

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 14 No. 8

Anthony Buzzard, editor

May, 2012

The Kingdom of God

by Blake Weber, Illinois

Blake recently completed the ABC distance learning course “The Kingdom of God as Gospel” with me. He wrote these excellent words as a final paper.

As Christians, we must understand what the Kingdom of God is truly about. Popular Christianity has separated the teachings of Jesus from its gospel preaching, drastically weakening the Gospel! Jesus taught about the Kingdom as the top priority: “But seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness...” (Matt. 6:33). If we desire to understand the truth about the Kingdom, then we must be sure that our **definition** aligns with the original understanding of the Kingdom, when the promise of the Kingdom to Abraham (Rom. 4:23), to Jesus and to us was made. We must go back to the original **covenant with Abraham** to grasp the understanding of our future and the future of the world. After all, God created the world and everything in it, including man, and He said that it was *good*. When sin and refusal to obey God entered the world, it became a sin-cursed world. God wants to restore it to paradise, the condition it enjoyed originally when it was good. Isaiah 49:8 tells us that God wants to restore the land: “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land.’”

God made His first covenant concerning the land with Abraham. God called Abraham out of the land of Ur to the land of Canaan and promised the land to him in Genesis 13:14-15: “The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring **forever**.’” This is well-known to scholars: “A constant feature in the eschatological [about the future] picture of the Old Testament is Israel’s restoration to its own land...The question how in our day we are to interpret such prophecies is a double one. It is a question, first, of what the prophets meant. And to this question there can be but one answer — **their meaning is the literal sense of their words**. They...predicted the restoration of the

people to their land...There is no question as to the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies.”¹

This is a promise that clearly has not been fulfilled yet: “The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Gen. 17:8). Under Joshua, they did have possession of most of the land, but not all of it (Joshua 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). But they did not have it forever! The promise to Abraham concerned an everlasting possession, yet we know that in the book of Judges, God’s people gave in to worshiping idols (which contradicts the promise in Gen. 17:8 that the one God will be their God), and they were conquered on multiple occasions. That leaves us with two options. Either God is a liar and Abraham and his descendants won’t possess the land forever, or this event is still coming in the future after our resurrection to immortality (1 Cor. 15:23).

The truth then is that the promise of gaining the land forever is for us and for the faithful of all times, including Abraham, who will be resurrected to life from their present sleep of death (Ps. 13:3).

This covenant continued through the line of Isaac and Jacob and on through David. Then the same covenant was reestablished with more detail. God says to David, “I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son” (2 Sam. 7:12-14). This promise was fulfilled (only partially however, so far) through Jesus, the Messiah. Hebrews 1:5 refers the promise to Jesus.

If we are truly to understand what the Gospel is today, we must define it accurately to match with Scripture. Our culture has defined the gospel, and reduced its scope dramatically, to be only about Jesus’ death and resurrection. If we take an honest look at Scripture, we will notice a very different picture. In Luke 9:6, we find that the Apostles went from village to village, preaching the Gospel. Chronologically, however, after this event, we read that they didn’t even yet understand or believe that Jesus, their Messiah, would die and rise again: “He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and

¹ “Eschatology,” *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911, vol. 1, p. 737.

kill him. On the third day he will rise again.' The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about" (Luke 18:32-34).

Here is the critical point to grasp and teach: If the gospel was only about Jesus' death and resurrection, they couldn't have been preaching it! They didn't at that stage know anything about it. But they had been learning and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom as they heard it from Jesus. The good news is truly *firstly* about the Kingdom. Look at what Jesus had to say as to the reason for his whole ministry: "But he said, 'I must preach the **Gospel** of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, **because that is why I was sent**'" (Luke 4:43). Jesus certainly believed that the good news, Gospel, was about the Kingdom. Look again at what Jesus proclaimed as the saving good news: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and **believe the good news**'" (Mark 1:14-15). Although the Gospel didn't yet include Jesus' death and resurrection, it was still the Gospel. We must not, of course, diminish the vital importance of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

It was after Jesus' ascension that we notice an addition to the Gospel message. Certainly, the apostles were now proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. However, they did not for a moment forget about the Kingdom. But today, where is the Kingdom in the Gospel? It has disappeared.

