

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## The Promise to Abraham That He Would Be Heir of the World

(Rom. 4:13)

*Continued from September*

### Hebrews, Abraham and the Land

The writer to the Hebrews insists that Abraham is yet destined to come into his promised inheritance of the world. In chapter 11 the faith of the noble heroes of the Old Testament is celebrated. “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to **a place which he was to receive as his inheritance**...By faith he lived as an alien in **the land of the promise**, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise...All these died in faith, without having received the promise...We [and they] are seeking the city which is to come” (Heb. 11:8, 9, 13; 13:14).

Now what reward was Abraham expecting? It was to live permanently in the land of the promise, described in Hebrews 11:8 as the **“place which he was to receive as his inheritance.”** This place was not “heaven” as some ethereal state of bliss removed from the earth. (The inheritance is sometimes described as “heavenly,” meaning that its origin is in heaven, though its location will be on earth.) The place destined to be Abraham’s possession was none other than the land of Canaan to which he was called and **in which he lived** (Heb. 11:9), and by extension, as we have seen, the whole world (Rom. 4:13). The promised land of inheritance was the earth with Israel as its center.

The same writer exhorts Christians not to neglect their promised salvation which he spells out as dominion over “the inhabited earth to come” (Heb. 2:5). God, says the writer, has not subjected to angels the “inhabited world to come,” but He has subjected it — and this is the “greatness” of the salvation which awaits the true believers — **to Christ and to believers as joint-heirs** (Rom. 8:17). The Gospel Message of salvation is precisely and expressly a statement about that great future promised to believers. This salvation “was first spoken through the lord [literally, it had its beginning in what the lord spoke] and confirmed to us by those who heard” (Heb. 2:3). It is “the inhabited **earth of the future** about which we are speaking” (Heb. 2:5).

The Gospel proclaimed by Jesus was, of course, the Gospel of the Kingdom, which implies the gift to all followers of Jesus, of world rulership in that future society. The content of the Gospel hope is appropriately summarized in this verse which bears repetition: “For

God did not subject to angels the inhabited earth to come about which we are speaking” (Heb. 2:5). But he has planned to subject it to man in Christ (Heb. 2:8).

It must be plainly stated again that the cherished, popular talk about “heaven” as the destiny of Christians is fundamentally misleading. Indeed it undermines and distorts the whole framework of biblical Christianity. It dissolves the reality of the Christian hope into a nebulous prospect of life as a disembodied soul (a meaningless concept!) in some unknown region away from the earth. It negates God’s great world plan to establish peace on the earth, as promised to Abraham. It negates the Gospel of the Kingdom (see Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; 2:35, 44). It replaces the true Gospel with a meaningless prospect for the future — “heaven.”

The Bible promises believers that they will share control of the renewed earth of the future to be introduced by the return of Jesus. As participants in the worldwide dominion of Jesus — the Kingdom of God — they will have power to affect the destiny of countless members of the human race. They will be instrumental, with Christ, in bringing about the utopia of world peace which is now the dream of so many, but which man apart from Christ will never achieve. All this forms the core of the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus and the Apostles proclaimed it (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, etc.). Contained within the same message, but not as a substitute for it, are the facts about the resurrection of Jesus and his sacrificial death for our sins. The forgiveness freely offered and the grace of God enable believers to enter on the path which leads to the inheritance of the Kingdom of God.

Preaching and teaching which persists in offering “heaven” to the believer should be challenged in the name of the teaching of Jesus, who expressly promised the meek that they “will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5, quoting Ps. 37) and “rule as kings on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). “Fear not, little flock,” Jesus said to his disciples, “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

To be given the Kingdom is to be granted royal office in the coming worldwide dominion of the Messiah. In response to Peter’s direct inquiry about what the disciples might expect to receive as followers of Christ, Jesus replied that they would become ministers of state in the future Kingdom, the inauguration of which would be in the New World (see Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30), to be introduced with power at Jesus’ second coming (*Parousia*).

