

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 16 No. 9

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June, 2014

We are really up against a very muddled system in the Bible study world when it comes to saying who Jesus and God are! Dr. James McGrath (as distinct from Dr. Alistair McGrath, quoted below) is quite clear that the Trinity is *not* in the Bible (he says this plainly in his *The Only True God*). But he then thinks that “the idea of the Trinity is an extremely helpful one”! The non-biblical definition of God is thus defended and supported by James McGrath as a very necessary and valuable growth in the development of ideas! (see his *The Only True God*, p. 100-101). Never mind the fact that it is not part of Scripture.

Many of us naively suppose that these distinguished authors and scholars are pledged to teaching and preaching the words of Jesus, Paul and Scripture. But this is not at all the case! Many of these scholars are quite content to allow post-biblical tradition, even when it contradicts Scripture, to continue unchallenged. At this point religious systems, deeply entrenched in “what we have always believed,” remain virtually irreformable (they simply will not change). What if Jesus’ complaint about “traditions learned in vain by rote” (Matt. 15:6-9; Isa. 29:11-14) is being ignored? None of us can risk the awful prospect of ignoring Jesus. Our salvation depends on hearing and obeying Jesus (Heb. 5:9; John 3:36, etc). These are great verses for your children, too! They should be learned for life, and they are not complicated.

I wrote this in response to the liberal scholars’ unclear allegiance to Jesus and the Bible:

Attempts to sustain a Trinitarian view of God from Scripture are unimpressive and often confusing. A leading modern exponent of the Trinity, Dr. Alistair McGrath, rightly tells us that Jesus Christ reveals God. He makes no mention of Jesus’ express revelation of God as the **One God of Israel** (Mark 12:29). He notes that one can find three examples in the whole New Testament of the term “God” being applied to Jesus. McGrath attributes the sparseness of references to Jesus as “God” to the fact that the writers were mostly Jews. But, one might ask, weren’t they also authentic Christians, and did they not know which God to worship? Were they not apostolic exponents of the Christian faith once and for all delivered to us (Jude 3)? Alistair McGrath says:

“The New Testament was written against a background of the **strict monotheism of Israel**...Given the strong reluctance of New Testament writers to speak of Jesus as ‘God,’ because of their background in the

strict monotheism of Israel, these three affirmations are of considerable significance [John 1:1; 20:28; Heb. 1:8].”¹

Dr. Alistair McGrath’s remarks provide eloquent evidence that Jesus and his followers **did not alter the Jewish creed**. If they were strongly reluctant to speak of Jesus as God, could this not simply be because their creed, affirmed by Jesus, forbade them to call anyone but the Father the supreme God? They show no sign whatever of being Trinitarians. Nor, of course, did Jesus.

The three examples of the word “God” for Jesus, as compared with over 1300 references to the Father as “God” in the New Testament, are easily explained.² They provide no justification at all for departing from the creed of Jesus, who believed that “The Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29).

When it comes to the Trinity itself Alistair McGrath remarks: “The casual reader of Scripture will discern a mere two verses in the entire Bible which seem, at first glance, to be capable of a Trinitarian interpretation: Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14. Both these verses have become deeply rooted in the Christian consciousness...Yet these two verses, taken together or in isolation, can hardly be thought of as constituting a doctrine of the Trinity” (p. 248).

This is a significant admission. McGrath then goes on to give us 20 pages of post-biblical historical development of the Trinity. He has only a page and a half to offer us for its biblical foundation. Then comes this amazing statement. How securely does he really find the Trinity in the New Testament?

“The doctrine of the Trinity can be regarded as the outcome of a process of sustained and critical reflection on the pattern of divine activity revealed in Scripture, and continued in Christian experience. *This is not to say that Scripture contains a doctrine of the Trinity*; rather, Scripture bears witness to a *God who demands to be understood in a Trinitarian manner*. We shall explore

¹Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Blackwell, 2006, p. 280, 281.