In Acts, we see key texts showing us clearly what the Apostles were proclaiming: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news [Gospel] about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were getting baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). "From morning till evening [Paul] explained and declared to them the Kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23). Lastly, "Boldly and without hindrance [Paul] preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:31). Clearly, as the apostles taught it, obeying Jesus, the Gospel message included the Kingdom of God (which is near, "at hand") and the fact that Jesus was truly the Messiah who had been prophesied (Deut. 18:15-18).

In the first chapter of Acts, after Jesus' death and resurrection, we read that he appeared to them over a period of forty days and instructed them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He could have spent that time talking about his resurrection or our future resurrection or even baptism, but he didn't. Of utmost importance, after proving he was the Messiah raised by God from the dead ("for you will not let your holy one see decay"), was the coming Kingdom. The Jews who

didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ, although they believed in the prophesied Messiah, thought that the Messiah ought to have brought in the Kingdom at *his first coming*.

I can only imagine how much the disciples learned in the precious time they spent with Jesus during those forty days. Six weeks is a very long time for a seminar! But it takes that sort of time to teach people the Bible. Are you dedicating that sort of instruction and learning time to the Gospel so that you may bring the Good News about immortality to your friends? We are commissioned to bring the same Gospel to others in our time. That is the great Commission commanded by Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20). How well are you doing the will of God and of Jesus in this respect?

In Matthew 13 alone, there are about seven parables. Every single one of them is concerned with the Kingdom of God. The fact that Jesus used seven different illustrations to explain the Kingdom of God tells me that this is a very large, in-depth and important doctrine that we must thoroughly digest and pass on. We even see from the parable of the sower that the teaching of the Kingdom is so important that whenever someone hears it and doesn't understand it, the evil one, the Devil, comes and tries to snatch it away. If this was a minor teaching, Satan might not even care if it is snatched away! But the Devil knows, better than many churchgoers, that the Gospel/word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) is the fundamental issue in salvation and believing and obeying Jesus. The person who hears about the Kingdom and understands it, the seed that fell on good soil, produces abundant fruit. That is to be our ambition also.

In Luke 22:29-30, Jesus tells the apostles: "I covenant to you a Kingdom, just as my Father covenanted it to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom and sit on thrones, administering the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke earlier tells us that the people thought that the Kingdom of God was going to appear at once because Jesus the king was near the capital of the Kingdom! So he taught the parable of the ten minas. Jesus was the man of "noble birth" who went away to a distant country to be appointed king (Psalm 110:1: "The Lord said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'"). After he is appointed as king (clearly by God, Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"), he will then return. Just as in the parable, the servants are given responsibilities in life (Deut. 30:19: "I have set before you life and death...Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."). The servants in the parable are given talents to be put to use in the service of the Gospel. The first servant was responsible and his mina earned ten more. This pleased the king! So the king told him, "Take

charge of ten cities.” So with the second servant. The third servant however squandered the gift and was barred from the Kingdom.

We are commanded multiple times in the Bible to “keep God’s commands.” Therefore we would be wise to keep Revelation 2:25 in mind: “Hold fast what you have until I come.” One day Jesus will return and we need to be ready for it and busy with Kingdom/Gospel work. Matthew 24:44 warns us to be on the alert because we do not know at what hour the Son of Man will return. He might even come at a time when we do not expect him.

The simplicity and importance of Psalm 110:1 cannot be overstated. Jesus will remain at the right hand of the Father *until* God makes Jesus’ enemies his footstool. Acts 3:21 tells us the same thing: “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

Here is more on the Christian destiny and hope: In Revelation 2:26, “To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations” and 3:21, “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” The Apostles knew very well what their role would be in the Kingdom.

