

Focus on the Kingdom

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Hebrews 1:10: A Challenge to Our Teaching That the Son of God Began in the Womb of Mary

Hebrews 1:10, read out of its immediate context, outside the context of Psalm 102 which it quotes, and read apart from the rest of Scripture, might challenge the Christology presented by this magazine. It is claimed that Jesus is here presented as the creator of the Genesis creation. We read here that the Son of God “laid the foundation of the heaven and the earth.” How can that be if Jesus came into existence some 2000 years ago?

This question requires some careful investigation. There are three “proof texts” addressed to the Son in Hebrews 1:8-12. They are introduced by the words: “But of the Son He says...” There is no hint in the text that they refer to someone other than the Son. Verse 8 is explicit: “But of the Son He [God] says...” Then follow three different quotes. The subject changes to the angels only in verse 13: “But to which of the angels did He [God] ever say...”

Verse 8 uses the term “God” of Jesus in a secondary sense, quickly adding that as “God” he *has* a God, that is his Father. The NAB properly writes “god” with a lower case in Psalm 45:6 which Hebrews quotes.

Much of chapter 1 of Hebrews compares the Son of God with angels, showing that the Son was never an angel and is superior to them. This proves a) that the Son cannot be God! It is not necessary to prove God superior to the angels. It is obvious b) that the Son cannot be an angel or archangel as maintained by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Both angels and archangels are angels!

What then of Hebrews 1:10? In what sense is Jesus, the Son, the founder of the heavens and earth?

How can this be since Jesus nowhere claimed to be the Creator and it was not Jesus but God who rested on the seventh day (Heb. 4:4)? “God [not Jesus] made them male and female” (Mark 10:6) and “the Lord God [not Jesus] formed man of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). Fifty Bible texts say that **God** created the heavens and the earth. Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18, 20 and 1 John 5:18 (not KJV) say that the Son **did not exist** until he was created/**begotten** in Mary. Was Jesus both six months younger than John the Baptist and billions of years older? Was Jesus 30 years old when he began his public ministry and yet really billions+30 years old? What part of Jesus was 30 and what part was billions of years old? Jesus cannot be so divided up, split in two. Mary bore a

human being. She did not bear an angel. She did not bear GOD. She did not bear “impersonal human nature” as Trinitarian theory says. God cannot be begotten, and the Son of God was begotten. **God cannot die** (1 Tim. 6:16). The Son of God died. God cannot be tempted by sin, and yet Jesus was tempted. Not to observe these category differences is to throw away precious biblical instruction.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says that God did *not* speak through a Son in the Old Testament times. Hebrews 1:5 speaks of the *coming into existence* of Jesus, the Son: “Today I have **begotten** you.” The same verse speaks of 2 Samuel 7:14’s promise that God “*will be* a father and he *will be* a son.” That promise was given to David and it referred to the Messiah who was to come as a biological descendant of David. The beginning of Messiah’s existence (“today I have **begotten** you [brought you into existence]”) is the moment when God becomes the father of the Messiah. This is exactly what we find in Luke 1:32-35 and Matthew 1:18-20 (“that which is begotten in her is from the holy spirit”).

Isaiah 44:24 says that God, unaccompanied, unaided created the Genesis heavens and earth. He was entirely alone. “There was no one with me.” There was no Son with him (cp. Heb. 1:1-2).

God did not speak in a Son until the New Testament. So then, who said, “Let there be light”? It would be a flat contradiction of Hebrews 1:1-2 to say it was the Son. The God of the Old Testament is quite distinct from His unique Son. The latter had his **genesis** in Matthew 1:20 (“the **genesis** of Jesus was as follows”). The Bible becomes a book of incomprehensible riddles if God can have a Son before He brought him into existence! Luke 1:35 describes how the Son of God *came to exist*. He was begotten. To beget in Hebrew, Greek and in English is a word which of all words denotes a “before and after.” Therefore the Son had a beginning. There was a time before he was begotten, before “he was.” If he already existed, these testimonies in Matthew 1 and Luke 1 are nonsense.