²John 20:28 is in the context of Jesus saying he is going to ascend to “my God and your God” (v. 17). Thomas had failed to recognize that in seeing Jesus one was seeing God at work (14:7, 9). Thomas’ exclamation “My Lord and my God!” beautifully summarizes his realization that in meeting his Lord Jesus, he is also meeting the One God who is at work in him. The address is to both “my Lord” (the Messiah) and “my God,” the God of Jesus and of Thomas.

the evolution of the doctrine and its distinctive vocabulary in what follows.”

I suggest that Dr. McGrath’s faith is rooted firmly in post-biblical tradition, against his own Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. He seems internally conflicted. There is no doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible, he admits, and yet in its pages, God demands belief in the Trinity!

I invite some prolonged reflection on the statement italicized above: “This is not to say that Scripture contains a doctrine of the Trinity.” Yet God “demands to be understood in a Trinitarian manner.” There is curious illogicality and irrationality, may we say incoherence, at work here. Can anyone explain how the absence of a Trinitarian doctrine in the Bible is good evidence that God demands to be worshipped as a Trinity? If Scripture is taken as the foundation of faith, as Protestants claim, its pages yield no information about “God in three Persons.” The God of Jesus and of the New Testament is a single divine Person, the Father of Jesus and of Christians. Jesus deserves to be heard on the most important of all commands. But are the churches listening to Jesus? Not to listen to Jesus is the one fatal disaster, as the NT warns on page after page (Matt. 7:21ff; John 12:44ff; John 3:36; Heb. 5:9). ✧

Daniel the Prophet

by Greg Deuble, Australia

We all know the captivating story of Daniel in the lions’ den. But have you heard the real ending? You think you have, but have I got a surprise for you! It wasn’t Daniel’s traducers and their wives and children whose bones the lions had for lunch that fateful morning. Rather, according to this modern version, it is Daniel himself who has been gobbled up in the den by some modern “scholars” and “commentators.” Bit by bit, piece by piece, the man Jesus designated as “Daniel the prophet” (Matt. 24:15) has had the flesh of his prophetic writing clawed away from our precious Scriptures, until all that is left are the bones of an emaciated skeleton, now euphemistically described as a “pseudonymous author” who wrote what is euphemistically called *ex eventu* prophecy.

This means the story, according to such modern Biblical commentary, apparently should be that Daniel was no prophet of the LORD, because he wrote his book at the time of the Maccabees, around 165 BC, or about 400 years later than the time of the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. Rather than being a first-hand historical account by the eye-witness testimony of a Daniel carried from his homeland by King Nebuchadnezzar, this later “Daniel” wrote *after* the event. His prophecies are not supernaturally revealed by a God who declares the end

from the beginning. His “prophecies” are in fact, past history masquerading as prophecy. Daniel, we are invited to believe, wrote his book as a “parable” in the form of the apocalyptic genres we find in Jewish apocalyptic literature typically composed during the Maccabean revolts.

However, we are further assured by this commentary, we are not to be alarmed. The goal of this later Daniel, like that of the rest of that crop of inter-testament writers, was worthy enough. The writers of those books such as *1 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, *4 Enoch*, *et al* wished to encourage God’s suffering people with the message that their God would at last break the heathen nations and so give His saints their reward. To achieve their literary goal such apocalyptic writers simply looked back at previous histories of their people, and re-interpreted such past history in the light of their current sufferings, even passing off such past history as prophecy. And so most “scholars” and “commentators” today place Daniel in this same category.

Traditionally, these modern scholars have justified their arguments under four headings. They allege Daniel has historical inaccuracies, or possibly more fairly, anachronisms. They allege linguistic irreconcilables (e.g. Daniel uses Greek words, and wrote in a later Hebrew and Aramaic style). They allege doctrinal aberrations and, relevant to this brief article, they allege prophetic inaccuracies and improbabilities. Such is the modern spin.

