

Focus on the Kingdom

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Resolving the Amillennial/ Premillennial Debate

Scientific exegesis of the Bible which abides by the plain meaning of words and the established principles of language would quickly resolve the unfortunate arguments which have raged over Revelation 20:1-6. The dispute is over **the thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints**. Does this passage describe a non-literal, present “reign” of the faithful which follows their individual conversion (**amillennialism**), or does it present us with a collective resurrection of the faithful from literal death followed by a future literal reign with Christ (**premillennialism**)? The whole question of Christian hope and reward is involved in this issue.

A period of 1000 years is mentioned explicitly only in Revelation 20. But the biblical teaching about the future destiny of the saints is a massive subject referred to with great frequency in both Testaments. The *length* of the period of the saints’ rule — the first stage being 1000 years — occurs only here. But the *fact* of the future reign of the saints with Jesus on earth is taught in scores of passages in both Testaments. It would be quite illogical to separate Revelation 20 from all the repeated Bible references to the saints ruling as kings with the Messiah on earth when he comes back.

Jesus is now of course seated at the right hand of God in heaven, “**waiting** until his enemies are made his footstool” (Ps. 110:1) Joseph of Arimathea was also “**waiting** for the Kingdom of God” after the ministry of Jesus had ended (Mark 15:43). If one is not waiting for that future Kingdom of God on earth, and the joint reign of Jesus and the saints, one has abandoned the reality of Christian hope and expectation. Not to mention the inspiring hope that peace on earth for the whole world will eventually come, but only when Jesus returns.

The amillennial view, popular since the time of the very philosophically-minded Augustine, contends that “those who came to life” (*ezesan*) and “began to reign as kings” (*ebasileusan*) in Revelation 20:4 are believers metaphorically “coming to life” at their individual conversion and baptism and “reigning” in their present Christian life. However, language really ought never to be so manipulated!

This reading of the passage overlooks a rather obvious fact — that the ones singled out who “came to life” are “those who had been **beheaded**” (*pepelekismenon*, v. 4). So Revelation 20:4 contains the very straightforward proposition that “those who had been **beheaded** came to life and began to reign with

Christ for a thousand years.” The perfect participle (“those who had been beheaded”) is followed by the main verbs “came to life” and “began to reign,” telling us, of course, that the beheading *preceded* the coming to life.

The sentence construction follows a normal pattern in which “the perfect participle [‘the ones who had been beheaded’] expresses an action *antecedent* to the main verb [‘came to life’]” (Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 1927, p. 230).

It hardly needs to be stated that at conversion one does not come to life after being beheaded! However, one obviously *does* come to life in a literal resurrection after being martyred. The fact that the proposition in Revelation 20:4 describes a beheading *prior* to a rising from death proves that a literal resurrection of literally dead persons is meant.

The glorious reward of believers who gave their lives for Christ is described in Revelation 20. All the early premillennial “church fathers” had no difficulty with this passage.

A parallel construction in John’s gospel does not present us with the slightest difficulty. In John 11:44 we read of Lazarus that “he who had been dead came out.” The perfect participle (“he who had been dead,” *tethnekos*) naturally implies that the death of Lazarus precedes his coming to life and coming out of the tomb. No one would suggest that Lazarus came out before dying!

Yet amillennialists commit themselves to this sort of misreading in Revelation 20:1-4. They maintain that the statement “those who had been beheaded came to life” means that “those who would later be beheaded had already come to life at conversion”! This makes no sense of plain language, and appears to “take away from the words of the prophecy,” by altering their obvious sense, a procedure which will have the direst consequences (Rev. 22:19).

The “amillennial” evasion of the description of martyred saints coming alive again in resurrection at the return of Jesus, to reign for a thousand years, stems from antagonism towards the ancient doctrine of the millennial reign of Christ and the saints. This triumphant rulership of the world will be initiated by the return of Christ and the resurrection of the faithful to inherit the Kingdom of God on the earth (cp. Rev. 5:10).

Revelation 12:9 states that “the Devil is now deceiving the whole world.” Is it too much to ask a reader to see that in Revelation 20:2-3 when the Devil is bound

and thrown into the abyss “so that he can **deceive the world no longer,**” **this cannot possibly be true of the time now when he is currently deceiving the entire world (Rev. 12:9)?** To avoid the obvious here would be to undermine and confuse the fabric of the whole Bible narrative.

Our point was well made by the *Century Bible Commentary*. In this commentary, C. Anderson Scott noted that some understand “the ‘first resurrection’ in a wholly spiritual sense, as equivalent to a resurrection ‘from the death of sin to the life of righteousness.’ This is indeed the theory accepted by most Roman Catholic theologians, from Augustine downwards, making this first resurrection a symbol of admission within the church, the sphere of safety from the evil one. To this there are **two fatal objections:**

“1) This resurrection is plainly the reward or result of martyrdom, and follows not the beginning, but the end, of a Christian life...

