent represented Him.

Another very clear example of this type of thinking is as follows. According to Deuteronomy 4:12 it was the LORD who spoke to Israel "out of the fire" to give them His Law at Sinai. It is said to be the

LORD's own voice that they heard. Yet several Scriptures reveal the speaker to have been an angel. Stephen says that "he [Moses] was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai" (Acts 7:38). He told the Jews, "You have received the law that was put into effect through angels, and have not obeyed it" (v. 53). Paul also says, "The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator [Moses]" (Gal. 3:19). Hebrews 2:2 only serves to confirm this point, saying that the message (the law) was "spoken by angels." This is no contradiction. The LORD did not literally speak "out of the fire." An angel spoke. However as the agent of the LORD the angel is treated as the LORD. It is as if the LORD actually spoke.

Scripture affirms that it was God who "opened the doors of the heavens" and "rained down manna" for the people of Israel to eat during their wilderness wanderings. He gave them "the grain of heaven" to eat (Ps. 78:23-24). The manna did not literally come down from heaven, the throne of God. It was "from heaven" in that it was a gracious gift of God. So too, the manna is called "the bread of angels" (Ps. 78:25). This is probably not because angels actually have manna for breakfast. God himself provided the food, but he did it through the agency of His angels.

### **"The Angel of the Lord"**

When Hagar saw the angel of the LORD she said, "I have now seen the one who sees me" (Gen. 16:7-14), referring to God. The angel of God said to Jacob, "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar" (Gen 31:11-13; cf. 28:16). While it is said that "the angel of the LORD" appeared to Moses from within the burning bush, it was God who called to him "from within the bush" (Ex. 3:1-5). Manoah, realizing he had seen "the angel of the LORD," said to his wife, "We have seen God!" (Jud. 13:20). So too, works attributed to the "angel of the Lord" are attributed to the LORD himself. The angel is said to have brought Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 3:7-8, Jud. 2:1). He is said to have sworn to give the land to the seed of Abraham (Gen. 15:18; Jud. 2:1). It was he who is said to have "cut a covenant" with Israel (Gen. 15:18; Jud. 2:1).

Many suggest that the angel of the LORD is a manifestation of the LORD Himself. Some even suggest that the angel of the Lord is a pre-incarnate (pre-human) form of Jesus Christ. If you believe this—Scripture is clear on this point—we suggest that you are mistaken. The book of Hebrews makes much of the supremacy of the Son and the superiority of his ministry over that of God's servants, the angels (1:5-14). It is because the ministry of the word in the Son

is superior to theirs that it must not be neglected. If the message “spoken by angels” (see the previous section) was binding, the saving Gospel message that comes by the Son is more so (2:1-4). While the Son was “made a little lower than the heavenly beings” (Heb. 2:7, 9), the “angels” of the LXX (Gk version of the OT) (Ps. 8:4-5), he has been exalted far above them by God the Father. He who is so superior to the angels cannot himself be an angel. One of the greatest truths revealed by Hebrews (1:1-2) is that God expressly did *not* speak through His Son in the Old Testament times. That is because the Son was not yet living. He had not yet been brought into existence (begotten) in Mary’s womb (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35).

To say that the angel of the LORD *is* the LORD Himself is inaccurate and imprecise. The angel of the LORD is the *agent* of the Lord and thus stands for the LORD Himself. Exodus 23:20-21 makes this clear: The LORD says, “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you, to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, **since my name is in him.**” As the LORD’s chosen representative, the angel speaks whatever he is told to speak by the LORD. The people are to obey the angel’s voice because “my [God’s] name is in him.” That is, the angel represents God when he is sent on a mission from God.