Did I say modern? Woops. I recall a critic by the name of Porphyry who was born in AD 233 in Tyre, Syria. Porphyry was a disciple of the famous Neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus. He was a bitter opponent of Christianity and wrote fifteen books titled *Against the Christians*. As far as I can tell, Porphyry was the first critic who alleged Daniel was not prophecy, and was not written by Daniel, but was composed around the time of the Maccabean revolt. He tried to suck all the prophetic wind out of “Daniel the prophet” by indicting his book as spurious. Now, I can excuse Porphyry because he was an avowed and hostile skeptic. His aim was to discredit Christianity. He unashamedly hated Christianity. But I cannot excuse those today who say they speak for Christ while adopting Porphyry’s exact same methods to cast doubt on what was clearly a favorite book that Jesus himself read and loved and implicitly believed.

So, what shall we say to this? There is no space here to address in detail such weighty issues. But briefly, let us note a few pertinent points. First, the book of Daniel has always been included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Whether the book was originally in the section called “The Prophets” or “The Writings” is irrelevant. After the debate is over, nobody will disagree the book *was* included in the sacred canon of the Hebrew Bible,

and has always been so fixed. (Other very noble books are not included; books such as *1 Maccabees* or *Ecclesiasticus*. These two works, for example, were highly regarded by the Jews of the time, but are not in the canon, nor considered to be divinely inspired.) The reason is the ancient synagogue believed that after the prophet Malachi there was no prophetic voice for 400 years until the voice of John the Baptist. This is to say, those who allege Daniel was an imposter writing around 165 BC want us to believe the book of Daniel was smuggled into the canon by the very men who knew Nehemiah and Malachi were the last true prophets of the Old Testament era; by the very men who revered their holy Scriptures as divinely inspired. A recurring sadness in *1 Maccabees* is that “there is no prophet in the land”! The dying priest Mattathias in *1 Maccabees 2:49-70* used the example of Daniel and his three companions to rally his sons to be found faithful to the God of Israel. He appealed to the voice of a past prophet because there was no living “Daniel the prophet” in the land then. Bottom line: If Daniel was written in the inter-testament period he was “no prophet”! The fact is he was a prophet because he wrote and spoke before God silenced His prophets in the 400 years leading up to John the Baptist’s grand announcement in the wilderness.

Second, every Bible student knows that the Septuagint, the LXX (the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible) was translated around the years 300 to 250 BC during the years of the Egyptian Ptolemies. And guess what? The book of Daniel that you and I read today was and is there in the Septuagint! If you are following the math you will know that 250 BC is chronologically prior to 165 AD.

Thirdly, and to follow on, I have always loved the story of Alexander the Great as recounted by Josephus (who wrote about 80 AD). In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, chapter 8, Josephus tells us a gripping story of how during the siege of Tyre the great Greek conqueror asked the Jews for provisions for his army. Jaddua, the high priest, refused Alexander’s request. The reason he gave was that the Jews had sworn allegiance to the Persian king, Darius. Once Alexander had overcome Tyre, he furiously marched on Jerusalem to teach the Jews a lesson.

It seems Jaddua the high priest had been told by God in a dream what the Jews must do. All the priests dressed in white. Jaddua put on his high priestly garb, a scarlet robe, the breastplate and the golden mitre. Followed by the procession of the priests in white, and singing the songs of Zion, the Jews went out to greet Alexander on his white steed with his fierce and unstoppable army. According to Josephus, Jaddua showed Alexander the prophecies of Daniel, as read in chapter 8:1-8 and 15-22. These are passages that prophesied of Alexander’s arrival

and invincibility on the world stage. Apparently, Alexander was so overcome that he offered sacrifices and worshipped the God of the Jews. The salient point is that this happened around 330 BC. The critics, of course, at least are consistent when they dismiss Josephus’ account as being that of a lying historian who also wrote after the event. The indisputable fact however remains: Alexander destroyed every city in Syria allied to Darius, with the sole exception of Jerusalem. Indeed, Alexander not only spared Jerusalem and its Temple, but highly favored it. Why? Well, make up your own mind. Josephus informs us of a very reasonable explanation: The impression made upon him by the reading of Daniel the prophet. Alexander was floored as he realized he was the star of this supernatural prediction written generations before his arrival!