Against some popular ideas today, Jesus did not teach anything that contradicts the law. But he did not repeat the law in the letter! He fulfilled it, giving it all its ultimate meaning. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-19, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but **to fulfill them**. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” It is imperative that Christians see the correlation between what the prophets said and what Jesus did and what is still to come. It is a part of one symphony that has only been partly accomplished.

As John Bright rightly explains, “For the concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, **the total message of the Bible**. Not only does it loom large in the teaching of Jesus, it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible...Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. Act I points to its conclusion in Act II, and without it the play is an incomplete, unsatisfying thing. But Act II must be read in the light of Act I, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically one. The Bible is one book. Had we to give

that book a title, we might with justice call it ‘The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.’”²

It is important to know where we have come from. The root of the Gospel is the promises made to Abraham, the work of King Messiah Jesus, and the future reward for submission and obedience. ✧

The Neglect of the Message

If there is one element of biblical faith which churches often seem to avoid and theologians have obscured, it is the matter of the meaning to be attached to Jesus’ favorite term, “the Kingdom of God,” which is a thoroughly Hebrew Messianic concept. To interpret any document intelligently one must enter the thought world of those whom one is attempting to understand. If one blunders in the interpretation of key terms and expressions, a disastrous misunderstanding will result. That such a breakdown in the transmission of the original faith, due to a failure to reckon with the Jewishness of Jesus and his Message about the Kingdom, has occurred was noted by an astute scholar of the Church of England. Critical of trends which developed in the Church from the second to the fourth century, he wrote: “The Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament, and the Greek and Roman mind in turn came to dominate the Church’s outlook. From that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or in practice.”³

The root of the problem was similarly diagnosed by a Jewish historian, a translator of the New Testament and sympathetic to Christianity:

“Christians would gravely delude themselves if they were to imagine that Jews on any major scale could subscribe to the tenets of the Christian religion, which owe so much to the legacy of polytheism. Because Christians have not become Israelites, but have remained essentially Gentiles, their spiritual inclinations are towards doctrines for which they have been prepared by inheritance from the pagan past.”⁴

This tragic departure of the Church from the biblical Message was noted also by an Archbishop of the Anglican Church. He expressed his astonishment that the central, fundamental concept of Jesus’ Gospel Message — the Kingdom — had been neglected for most of church history:

“Every generation finds something in the Gospel which is of special importance to itself and seems to have been overlooked in the previous age or (sometimes) in all

² *The Kingdom of God*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1953, pp. 7, 197.

³ H.L. Goudge, “The Calling of the Jews,” *Essays on Judaism and Christianity*, cited by H.J. Schonfield, *The Politics of God*, Hutchinson, 1970, p. 98.

⁴ H.J. Schonfield, *The Politics of God*, p. 98.

previous ages of the Church. The great discovery of the age in which we live is the immense prominence given in the Gospel to the Kingdom of God. *To us it is quite extraordinary that it figures so little in the theology and religious writings of almost the entire period of Christian history.* Certainly in the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] it has a prominence that could hardly be increased.”⁵

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the significance of this observation of the Archbishop. A glance at the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry will reveal to every reader the simple fact that Jesus, the original herald of the Christian Gospel, was a preacher of the Kingdom of God. There can be absolutely no doubt about this: Can anyone question F.C. Grant’s assessment of Jesus’ purpose?

“It may be said that the teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God represents His whole teaching. It is the main determinative subject of all His discourse. His ethics were ethics of the Kingdom; His theology was theology of the Kingdom; **His teaching regarding Himself cannot be understood apart from His interpretation of the Kingdom of God.**”⁶

It is equally clear that Jesus intended his own Kingdom Message, the Gospel or Good News, to be the chief concern of those who claimed to represent him for the whole period of history until his promised return. Giving his marching orders to the Church, Jesus commanded his followers to teach *everything he had taught* to those whom they disciplined and initiated into the faith by baptism (Matt. 28:19-20). The task of the faithful, as Jesus saw it, would be to preach “*this Gospel about the Kingdom in all the world*” (Matt. 24:14).