### **Has Anyone Ever Seen God?**

When God confirmed His covenant with Israel, it is said of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders that they “saw the God of Israel” (Ex. 24:9-11). So too, in Exodus 33:17-23, Moses is said to have seen God’s “back.” God would not allow Moses to see His face when He passed because “no man can see Me and live.” Note, in verse 20, in God’s own words, “seeing God’s face” and “seeing God” are synonymous. Seeing God’s “back” is akin to seeing “God’s glory” (Ex. 33:18, 22), which Moses did indeed see. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, Moses “saw Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). How is it then that the Bible is so clear: “No one has ever seen God”? (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12). He “lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). The only explanation available to us is that none of these worthies ever literally saw God. Rather they saw God’s agent, His chosen representative, who spoke with the authority of the LORD as though he were the LORD. They saw the angel of the LORD. In exactly the same manner Jesus said “He who has seen me has seen my Father” (John 14:9).

### **The Messiah as God’s Agent**

There are a number of texts where titles explicitly referring to God in the Jewish Scriptures are referred to Jesus in the Christian Scriptures. Many take this as proof positive that the two are One in a Trinitarian sense, that is, two Persons in the One Essence of God. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, in line with all that has gone before, it can easily be shown that these verses teach the vital truth that the LORD is the principal and the Messiah is His agent. As His appointed representative Messiah stands in the place of God, but is not literally God any more than Moses, Aaron or any of the angels who stand in the place of God are literally God.

### **Jesus as Savior**

The Jewish Scriptures are clear on this point: God is the *sole* Savior of Israel. The LORD says, “I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Is. 43:3); “apart from Me there is no savior” (Is. 43:11; cf. 45:15, 21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8). Nevertheless, Moses, as God’s agent, is called a savior (Acts 7:35; cp. 27 and Ex. 2:14; 18:13). The judges, as God’s appointed agents, are also called saviors (Jud. 3:9, 15; Neh. 9:27; Ex. 2:14; 18:13, Acts 7:27, 35). The prophets speak of other human agents, yet future, who will save Israel (Is. 19:20, Obad. 21).

Of course the Apostles acknowledge God as their Savior also. They speak of God as “our Savior” (1 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:4) and as “the Savior of all men” (1 Tim. 4:10). For them “the grace of God [the Father] brings salvation” (Tit. 2:10). But in true Biblical fashion, they also refer to Jesus, God’s ultimate agent, as Savior. He was born a Savior (Luke 2:10-11) and not just the Savior of Israel but “the world” (John 4:42). “Salvation is found in no one else.” There is “no other name” than that of Jesus “by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). They were eagerly awaiting that Savior, Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:20). This does not however prove that Jesus is the LORD God any more than the fact that Moses and the judges of Israel are called savior, makes them literally Divine. There is indeed only one *ultimate* Savior who is the God and Father of Jesus. Jesus is also savior as the perfect agent of the One supreme Savior. Salvation derives as Jude 25 says from “the only God” who is our principal savior “through” His agent Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus as Shepherd**

Without doubt God is the principal “shepherd” over Israel (Gen. 49:24; 80:1; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:11-16). David said, “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23). “We are His people, the sheep of His pasture”

(Ps. 100). The prophet Isaiah agrees, saying, “He [the LORD] tends His flock like a shepherd” (Is. 40:11). However He shepherds His people Israel through His agents. Thus the elders of Israel were God’s appointed shepherds (2 Sam. 7:7). David himself was appointed by God to shepherd Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-3; 1 Chr. 11:1-3; Ps. 78:71). Then also a future greater “David,” the Messiah, was predicted to be God’s appointed shepherd over Israel (Ezek. 34:23-24).

Is it any wonder that Jesus, God’s ultimate agent, should refer to himself as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14) or that his Apostles refer to “our Lord Jesus” as “that great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20) and “the shepherd and overseer [bishop]” of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25). Nevertheless, this does not prove that Jesus is literally the LORD transmuted into flesh, any more than the fact that the elders of Israel and King David being styled shepherds of Israel proves them to be God incarnate.