Fourth, when the Dead Sea Scrolls came to light in 1947 we learned that the Qumran community had in their possession many ancient texts and fragments of the Hebrew prophetic Scriptures. Included in this treasured cache were fragments of the books of the prophets Isaiah and Daniel, amongst others. In his book *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel* W.A. Criswell comments: “The scrolls of Daniel date back practically to the time the critics say that Daniel was forged. The scrolls of Daniel...are written partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic, and the Aramaic is not at all the Aramaic of the other documents of the Maccabean period, but the eastern Aramaic of the sixth century BC. Where the Bible is, where Isaiah is, there Daniel is. And the Hebrew language of Daniel in the Qumran Scrolls is the good, classical, Biblical Hebrew of the Old Testament, not the Hebrew of the Maccabean period.” Understand the impact of this statement. On purely linguistic grounds Daniel was composed hundreds of years before modern commentators want us to believe it was composed. The real “Daniel the prophet” prophesied hundreds of years *before* the Maccabees. The real “Daniel the prophet” supernaturally revealed God’s decreed future *before* the events came to pass in history. Daniel passes the test God sets for genuineness (e.g. Deut. 18:21-22).

Fifth, consider this. The prophet Ezekiel in 14:14, 20 and in 28:3 mentions a certain Daniel alongside two other great heroes of the Hebrew Bible — Noah and Job. Remember that Ezekiel wrote at the time of the Babylonian exile and was a contemporary with Daniel. He calls this Daniel “righteous” and “wise.” I hardly think God would call a man writing in 165 BC pretending to be His prophet (but actually looking back *ex eventu* and interpreting retrospectively) either righteous or wise. No! Ezekiel’s Daniel is famous for his holiness and wisdom in the same league as Noah and Job. Ezekiel testifies of a Daniel who is a true hero like the one I read

of in my Bible today. Or shall we now question Ezekiel's prophetic standing as well? Do we see where this line of inquiry inevitably leads us?

Sixth, let us consider this: The writer of Daniel in my Bible testifies that he is a "seer," that is, a prophet, and that the LORD God appeared to him in visions and spoke to him through angelic messengers and by other means. For instance in Daniel 8:1 he testifies, "a vision appeared to me, even to **me, Daniel**, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously." We are specifically told by this "me, Daniel" the precise years he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams: "Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams" (Dan. 2:1). Daniel testifies not only that God told him the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream but that he stood before the king and revealed its meaning during that king's second year on his throne. Also in Daniel 7:1 we read, "In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed." Then in Daniel chapter 8 Daniel's solemn statement again reads, "In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel." Our choice is this: Either Daniel is who he claims to be and is telling the truth when he dates these visions and their inspired interpretations, or he is an imposter.

The idea that the book of Daniel is of the same genre as the other inter-testament writings is false for the reasons outlined above. In fact, Daniel is the prototype! Daniel is the first (and the only) genuine apocalypse in the Hebrew Bible. All later apocalyptic writers subsequently model themselves on the original prophet Daniel of the Babylonian exile!

And if you don't believe a word I have written, I will in the seventh place finally appeal to my Lord and Messiah Jesus. He calls Daniel "the prophet" (Matt. 24:15). Our Lord Jesus did not say, "Daniel the pretender"! He did not nominate him "Daniel the parable man!" He did not say, "Daniel the commentator who looked back over his shoulder to his predecessors." Not at all. Our Lord Jesus himself believed the spirit of prophecy testified through Daniel. Or perhaps Jesus who claimed every word he spoke was his Father's was sadly mistaken after all?

In conclusion: To write Daniel off as a genuine eye witness to the historical events listed in the book that bears his name, to write Daniel off as a genuine prophet to whom the LORD God revealed in remarkable detail the future events from Babylon onwards to the very consummation of this present evil age, is to threaten the whole fabric of Jesus, his apostles and indeed the Scriptures themselves. It is to fatally rewrite the story. It is to see Daniel swallowed by his critics!