Mary bore a human being, not God or an angel. That is what all human mothers do. The notion that the Son of God was in fact God would make a charade out of his whole struggle in obedience to God and on our behalf as Savior and model. The whole point of a High Priest is that he must be selected “from among men” (Heb. 5:1). He is the “man Messiah Jesus” in contrast to his Father, who is the One God (1 Tim. 2:5). The Father in John

17:3 is “the only One who is truly God.” If God is the only One who is God, no one else is God except the Father, which is exactly what Paul declared when rehearsing the creed in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6: “There is no God except the One God the Father” (combining v. 4 and 6). Jesus himself went on record as agreeing with the Jewish creed that “the Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29).

If the Son were God, it would produce the notion that there are two Gods. To call Jesus God and the Father God amounts of course to two Gods and this is not monotheism, however much the label may be applied.

In Hebrews 1:10, there is a complication due to the fact that the writer quotes Psalm 102 from the **Greek** version (LXX) of the Old Testament and not the Hebrew version. **The LXX has a different sense entirely in Psalm 102:23-25.** The LXX says “He [God] answered him [the suppliant]...Tell me...[God speaking to the suppliant]...Thou, lord...[God addressing someone else called ‘lord’].” But the Hebrew (English) text has “He [God] *weakened* me...I [the suppliant] say, ‘O my God...’”

Thus the LXX introduces a **second lord** who is addressed by God and told that he (the second lord) “at the beginning founded the earth and the heavens.” The writer to the Hebrews had open before him the LXX reading and not the Hebrew reading.

F.F. Bruce in the *New International Commentary on Hebrews* explains:

“In the LXX, Septuagint text, the person to whom these words (‘of old you laid the foundation of the earth’) are spoken is addressed explicitly as ‘lord.’ God bids him acknowledge the shortness of God’s set time for the restoration of Jerusalem (v. 13) and not summon Him [God] to act when that set time has only half expired, while He [God] assures him [the suppliant] that he and his servants’ children will be preserved forever.”

There is a footnote to B.W. Bacon’s discussion in 1902: “Bacon suggested that the Hebrew as well as the Greek text of this psalm formed a basis for **messianic eschatology**, especially its reference to the shortness of God’s days, i.e. the period destined to elapse before the completion of His purpose. He found here the OT background to Mark 13:20 and Matthew 24:22 and Ep. Barnabas: ‘As Enoch says, “For to this end the Master [God] has *cut short* the times and the days, that His beloved [Jesus] should make haste and come to his inheritance”’ (Kingdom).

Bruce continues: “It is God who addresses this ‘lord’ thus. Whereas in the Hebrew text the suppliant is the speaker from beginning to end of the psalm, in the **Greek text** [which your English Bible does not show] the suppliant’s prayer comes to an end in verse 22. And the next words read as follows: “He [God] answered him [the

suppliant] in the way of His strength:¹ ‘Declare to Me the shortness of My days. Bring me not up in the midst of My days. Your [the suppliant’s] years are throughout all generations. You, lord [the suppliant, viewed here as the Lord Messiah by Hebrews] in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth...’

“This is God’s answer to the suppliant (v. 23ff in the LXX)...But to whom a Christian reader of the LXX might well ask could God speak in words like these? And whom would God Himself address as ‘lord’ as the maker [or founder] of heaven and earth?”

Reading the LXX the Hebrews writer sees an obvious reference to the *new* heavens and earth of the *future* Kingdom and he sees God addressing the Messianic Lord in connection with the prophecies of the rest of Psalm 102 which speak of “the generation to come” and of the set time for Yahweh to build up Zion and appear in His glory: This is a vision of the coming Kingdom.

There is an important article in the *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* of 1902 (B.W. Bacon, Yale University, alluded to by Bruce above) where the author makes the *fundamental* point: “The word ‘lord’ is wholly absent from the Hebrew (and English) text of Psalm 102:25.”