### **Jesus as Judge**

God is the principal judge of the whole earth (Gen. 18:25; 1 Sam. 2:10; 1 Chr. 16:33; Ps. 50:3-4; 67:4; 94:1-2; 96:13; 98:9); yet though it is said that God Himself is judge (Ps. 50:6) and that God Himself will bring every deed into judgment, “including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecc. 12:14), God has chosen and commissioned human agents as judges to execute God’s judgment throughout Israel’s history.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture we discover that Jesus, God’s ultimate agent, actually stands for God and will judge all things at the end. “He [Jesus] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts” (1 Cor. 4:5). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10) when he will judge “the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1).

When the Son of Man comes “all the nations will be gathered before him” (Matt. 25:31-46). The Father will actually judge no one. He has “entrusted all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22-27). The Father “has set a day when He will judge the world with justice” but through the agency of “*the man* He has appointed” (Acts 17:31). Note that the Son does not judge in his own right but only because the Father entrusts judgment to the Son (John 5:22-27). And the Son is styled man and not God. That of course is because there is only One God, and not two!

### **Jesus as the Rock or Stone of Stumbling**

Peter applies to Jesus the text describing the Messiah as “a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (Is. 8:14; cp. 1 Pet. 2:8).

Again, remember Jesus is God’s agent. Thus when Isaiah says, “The LORD will be a stumbling stone,” he allows for the fact that God causes Israel to stumble over Jesus His agent. “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Ps. 118:22, 23).

### **Jesus as the Coming One**

In Isaiah 40:10 we read, “See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and His arm rules for Him. See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him.” Clearly, the Sovereign LORD is the Father. The phrase “His arm” may be taken to refer to Messiah (John 12:38), but “the Sovereign Lord” is the coming one; it is He who brings His reward with Him. Yet the Christian Scriptures repeatedly tell us that Jesus is the coming one (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). Our reward is with him (Rev. 22:12). This is not because Jesus is God but because Jesus as His representative stands in place of Him.

Zechariah 14:4 should be seen in this light as well. “On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.” In the Jewish Scriptures “His feet” are the LORD’s feet. Christians believe it is Jesus who is returning to set up his Kingdom upon earth. But rather than jumping to the erroneous conclusion that Jesus *is* the LORD we should understand that, as the LORD’s agent, Jesus’ feet are spoken of as God’s feet in exactly the same way as Aaron’s hand is spoken of as the LORD’s hand (remember Ex. 7:17-19).

All the Second Coming passages in the OT are referred to God, but in the NT to Jesus. Since there is only one God, we know that Jesus cannot be God (which would make two!). The principle of agency steps in to provide a wonderfully satisfying solution to the apparent puzzle. God acts through and in His beloved Son and also in His sons.

### **Jesus as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, etc.**

Surely, the same reasoning applies to Jesus’ being called “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:16), King or Lord of glory (Ps. 24:7, 10; 1 Cor. 2:8), the first and the last (Isa. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:17; Rev. 22:13), the Rock (1 Sam. 2:2; Ps. 18:2; 31:2; 89:26; Is. 17:10-11; Mt. 16:16; 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:4, 6) and so on. Jesus stands in this relationship to the LORD not because he is the LORD in a literal sense, but because as God’s ultimate agent he stands for the Lord in a way that supersedes the status of Moses and Aaron or any of

the angels, even the angel of the LORD, who preceded the time of Jesus.

### **Zechariah and the “Thirty Pieces of Silver”**

Perhaps one more example will drive the point home. The prophet Zechariah, speaking about himself and recording an event in his own life, pictures his prophetic ministry as the shepherding of sheep. When he challenged the leaders of Israel to give him the wages due him, they gave him instead the price of a slave (30 pieces of silver). This surely was an insult worse than if they had not paid him at all. So the LORD told the prophet to throw it to the potter.

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter, the handsome price at which they priced Me!’ So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter” (11:13). It may be that the LORD Himself speaks of being priced at 30 pieces of silver, but it was Zechariah who was so paid. Are we to assume that Zechariah is Almighty God? Not at all! Rather, in so pricing Zechariah the LORD’s agent, they thus priced the LORD Himself. So when Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 26:14-15; 27:3-10) they betrayed the LORD for 30 pieces of silver. We need no more conclude, therefore, that Jesus *is* the LORD in a Trinitarian sense, than we would conclude that Zechariah is the LORD. The Trinitarian idea of God in three Persons had not been imagined in NT times. A fine recent study by a German scholar, *One or Three?* by Karl-Heinz Ohlig, says, “The Trinity possesses no biblical foundation whatsoever” (p. 130).