So who among us will be as noble as the anxious king of the Medes and the Persians whose sleep deserted him as Daniel spent the night in the lions' den? Will we not be as concerned as the king of that vast empire for Daniel's integrity, when he fasted the night, refusing to be distracted by any light-hearted entertainment, and before the sun arose in the morning rushed off in his pajamas to inquire after Daniel, "Has your God whom you serve been able to deliver you from the lions?" (Dan. 6:18-20). I have a hunch the living God will yet send His angel to stop all contrary mouths and vindicate "Daniel the prophet" in a Day near at hand. ✧

Sage Advice on "Tongues" (= Languages)

Author and Professor **Wayne Grudem** writes:

"It should be said at the outset that the Greek word *glossa*, translated 'tongue,' is not used only to mean the physical tongue in a person's mouth, but also to mean 'language.' In the New Testament passages where 'speaking in tongues' is discussed, **the meaning 'languages' is certainly in view.** It is unfortunate, therefore, that English translations have continued to use the phrase 'speaking in tongues,' which is an expression not otherwise used in ordinary English and **which gives the impression of a strange experience, something completely foreign to ordinary human life. But if English translations were to use the expression 'speaking in languages,'** it would not seem nearly as strange, and would give the reader a sense much closer to what first-century Greek-speaking readers would have heard in the phrase when they read it in Acts or 1 Corinthians" (*Systematic Theology*, p. 1069).

2 Peter 3:5-7: An Enormous Key to Genesis 1 and World History

"By the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment" (2 Pet. 3:5-7).

This passage states that the first ordering of the world for Adam (*kosmos*, v. 6: the world, "heavens and earth," as made for man) in Genesis 1 was replaced by a different order (also called "heavens and earth," v. 5) at the flood. So the post-flood world was a new "heavens and earth" — **not that the far-distant galaxies were involved in this.** They were not affected by the flood. They were not deluged, and they were not included in the creation history given us in Genesis 1. The heavens and earth of Genesis 1:1 was not the entire universe, but the "heavens and earth," "sky and land" of the world

prepared for Adam. Those heavens and earth were severely affected and altered by the flood. That is what Peter said.

There will be a future “new [renewed] heavens and earth” at the return of Jesus (2 Pet. 3:13; Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 51:16). “Heavens and earth” does not mean, as popularly thought, the whole vast universe, but rather the ordered world as seen by man, and in which man dwells — more like the concept of “society,” the “theater” made for man. Genesis 1 describes the ordered world of **sky and land or earth** as Adam experienced it. Peter equates “heavens and earth” with “the society which was formerly, then, at that time.”

Two Bible translations have already decided to translate Genesis 1:1 as “In the beginning God made sky and earth” (Easy to Read Version and New Century Version).

Peter contrasts the pre-flood society (v. 6) with the society after the flood and still existing now. Peter gives us vital commentary on Genesis 1. Genesis is about the created world made for man. The birds fly in the sky (heaven) and the sun is placed in the sky (heaven). In Genesis 1:8 God defines “heaven” as the dome of firmament, i.e. the sky. The whole system was built with water above and below the heaven or firmament, or sky. That “heaven and earth” was later deluged by water. It is wrong to make this innocent text in Genesis 1 deal with issues of the origin of the ultimate universe in which God dwells. The sun is millions of miles away, we know, but in the simple Bible cosmogony it is in the firmament, where also the birds fly!

The *Word Biblical Commentary* on 2 Peter says nicely: “The idea of the destruction of the pre-flood world need not be taken to mean total annihilation. Rather as the pre-flood world (described by Peter) was created by being brought out of the primordial ocean, so it was destroyed when it was once again submerged in the primeval ocean. The ordered [pre-flood] world reverted to chaos. The author of 2 Peter seems to envisage world history in three great periods, divided by two great cataclysms, the world before the flood, the present world which will end in the future conflagration (v. 7), and the new world to come (v. 13). This is in accordance with the Jewish background. Sibylline Oracles tell us that a **second age** began after the flood. Jesus said that a new age, the reborn world (Matt. 19:28) will begin at the second coming, and of course he likens the preceding world of today to the pre-flood world, equal in wickedness (Matt. 24:37-39).”