## The Gospel and Worldwide Messianic Rule

As we saw in part 1 of this article, the *International Critical Commentary* correctly understood the promise to Abraham that he would inherit the world to mean that he would take part in the coming “worldwide Messianic rule.” This is only a synonym for the Kingdom of God. Our grasp of the stupendous future offered to believers directly affects our reception of the Gospel itself.

This is simply because the Christian Gospel of salvation contains as its core the promise of the Kingdom of God: It is the Gospel or Good News about the Kingdom. This is the key term in Jesus’ teaching and the reason for his whole mission (Luke 4:43).

The essential content of the New Testament Gospel is seen in the following primary texts describing the ministry of Jesus and Paul. The term “Kingdom of God” embodies the ancient hope of worldwide rule promised to Abraham and his royal descendant, Jesus Christ:

Mark 1:14-15: “Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God [i.e. God’s saving Message] and saying, ‘The Kingdom of God is approaching; repent [reorient your life, your priorities and your commitments] and **believe in the Gospel.**’”

Matthew 4:23: “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

Matthew 6:33: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these [other] things will be added to you.”

Matthew 9:35: “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

Matthew 13:19: “When anyone hears the word about the Kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.”

Matthew 24:14: “This Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

Luke 4:43-44: “Jesus said to them, ‘I must proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.’ So he kept on proclaiming the Gospel in the synagogues of Judea.”

Luke 8:1: “Soon afterwards, he began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and the twelve were with him.”

Luke 8:10, 12: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables...Those beside the road are those who have heard, then the Devil comes and takes away the word [of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] from their heart, so that they will not believe it and be saved.”

Luke 9:2, 6: “He sent them out to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God...They began going throughout the villages preaching the Gospel.”

Acts 1:3, 6: The resurrected Jesus was “speaking of the things concerning the Kingdom of God...So when they had come together, they were asking him, ‘Lord, is it at this time that you are restoring the Kingdom to Israel?’”

Acts 8:12: “When they believed Philip as he proclaimed the Gospel about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women.”

Acts 14:21-22: “After they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, ‘Through many tribulations we are destined to enter the Kingdom of God.’”

Acts 19:8: Paul “entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the Kingdom of God.”

Acts 20:25: “...all of you among whom I went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

Acts 28:23: “When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the Kingdom of God and trying to persuade them about Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning until evening.”

Acts 28:28-31: “‘This salvation of God [cp. Gospel of God, Mark 1:14] has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen’...And [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and teaching concerning the lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”

1 Corinthians 4:15, 20: “I became your father through the Gospel...The Kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.”

1 Thessalonians 2:9, 12: “We proclaimed to you the Gospel of God...who is inviting you into His own Kingdom and glory.”

2 Thessalonians 1:5, 8: “...that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God for which you are suffering...[God will destroy] those who do not obey the Gospel of our lord Jesus.”

2 Timothy 4:1-2: “I solemnly testify to...[Christ’s] appearing and his Kingdom; proclaim the word [i.e. Gospel of the Kingdom].”

In addition to these passages the term “Gospel” occurs some 60 times in the letters of Paul. In every case this key “technical term” should be “filled out” by adding the words “about the coming worldwide Messianic rule, or Kingdom of God.” In this way the content of the Gospel message will be protected against the loss of its central element — the Kingdom of God.

Thus, to cite two examples by way of illustration, Paul is “not ashamed of the Gospel [about the coming worldwide Messianic rule — the Kingdom of God], for it is the power of God leading to salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Paul is profoundly disturbed by any attempt to subtract from or add to the saving Gospel. He insisted in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 that the Gospel is founded on the promises made to Abraham — the posterity promise and the property promise of land. Thus “the Gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham” (Gal. 3:8; cp. Rom. 1:1-2). On no account may it be altered in any way: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should proclaim to you a Gospel other than [the Gospel about the coming worldwide Messianic rule — the Kingdom of God, including the death of Messiah for our sins and his resurrection], let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

### Rulership with Messiah

The entire fabric of the New Testament has suffered a drastic distortion because the key biblical terms have been “reinterpreted” — a sophisticated term for perverted — by reading an alien, post-biblical system into them. Thus “heaven” has replaced the biblical term “Kingdom of God,” giving a thoroughly misleading impression of the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. In the Bible there is no such thing as “going to heaven” when you die. What is promised is participation in the worldwide rule of Messiah on earth when Jesus reappears. For those Christians who die before Jesus returns, participation in the Kingdom will be via resurrection from the dead (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:23, 50-52).

