

Book Review

The Gospel of the Kingdom, Wiley Jones, published by the author, 1879, 5th edition 1895. 283 pp.

The title page of this book reveals its complete title: *The Gospel of the Kingdom Advocated in a Series of Ten Discourses*. The author's preface indicates that the book is based upon his speaking notes. The book itself is academic, pastoral, and evangelistic — all at the same time. In it Jones proved himself to be a worthy debater of issues in theology and biblical studies. He was aware of the current debate and referred to other theological works of his time. Jones also used the Hebrew and Greek texts, and the Church Fathers. Yet the author had a pastor's heart. His deep concern for the spiritual and moral welfare of his listeners/readers can be seen clearly throughout each discourse. Sometimes his passion for both the message and the people is especially apparent, as when he writes: "I use this pointed language because truth requires it, and because I am trying to save people, not to flatter them" (177, footnote). His concern for evangelism is emphasized again and again. Each of the discourses/chapters concludes with a lengthy and passionate plea for all to obey the gospel of the kingdom.

As Jones' book is well over 100 years old a number of the anecdotes/illustrations are somewhat dated. For instance references appear to horses and trains as major forms of transport, to 19th-century methods of health care, to the Temperance movement, and to people in the news in 1879 — Napoleon III and the Czar. Of particular note regarding the age of the book is the ninth discourse, in which Jones suggested a few signs that the prophecies of the Bible were being fulfilled. He pointed to the then current decay of the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire's growing influence in the Middle East, as fulfillments of prophecy! Modern readers can learn from this — it is not always wise to use current events to interpret prophecy; one wonders about what modern prophetic interpretations will sound like 100 years from today. Yet Jones should not be underestimated. He was anticipating the return of the Jews to Palestine as an event dictated by Bible

prophecy. Further, what Jones understood then about the nature of prophetic events is even more clear today: “We live in an age of rapid movements, and the advent crisis may be quickly formed” (235).

Jones’ major concern throughout the book is the *gospel of the kingdom of God*. One of Jones’ banner texts is Acts 8:12, which reads, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.” It is Jones’ contention that the gospel of the kingdom is the message that saves. It was the message of Jesus (Luke 4:43), it was the message that he delivered to his apostles, and it was the message of the early church. The message is the hope of the coming kingdom of God to be established at the second advent of Christ. It will literally be established upon this earth with Jerusalem as its capital and Christ as its king. It will be an everlasting kingdom of peace and justice. Through his discourses Jones argues that the gospel of the kingdom is the key to understanding the Bible. He argues that the hope of the kingdom is the form of Christian faith and the content of true Christianity. Jones recognizes in the gospel of the kingdom not merely a teaching of the New Testament, but one anticipated in the Old Testament. He writes, “The great plan of redemption has been gradually unfolded to man. Commencing in Genesis with a few comprehensive sentences, it is progressively expanded, as to details, until it shines forth in the apostolic writings as the fully revealed, ‘Gospel of the Kingdom’” (81). In the Old Testament, the covenant with Abraham and the patriarchs included the promise that the land of Canaan would be an *everlasting* possession (Gen. 13:14, 15). The “Seed” of Abraham is Christ. Christ, and those who are Christ’s, become heirs of that same promise delivered to Abraham. It is the promise of an everlasting kingdom upon the earth with the land of Canaan as its center and Jerusalem as its capital. Matthew 5:5 reads, “the meek shall inherit the earth.” The Davidic covenant also anticipates the gospel of the kingdom of God. In 2 Samuel 7 David was promised that one of his descendants would sit on the throne of David forever. This promise is fulfilled in Christ who, according to Luke 1:32, 33, will be given by God “the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” In a number of places Jones insists that we must take these promises literally, not employing figurative or allegorical interpretations.

Though some of the discourses are concerned with topics such as immortality, baptism, and Christian duties, *the gospel of the kingdom is the lens through which he sees all things*. In this sense the ten

discourses become a kind of “systematic theology.” Since the kingdom will commence at the second coming of Christ, Jones reasons that the Christian experience of immortality will not begin until this second advent (the event which will initiate the kingdom of God). The dead now “sleep” in the graves awaiting the day of resurrection, a literal resurrection of the body to life eternal. The hope of Christians is the coming kingdom of God. Immortality is not natural to human beings; it must be given by God through Christ. Jones appeals often to Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Using this same reasoning he teaches that the final lot of the wicked will not be an eternity of fire and torture. The wicked are not naturally immortal but will be judged and destroyed completely in the lake of fire. Jones concludes that the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul is a heathen, rather than biblical, doctrine. On the other hand Jones takes a fairly traditional view of the atonement. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ made our participation in the coming kingdom of God possible. He also insists upon a believer’s repentance, a believer’s baptism by immersion, and a faithful Christian life. Jones makes it clear, as well, that the church is not equivalent to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God can only be initiated by the second advent of Jesus Christ.

Jones emphasizes the absolute necessity of the gospel of the kingdom. He writes, “is it wiser or safer to include ‘the things concerning the kingdom’ in our preaching and faith, and thus have a whole and true gospel; or to leave out those things of the kingdom as though they were never mentioned in Scripture, and thus have a fragmentary and perverted gospel?” (25). For Jones, it is not simply “to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” that saves us. He writes, “we know that a message sent makes him by whom it is sent a messenger, and that to truly believe on the messenger is to believe the message which he brings.” In other words, one cannot truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unless one believes the message which he preached — the gospel of the kingdom. Jones bemoans the lack of knowledge of the gospel of the kingdom among his contemporaries. In one place he complains:

A preacher of another large and popular sect told me that he remembered the expression, “the gospel of the kingdom” and he believed that it occurred “somewhere in the Epistles.” Another preacher, who said he had studied Greek and Hebrew, had graduated regularly in theology, and had been preaching six years, on being questioned by me as whether the expression “the gospel of

the kingdom” occurs in the Old or New Testament, said that he believed it occurred in the Old Testament. . . . Do not these incidents prove that a great apostasy has taken place in the world, and that many have “departed from the faith,” have lost sight of the ancient gospel of the kingdom, and fallen into the deadly error of preaching and believing “another gospel” than that which the Lord Jesus preached? (37-38).

The biblical evidence that Jones presented is still overwhelming. The gospel of the kingdom was the centerpiece of the preaching of Jesus and his apostles. Why does it not occupy that same treasured place in modern churches? The questions that Jones raised 100 years ago are still relevant today. The inconsistency he recognized between Jesus’ teaching and the popular teaching of the modern church continues to exist as an unresolved problem deserving urgent attention.

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