Our point is that the creation (sky and earth, Gen. 1:1), which was replaced by a new heavens and earth after the flood, had no reference to distant galaxies, which were obviously not affected by the deluge in the time of Noah.

All this has been well understood by commentary, for instance, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown on 2 Peter: “‘From old’ in Peter means from the first beginning...The heaven (sky) have been from old...The original earth was ‘formed out of water.’ The waters under the firmament were at creation gathered together into one place and the dry land emerged, out of, and above them. This was by means of the water, as an instrument in the changes wrought on earth’s surface to prepare it for man. The ‘then’ word perished, i.e. in respect of its occupants, men and animals and its existing order. But it was not annihilated; for at the flood, the fountains of the great deep were ‘broken up’ from the earth below and the windows of heaven were opened. The earth was deluged by that water out of which it had originally risen” (p. 626). The commentary defines the “heavens” of Peter’s writing as the upper and lower regions of the sky. The expected “new heavens” would be “the new atmosphere surrounding the renovated earth.”

This gives us the Bible’s own commentary on and definition of what is meant by “the heavens and earth” in Genesis 1.

Jesus affirmed that the present “heaven and earth” will pass away and be replaced by the new heaven and earth of the future Kingdom. This again says nothing about the distant galaxies, but refers to the “heaven and earth,” “sky and land” which is our home.

What comes then? What happens when Jesus comes back in power to bring this wicked society to an end?

Jesus constantly promises his faithful followers that they will “have authority over the nations and rule and shepherd them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 2:26-27; cp. Luke 19:17: “Assume authority over ten cities”). This shows that society will continue in a reorganized, recreated form, from the Parousia (Second Coming) onwards (Isa. 65:17; 51:16; 66:22). Jesus uses the maximum emphasis to get his point over: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Rev. 2:29) and compare Daniel 7:18, 22, 27. The “ears to hear” warning and admonition is found 16 times in the words of Jesus, 8 of them in his Revelation. Daniel 7:27 promises that the whole world will be subject to the saints, the people of God. All nations will be required to obey Jesus and the faithful believers of all ages.

The notion that only **immortals** will be in the Kingdom is refuted by so much text of Scripture. And Revelation 2:26 is key, among a mass of verses, to Christian hope. The point of being a believer is to train now for high governmental responsibility in the future. Nations to be administered will be there in the millennium (Isa. 19:16-25; Zech. 14, etc.)

Revelation 2:26 is a more or less direct quotation of Psalm 2:8 (LXX rather than the Hebrew is quoted in the NT, but the overall sense is just the same). Jesus will

share his Kingdom and its administrative responsibilities with us. Compare how this elementary truth was not understood by church members in 1 Corinthians 6:2. Paul was shocked that believers had not grasped this “101” of Bible instruction! This is a major component of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Take careful note of the fact that faith and love are **based on hope** (Col. 1:4-5). “Faith is the confident assurance of things **hoped for**” (Heb. 11:1). If congregations lack faith and love, they might try making Christian **hope** and its content clear to the church members! At present there is very little clarity in the Christian mind about **the content of what we are to hope for in Christ**. The extreme opposite of the mind of Jesus is that we will be playing harps (solo!?) on clouds in the sky! Not much better is the prospect of non-activity in the future Kingdom, in which, as is mistakenly thought, only immortals dwell.