A sure sign of the continuing presence of the living Christ in his Church must be a clarion-call proclamation of the Kingdom of God, just as Jesus preached it. To say, as Archbishop Temple does, that the Kingdom of God “has figured so little in the theology and religious writings of almost the entire period of Christian history” is to admit only that the Church has not done what Jesus told it to do. The Church has been sailing under false colors. While it claims the name of Christ, it has not been busy faithfully relaying his saving Gospel Message about the Kingdom to the world. How can it, when it admits to uncertainty about what the Kingdom means?⁷ A reappraisal of the Church’s task, including the frank

⁵ William Temple, *Personal Religion and the Life of Fellowship*, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1926, p. 69, emphasis added.

⁶ “The Gospel of the Kingdom,” *Biblical World* 50 (1917), pp. 121-191.

⁷ For example, Robert Morgan wrote, “It is time someone called the bluff of those who think they know what exactly Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God” (*Theology*, Nov. 1979, p. 458).

admission that its Gospel has lacked an essential Messianic element, seems to be in order.

It is a very simple matter to document the absence of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God from the Church’s preaching. Listen, for example, to the call of evangelists today to potential converts. Is the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom” the main subject of the appeal for men and women to become Christians? Do pulpits the length and breadth of the land resound with clear expositions of what Jesus meant by the Kingdom?

Apparently this is not the case. In his book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* the noted American church planter, Peter Wagner, agrees with G.E. Ladd that “modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.” Wagner then reflects:

“If this is true, and I know of no reason to dispute it, I cannot help wondering out loud why I haven’t heard more about the Kingdom of God in the thirty years I have been a Christian. I certainly have read about it enough in the Bible. Matthew mentions the Kingdom 52 times, Mark 19 times, Luke 44 times and John 4. But I honestly cannot remember any pastor whose ministry I have been under actually preaching a sermon on the Kingdom of God. As I rummage through my own sermon barrel, I now realize that I myself have never preached a sermon on it. Where has the Kingdom been?”⁸

In an article entitled “Preaching the Kingdom of God” the British expositor, Dr. I. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen, says:

“During the past sixteen years I can recollect only two occasions on which I have heard sermons specifically devoted to the theme of the Kingdom of God...I find this silence rather surprising because it is universally agreed by New Testament scholars that the central theme of the teaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God...Clearly, then, one would expect the modern preacher who is trying to bring the message of Jesus to his congregation would have much to say about this subject. In fact my experience has been the opposite, and I have rarely heard about it.”⁹

From a Roman Catholic writer comes the extraordinary admission that what he had learned in seminary did not include an explanation of Jesus’ Message about the Kingdom:

“As a teacher of New Testament literature...it early became obvious to me that the central theme of the preaching of the historical Jesus of Nazareth was the near approach of the Kingdom of God. Yet, to my amazement, this theme played hardly any role in the systematic

⁸ *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981, p. 2.

⁹ *The Expository Times* (89), Oct. 1977, p. 13.

theology I had been taught in the seminary. Upon further investigation I realized that this theme had in many ways been largely ignored in the theology and spirituality and liturgy of the Church in the past two thousand years, and when not ignored, often distorted beyond recognition. How could this be?"¹⁰

A further striking example reinforces our contention that for modern preachers the Gospel of the Kingdom of God does not have anything like the comprehensive significance it had for Jesus and the whole New Testament Church. While Jesus concentrated single-mindedly on the propagation of a Gospel about the Kingdom, modern preachers seem to steer clear of the phrase "Gospel of the Kingdom." In an editorial in the journal *Missiology* Arthur F. Glasser writes:

"Let me ask: When is the last time you heard a sermon on the Kingdom of God? Frankly, I'd be hard put to recall ever having heard a solid exposition of this theme. How do we square this silence with the widely accepted fact that the Kingdom of God dominated our Lord's thought and ministry? My experience is not uncommon. I've checked this out with my colleagues. Of course, they readily agree they've often heard sermons on bits and pieces of Jesus' parables. But as for a solid sermon on the nature of the Kingdom of God as Jesus taught it — upon reflection, they too began to express surprise that it is the rare pastor who tackles the subject."¹¹