“With the translation in the LXX ‘He answered him’ the whole passage down to the end of the psalm becomes the **answer** of Yahweh to the suppliant who accordingly appears to be addressed as *Kurie* and creator of heaven and earth...Instead of understanding the verse as a complaint of the psalmist at the shortness of his days which are cut off in the midst, **the LXX [quoted in Hebrews, of course] and the Vulgate understand the utterance** to be **Yahweh’s answer to the psalmist’s plea** that He will intervene to save Zion, because ‘it is time to have pity on her, yes, the set time has come’ (v. 13). He is bidden to prescribe (or acknowledge?) the shortness of Yahweh’s set time, and not to summon Him when it is but half expired. On the other hand he [the Messianic lord] is promised that his own endurance will be perpetual with the children of his servants.”

This is exactly the point, and it can only be made clear when we see that 1) the Hebrews writer is reading the LXX and finding there a wonderful prophecy of the age to come (Kingdom, restoration of Israel) which fits his context exactly and that 2) there is a **Messianic Lord** addressed *by* Yahweh and invited to initiate a founding of the heaven and earth, the new political order in Palestine, exactly as said in Isaiah 51:16. This is exactly the point

¹ The reason for the completely different translations, as between Greek and Hebrew of Psalm 102 in these verses, is the Hebrew vowel points. The sense can be altered if the vowel points are changed, and sometimes it is not clear which of the possible senses is the right one. Hence the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek here.

the Hebrews writer wants to make about the superiority of Jesus over angels. Jesus is the founder of that coming new Kingdom-order on earth. **The Hebrews writer in 2:5 says that it is about “the inhabited earth of the future that we are speaking.”** He himself points to the future founding of a new order on earth, the Kingdom of God which Jesus will inaugurate.

This is really not so difficult when this difference in the LXX is explained. Both Psalm 102 and Hebrews 2:5 and indeed the whole of Hebrews 1 refer **to the new order of things initiated by Jesus**, and it would not matter whether we think of the new order as initiated by the ascension: “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me,” or at the second coming.

Note: Psalm 102 is all about the coming age of the Kingdom and the restoration of Jerusalem in the millennium (see vv. 13-22). The writer looks forward to the restoration of the city when God appears in His glory (v. 16). The Psalm is written for the “**generation to come**” and a newly created people. Jesus will come in the glory of his Father.

Isaiah 51:16 also speaks of an agent of God in whom God puts His words and uses him to “**plant the heavens and earth.**” *The Word Bible Commentary* says: “This makes no sense if it refers to the *original* [Genesis] creation...In other instances God acts alone using no agent (Isa. 44:24). Here the one whom He has hidden in His hand is His agent. **Heavens and land** here refers metaphorically to the totality of order in Palestine. Heaven means the broader overarching structure of the empire, while ‘land’ is the political order in Palestine itself.”

Thus Hebrews chapter 1 speaks, as he says in Hebrews 2:5, of the “economy or world order to come.” That is his concern in Hebrews 1:10. Jesus is the “father or parent of the age to come” (Isa. 9:6, LXX). Jesus is at present the co-creator with the Father of the new order now in preparation and to be manifested fully in the future.

Finally in Hebrews 9:11, the writer speaks of the “good things to come”² as the things “not of *this* creation.” By this he means that the things to come are of the new, **future creation (see Heb. 2:5)**. That creation is under way since Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God where he is now co-creator, under the Father, of the new creation and has “all authority in heaven and earth.”

Once again, eschatology is the great factor in revealing the truth. God is producing a new creation in Jesus, and we are to be new creatures now in Christ (2

Cor. 5:17). We must resist the temptation to be looking backwards to Genesis when the whole book of Hebrews bids us look forward to the “inhabited earth of the future” (Heb. 2:5). Note that in several places Hebrews speaks of the redemption, inheritance, covenant, judgment, salvation and spirit “of the age [to come]” (*aionios*). ✧

Enoch and Elijah: Where Are They Now? (Part 1)

By Jim Puntton and Anthony Buzzard

Hebrews 11:5: “By faith Enoch was **taken away** so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” Other heroes of faith are then listed in this hall of fame. Then the writer says: “All these *died* in faith, not having received the promises. They saw the promises from afar and welcomed them. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the land” (Heb. 11:13). “What more shall I say?...Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, David and Samuel **and the prophets...**All these, though well attested through their faith, **did not obtain the promise**” (Heb. 11:32, 39).