The Bible points to the colossal reality of a future job description for all true believers: “They will rule and reign as kings with the Messiah for 1000 years” (Rev. 20:4), and beyond (Rev. 22:5). This will be a royal rule and reign on the earth (Rev. 5:10). It will involve the stupendous promise of Revelation 2:26, which is to be believed because Jesus said it. To do other than believe the words of Jesus risks the blindness incurred by Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, when he failed to believe and act on the words of Gabriel in Luke (Luke 1:19-20). Failure to believe why, how and when Jesus is the Son of God in Luke 1:35 is equally a failure to believe what God declares through His agents.

Erroneous ideas about God and Jesus or any Bible truth are dangerous and must be rejected. Christianity is about believing what is true and rejecting what is false. “A passion for truth” is the non-negotiable standard for good Christianity (2 Thess. 2:10). The bar is always set very high, and a sloppy disregard for truth and the words of Jesus and Scripture is perilous (Mark 8:38; Matt. 7:21ff).

Adam’s job assignment in Genesis was to reign as king for God, as vice-regent. He threw away this great destiny. Recovering from and **repenting** of this loss of destiny in God’s plan means to “repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14-15). That is where the Christian Gospel starts. In other words, repentance means “stop NOT believing in the destiny offered to you by the God who promises to give the Kingdom to those who love Him” (James 2:5; Luke 12:32). Then preach *everywhere* that Good News of the Kingdom (Luke 9:11). This is good discipleship and obedience to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Failure to exercise our God-given talents for the cause of the Gospel results, alas, in being excluded from the Kingdom when Jesus comes (Matt. 25:27-30). ✧

Near-Death Experiences

by Peter Nagy, Washington

Lately there are elaborate accounts and movies reporting near-death experiences. These are really exploitations of what people allegedly saw and remember while they were “in heaven.”

First of all, where does the Bible say that anybody goes to, or has ever gone to heaven upon death? If all dead people are sleeping in the grave, and nobody is in heaven except the Lord and His host, we must wonder who are these “revived from the dead” folks talking to, or getting their messages from? Hopefully they are not being influenced by demons imitating Uncle Joe; or from too much pizza for dinner.

Ouija boards, fortune tellers, séances, mediums, palm readers, and any form of our communication with the dead are strictly forbidden in Scripture. After driving all the fortune tellers and mediums out of the land of Israel, Saul went against his own decree and consulted a medium at Endor (1 Sam. 28:7-15). He eventually died because he did not obey the Lord, and asked for advice from the medium and the dead (1 Chron. 10:13, 14).

It seems to be consistent throughout Scripture that the Lord frowns upon turning to mediums (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27). Moses told the people not to learn the pagan ways (Deut. 18:10-14). Partakers in this practice were not looked upon favorably and were to be eliminated (2 Kings 21:6; 23:24; 2 Chron. 33:6). In Micah’s day, the same disapproval was evident (Micah 5:12).

When there was a vision in the Bible, it was meaningful for all mankind, or expressed an intended and specific Godly purpose. The Bible does not support a private message from one dead family member back to reassure some living family member that everything is all right with them, or not to feel bad for them, or that they will see their favorite deceased pet again someday.

Even if a cute little boy or girl comes back from a near death event and tells us that Grandpa has a message from beyond the grave for the immediate family members, or an angel with big fluffy feathery wings wants everyone to know how to save the earth, or they are assured they will again see a long lost spouse or friend; we must be discerning enough to validate if what is described in the account aligns with Scripture. It could simply and sadly be the tickling of people’s itching ears.

It is interesting to observe that people who have a near-death episode in India will report having seen Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva, Buddha, or some other deity in their testimony. Catholics see Mary (who in the Bible is now dead, not alive) or one of their favorite saints. Can this brushing up against death experience be attributed to what any person has learned in their life and perceived in

their minds, related to their specific culture, religious concepts, and the country and continent they reside in?

Some of the near-death accounts are not always of heaven. Some are of a perceived hellish place of torment for all the inhabitants. The same reasoning holds true for the mirror opposite story too. If all people are sleeping in the grave, as the Bible says, waiting for judgment day, then who were these people supposedly seeing and talking to in “hell” or in “heaven”?