At present an anti-biblical, Greek philosophical system colors and distorts the ordinary reader’s perception of biblical teaching. This system which misled believers as early as the second and third centuries exercises a stranglehold on the minds of many who sincerely want to understand the teaching of Jesus and Paul. A revolution is needed by which Bible readers refuse to use non-biblical language about “heaven,” “going to heaven” and “the dead in heaven” (now propagated incessantly by funeral sermons as well as evangelistic appeals promoting “heaven,” both as the present residence of the departed and as the goal of the convert).

It is tragic that churches have not paid attention to Jewish historians who recognize that the Messianic hopes of the prophets were directed to a renewal of the earth. Speaking of the Hebrew expectation of the coming Kingdom taught by the early Christians, Hugh Schonfield writes:

“What is clear is that a transformed human world is in view, and not a harp-playing home in the heavens. Pointers in the latter direction are of later date and partly inspired by Gnostic repugnance to a material dwelling place for the soul. We may dismiss Messianic

eschatology as a fantasy; but we cannot say that Jesus and his early followers did not subscribe to it. What it did was to set a *target for achievement* which would justify the creation of man and make it worthwhile to persist in well-doing. Ultimately righteousness would be rewarded, and God’s will would be done on earth as in heaven. *There is no ‘pie in the sky when you die’ in the Messianic program.*”<sup>1</sup>

Once the biblical meaning of Romans 4:13 is reinstated, Bible readers will be able to grasp the tremendous destiny offered in the Gospel to believers. With Abraham, the “father” of all the faithful (Rom. 4:12, 16), Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, will strive to “be considered worthy of the Kingdom” (2 Thess. 1:5) to which, by the Gospel, they are invited. Now joint-heirs of the world with Jesus, they will later reign and rule over the nations with him in the renewed society of the Kingdom of God on earth (Isa. 32:1; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6). Such a calling affords them the greatest future imaginable for a human being. The Gospel of the Kingdom or the coming worldwide Messianic rule is the ultimate Good News for a world groaning under the slavery of corruption and waiting for the manifestation of a state of incomparable glory, in which the sons of God, in company with the Son of God, will administer the world in righteousness and endless peace. This is the Christian hope and it is in that hope that we are saved (see Rom. 8:24). It is that hope which purifies (1 John 3:3) and on that hope faith and love are built:

Colossians 1:4-5: “We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, **because of the hope** laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth — the Gospel.” (Note that the hope is at present kept in reserve in heaven waiting to be manifested on earth at Christ’s return.)

Colossians 1:23: “...if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, **and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel**” (i.e. the hope of the coming Kingdom of God presented in the Gospel of the Kingdom). “Christ in you [now is] the hope of glory [i.e. the Kingdom of God]” (Col. 1:27).

### Justification (Being Declared Right, Rather Than Wrong) by Faith

The loss of the Bible’s strongly future-oriented Gospel can be traced to the Church’s loss of the Old Testament. Elizabeth Achtemeier devotes an entire chapter to “The Results of the Loss of the Old Testament: The Loss of the New Testament and the Development of ‘Reader’s Digest’ Religion.”<sup>2</sup> She complains that what goes under the name of Christianity in American churches is a vague religion which has

<sup>1</sup> *For Christ’s Sake*, p. 84-85, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Old Testament and the Preaching of the Gospel*, 1973.

borrowed the name of Jesus but not understood his teaching, especially as it relates to the central covenant promise made to Abraham.

As the *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* says, “The whole future of Israel is conceived as bound up in something which God said to Abraham” (Vol. IV, p. 105). The future of Israel is of critical importance to Christians. In the words of Paul, “Through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6). This is a summary statement of the whole New Testament faith.