One needs no special theological training to conclude that something is drastically askew, when leading exponents of the faith in our day confess that Jesus' Message is unfamiliar to them. At the level of popular evangelism it is evident that the critical Kingdom element is missing from presentations of the saving Message. Billy Graham defines the Gospel by dividing it into two main components. The first element is the death of Jesus, which is half the Gospel. The other half, he says, is the resurrection of Jesus.¹² But this definition omits the basis of the Gospel Message. Jesus announced the Kingdom of God as the heart of the Gospel long before he said a word about his death and resurrection. Luke reports that the disciples went out proclaiming the Gospel *even before they had any knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus* (Luke 18:31-34). *It follows, therefore, that there is more to the Gospel than the death and resurrection of Christ, essential as these things are.*

Michael Green, an expert on evangelism, poses the question raised by the obvious difference between what

we call evangelism and how Jesus defined it. At the Lausanne International Conference on World Evangelism in 1974, he asked: "How much have you heard here about the Kingdom of God? Not much. It is not our language. But it was Jesus' prime concern."¹³ How can it be that our language as Christians is not the language of Jesus himself? The situation demands an explanation. It should alert us to the fact that all is not well with our version of the Christian faith. We are not preaching the Gospel as Jesus and his Apostles preached it, as long as we omit mention of the substance of his entire Message, the Good News of the Kingdom.

Other scholars warn us that the all-embracing expression Kingdom of God, which is the axis around which everything Jesus taught revolves, is strange to churchgoers. Noting that Jesus opened his ministry by alerting the public to the approaching advent of the Kingdom without an explanatory comment about the meaning of the Kingdom, Hugh Anderson observes:

"For Jesus' first hearers, as presumably for Mark's readers, [Kingdom of God] was not the empty or nebulous term it often is today. The concept had a long history and an extensive background in the Old Testament, extra-canonical works of the intertestamental period, and in the rabbinical literature."¹⁴

Jesus' audience knew what he meant by the Kingdom of God for the simple reason that they knew the Hebrew Bible, which was replete with glorious promises of peace and prosperity on earth to be enjoyed by those counted worthy to find a place in the Kingdom of the Messiah. To Jesus' contemporaries the Kingdom of God was about as well known as the Statue of Liberty, the Declaration of Independence or the Tower of London. One can imagine how confusing things would be if Americans and Englishmen today were unable to define clearly what is meant by these terms. What if World War II was a nebulous idea in the minds of historians or Buckingham Palace a strange term to Londoners? When an idea is deeply rooted in the national identity of a people, it does not have to be defined every time it is mentioned. Such was the case with the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom meant a new era of world government on earth destined to appear with the arrival in power of the promised King of the line of David, the Messiah, or anointed agent of the One God.

A perceptive theologian, conscious of the need to define basic Christian ideas within the framework

¹⁰ B.T. Viviano, *The Kingdom of God in History*, Michael Glazier, 1988, p. 9.

¹¹ April 1980, p. 13.

¹² Roy Gustafson, "What is the Gospel?" Billy Graham Association.

¹³ Cited by Tom Sine, *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy*, Waco: Word Books, 1981, pp. 102, 103.

¹⁴ *The New Century Bible Commentary, Gospel of Mark*, Eerdmans, 1984, p. 84. Anderson notes that "the Kingdom of God was without doubt at the heart of Jesus' historic message" (*Ibid.*, p. 83).

provided by their original environment, has this to say about the Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching:

"The Kingdom of God was basically a political idea — but political in the ancient religious sense, according to which 'politics' was part of religion and expressed practically the doctrine of God's rule in the world...It meant the world empire of God...It was this idea which Jesus made his own, the vehicle of all his teaching...which he identified with the purpose of God in his own time, and adopted as the clue to his own prophetic or messianic mission: He was — or was to be — God's agent in the final establishment (or reestablishment) of the divine Reign in this world...The Kingdom of God, in the New Testament period, was still the old prophetic dream of the complete and perfect realization, here upon earth, of the sole sovereignty of the one and only God."¹⁵ ✧

Calvinism denies that God means "choose" when He says "choose"!