We can confidently realize these experiences carry the distinct possibility a person could have been deceived by a familiar spirit who was posing as a beloved family member. The other choice would basically be a neurologically brain-triggered imaginary vision or dream containing pre-supposed notions.

These deceptive near-death scenarios and testimonies are not biblically approved contact with the dead. The people always have a vivid memory of their experience, and it obviously seemed very real to them. But the sad harsh question is, did they simply “really imagine” it?

These tales are not to be considered a true communication from the Lord. Though many church groups have embraced this questionable phenomenon; could they actually be at risk of “Christianizing necromancy”?✧

Think of Error as Poison

A very widespread opinion about the Bible and Bible study goes like this: “I want to learn how to live a successful Christian life. Don’t teach me ‘doctrine’; teach me Christian living.” A perilously deceptive falsehood underlies this thinking. All of the Bible is “teaching,” and all of the Bible is therefore “doctrine.” So anyone who says “I don’t want doctrine, I want Christian living” has not understood that they are really saying “I want one part of Scripture, but not other parts.”

In Scripture we are urged by Jesus to “live by **every word** which proceeds from the mouth of God.” Yes, every word! The teaching of Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27, the basis of the NT understanding of the future, is just as much necessary doctrine/teaching as “love your neighbor as yourself,” or “Husbands, love your wives,” or “Children, obey your parents.”

Here is how Scripture works: The words of the Bible are carriers of life and energy. Jesus said that his words are “spirit and life” (John 6:63). Zechariah 7:12 analyzes our common human problem: “They made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of Hosts had sent by His spirit.”

Salvation in the NT is defined by the important text in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. It was because people failed to have “a love for the truth, in order to be saved” that they were in jeopardy, risking spiritual shipwreck. So a careless indifference to the issue of truth and error is

dangerous. Think of it this way: Do you want to put cyanide in your coffee? It is lethal. Believing what is false or not believing the words of Gabriel in the case of Zacharias in Luke 1:20 was costly. Falsehood in any department of biblical understanding is dangerous to spiritual health. Truth is light and life, and the Gospel properly understood is “life-giving” and energizing. Your whole personality and life is affected by what you believe, either truth or falsehood. So let us search out truth with maximum energy and determination (see 1 Thess. 2:13: *energetai* — “is energetically at work in you”). “Oh send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me to your Holy Hill” (Ps. 43:3).✧

Comments

“Just wanted to drop you a line and let you know that I ‘tuned in’ to the Bible study this morning and enjoyed it immensely. Everyone on chat was very cordial and I enjoyed participating in the discussions. Already looking forward to next week! On a side note, I spoke with my wife about some of the things I have been learning (mostly about the Trinity and person of Christ) and was very surprised at how receptive she was. She informed me that she always has had a hard time trying to make sense of the Trinity, and believed that the plain reading of Scripture would lead one to believe that Jesus was the Son of God not God the Son. She then went on to argue her point. You would have thought that she had been reading your material for years. It was quite the sermon! To say the least I am thrilled that my wife is with me on this issue. I hope she will be as receptive to some of the other things I have been learning, but I don’t want to overwhelm her or come on too strong right now. Since learning the basic principles of the Gospel of the Kingdom, my Bible has become a living Book to me. I can’t seem to open it without truth just ‘jumping off the page.’ Everything seems to be lining up quite nicely, and all dots seem to be connecting effortlessly.” — *Florida*

“I have just received YouTube on my TV system, and I’m addicted to watching your fellowship, it is very informative, please keep going.” — *Youtube*

“Just wanted to tell you how much I enjoy your video discussions with Dan Gill and yourself on **21stcr.org**. One cannot think of all logic to prove a point and you guys bring out things I’ve not thought of before. It’s so much harder to UNLEARN anything.” — *email*

(*Commentary on the letters to the Thessalonians is planned to film in July.*)

Please do listen to “What Good is Jesus Without His Gospel?” This audio can be downloaded as well as other free audio files at www.focusonthekingdom.org/av.htm This will help with our training for sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom.