

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 2 No. 11

Anthony Buzzard, editor

August, 2000

“Destroy This Temple”: The End of the Mosaic System by Charles Hunting (continued)

The writer of Hebrews 13:9 pursues our theme about the replacement of the Mosaic system by the New Covenant introduced by Jesus. He asserts: “It is good that we should gain inner strength from the grace of God and not from rules about food, which have never benefited those who observed them.” Old patterns of conduct die hard. Peter had to be reprimanded publicly for slipping back into out-of-date ways of thinking. Paul’s admonition in Galatians 2:14 is clear: “But when I saw that their conduct did not square with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of the whole congregation, ‘If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?’” Peter, the Jew, had rightly learned and lived a different life as a Christian, but retrogressed into a Mosaic mode. This is still the habit of some today. It is a fundamental misreading of the New Testament to re-erect the barrier that once separated Jew and Gentile. “Living like a Jew,” when this means living under the temporary Mosaic regulations, is an affront to biblical Christianity.

The danger of muddling two Covenants is that we make the Messianic faith of Jesus unattractive or impracticable to the potential convert (just as ascribing belief in the Trinity to Jesus provokes unwarranted hostility from Jews and Muslims). Mosaic food laws would cause unnecessary hardship in many parts of the world. Should matters of food exclude Gentiles from having a right relationship with God who had legislated specifically for the nation of Israel under the Law?

Jesus chipped away at the Temple authority and the Mosaic system in Matthew 12:6 when he said, “There is something greater than the temple here.” Greater than the Temple? This was his answer to the Pharisees when they criticized the disciples for plucking corn on Israel’s official Sabbath. Jesus argued from the Old Testament: “Have you not read what David did when his men were hungry? He went to the house of God and ate the sacred bread, though neither he nor his men had a right to eat it, only the

priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple *break the Sabbath* and they are not held guilty? If you had known what this text means, ‘It is mercy I require, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Attention is thus called to the fact that even under the Law there was a group who were *not subject to the restraints of Sabbath-keeping*, the fourth commandment. Jesus further observed that the law of circumcision actually took precedence over the Sabbath, if the eighth day of the boy’s life fell on the Sabbath day. With more than a hint of his revolutionary intention Jesus pointed out that even under the Old Testament regime the priests were not bound by the national Sabbath law. They could work in the Temple and remain innocent. How much more, then, are the royal New Testament priests, the Christians (I Pet. 2:9), exempt from Sabbath observance? This new priesthood works at promoting and maintaining the new Temple, the body of Christ.

It is quite clear that Jesus intended to show that Sabbath laws were superseded in cases where emergency human needs called for an act of mercy. And by his assertion that he was “Lord of the Sabbath” a new view of the whole legal system enters the picture. It is Jesus, not Moses, who is now the interpreter of law. Jesus noted that a troubled cow in a ditch on the Sabbath is worthy of special care. How much more a man whose family is starving in Saudi Arabia because his national laws have decreed Friday as the official day of rest and Saturday as a day of work? Could the dietary economy of the Arctic North be so radicalized that Christians there could avoid the consumption of all “unclean” whales and seals?

National Israel was given the seventh-day Sabbath as part of a unique covenant with their Creator. The Sabbath was never part of the Abrahamic Covenant (Deut. 5:3). Observance of the Sabbath in ancient Israel required no faith on the part of its citizens. As a

In This Issue

Expert Quotations to Restore Biblical Belief.....	6
A Kingdom Believer’s Fundamental Persuasion ...	7
Comments.....	7

matter of fact, it would have been awkward not to keep a seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest. Question: What of the people today, in lands far away from Israel, whose national laws are such that a job, schooling for children and prohibitive religious customs would insure disaster if believers were required to keep the Laws of Moses and the Mosaic Sabbath? It would be a huge sacrifice. Jesus said in reference to the Sabbath, "It is mercy I require, not sacrifice" (Matt. 12:7).

The Sabbath issue was clarified by the Apostle Peter at a conference convened for the purpose of deciding what was required of the Gentile converts. The debate arose when some insisted that "those Gentiles must be circumcised *and told to keep the law of Moses.*" Peter's response in brief was that God had chosen him to announce that "the Gentiles were to hear and believe *the message of the gospel...and God made no difference between them and us. He purified their hearts by faith.*" Then he asked the august council, "Why do you now try God's patience by laying on the shoulders of these converts a yoke which neither we nor our forefathers were able to bear? For our belief is that we are saved in the same way as they are: by the grace of our Lord" (Acts 15:5-11). It hardly has to be said that Peter means that the salvation process cannot be facilitated by "keeping the laws of Moses."

All that needed to be said about the new Christian "take" on the legal system was not said by Jesus while he was with the disciples on earth. It was left to the first-century Apostles to develop the Messiah's instructions and apply them. No true Apostles (despite a temporary lapse by Peter) wandered outside the ongoing guidelines set by the risen Jesus and transmitted by the spirit. Somewhat ironically, it was left to the Apostle Paul, by training a premier legalist, to grant the greatest understanding for the change from the Mosaic system, as well as the reason for new policy. Whole sections of the book of Galatians are devoted to this theme. The lesson of freedom from Mosaic restraints was learned slowly and painfully. So it is today.

Paul spoke to the Gentile world about the now outdated *separation between Jew and Gentile*. He tried to persuade those opponents who because of Jewish influence wanted to cling to remnants of the Mosaic system: "You [Gentiles] were at one time separate from Christ, excluded from the community of Israel, strangers to God's covenants and the promises that go with them. Yours was a world without hope and without God. Once far off, now you are in union

with Christ...For he himself is our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made one, and has broken down the barrier which separated them." How was this wonderful situation achieved? "*For he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single community in himself, thereby making peace...for through him [Jesus, not Moses or the Law] we both alike have access to the Father in the one spirit*" (Eph. 2:12-18). And the spirit was the spirit received in the reception of Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom (Gal. 3:2), just as Jesus had described the reception of the seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom as the indispensable spark of immortality (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11, 12).

Could there have been any clearer statement of the fundamental change in the Law than the one given by this brilliant, zealous ex-Mosaic adherent?

Paul battled continuously with the problem which continued to trouble many of the church congregations. To the Galatians he said, "You stupid Galatians!...You before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly displayed on the cross! Answer me one question: did you receive the Spirit *by keeping the law* or by believing the gospel message?...Look at Abraham; he put his faith in God and that faith was counted to him as righteousness...On the other hand those who rely on obedience to the Law are under a curse" (Gal. 3:1ff).

Paul's whole premise in the book of Galatians was that the legalists were preaching a false gospel — not the one preached by Christ. Paul summed up in the clearest terms his argument for the *change in the Law*: "The power we have comes from God; it is He who has empowered us as ministers of a new covenant, *not of the letter but spiritual*; for the letter condemns to death but the spirit gives life. The ministry that brought death, and that was in written form on stone was written with such glory...even though the glory...was soon to fade...Indeed, the glory that once was is no glory at all; it is outshone by a still greater glory...It is not for us to do as Moses did; he put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at the end of what was fading away. In any event their minds had become closed, for that *same veil is there to this very day when the lesson is read from the Old Covenant and it is never lifted, because only in Christ is it taken away. Indeed to this very day, every time the Law of Moses is read, a veil lies over the mind of the hearer.* But as the Scripture says, 'Whenever he turns to the Lord the veil is removed'" (2 Cor. 3:5 ff). The reality of what Jesus taught as minister of the New Covenant is obscured

when we are wedded to the Mosaic system. Even a “little leaven leavens the whole lump,” according to Paul (Gal. 5:9).

Paul’s occasional concessions to the Mosaic pattern were for expediency only, so that he might not cause offense to those who considered themselves under the Law. And there can be no doubt about which Law was under consideration. Paul’s words should not be dissolved with the claim that he was talking only about being or not being under *the penalty of the law*. This argument *is a specious attempt to avoid the Apostle’s radical teaching*. Paul confesses: “To the Jews I behaved like a Jew, to win Jews; that is, to those under the Law I behaved as if under the Law...though *not myself being subject to the Law*; not myself outside God’s Law, but *subject to the Law of Christ*” (I Cor 9:20, 21). When Paul wrote to Timothy he made it perfectly clear that the Law of Moses was designed for the law-breakers, and in Galatians 3 the now obsolete Law was a provisional schoolmaster to bring people to Christ and the greater Law of Christ. That Christian Law amounted to love toward God and love toward neighbor. “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). How does one ritualize bearing one another’s burdens? How do you ritualize love or make rules for love? The Mosaic system, allowing for “just wars,” even “holy war,” aggressive and defensive, an eye for an eye, did not provide that answer. That answer could come only through Jesus and a change of heart through the spirit of the Gospel of the Kingdom. “Would that they may always be of a mind to fear me...” (Deut. 5:29). But as a nation they never did achieve that mind to obey.

A Christian should look for ways to serve with acts of kindness. In practical terms this attitude surpasses the sentiment of the famous musical: “God made man to serve his neighbor but with a little bit of luck he won’t be home.” “Pure religion and undefiled is to visit the widow and orphan in distress” (James 1:27) and to make sure they are home!

The change from the Old to the New Testament Scriptures regarding circumcision clearly associates the radical *change in the Law* with the change in the priesthood. Hebrews 7:11-12: “Now if perfection had been obtainable through the Levitical priesthood (on the basis of which the people were given the Law), there would be no need for another kind of priest to arise, described as being in the order of Melchizedek...but a change in the priesthood must *mean a change in the Law*.” Physical circumcision was one of Israel’s most deeply embedded laws. The

Jews were identified as “the Circumcision.” Circumcision was the very sign of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham. The physical work of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. Yet the physical form, *not the spiritual principle*, of circumcision was abandoned. The spiritual equivalent — circumcision of the heart — remained. Circumcision was “spiritualized,” and so was Law of the Sabbath(s). There is no justification for reintroducing either requirement. Christians are now known as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16) as distinct from the Israel of the flesh (see I Cor 10:18, KJV). We are “the true Circumcision” (Phil. 3:3). The whole New Covenant system is a transposition into a new and brilliant key. Why destroy this new melody by mixing it with the outmoded melodies of Moses? It is true that the sacrificial system was not simply removed. It was replaced by a new system. Hebrews calls for a different type of sacrifice, another *change in the Law, not an abolition*. “Through Him [*the new Temple*] let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God...And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such *sacrifices* God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15, 16). Would anyone insist that this must be accompanied by the physical killing of a turtledove?

Paul made it clear to the Galatian church “that God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to buy freedom for those who were under the Law, that we might attain the status of sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). Then he went on to chide them: “How can you turn back to those feeble and bankrupt elemental spirits? Why do you propose to enter their service all over again? You keep *special days and months and seasons and years*” (vv. 9-10). But Paul is not finished with his point. Further interaction with this brush with the Mosaic system is needed. “Tell me now, you that are so anxious to be under Law, will you not listen to what the Law says?...Sinai [where the law, *including the Ten Commandments*, was given as the basis of the Covenant] represents the Jerusalem of today, for she and her children are in slavery” (vv. 21-25). Slavery is the word for the Old Covenant in stark contrast to the Truth of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as Jesus preached it, which enables us to be free (John 8:32). Knowing the Truth, the Gospel as Jesus preached it, is the key to freedom.

The writer of Hebrews likewise sees the limitations of the old Mosaic system given at Sinai: “It is not to the tangible, blazing fire of Sinai that you have come, with its darkness, gloom, and whirlwind...No, you have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem [the

Jerusalem of the future]...and to Jesus the mediator of a New Covenant..." (Heb. 12:18-24). When one has been steeped in the code given to Moses for the nation of Israel, it is most difficult not to want to climb that ladder as a measurable reminder of the success of our own works.

Paul denied that one has a right to the title Jew, if one's status is merely physical. "The real Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew, and his circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal" (Rom. 2:29). He tells the church at Colosse: "For you were buried with him in baptism, and in that baptism you were also raised to life with him through *your faith* in the active power of God...And although you were dead because of your sins...He has brought you to life with Christ...He has canceled the bond...against us *with its legal demands [not "legal penalties"]*, He has set it aside, nailing it to the cross...Allow no one, therefore, to take you to task about what you eat or drink, or over the observance of festival, new moons, or Sabbath. *These are no more than a shadow of what was to come; the reality is Christ's*" (Col. 2:12-17). For Paul all three sorts of observance stand or fall together. If one insists on keeping the weekly Sabbath, then Holy Days and the New Moons are equally binding. For Paul the whole system is one — "a shadow." It would be arbitrary to keep one or two forms of observance and not the third.

The Apostles were merely carrying on the work that Jesus had initiated, as he began to build a whole new community around himself — a Messianic community charged with the duty of taking the great prophetic message of hope and freedom for all, news of the coming Kingdom on earth. "Come to me, all who are weary and whose load is heavy; I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me [learn my Gospel of the Kingdom and the Law of Christ] and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to wear, my load is light" (Matt. 11:29-30).

This could never be said of the code of Moses. Taking the Good News of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the rest of the world was not governed by the dicta of Sinai. Yet some to this day, all in good conscience, still want to insist that the Sabbath, the Holy Days, the New Moons, the food laws are beautiful practices which must be maintained by all. This code of Moses, brilliant in its proper time for the nation of Israel, would be an intolerable burden incompatible with the light burden promised by Christ. Could the majority celebrate a rest day every New Moon?

We should marvel at the great mercy God provided through His Son when He authorized the Gospel hope of the Kingdom of God for the whole world. Those who might be concerned that life without Sinai would be a free-for-all, and that we would now be at liberty to kill, commit adultery, steal, covet and neglect our parents, should be reassured by the Law of Christ. It seems obvious that the law of love toward neighbor would preclude any such behavior. So Jesus said in his new instruction, the Sermon on the Mount.

Those who would feel threatened if New Covenant Christians are freed from the obligation of the keeping of a seventh day, sunset to sunset, should find Hebrews 4:4ff illuminating: "Scripture somewhere says of the seventh day: 'God rested from all his work on the seventh day' [note that *God*, not the Messiah, was the active executive of the creation] and in the passage above we read: 'They shall never enter my rest.' This implies that there are some indeed who are to enter that rest, and that those who first heard the Good News failed to enter through unbelief." It was not a matter of stopping work on Friday at sunset but a failure to embrace the spirit and mind of Christ, thereby entering into "a Sabbath rest [which] awaits the people of God: anyone who enters God's rest, rests from his own works as God did from his" (vv. 9, 10). That sort of rest applies to every day of the week.

Joshua led the children of Israel into the promised land. They were given a national law peculiar to Israel. Despite rigorous Sabbath-keeping, Israel's tumultuous history brought her to the brink of another sad era, the exile — far removed from the rest God had designed for her. In the time of Jeremiah, reliance on the repeated mantra that the Temple could save them showed how far their hearts were removed from true faith. "Thus says the Lord of hosts... 'Amend your ways and your deeds... Do not trust in the deceptive words, saying, 'This place is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!' This slogan of yours is a lie; put no trust in it" (Jer. 7:3, 4).

Israel nevertheless was still the nation designed by God to hear a life-saving Message involving a completely new focus. Her long-awaited Messiah arrived with his galvanizing Gospel of the Kingdom, a message that was to encompass also the nations of the world (Matt. 24:14). Jesus persistently demonstrated to his people that the time of the Temple and all it stood for was coming to an end. Her cherished Law was inadequate for the period of the announcement of the Kingdom to all the world. By word and deed, he proclaimed that only he had answers to the impossibly

difficult problems facing the nation. Peter advocated this teaching by declaring that there was no other Name (i.e. system of faith) given under heaven by which everyone of every nation must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Reflecting on Jesus' dramatic disturbance of the Temple, "his disciples recalled the words of scripture: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews challenged Jesus: 'What sign can you show to justify your action?' 'Destroy this temple,' Jesus replied, 'and in three days I will raise it up again.' The Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple. Are you going to raise it up again in three days?' But the temple he was speaking of was his body. After his resurrection his disciples understood the full force of these words. They believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus spoke" (John 2:17-22).

A whole new mindset does not grow out of rules and rituals. You cannot legislate acts of kindness. They proceed from a way of life in the spirit of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Kindness still perpetuates the divine principle of sacrifice. Unblemished animals had to be offered in sacrifice, not the lame and the dying. God is concerned with people, not animals. Our kindness must be wholehearted. Paul joins the chorus of New Testament teachers calling on us to "Carry one another's burdens and in this way fulfill the law of Christ." Laws have not been "done away with." They have been reinterpreted on a new plain in the spirit. The law did not provide a way to life. It is through the new mediator and his New Covenant teaching, as well as his death and resurrection, that we approach God. With the replacement of the Temple we are launched into the new age of the spirit. The resurrection on Sunday marks the beginning of a new system: "Having risen on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene" (Mark 16:9). That formerly demonized lady enjoyed the privilege of the first exclusive interview with the risen Messiah. Sunday was indeed the appointed "third day since all these things [the crucifixion] happened" (Luke 24:21).

This arresting theme occupies the writer of Hebrews 7:18, 19: "The earlier rules are repealed as ineffective and useless, since the law brought nothing to perfection, and a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God." The entire Mosaic system was suspended. At the Messiah's death the Temple veil had been torn asunder, ripped from top to bottom. The separation between Jew and Gentile was no more. At this juncture and the resurrection of Jesus the new Temple became the body of Christ, available for membership to all nations through repentance,

belief in the Kingdom Gospel of Jesus and baptism (Mark 1:14, 15; Acts 8:12; 28:23, 31), apart from the sacrifices and the legalism of the Temple ordinances.

If the Mosaic dispensation had produced a climate that would bring the world in contact with its Creator, why change it? Why remove this system so solemnly and gloriously promulgated at Sinai? The answer is that the Law at Sinai was not God's last word.

Never did Paul refer back to Genesis 2:3 to sanction the seventh-day Sabbath as an obligation for Christians. Nor did any of the New Testament writers. Abraham was not commended first for his obedience to the Law of circumcision as a path to right standing before God. That rite came only after Abraham was given God's stamp of approval because of his *belief* in the promises of God that he would receive the land/Kingdom and the celebrated seed, the Messiah. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." That is the New Testament slogan, but it is not the center of the Mosaic code. Abraham was not obliged to keep the Sabbath. To revert to a semi-Mosaic system, despite the constant protestations of the New Testament against it, risks the introduction of another Gospel, one without the power to save (see the whole argument of Paul in Galatians).

Lest anyone misunderstand, Paul says, "Tell me now, you that are so anxious to be under law, will you not listen to what the Law says?" (Gal. 4:21 —that Law which gives a sense of our own righteousness). "Such persuasion did not come from God who called you. A little leaven, remember, 'leavens all the dough'" (Gal. 5:8, 9). This blend of the Mosaic law with its rules and rituals, God's grace and the laws of Christ is a disastrously confusing mixture. It destroys the simplicity of the universal Gospel of Christ which is now the vehicle for taking the Kingdom of God message to the whole of the world.

"Those who rely on obedience to the law are under a curse" (Gal. 3:10). "I impress on you once again, that every man who accepts circumcision is under obligation to keep the entire Law. When you seek to be justified by way of Law you are cut off from Christ: you have put yourselves outside of God's grace" (Gal. 5:3, 4). The point could hardly be clearer. But such freedom from Law is not a freedom to be inactive. It is freedom to enter the service of Christ in spreading the Gospel of Christ, i.e., the Gospel of the Kingdom, Luke 9:60: "Go and preach the Kingdom everywhere."

"You must understand, my brothers, that it is through Christ that forgiveness of sins is now being proclaimed to you. It is through him that everyone

who has faith is acquitted of everything for which there was no acquittal under the Law of Moses” (Acts 13:38, 39).

No ritual animal sacrifice, food law, keeping of Sabbaths, New Moons or Holy Days, tithing or special offering can strengthen our position with God. God “loves a cheerful giver,” certainly, but this is not just a repeat of the Old Testament tithing regulation, which Paul imposed on no one.

With his ministry devoted entirely to proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus began to remove every barrier which would interfere with his life-giving message to the world. The blindness which clings to outmoded Old Testament regulation can be removed only in Christ. The commands of Christ are simple. They begin with the summary of the faith: “The Kingdom of God is at hand [and now the imperative]: Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15). “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:28ff). Jewish monotheism is still the framework of the faith. Jesus knows of no Trinitarian or Binitarian modification of the faith. Belief in the One God of Israel and in Jesus as the promised Messiah, plus the demands of love to neighbor and brother, summarize the faith. This new system frees us to concentrate on the command to shoulder the task which counted supremely for Jesus: “I must proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to the other cities also; that is why I was commissioned” (Luke 4:43). That commission passes now to his Church, which, under his supervision from the right hand of God, is to invite men and women of all nations to “repent and believe in the Gospel about the Kingdom,” the new way involving the new Hope by which we can approach God (Heb. 10:20). ☩

Expert Quotations to Restore a Biblical Belief System

“The Resurrection *is the event in which Jesus passed from earthly mortal existence into the realm of immortality.* This is the explanation of the grave clothes...The grave clothes did not have to be stripped off to allow Jesus to emerge; he passed from the grave clothes while they still remained as they had been, rolled up around Jesus’ body” (George Eldon Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 96).

According to the constant message heard at contemporary funerals, the dead do not have to wait for the future resurrection to gain immortality. Popular Christianity contradicts the Bible by asserting that the dead can obtain immortality in advance of the Resurrection when Jesus comes back

(I Cor. 15:23). There is no access to immortality apart from Resurrection. The Resurrection of the faithful has not yet happened. Therefore the dead are currently dead, not immortal in heaven or hellfire.

“Jesus is what the logos became, not the logos as such” (Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 297).

“The logos is the mind of God. Jesus is the embodiment of the mind of God. He is the logos made flesh — through the Holy Spirit...What preexists is God’s word or wisdom, God’s spirit and God’s self (the Father)...Contrary to widespread belief, Philippians 2 is not about a preexisting Son becoming an earthly Son. The New Testament is not about a divine Son inside the body of an earthly man” (Colin Brown, from correspondence).

The two statements above from leading biblical theologians provide a correction of the popular misunderstanding of John 1:1 which does not read “In the beginning was the Son,” but “In the beginning was the word...” The word is the mind and plan of God as promised from the beginning. Jesus, the Son of God, came into existence at his conception (Luke 1:35), as the fulfillment of that divine promise. Jesus is the logos (word), God’s mind and plan fully expressive in the human being Jesus (I Tim 2:5).

“Jesus offers eternal life to anyone who will receive him as their Savior and Lord. Note: the word ‘receive’ means to believe his words and obey them” (from “How to Get Saved,” www.fathersbusiness.com/saved.htm).

This excellent summary of salvation in the Bible makes the point for which this magazine stands: “Believing in Jesus” in the absence of belief in the word/Gospel of the Kingdom means an interference with biblical salvation. Jesus’ first command was: “Repent because the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent and believe the Gospel” (see Mark 1:14, 15). This is Mark’s and Jesus’ “John 3:16” — the epitome of the salvation message. In Luke 8:12 Jesus expressly relates salvation to believing the word of the Kingdom (parallel in Matt. 13:19; see also Acts 8:12 for the same formula). “Whenever someone hears the Message, the Devil comes and snatches away the Message which has been sown in his heart to prevent him from believing and being saved.” The crucial issue in salvation is here said by Jesus to be the reception of his Gospel/words/preaching about the Kingdom. Belief in his death and resurrection is the other major factor in the Gospel.

“The Old Testament’s standard way of envisaging dying and coming back to life is by speaking of lying

down and sleeping, then of waking and getting up. Dying is an extreme form of sleeping. Lying down and sleeping thus provide the metaphor for death (II Kings 4:31; 13:21; Isa. 26:19; Jer. 51:39, 57; Job 14:12). Further, dying means lying down with one's ancestors in the family tomb, with its non-material equivalent, Sheol; so coming back to life would mean leaving such a 'land of earth' [dust] (Dan 12:2; Ps. 49; 73). The image presupposes a restoring to life of the whole person with its spiritual and material aspects" (Goldingay, *Commentary on Daniel*, p. 307).

This biblical description of death, confirmed by Jesus in John 11:11, 14; 5:28, 29, etc., has not been able to prevail against the popular, pagan notion that death means an immediate conscious survival in heaven or hell. Our question to readers would be: Which view of death informs the instruction you give to your children? That of Jesus and the Hebrew Bible or that of popular, traditional Christianity, developed after Bible times? Interference with the doctrine of Resurrection and its corresponding prior "sleep of death" in Hades/Sheol is said to be a cancer in our spiritual thinking (II Tim. 2:17, 18). The doctrine of Resurrection is a fundamental biblical teaching. If immortality is gained the moment we die, what point is there in the Resurrection? What point in the Second Coming of Jesus which is for the purpose of raising the faithful dead? If one maintains that the dead have already become immortal, this is tantamount to saying that the Resurrection of the faithful has already occurred. In the Bible only by Resurrection can one attain immortality. This is one of the great "ABC's" of biblical faith, yet little understood in Christian circles. ☩

A Kingdom Believer's Fundamental Persuasion

I believe God has a great Kingdom plan and that the main reason for my existence is to do His will devotedly. It is my duty to learn His ways and to grow to be more like Him and His firstborn Son, Jesus Christ. My mission as a disciple is to lovingly generate a desire in others to believe in and live for the coming Kingdom. I must continue to study the Scriptures in order to gain meaningful knowledge, grace and wisdom. It is my responsibility thoroughly to understand the content of what I teach and prayerfully to use my strengths to handle accurately the word of truth. I must be a model to others in every way. Therefore, I must constantly take inventory

of my morals, behavior and thinking. I must promptly admit it when I am off the mark so that I may never tarnish the glory of Jesus or ruin even one opportunity to lead others to salvation in the coming Kingdom on the earth. I believe that a true disciple knows both his limitations and his potential, and he exerts his mental and physical powers to become what God expects. I need the fellowship of other disciples, and they need mine. To renew both them and myself, I must communicate with love, giving them my rapt attention, seeking their advice and sharing my joys. As a disciple I need to understand how the holy spirit operates and be ever ready to lend my talents, words of encouragement, and knowledge so that the spirit will not be hindered in its work. Having the spirit of God and Jesus is life's most valuable possession, and no enemy of God or man can take it away. Prayerfully learning, pursuing and teaching the divine plan and will of God are what life is all about. My blessings will ever increase as I grow in appreciation for this highest privilege bestowed on any creature — that of being a true disciple and ambassador of earth's forthcoming King and Kingdom. ☩

Food for Thought

"There is a special factor that colors any Jewish-Christian debate: anti-semitism. Christianity did not originate hatred of the Jews but it carried and abetted it wherever it went" (Eugene Borowitz, *Contemporary Christologies: A Jewish Response*, p. 22).

Comments

"I really enjoy your research and insights on the Kingdom of God and the Trinity that you share at your website." — *Rhode Island*

"The themes of immortality and the Gospel of the Kingdom have been used with great effect among my Christian friends to stimulate thinking and dispassionate reflection on the ability of preconceived ideas to unconsciously color the reading and understanding of biblical texts." — *Washington*

"This book [*The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, 800-347-4261] is one of the best books on the Trinity I have ever read. Finally, a book that does not seek to bash the other side, but rather shows them the truth. The authors are very careful in their analysis of Scripture and put to rest the mistaken doctrine of the Trinity. If you are a Trinitarian, this book will not offend you; it will merely show you where you have been misled, and if you do not believe in the Trinity, it will strongly affirm what you already know. — *From a reader's review on Amazon.com*