Here is how Revelation 3:20 reads (Jesus is speaking): "Behold, I stand at the door and **knock**; if **anyone** hears my voice and **opens** the door, I **will** come in to him..."

Here is Calvinism's version of Revelation 3:20: "Behold, I stand at the door and **knock it down**; **only the elect** will be allowed to hear my voice, and they will **do nothing**, as I will already have come in to them **previously**."

Revelation 3:20 is so plain and simple, only a person *trying* to misunderstand it could become or remain a Calvinist. There must be hundreds of Bible verses like Revelation 3:20 which the Calvinist has to ignore completely in order to hold on to his theory.

One God Seminar

June 2-3 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Austin, Texas

DoubleTree by Hilton, 6505 I-35 North

Reservations: 1-800-347-0330 or

tinyurl.com/austinconference

westby@godward.org

Join us on Sundays at 10:45 a.m. EST at livestream.com/rkitect for live streaming of our Restoration Church Bible studies. You can listen and also type in your comments and questions.

"It seems to me that most who argue the orthodox line are doing so in a rather preposterously anachronistic manner following the results of the arguments of Jesus' opponents, the ones who were the offspring of their father the Devil. Jesus himself said that "the Father is greater than I." Why, pray tell, should we believers in and followers of Jesus our Lord, Savior, and God unreflectively adopt the arguments and conclusions of those who JESUS said were of the father of lies to confirm our arguments? **Jesus never said "I am Yahweh."** Period. Jesus said authority had been **given to him** and never said that it was **his** by right, nature, much less because he was one "**essence**" with his Father. Again, it seems to me that most all of the arguments for pure creedal orthodoxy are altogether dependent on arguments that go beyond what scripture actually and explicitly says, and it is in the Jesus of these arguments that most orthodox believers put their faith rather than the plain Jesus of Apostolic affirmation."

Comments

"I have to tell you that the last *Focus on the Kingdom* was really wonderful. It touched on so much, and was so clear and powerful, I couldn't help wishing that every believer everywhere could have access to such solid teaching. I know God is doing great things and waking people up to spirit and truth, and the Gospel of the Kingdom is vital to that process." — *New York*

"I enjoyed your article about the Gospel of the Kingdom in the latest issue. The 'gospel in contemporary terms' was great! I loved it!" — *Austria*

"My wife and I have come to the truth of biblical unitarianism through hours of study. Your teachings have helped us along the way. I am currently in an M.Div. program focusing on biblical languages. I hope to go on to PhD work, if God wills. Please keep us in prayer. There is no biblical unitarian fellowship for us in this area." — *Kentucky*

"I was a convinced Trinitarian. It's taken almost 12 months of continuous prayer, reading, researching and hopping back and forth between Trinitarianism and monotheism to be able to say that I now believe that Jesus is the Son of God yet not God the Son. This is HUUUGE for me!! I now read the Scriptures with a new excitement though there are some verses that are difficult to understand from a monotheistic point of view. I do read from yours and other unitarian sites in order to try and gain a more biblical understanding. Of course I also rely on the leading of God. My story in a very small nutshell: I was very reluctant to even consider that Jesus was not God. A friend told me about Greg Deuble's book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* and I was open to reading it. That was the beginning of a turbulent inner

¹⁵ F.C. Grant, *Ancient Judaism and the New Testament*, New York: Macmillan, 1959, pp. 114-119.

spiritual journey and as a result most of the major doctrines in which I believed have been challenged. Talk about shaking things up. I was *not* prepared for this! I don't claim to have complete understanding and I have many questions." — *Australia*

Your story is typical of many we receive every week and they are exciting. The Bible will come alive for you in a new way. You will be able to rest in the peaceful understanding that God is the Father, "the only one who is true GOD" (John 17:3). God promised him glory from before the world began (John 17:5). This is glory in prospect and promise, and that same glory was given to us Christians who were not even born when Jesus spoke those words (John 17:22, 24!) Do not make the mistake of turning Jesus into a non-human person, who was alive before he was born! This idea of preexistence is really fog-language and confuses the precious fact that Jesus is the perfect human model, the authentic human being. God cannot die, and so to say that "Jesus is GOD" confuses everything, since the immortal God cannot die! To say that GOD can die is simply to destroy the priceless gifts of logic and language. God never intended us to do that. — Editor

Some Comments from Our Recent Atlanta Conference

"I enjoyed every part of this conference."

"Need to have conference at least twice a year."

"Enjoyed the speakers and the questioners afterward.

It is good to see different opinions welcomed, questioned, bantered and corrected or clarified where needed."

"I appreciated the various slants — history, logic, word study, etc."

"Informative, well-presented."

"The love everyone showed was very welcoming."

"All the speakers did a great job."

"I enjoyed everyone and the love shown. Everyone was friendly and easy to talk to. I felt I made many new friends."

"Very encouraging. I learned a lot and want to continue to learn."

"We enjoyed the conference very much and met so many wonderful like-faith believers. I am already corresponding with many of them."

"I enjoyed the conference immensely."

"I enjoyed the conference and was very encouraged by it. There is no greater blessing than to be of use to believers."

"I was *tremendously* encouraged by the 2012 Theological Conference!"

"There is always a loving atmosphere at the conference but this year I found the love and bond between the brothers and sisters to be greater than ever

before. The words of 1 Cor. 14:25 quickly came to mind: 'God is really among you.' Where we are quite isolated the only way we can see the majority of our friends is by using Skype but to actually be in their company was overwhelming. The quality of the talks was superb. I had an amazing time and feel rejuvenated and spiritually topped up to face another productive year."

The enthusiastic chorus of comments and reactions to a remarkable gathering of often "isolated believers" shows how vitally important *community* is in the Christian faith. Christianity is not a solo exercise. But it is a very great danger that some think of themselves as solo, inventing brand new things. A Christian tradition based on the Bible holds us together. I have suggested to our fine students at Atlanta Bible College: Beware of coming up with some "new truth" which no commentary at any time, in any language, ever imagined as plausible. You could be wrong! I suggest that supporting a teaching with a single text, which eliminates all the other relevant ones, is almost certainly a mistake.

This conference, I believe, was a wonderful forum for reasoned and reasonable discussion. The interaction with speakers allowed both questioners and presenters to refine their thinking, and the community itself was gently corrected (I think by the spirit of Jesus) to understand the spirit not as "impersonal power" but the very real, personal, operational presence of God or Jesus. There is no "third Person" in the Scripture (one who never sends greetings and is never worshiped!). But we must be continuously aware that Christ himself is present with and in the true believer. "The Lord is the spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17; see 1 John 2:1). We must all continue to shed our "churchy" baggage and enter more into the joyous freedom to be experienced in Christ. Galatians (the *whole* book) and 2 Corinthians 3 are the antidote to the unfortunate "legalisms" which many learned wrongly, and which seem to be right, but are not!

Thanks to all who came to Atlanta this May. Do plan on coming again next year. The date will be announced soon. Persuade your friends to come with you for an experience of refreshment and instruction. Revival in the Christian faith will come not by a temporary hype, but by a passionate, invigorating involvement with the mind of Christ located in Scripture — and with the community experience which belongs to the body of Christ. "The words I have spoken to you," Jesus said, "are spirit and life" (John 6:63). They impart the seed of immortality; they are the elixir of life, and they lead to the permanent and unending life of immortality in the future Kingdom. Surely three special days dedicated to those aims is more than worth it. ✧