The important doctrine of “justification by faith” has not escaped the distortion caused by the loss of the land promise made to Abraham which underlies Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom. Justification is often limited to the concept of forgiveness of sin. But as the *Pulpit Commentary* points out:

“We must not restrict justification [being declared righteous] to deliverance from deserved penalty, but must attach it to the further **idea of inheritance**. As one writer has well remarked, ‘Justification is applicable to something more than the discharge of an accused person without condemnation. As in our courts of law there are civil as well as criminal cases; so it was in old time; and a large number of the passages adduced seem to refer to trials of the latter description, in which some question of property, right or inheritance was under discussion between the two parties. The judge, by justifying one of the parties, decided that the property in question was to be regarded as his. Applying this aspect of the matter to the justification of man in the sight of God, we gather from Scripture that whilst through sin a man is to be regarded as having forfeited legal claim to any right of inheritance which God might have to bestow upon his creatures, so through justification he is restored to his high position and regarded as *an heir of God*’” (Vol. 18, p. 121-122).

Thus it is that man is justified in order to regain his status as son of God and in consequence his right to be heir of the promises given to Abraham and made possible through Christ. The goal of the Christian, which unconditional forgiveness and the grace of God place him in a position to strive for and reach, is to rule with Christ in the coming Kingdom of God on earth. A number of high frequency New Testament terms describe this goal: Kingdom of God/Heaven (Matt. 19:14, 23, 24); eternal/everlasting life (Matt. 19:16) — literally “life in the Age to Come”; “life” (Matt. 19:17, Rom. 5:17); being saved/salvation (Matt. 19:25); rulership with Christ as royal family in the New Age to come (Matt. 19:28); “inheritance of eternal life” (Matt. 19:29).

Inheritance of the promises of world dominion is invariably placed in the future. For the present time of struggle towards entrance into the Kingdom of God, the

Christian is promised the spirit of Christ as a “down payment” or pledge of the future inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). But the inheritance itself is plainly to be received in the future. No New Testament text says that we have already inherited the Kingdom. “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the lord rather than for men, knowing that from the lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance [of the world promised to Abraham, i.e. rulership in the Kingdom of God]” (Col. 3:23-24).

Inheritance and possession of the world are offered to the faithful believers. The Greek word *kleronomia*, inheritance, is derived from two words: *kleros*, lot, portion, possession, and *nemein*, to control or administer. The Christian reward involves administration of the possession to be received. Thus Paul believed that “the saints are to manage the world. The world is to come under your jurisdiction” (1 Cor. 6:2, Moffat), while the wicked will be unable to “inherit the Kingdom of God” (v. 10). The one phrase defines the other: Inheriting the Kingdom is equivalent to managing the world.

The notion of a future world government in the hands of the immortalized saints is derived not only from the promise made to Abraham of world dominion, but also from key passages in Daniel who predicted that “the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that Kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put to an end all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Dan. 2:44). To the Son of Man (the ideal human being, Jesus) “was given dominion, glory and a Kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and his Kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14).

The location of this Kingdom of the God of heaven is described in Daniel 7:27: “The kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms **under the whole heaven** will be given to the saints of the Most High. Their kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions will serve and obey them” (RSV). It should be observed that this Kingdom will not come into power until the return of Jesus. Any attempt by believers to dominate the politics of the world *now, before the reappearance of Jesus*, is utterly mistaken.

The final word to Daniel was that he should expect to arise from the sleep of death to receive his portion or inheritance in the Messianic worldwide rule (Dan. 12:13) which was the subject of the visions he had received (chapters 2, 7, 11, 12).

Paul obviously shared the hope given to Abraham and confirmed by the prophets. As a leading Christian he had not abandoned the biblical, Jewish expectation of world dominion. He confessed before King Herod Agrippa that he was on trial “for the hope of the promise

made by God to our fathers, the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain” (Acts 26:6-7). That promise involved the future resurrection of the dead (v. 8; cp. Acts 24:15) and the inheritance of the world (Rom. 4:13). Speaking to Jews shortly before his martyrdom, Stephen likewise testified that “God had [Abraham] move to this country in which you are now living. But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him” (Acts 7:4-5).

The false hope of “heaven,” as opposed to the possession and administration of the world, deserves to be revealed for the fraud that it is. As a leading British biblical scholar noted, “Heaven is never in fact used in the Bible for the destination of the dying.”<sup>3</sup> He observed that “the whole of our teaching and hymnology has assumed that you go to heaven, or of course hell, when you die. But *the Bible nowhere says that we go to heaven when we die, nor does it ever describe death in terms of going to heaven.*”<sup>4</sup>

The reflective reader will realize that popular sermons and preaching at funerals are in need of drastic revision. They are at present vastly non-compliant with the truth of the Bible and the teaching of Jesus.

The truth is that a serious loss of the original Christian faith and Gospel has occurred under the influence of a Gnostic tendency which despised the things of the earth and therefore could not tolerate the idea of the earth renewed and reorganized under the Messiah as ruler. Despite the Old Testament’s passionate yearning for the restoration of the world under sound government, the churches have continued to promote a hope of bliss removed from the earth. The plainest teachings of Jesus that the meek can expect *to inherit the earth* as their reward have been treated by theologians as metaphors and are supposed not to mean what they say! Churchgoers are left with the vaguest idea of the ultimate purpose of faith in Christ. They do not see how Christianity has anything to say about the future of the earth. Traditional talk about “heaven” thus thoroughly frustrates and confuses God’s Grand Design to bring peace on the renewed earth (for example, Isa. 65:17-25) through the return of Jesus to establish his Kingdom.

May pulpits everywhere undertake the long overdue restoration of the language of the Bible and return to the Christianity which is based on Jesus’ confirmation of the promises made to the patriarchs (Rom. 15:8). Paul was alert to the danger that doctrinal corruption could result in the abandonment of the hope contained in the Gospel. Believers could expect to be presented before Christ “holy and blameless and beyond reproach — **if** indeed

you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and **not moved away from the hope of the Gospel [of the Kingdom] that you have heard**” (Col. 1:22-23).

That hope of ruling the world with Christ was presented to converts in the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed throughout Judea by Jesus, designated “the message” or “the word” some 32 times in Acts, and summarized as “the Gospel” 60 times in the letters of Paul. (Acts 8:12 provides an essential summary of the content of the Christian Gospel.)

### Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom

Jesus is proclaimed by the New Testament to be the Messiah of biblical prophecy, the heir to the permanent throne of David (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Luke 1:32-33, etc.). The Messiah was the promised seed of Abraham, the one to whom the covenants and promises were directed (Gal. 3:16). As recipient of the Kingdom of God and rulership of the world, Jesus recognized that his life purpose was to announce the Good News about the Kingdom (Luke 4:43). To carry out this commission he saw himself as a sower sowing the word/message/Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19). Those who listened and understood his saving message became candidates for royal office in the coming Kingdom. The issue of salvation and the destiny of man hinges on our response to the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it. Thus the parable of the sower informs us that **forgiveness and repentance depend on an intelligent and willing reception of the Gospel of the Kingdom**. In an amazing statement Jesus claimed to have revealed the secret of immortality and the destiny of both man and the world: “I have explained the secret about God’s Kingdom to you, but for others this comes only as an enigma. The reason for this is [as Isaiah said]: ‘These people will look and look but never see; they will listen and listen but never understand. **If they did**, they would turn to God [repent] and He would forgive them’” (see Mark 4:11-12).

Plainly, **repentance and forgiveness are conditional not just on belief in the death of Jesus, but on understanding and believing his prior Gospel preaching about the Kingdom** (“Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom,” Mark 1:14-15). The issue for Jesus in the critically important parable of the sower is comprehension or non-comprehension of the Gospel of the Kingdom. No wonder, then, that Luke records the Messiah’s brilliant intelligence report about how the message of immortality is treated in the present wicked system. Jesus said, “The seed is God’s message [Gospel], and the seeds that fell along the road are the people who hear the message. But the Devil comes and snatches the message out of their hearts, so that they will not **believe and be saved**...Pay attention to how you listen! Everyone who has something will be given more.

<sup>3</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, p. 104-105.

<sup>4</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *On Being the Church in the World*, p. 130.

But people who have nothing will lose what little they think they have” (Luke 8:11, 12, 18, CEV). Jesus customarily raised his voice when uttering those amazing words! (Luke 8:8).

The destiny and the future of each of us hinges on our comprehension and intelligent reception of the Gospel of the Kingdom as it fell from the lips of the Messiah. Truly Isaiah wrote of the suffering Messiah to come: “By his **knowledge**, he will make many righteous” (Isa. 53:11). Righteousness does not come only by believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, divorced from his Kingdom Gospel preaching.

## Conclusion

The Bible tells a coherent story. God’s world plan, in response to the fall of Adam, is to reestablish just government on earth under the rule of the Messiah Jesus. Revelation 5:9-10 sums this up.

Man sinned by coming short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The result was that his glorious destiny as co-ruler with God (Gen. 1:26) was forfeited. The Gospel of salvation, therefore, is the invitation and command to repent and believe in the Gospel of the restored Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15), which means a return to the lost glory of man and the restoration of Garden of Eden conditions on earth. Sin is defined in John 16:9 as failure to believe in Jesus, which is failure to **believe his Gospel/words** (John 12:44-50; note v. 48).

The groundwork of this grand purpose was laid when God called Abraham to go into the “land of the promise,” in which he lived as an alien (Heb. 11:8-9) but which was promised to him and his descendants (later defined as the faithful Christians, Gal. 3:29) as a permanent possession. This promise remains unfulfilled to this day (as Stephen said in Acts 7:5) and is dependent upon the future resurrection of Abraham and all the faithful to take possession of Israel and the world Kingdom with the returning Messiah (Heb. 11:13, 39). That stupendous event — the return of the Messiah to inaugurate his Kingdom on earth (Rev 11:15-18) — is encapsulated in Peter’s brief reference in Acts 3:21 which speaks of Jesus’ temporary absence in heaven “until the time comes for the **restoration** [*apokatastasis*] **of all things** about which the prophets spoke.”

The Christian story was foreshadowed in the Exodus, which symbolizes our redemption from sin in the cross of Christ. But the story does not end there. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the presence of Jesus with the faithful as they proceed through their “wilderness” pilgrimage towards the promised land. Christians have **not yet** entered the promised land of the Kingdom, though they have a foretaste of their inheritance in the spirit of God. Traditional Christianity knows little about the end of the story and dispatches the believer to a location away from the earth to enjoy a vague celestial existence as a disembodied soul. It is as

though the children of Israel disappeared in the desert haze and never reached the promised land. The Exodus then loses its whole point.

The oft-repeated talk of “heaven” as the destination of the believer is entirely false to the Hebrew faith of Jesus and the Apostles who, in their Gospel, put before us a momentous statement about the future of human society on earth. The Gospel of the Kingdom, the Christian Message, summons all who hear to prepare now for the staggering privilege of ruling the earth with Christ and sharing in the fulfillment of the age-old covenant promise to Abraham that he would one day inherit the world (Rom. 4:13; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2). This should provide ample reason for believers to “exult in the hope of the glory of God” to be manifested in the coming Kingdom of God (Rom. 5:2). No prospect could be more calculated to instill the highest moral-spiritual idealism than the challenge of being “worthy of the Kingdom to which we are invited” (2 Thess. 1:5; 1 Thess. 2:12). 1 Thessalonians 2:13 promises that God’s energy will be at work in all who accept the Gospel of the Kingdom and thus align themselves with the mind and plan of God and the Messiah.

To crown our account of the Bible’s huge Kingdom story, God’s idea from the beginning (John 1:1), may I point out that in Luke 22:29-30 Jesus says, as the Greek and some translations state: “Just as my Father **covenanted** to give me a Kingdom, so I **covenant** to give you a Kingdom, so that you may sit on twelve thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel.” The Gospel of the Kingdom is thus the core and central idea of the New Covenant, of which Jesus is the mediator (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). By no means must Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom be relegated to the Old Covenant, and thus destroyed! Christianity *begins* with Mark 1:1, “the beginning of the Gospel,” and is then defined by Mark 1:14-15, where Jesus’ first and fundamental command to us is: “Repent [change our thinking and our lives] and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom.”

Peter repeats this information in Acts 10:36-38. The Gospel of peace had its *beginning* in the preaching of Jesus — Jesus’ own preaching. This point is so important for our understanding that it receives a further emphasis in Hebrews 2:3: “How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which had its beginning” in the preaching of Jesus and must continue to the end of the age (Matt. 24:14; 28:19-20). ✧

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## Believing in Jesus

A very popular misunderstanding prevails in the minds of many churchgoers. The degree of group-think in regard to "believing in Jesus" is very great. It is fundamentally wrong to think that "believing in Jesus" means believing *only* that he died for our sins and rose. Christianity does not *begin* at the cross! It begins with Jesus' own proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom, as Mark reports in Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the Gospel." In Mark 1:15, the first command of Jesus appears: "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom."

Many have not grasped the easy fact that Christianity begins with believing Jesus' words and commands. The "lie" warned against in the New Testament is the falsity that one can "accept" or "receive" Jesus without an intelligent exposure to Jesus' own Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus without his words and Gospel preaching is a false Jesus. See 1 Timothy 6:3 and 2 John 7-9.

It is false to say that an initial acceptance of the Gospel is sufficient to guarantee final salvation. Rather, we are "being saved" (1 Cor. 1:18; 2:15). Salvation is a process which ends with our immortalization at the future one second coming (*Parousia*) of Jesus in glory to bring in the worldwide Kingdom (Dan. 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27).

Revelation 3:5 threatens the removal of a genuine believer's name from the book of life. The doctrine of "once saved, always saved" is false to the New Testament. Remember too that water baptism is a matter of required obedience for salvation (Heb. 5:9; Acts 2:38).

## Comments

• "I have been hearing your messages for some time and I am being encouraged through the Word exposition. I appreciate all your team members who are taking the Gospel of the Kingdom forward the way Jesus commanded us." — *India*

• "Bless you for the regular copies of *Focus on the Kingdom*. My wife and I have long felt that there is great wisdom in your teaching and explanation of essential Bible facts, in particular the fact that Jesus is not God but the Son of God, which Scripture makes quite clear." — *England*

• "I have learned much from your ministry over the years. I want to personally thank you for helping me better understand the Scriptures in ways that I never thought I could. I have gained a new perspective on the Bible and it has truly been an eye-opening experience. The fundamental question that led me to your ministry was our ultimate destiny as Christians: Do we go to the heavenly realm where God and His Son reside, or do we remain here on Earth? That was a question I often asked myself, and that quest for answers led me to the ministry of brother Anthony Buzzard as well as brother Dan Gill and brother Edward Fudge. I truly do consider you brothers in Christ, even though I have not had the honor of meeting you. I have studied the work of brother Raymond Franz over the years as I was raised a Jehovah's Witness. I left at a very young age because I could not reconcile many of their doctrines with the Scriptures. Brother Franz was an invaluable source in helping me understand the history and inner workings of this organization. To this day there is no more credible source on how the J.W organization operates. He was also a fine Biblical scholar. I want to personally thank Carlos Xavier for his ministry as well. I have learned a great deal from all of you and hope to learn more as I continue on my quest to better understand the word of God. I consider myself a Christian and hope that God and His son see me as one of their own. God bless you all in the name of our lord and savior Jesus Christ." — *Illinois*

• "Firstly I wanted to thank you highly because I was finally able to be baptized and I am now officially a follower of the Messiah. On top of this I've been able to learn much from you, and God willing one day I can teach many people concerning the Gospel of the Kingdom and much more. I pray God continues the work He has done in you and that we will rejoice at our Lord's second coming." — *England*

## Australia Trip

We plan to visit Australia from November 25 through December 6. We will be in Sydney (Liverpool), and then Melbourne for the weekend of November 29-December 1, at the Christian Disciples Church in Box Hill on Saturday and Sunday ([www.christiandiscipleschurch.org/content/australia](http://www.christiandiscipleschurch.org/content/australia)). Please email us at [anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com) and we will provide more details as they become available.