The writer to the Hebrews allows for no exceptions when it comes to the question of death. Enoch died, and the prophets died. Elijah, of course, was a celebrated prophet.

There is no hint here that either Enoch or Elijah was taken to be with God in heaven and given immortality before Jesus. They were removed, certainly, but the text does not say “taken up to the throne of God.” In fact their colleagues went looking for them, expecting to find them in a different location on earth. On the basis of these facts we conclude:

1. By the end of the first century no human being other than Christ himself had been resurrected from death into immortality. Peter said (about 31 AD), “David has not ascended into heaven” (Acts 2:29, 34). Paul said that Christ was “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20) and “afterwards, *at his coming again*, those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15:23). Jesus was the “firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18). Between Christ’s resurrection and Christ’s return, these dead are “asleep in Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:14). Since “the fathers fell asleep” (2 Pet. 3:4) none who trusted God before or after Christ has been awakened. None has been removed to heaven. No one but Christ has ascended to heaven.

2. Those who have “fallen asleep” trusting in Christ “have already perished,” says Paul (1 Cor. 15:18), unless there is a coming resurrection. If there is no resurrection, there is no life beyond death. Paul places no hope in the dead being now immortal nor even alive. No one yet has immortality. Immortality is a gift beyond death, to be given only to those who have God’s Holy Spirit, and to

² Some Greek manuscripts read here “good things which *have* come.” The new order has been in preparation since the first coming of Jesus, and all authority was given to him at the ascension.

be given when Christ returns. If he doesn't return, if there's no resurrection, then the dead are already perished. BUT Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! Immortality awaits our awakening at Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; John 5:29).

3. This is not contradicted by 1 Peter 3:18-19. Christ was "put to death"; but he was raised again or "made alive" (v. 18). Having then also "gone"³ or ascended to God, he made by this his proclamation of triumph over the demonic, the "spirits in prison" (v. 19). Carefully read, this passage says nothing of an alleged "life" of Jesus while he was dead. It does not speak of activity between his death and resurrection. It affirms his resurrection — he was dead and then "made alive" by resurrection. Then followed his ascension. In that risen condition he made a proclamation of the defeat of evil to fallen spirits (angelic beings, v. 19). The robbing or "harrowing" of Hades (by which Christ supposedly set free the Old Testament believers and took them off to heaven) is fantasy. And it is based on misinterpreting the above and Ephesians 4:8. The "captivity he took captive" probably refers again to the "principalities and powers" (Eph. 1:21, 22; Col. 2:15).

4. The "sleep" of death itself need hold no fears. At the resurrection the period of death will seem to have been as momentary as any undisturbed sleep now. And, to the Lord, all our time is present. Tyndale says this: "I think the souls departed in the faith of Christ...to be in no worse case than the soul of Christ was from the time that he delivered his spirit into the hands of his Father until the resurrection of his body in glory and immortality" (1534).

5. The early church firmly held that resurrection at Christ's return was our hope of God's Kingdom. Till then, the whole person who died remains in sleep. Justin Martyr (who died in 165 AD) says: "I choose to follow not men or men's teachings, but God and the doctrines delivered by Him. For if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians but...who say that their souls when they die are taken to heaven, do not imagine that they are Christians...Christians who are right-minded on all points are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead" (*Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80).

Elijah and Enoch are not, as we saw in Hebrews 11, exceptions. They too died (Heb. 11:13, 39), although they had previously experienced a miraculous "transference" by divine intervention.

³ That "having gone" (v. 19) refers to his ascension is clear from its reappearance in verse 22 (cf. Acts 1:10, 11; John 14:2, 3, 12, 28; 16:7, 28).

Elijah

The year in which Elijah was lifted up and carried off in a whirlwind was 852 BC. This was the year when Jehoram (son of Ahab) began to reign over the northern territory of Israel (2 Kings 1:17; 3:1). Elijah was removed and Elisha succeeded him as God's prophet to Israel (2 Kings 2:1, 11).

But in the southern territory of Judah another Jehoram (son of Jehoshaphat) had been reigning alongside his father from 853 BC and became sole king of Judah in 848 BC (2 Kings 8:16).

So from the time of Elijah's disappearance in 852, till 841 BC, there was a Jehoram in Judah and a Jehoram in Israel. They were brothers-in-law.

Jehoram of Judah turned to idolatry (2 Chron. 21:11). In 842 BC, the year before he died of dysentery, and ten years after Elijah had gone, Jehoram of Judah received a letter *from Elijah* (2 Chron. 21:12-15). Elijah was still alive, still on earth, still active for God *ten years after* he was removed from Israel.

In 852 Elijah had been caught up "into the heavens," into the sky, in a whirlwind. The other prophets were afraid that he might have been dropped on some mountain or in some valley (2 Kings 2:16); they obviously hadn't thought that Elijah would be carried beyond the skies. Fifty athletes searched for him for three days but "did not find him" (2 Kings 2:17). Clearly they expected him to have been transferred from one location on earth to another on earth. And so it was. But God did not reveal where. Yet, from that unknown place, Elijah continued his watchful and prayerful concern for Israel and Judah. He broke his silence after ten years when he wrote his letter to Jehoram of Judah. We are told no more, and don't know when or where he died. But we do know that immortality awaits him when he is awakened by Christ at the last day (1 Cor. 15:51-56). Three of Jesus' disciples were allowed a glimpse of that future Kingdom and saw Elijah alive by resurrection there. But this was a *vision* (Matt. 17:9), the future being seen in advance. Like Moses, Elijah now *awaits* the resurrection. There is no contradiction of John 3:13 in what the Bible tells us of Elijah.

Those who insist that the whirlwind took him "to heaven," to immortality, into God's presence (despite Heb. 11:13, 39) have real difficulty with Elijah's letter to Jehoram. They have to suggest (a) that 2 Chronicles 21:12-15 is a corrupted text (though there's no evidence for this); or (b) that Elijah foresaw Jehoram's idolatry and, writing the letter before he was removed, left it with someone with instructions to send it ten years later; or (c) that he came back from heaven in order to write to Jehoram. But the straightforward explanation rings most true. And John was not opposing the Old Testament Scriptures when he wrote John 3:13.

What evidence is there that the Hebrews ever thought Elijah had ascended to God? His fellow prophets didn't think of this. Nor in the rest of the Old Testament is it suggested. Josephus (writing about the same time as John) says, "Elijah *disappeared* from men and no one knows to this day of his end" (*Antiq.* ix. 2:2).

As for his being transported in the whirlwind, we may have a parallel in the account of Philip in Acts 8:39. It seems to be a similar phenomenon. But while Elijah was not found (2 Kings 2:17), Philip was found (Acts 8:40).

Summary

On this understanding, Elijah did not ascend into heaven and gain immortality. He was carried by God's Spirit to an undisclosed location where he lived on, serving his Lord; ten years passed before he spoke out his challenge to Jehoram of Judah. He eventually died in faith, as did all the prophets (Heb. 11:32, 39, 40) and he sleeps now till Christ returns. — *To be continued*

The Heart of the Matter

I like easy Bible teachings. It is unarguable that what concerned Jesus above all during his time in Israel was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. No one who takes the New Testament seriously can dispute that fact. "I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to the other cities also: that is why God sent me" (Luke 4:43). This is the crystal clear purpose statement of Jesus, and it is startling to me that Rick Warren seems to make nothing of that passage of Scripture when he discusses *The Purpose-Driven Church*. Apparently the Church has not adopted Jesus' own purpose statement. But it has also forgotten Jesus' unitary monotheistic creed, "the Lord our God is one Lord," recorded in that famous discussion with a sympathetic scribe in Mark 12:28-34.

"Jesus welcomed the people and began talking to them about the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:11). How beautifully Paul followed his master when "he welcomed all who came to him and began preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:30, 31).

There is an alarming absence of the phrase "Gospel of the Kingdom" in modern preaching. Instead the Gospel offered to the public shrinks the message to "Jesus died and rose." Thousands of dedicated websites and scores of tracts offer salvation on the basis of "repentance and believing in Jesus." But do they tell you what to repent of? Or what "believing in Jesus" means?

Invariably these invitations to salvation fail to begin with Jesus. They proceed, rather, to isolated verses in Paul, not realizing that Paul was addressing converts who already knew that the Gospel was about the Kingdom. Typically Paul's message is restricted to: "believe that Jesus is Lord, that God raised him and you will be saved."

If that is in fact what Paul understood by the Gospel, Paul has neglected the Gospel preaching of Jesus and has failed to bring Jesus to the people, *via Jesus' own preaching*. But you can prove almost anything from the Bible by isolating certain verses and forgetting the wider context. In Romans 10, where Paul did indeed speak of calling Jesus Lord and of being saved by believing that God raised him from the dead, tracts omit two important facts. Firstly, that for salvation you must hear Jesus preaching. "How can they believe in him whom they have not heard [preaching]?" (Rom. 10:14). Note the subtle distortion of the Greek in those translations which speak of hearing *about* Jesus, rather than actually hearing Jesus preach. There is a difference and the NASV gets the text right with "How will they believe in him *whom they have not heard?*" It is necessary in other words to come within earshot of Jesus' preaching his Gospel of the Kingdom via the apostles. Paul concludes his sermon in Romans 10:17 by saying, "Faith [or belief] comes by hearing and hearing by Christ's word."

Hearing Jesus and his words about the Gospel of the Kingdom is the first step in conversion. Mark knew this well and he set out to make that point as directly as he knew how. Here he gives a summary statement of the whole of the Christian faith. Jesus came preaching God's Gospel and saying "The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe that Gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15).

In that statement we have indeed the heart of the matter: The Kingdom of God, which is the pulsating heart of the whole biblical drama. Jesus is the ultimate theocrat. He represents God's political party, bringing a manifesto full of hope for world peace, as he announces his Father's plan to bring peace to our tortured earth.

"Seek *first* the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33) and all the right teachings and lifestyle that go with it. Just as Jesus affirmed, as the *greatest* of all the commandments, the Jewish creed of his heritage that we are to "Hear" and believe "the Lord our God is one Lord," so Jesus gives an equal priority to our need to "seek first and foremost the Kingdom of God." This is only reasonable since the Kingdom is our human destiny, our prospect of living throughout endless ages.

Following the programmatic summary statement of Jesus' activity as the chief Kingdom Gospel preacher, it is little wonder that Jesus' illustrations, his parables, zoom in on the precious doctrine of the Kingdom. The parable of the sower is the parable which must, as Jesus said, be first understood, lest we fail to understand all the rest of the parables (Mark 4:13).

In the parables we see the fruit of Jesus' own meditation on the great theme of the Kingdom. In Isaiah 50:4-11 we learn that the suffering servant had learned to be a perfect hearer of God's will. God had opened his ears to hear. Morning by morning as he set out on a new

day, God awakened his ear so that he could hear the voice of God during the day. As one scholar observed, Jesus was the perfect listener, sensitive constantly to the will of his Father. Jesus is the best possible teacher of meditation since he practiced that art perfectly.⁴

Jesus was the impeccable student of God's will and this is reflected in his relentless concern for the Gospel about the Kingdom. In his parables Jesus passes on to us the mysteries of the Kingdom. We receive the mind of Christ as we absorb these brilliant expositions of God's will for our salvation, and peace for the whole world.

First we must be a good listener: "he who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus used to raise his voice as he spoke those words with passion (Luke 8:8). Matthew (in chapter 13) emphasizes the intellectual aspect of good listening. We must *understand*. Those who do not understand miss out on the saving Gospel of the Kingdom.

Luke stresses the need for a *retentive* hearing. We must hold fast the word of the Kingdom and retain it as the permanent dynamic of our Christian life. The heart — the center of our personality — is the seedbed of the seed message which is the Gospel or word about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19). By meditating on Jesus' Kingdom illustrations we appropriate what we read, understand it, retain it, and only then do we bear fruit, as the seed/word of the Kingdom does its desired work in us. Mark recalls Jesus' warning: "Take heed *what* you hear." The information contains the secret of immortality.

Luke reports Jesus (who must have preached the sower parable over and over again) saying, "Take heed *how* you hear." The word of the Gospel is a lamp which illuminates the attentive hearer and then shines from him to the dark world around. The person who does not retain the word will lose its value altogether. Meditation is the process by which we ensure that the word is permanently absorbed into our thinking and character.

Mark adds another dimension to the process of appropriating the words of Jesus about the Kingdom: "The measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you" (Mark 4:23). By contrast the one who does not go forward will lose even the little he has. There is no standing still in Jesus' Kingdom school. The fruit of the word is seen in the activity of the hearer who *spreads the Gospel*. The Kingdom message must not be hoarded by the listener but shared with others. Only then will a person really hang on to the message and receive even more of the secrets of the Kingdom. Bearing fruit is winning others for Christ.

⁴ I am indebted for some of the following concepts to an article by John Kleinig in the *Reformed Theological Review* of Sept. 1992.

When a female member of the audience reacts with the words "Blessed is the womb that bore you," Jesus puts her on a better track by responding, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God [word about the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] and keep it" (Luke 11:28). The essential thing is not the physical life from the womb, but the spiritual life of the new birth (being born again) through Jesus' kingdom teachings. Real enlightenment comes not from just observing the miracles of Jesus but listening to his teaching and preaching. His words are the words of life, that is, as "spirit and life" (John 6:63) they transmit the very life of God Himself, whose whole intention is focused on the Kingdom of God.

Proverbs had anticipated the preaching of Jesus with these words: "My son, be *attentive* to my words; *keep* them within your heart. For they are life to him who finds them and healing to all his flesh. Keep your *heart* with all diligence, for in it are the springs [the starting point] of life" (Prov. 4:20-23). The words of wisdom given us in their purest form by Jesus are the source of our life. As spiritual nutrition they must be, as John says, "chewed on" and taken into our very being.

Jesus complained that in the case of his opponents, his Gospel/Kingdom/word found no place in their hearts. His disciples however had learned to internalize the Kingdom Gospel, as precious treasure. Apart from his word about the Kingdom, we cannot be true disciples. This must mean that any Gospel which is deprived of its Kingdom center will not sustain a spiritual life. It is deficient, lacking necessary spiritual nutrients and thus unable to lead us to our goal, which is immortality in the coming resurrection.

Wherever the words of Jesus remain, Jesus himself remains. Jesus is not present if his words are not present. He is known and understood by his words and those words are organized around the Kingdom concept — his Gospel. The benefits of retaining or remaining in the Gospel word of Jesus are extraordinary: "If you abide in my word [Gospel of the Kingdom] then you are truly my students/disciples and you will ask what you will and it will be granted to you" (John 8:31;15:7).

Conversely the careless disciple is threatened with having the word removed from his heart by the Devil, who does not want believers to succeed. Jesus makes this devastatingly interesting and revealing statement about the "mechanics" of the salvation process: "Those beside the path are those who have heard. Then the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they cannot *believe and be saved*" (Luke 8:12). Salvation is directly related to the willing and intelligent reception of the Kingdom of God message as Jesus preached it.

The basis of all this was announced right from the start. "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom" (cp. Mark 1:14, 15). That is Christianity's thesis

statement. Repentance is not just a general turning away from what we define as sin. It is a wholehearted change of mind, which involves believing the Kingdom Gospel. That is where Jesus begins his instructions to us. It is as though Jesus says, "Repent by giving up your unbelief relative to the Kingdom of God. Repent by turning around and embracing with joy the Kingdom Gospel."

Mark 4:11, 12 contain the arresting concept that *unless* we believe the Gospel/Kingdom/word of Jesus we cannot repent and be forgiven. Repentance and forgiveness in other words are contingent on and dependent on our intelligent reception of the Kingdom Gospel. "For those outside everything is in enigmas, so that they may indeed see but not perceive and may indeed hear and not understand. *Otherwise they would repent and gain forgiveness.*" These are astonishing teachings, and they expose the superficial presentations of the Gospel which seem to bypass all reference to the Gospel preaching of Jesus and instead tell us *only* about his death and resurrection. "Crossianity" is not Christianity.

The public seems fixed on the idea that the Gospel can be preached *without a single reference to the Kingdom of God* and the necessity of repenting in order to believe, as Abraham believed God (Gen. 15:6), in God's amazing promise of the Kingdom. Repentance in Jesus' and Paul's teaching is simply a receptive acceptance of God's great promises in Christ. God is delighted when His creatures pay careful attention to what He is announcing through His supreme Kingdom agent, the Messiah. But what if the Gospel of the Kingdom is not offered in evangelistic settings? Might it be that the public is offered a partial message which lacks the dynamic power contained in the pure Kingdom preaching of Jesus and the Apostles? The word of the Gospel of the Kingdom, Paul said, is "energizing in you" (I Thess. 2:13). It is nothing less than the mighty power of God's spirit unleashed for our benefit and salvation. ✧

2007 Theological Conference

March 29-April 1, 2007

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA

We want to extend a warm invitation to you to be with us March 29-April 1, 2007. This is a unique gathering of Abrahamic believers, bringing people together from various countries. A number of speakers will present papers on subjects of interest to us all, with time for questions following. The conference is a rich time of fellowship and an opportunity to meet and encourage others of Abrahamic persuasion. There will be opportunities, as usual, for shorter faith story presentations. This is not an academic occasion, for specialists only! It is a meeting for Christian education and fellowship to confirm and strengthen our grip of the great truths of Scripture. Perhaps for you the social dynamics which happen in between sessions will be the

highlight. Many of the participants have newly discovered the Abrahamic faith and are excited to meet others of similar persuasion.

The new venue (see www.simpsonwood.org) will provide many advantages in terms of the convenience of being all together at one location. No need for shuttles to a hotel. The conference is only as good as the combination of its participants allows. Please do not deprive us of the privilege of having *you* with us to encourage and embolden us in a hostile world.

Previously the cost of the conference was divided up between hotel and conference fee. This year room, meals, breaks, and conference fee are all included in one price: \$200 for a single, \$170 per person in a double room. See the cost comparison chart below to compare the cost of the 2006 conference with the 2007 conference. **The registration deadline is March 8.** Please register by phoning Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 or mail the form on the back page. The conference will begin in the afternoon of Thursday, March 29 and end on Sunday afternoon. Transportation from Atlanta airport to Simpsonwood is available for an additional cost (details in next *Focus*).

Please do consider joining us. It is so important for us all to gather from time to time to celebrate our common faith.

Intensive Course

Following the conference, Monday-Wednesday, April 2-4, Anthony Buzzard will teach "The Destiny of the Righteous."

Cost Comparison for Single

Last Conference	This Conference
3 nights @ \$75=\$225	3 nights @ \$60=\$180
Conf. fee = \$105	Conf. fee = \$20
Total: \$330	Total: \$200 (+airport trans.)

Cost Comparison for Couple

Last Conference	This Conference
3 nights @ \$75=\$225	3 nights @ \$100=\$300
Conf. fee (2x\$105)=\$210	Conf. fee (2x\$20)=\$40
Total: \$435	Total: \$340 (+airport trans.)

We have available three DVDs of a presentation Anthony gave in Indiana. Their titles are "The Treasures of Abrahamic Faith," parts 1 and 2 and a third on "The Spirit of God" (\$5 each). Please send checks to **Restoration Fellowship**, c/o Atlanta Bible College, PO Box 100,000, Morrow, GA 30260. Or send money using PayPal to anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com

Anthony is heard on **thebyteshow.com** interviewed weekly by GeorgeAnn Hughes. At the site, click on **Library** in the left column to access the archived interviews.