### **Conclusion**

A Jewish understanding of the law of agency is expressed in the dictum: “A person’s agent is regarded as the person himself.” God appointed Jesus the Messiah as His agent. As such anything he does is regarded as though the Almighty Himself did it. One trusts the principal in trusting the agent. This notion of principal and agency helps us to understand why if you do not honor the Son, you do not honor the Father (John 5:23; 15:23). By refusing to honor and love the agent you are refusing to honor and love the principal. We see in Jesus a perfect reflection of his principal. He who has seen and heard Jesus has seen and heard the Father (John 14:9, 10; 10:38). And remember that people should be able to see God and Jesus in you, since Christians are also God’s agents to bear the saving Gospel of the Kingdom to others. ✧

## **Word and Spirit: The Vital Energy of the Christian Life**

### **A Useful Definition of the Holy Spirit**

“The Spirit is not merely God’s breath, but his self-awareness, his mind, his inner being. This may be the source or seat of God’s vitality, but it is more. It is his self-consciousness, his very being, the center of his Person, as we might say. Just as a man’s spirit is his ultimate reality, when he is stripped of all that is accidental to his being, so God’s Spirit is his inner self” (W.R. Bowie).

God bridges the gap between Himself and us humans through His spirit and word, His operational presence and power at work in our lives. Peter said to Jesus “You have the **words** of the life of the age to come” (John 6:68). Jesus said, “The **words** I have spoken to you are **spirit** and life” (6:63). John wrote “The **spirit** is the Truth” (1 Jn. 5:6). Paul called the Gospel of salvation the **word** of Truth (Eph. 1:13). Jesus said, “Your **word** is Truth” (John 17:17). We must worship within the sphere of **spirit** and Truth (John 4:24) and God’s “**holy words**” (Jer. 23:9).

The Christian’s job description is called working for the Kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). It is a task we undertake with joy knowing that we are dealing with issues of human destiny and the destiny of the whole world. No task is more desirable. It demands all the energy and intensity we can bring to it. We are to go into training to be ambassadors of Jesus now, in view of our future as servant-executives in the government which will one day take office — the Kingdom coming on earth at the return of Jesus. Nothing is more exhilarating than bearing fruit for the Kingdom, bringing others to the knowledge of the Truth and salvation, so that they too may take part in God’s immortality program. Fruit is born, Jesus said, from the seed Kingdom Gospel he preached everywhere (Luke 8:5-15). Thus “unfruitfulness alone separates men from Christ and his church. The church without a sense of mission is no church.”<sup>1</sup> How are we to work for God and “bear fruit”?

To do our job well, we need to be clear how God is doing His. We are to be God’s coworkers and spokespeople. Jesus calls those who have grasped the Kingdom-immortality program “friends,” not just servants. After all, Jesus reflected, a servant does not really know what his master is doing. But friends share the secret; they are “in the know” (Jn. 15:15). God’s secret counsel is with those who stand in awe of Him and His revelation in Scripture (Ps. 25: 14-15).

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *Gospel According to John*, p. 671.

How then is God at work? God is a worker in **spirit and word**. God's **words**, spoken through the prophets, and finally in Jesus and the Apostles and other NT writers, have, thankfully, been recorded for us. We can via Scripture be there in the first century to hear those masters of theological science — teaching us how to relate to God as we should in **spirit** and truth. We need to catch their **spirit** and “atmosphere,” which is the spirit and atmosphere of God and Jesus themselves. In John 14:10 Jesus observed: “**The words** I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does His work through me.” Yes, God was and still is working through and in Jesus and using **words** to do His work. “**The words** I have spoken to you,” Jesus said, “are **spirit** and life” (John 6:63). Spirit and word are closely linked.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the **words** of Jesus, if only because in standard theologies they are given so little space. Jesus in discourse with religious leaders said, “If you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. [Quite a challenge to the unbelievers here!] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe **my words**?” A few verses later we encounter that master saying of Jesus about believing **words**. “It is **the spirit** which gives life...**The words** I have spoken to you are **spirit** and life.” That is to say that when intelligently appropriated, and taken into our minds, those Messianic/Kingdom of God **words** of Jesus provide us with vitalizing energy, since Jesus' **spirit-words** are God's creative tool to change and renew our minds and fashion us like Him and like Jesus. And Jesus is the model Christian, the pattern of man in good standing with God.

That is why we need to be constantly learning and meditating on the immortality **words** of the Bible, and especially of Jesus and the NT. Peter well understood the life-saving power of the **words** of Jesus when he said, “Where else shall we go? You, Jesus, have the **words** of the age to come, the Kingdom” (see John 6:68). You are in possession of the secrets of man's journey to life forever. No one else has those marvelous instructions about the meaning and purpose of existence.

We need to be immersed in the spiritual atmosphere of Jesus and his **words**. We need to be “baptized” in them (I Cor. 12:13). But note this: We must be sure we are understanding, not *blocking* with our own faulty or flawed understanding, the words/teachings of Jesus. To stumble at his **words**, not to understand them, is to shut out of our lives the

precious **spirit and mind** of Jesus contained in those energy producing power-**words**. Jesus spoke of sowing his saving Gospel of the Kingdom information in our hearts. “Knowledge of the secrets of God's Kingdom plan has been graciously given to you” (God's grace to us; cp. Lk. 4:22, “words of grace”), but in some cases “the Devil comes and snatches away **the word [of the Kingdom]**, Matt. 13:19] from their hearts so that they cannot *believe it and be saved*” (Luke 8:12). In the Bible the heart is not the seat of the emotions only, but of the whole operation of a person, the core of his thinking and being. We think both with the heart and the mind in the Bible. The core of the Christian faith is the successful reception of the Kingdom of God words, including of course reception of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Devil well knows this and so struggles to remove the incorruptible seed-**words** of the Kingdom from our minds, so that we cannot “believe them and be saved.” The Devil works hard to obstruct our reception of the immortality-words of God and Jesus which transmit to us the character and life of God Himself. God said, “*Listen to my beloved Son*” (Luke 9:35).

Luke 8:12 (cited just above). What a key to the New Testament teaching about salvation! What a rivetingly interesting observation — intelligence report. The Devil knows what to oppose and how to work. He well knows the tremendous power of the **words** of Jesus and tries to block or twist them on every occasion. Satan, we might say, has only one trick, and it appears to be working rather well: To divorce and separate Jesus from his **words/Gospel of the Kingdom, which are carriers of spirit and life**. One can talk endlessly about Jesus, but who is this person, if not defined by *what he said*?

First we have to know what Jesus said and meant. Then we can believe him by believing his **words**. You cannot believe Jesus without believing his **words**. He is defined by his **words** and his actions. We are drawn into a sympathetic relationship with Jesus by being persuaded (not coerced) by his **words**. Believing his **words** means adopting a child-like open attitude to Jesus' teachings. (One of the great hindrances to actually believing Jesus is our tendency to look for honor from other persons, instead of “seeking the honor which comes from the only one who is God,” the Father of Jesus, John 5:44; cp. 17:3.)

In the Hebrew mind a word has power within it to affect and change what it impacts. We need to adjust our thinking about what a “word” means to a Hebraically trained person: “A word, and especially a divine word, is something real and active...it is a

vehicle of living power. Through His word God communicates some part of Himself. His energy passes over into matter previously dead. [The word is transmitted] to human souls which are then awakened to new and higher activities. A similar quality is described in the Gospel to the words of Jesus...through his **word** (or words) Jesus gave out his own living **spirit**, so that it could enter as new life into the natures of men...Jesus' words are like the creative **words** of God which are instinct with divine will and **power**, and enliven what was lying dead."<sup>2</sup> The very mind/**spirit** of Jesus (I Cor. 2:16).

Christians everywhere should pray for and seek the precious **words/mind** of Jesus and the Bible as the source of life now and life in the coming age of the Kingdom of God on earth when Jesus returns. Those **immortality words** contain the secret of living forever. They are transmitters of the very life of God. They are intended as the gracious gift of the Creator to human beings who are open to receiving them. Jesus breathed on the Apostles and said "receive holy spirit" (John 20:22). His whole ministry had been an exercise in the transmission of his "**words** which are spirit and life" (John 6:63). To have the creative **words** of Jesus with us is to have Jesus with us and in our lives. That guiding presence of Jesus through the creative activity of his **words** will bring us finally into his Kingdom, so that we may rule with him on the renewed earth (Rev. 5:10).

John recorded this memorable saying of Jesus. The Messiah promised us "the **spirit** of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold him or know him, but you know him because he **abides** with you, and will be in you." Towards the end of the NT period, John needed to clarify, in the face of many conflicting and confusing "spirits," what Jesus meant by the spirit. John sent greetings "for all who know the truth, and for the sake of **the truth** which **dwells in us** and shall be **with us** for ever" (II John 1:2).

Since the holy spirit is anchored to mind and words, it is called "the spirit of the truth," the "spirit of wisdom and revelation," the "spirit of the promise" (Eph. 1:13, 17). The spirit here brings truth, wisdom and knowledge. This is the chief activity of God's **spirit**. His operational power and presence among us through Jesus. **Spirit** is a state of mind. We speak too of a spirit of fear, timidity, i.e. a state of mind. God's **spirit** which is also the **spirit** of Jesus is a spirit of a sound, healthy mind. We are thinking straight when

we have learned to think along the lines of God's "**inspired**" **words** in the Bible. We need them all. Man is not to live on bread only, Jesus said, but "by every **word** which proceeds from the mouth of God." Paul expressed this teaching in various ways and strikingly by instructing us about "the mindset of the **spirit**" as opposed to "the mindset of the flesh" (Rom. 8:6). Paul was contrasting the way God and His spirit thinks, the way God and His mind works, with how our fallen human spirit works, often against God, because of our "ignorance which alienates us from God" (Eph. 4:18).

Yes, ignorance of Truth is no blessing. Ignorance and lack of spirit go hand in hand. Ignorance, said Paul, puts up a barrier between us and God, blocks fellowship with Him (Eph. 4:18). How important then are truth and knowledge? Absolutely vital for us, so that we can "track with Jesus" and think and behave as he did. So that Jesus can through his words "rub off on us." It seems not often to be preached publicly that "Jesus came to give us **an understanding** to know God" (I John 5:20) and that "by his **knowledge** the suffering servant will make many righteous" (Isa. 53:11). He will show them how to be "right" before God, not out of line with His purpose. All this is summed up splendidly in that unforgettable statement in Genesis 15:6, repeated in Galatians 3:6 and Romans 4:3, that "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," which is the learned way of saying that by believing God's **words** and acting on them, Abraham was OK before God, pleasing to Him, doing what he was supposed to do and thinking in tune with the **spirit-words** of God. All this makes good sense, and Christians should arm themselves with the **word/words** of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Not to do so is to be ashamed of "Jesus and his words."

To embrace the Gospel **word/words** of Jesus is to be armed with the sword of the **spirit** which is the **word** of God (Eph. 6:17), the offensive weapon by which the cause of God and Jesus is advanced. ✧

**Comment:** "I look forward to receiving *Focus on the Kingdom*. Over the last 18 months, having read your books and articles from men like Uri Marcus, I find myself in a similar position to Graeme Campbell in his recent article. Can I encourage you to continue your most enlightening work for Adonai, and thank you for how you have enlightened myself and others?" — *England*

<sup>2</sup>E.F. Scott, D.D., *The Fourth Gospel*, pp.285, 286.