“2) [As Henry Alford pointed out]: ‘If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned...the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* [non-literal] rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave, then **there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.**”

Here is the full quote from Dr. Henry Alford on Revelation 20:4-6: “It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this Commentary that I cannot consent to distort words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any considerations of difficulty, or any risk of abuses which the doctrine of the millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole Church for 300 years, understood them **in the plain literal sense;** and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, **no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation** now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain persons *came to life* at the first, and the rest of the dead *came to life* only at the end of a specified period after that first — if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave — then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything. If the first resurrection is spiritual [non-literal], then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain; but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope” (*Greek Testament*, Vol. 4).✧

A Road Less Traveled

by Bob Shutes, Wisconsin

From the website “Allstar Theologians Reunion”
theologyallstars.com

*“Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”*

(From the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost)

A lot of unforgettable events took place in the course of the [imaginary] All Stars Reunion, but none left a greater impression than the unscheduled remarks of an unnamed believer from only God knows where. All we do know is that he appeared unbidden and uninvited, and that he was without ecclesiastical rank or theological education. Truth be told, no one had ever heard of him, and he was not mentioned in the program or included on the list of invited guests. He simply insisted that God had invited him to the reunion and he would not be denied.

The setting was a planned debate between the proponents of opposing theological persuasions [Trinity vs. Unitary Monotheism] but what actually happened was far different. Far different indeed! Just as the program was getting under way a voice was heard ringing out from the rear of the auditorium. “Mene! Mene! Tekel! Upharsin!” This offended just about everyone and caused no small amount of indignation. How could anyone say something so rude? (Mene. Mene. Tekel. Upharsin means “You are weighed in the balance and found wanting! Your kingdom is taken from you!”) Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson Belshazzar was an unworthy heir to the throne and the finger of God had miraculously written those very words on a wall to let him know his time was just about up (Daniel 5:25-28) The assembled dignitaries at the reunion knew quite well what this phrase meant and they had a pretty good hunch it was directed right at them! They were angered by this intrepid intruder and wanted to have him arrested but the “Roman Guards” working at the hotel were enjoying the show so much they just wouldn’t cooperate.

Another shock went through the conference hall when this interloper walked right up to the dais and stood at the podium without even asking for permission! It was all so unexpected that no one had time to stop him. A hush fell over the room when he began to speak and though he didn’t talk long his words lingered long after he left. Here is what he had to say:

Hear me out! Today you are faced with a choice about what path you will walk. I came here on an ancient highway prepared for souls who long to see the face of God. God Himself invited me here and this is what He

told me to say. Some of you claim to understand the deep mysteries of God but you have only erected towers of dogma that darken counsel by words without knowledge. You have taken away the key of knowledge! You do not enter into the Kingdom yourselves and you hinder those who seek the entrance.

Here is the key that you have obscured. Here is the key that was given to the Apostle Peter because he had rightly seen that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God! This is the key! It is the only key! The truth that unlocks the kingdom of God is the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and only begotten Son of God. He is not more than the Son of God and He is not less. You are not free to add anything to this or take anything away. If you add to it God will add terrible plagues to you and if you take anything away God will take your name out of the Book of Life (Rev. 22). You are not to go to the right or go to the left (Josh. 1:7). You must not fall short of or go beyond these words. Do not pretend that God does not know how to express Himself exactly as He chooses!

Jesus said, "This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). It is enough to know Jesus Christ the Messiah and His Father the God of Israel! There is but one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He declared, "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Jesus said nothing about the threeness of God, not a single word! Ever.

You have parsed your words and created new ones as it suited you! You have constructed your creeds but deny the simple unbending creed of Jesus himself. Here is the creed of Jesus and the creed of his church! "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God is one Lord!" (Mark 12:29). This is the first and greatest commandment! This is the teaching of Jesus! The Father is God and Jesus is His only begotten Son. God is not Triune — He is One Person! Jesus is not the Second Person in a Trinitarian Godhead, He is the only begotten Son of the One True God. You insist that God is three and Jesus insists that God is one. Who then shall we believe?

Many believers have accepted your pronouncements but Jesus does not. You have constructed your grand temple of religious dogma and tradition but God will surely tear it down! Your theological creations are not strong enough to bear the weight of His glory! It is time to abandon your own words in favor of His! You will not find favor among men but you will find favor with God. It will not be easy but you will find companions along the way and in the words of one modern poet, someday you will discover that it "has made all the difference."

No nation had ever risked crossing a barren desert until God called His chosen ones to do just that! No people had ever walked through the sea until God called Israel to a distant shore. No disciple ever dared set foot on the waves until Jesus beckoned Peter to join him ON the waters! It is a narrow way that Christ calls you to walk. You were not destined to travel the broad highways of religious tradition. There is another way that proclaims just One God and His only Son the Messiah! Many have gone before you. They are little known among men but well known to God. Today He calls you to set your feet on a path that is less traveled than the one you have known.

And then... in all the uproar that followed he quietly slipped out a side door and was not seen again. That's just how it is with those who are born of the Spirit. They are like the wind that blows where it wills. We hear the sound of it but don't know where it comes from or where it goes. Some will listen and take heed. Others will ignore what they hear. But at least now you have heard. ✧

A Theological Bombshell

An Excerpt from *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*

It was in the 19th century that theology awoke to the recognition that Jesus was a Jew with a Jewish message for all mankind ("salvation is of the Jews," John 4:22). A book of only 67 pages by a German theologian, Johannes Weiss,¹ proved to be a theological bombshell when it pointed to unarguable evidence for Jesus' belief in an objective apocalyptic Messianic Kingdom and government of the future. Such an idea was revolutionary, since it had been traditional to think of the Kingdom as a religious experience or a moral force working to improve society now. The new and shocking understanding that Jesus was in the best Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic tradition forced scholars of the Bible to deal with a difficult situation, not least the possibility of having to admit that the Church had been misreading its own documents and misinterpreting its own founder.

Paradoxically, those who came to see that Jesus had been the bearer of the news of the *coming* apocalyptic Kingdom did not suggest that such a Gospel was appropriate for the Church now. Albert Schweitzer, whose independent investigation led him to see that Jesus was not a "liberal" theologian, but a preacher of a future apocalyptic Kingdom, was unable to embrace such a Gospel as the object of faith. Both Weiss and Schweitzer were scholars, as someone has said, who did not belong to their own school of thought. Quite astonishingly, they deemed it "better to cling to the modernized ethical [and false] construction of Jesus' message — although it rests

¹ Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, ed. and trans. Hiers and Holland.

on a misunderstanding — than try to retain his antiquated eschatological ideas.”²

Avoidance of the awkward Jewishness of Jesus’ Gospel was achieved by variations of the same “husk and kernel” theory. Jesus must be stripped of his local Jewish garb and made respectable for modern man. Bultmann’s theory of “demythologizing” arrives at the same goal by a similar method. What counts for Bultmann is the permanent call to decision in Jesus’ message. The Jewish framework can be dispensed with as the relic of a primitive world view which we have outgrown.

In England the famous C.H. Dodd proposed the extraordinary theory that Jesus spoke only of the *presence* of the Kingdom and not of any future cataclysmic manifestation by which a new age would be introduced. Dodd was confident, with his theory of “realized eschatology,” that the early Church must be blamed for reverting to the old Jewish concept of a future Kingdom and of Jesus as the Messiah destined to “come in the clouds with power and great glory.”

It must be said that all attempts to separate Jesus from his Jewish apocalyptic background and teaching are doomed to fail. It would be much more honest if the Church were to say plainly, “We reject Jesus,” rather than affirming that we “accept him,” but only on condition that he gives up his unfortunate Messianic insistence that the Kingdom is going to enter history in the future as a world event for which the Church of every generation is to prepare with solemn urgency. Christianity divorced from its prophetic-apocalyptic framework is a pale reflection, indeed a perversion, of the faith of the Bible, and it seems that the Protestant claim to be following Scripture is an empty boast as long as theology feels free to interpret away whatever is deemed unwanted and unsuitable. As one observer of the Church’s method of dealing with the Kingdom of God observes:

“Analysis of the precise character of the eschatological beliefs of Jesus and the early communities has been complicated by a high degree of semantic confusion, if not obfuscation... There can be no doubt that Jesus and the evangelists looked for the future actualization of the decisive ‘last’ events: the coming or manifestation of the Son of Man, the judgment of the living and the coming of the Kingdom or the coming age. That *this certainty has played but little part in*

² *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, Vol. I, p. 484.

³ Richard Hiers, *The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970, pp. 94, 96, emphasis added.

⁴ Jesus spoke about gathering the elect Christians *after* (i.e., post) the tribulation (Matt. 24:29-31; the elect, of course, are the Christians: see Matt. 22:14, where “chosen” represents the same Greek word “elect”). He also urged his followers to expect their redemption *after* the cataclysmic events leading to

contemporary exegesis and theology can be attributed primarily to the dogmatic or philosophical interests (or aversions) of the ‘doers’ of exegesis and theology. It is only quite recently that these ‘futuristic’ beliefs are coming to be recognized as something other than a primitive Jewish and early Christian absurdity to be disposed of quickly and, if possible quietly.”³

Little does the average churchgoer know of what has been happening behind the scenes in the halls of theology, in which his leader or pastor probably has received his official training.

Dispensationalism

For schools of theology committed to believing the authoritative word of Scripture, there are other ways of circumventing the Gospel of the Kingdom. One popular Gospel tradition has erected a scheme by which the Gospel of the Kingdom is specifically *not* the Gospel of salvation now to be offered to potential believers. It is a system known as “dispensationalism.”

All students of the Bible recognize that God appointed different “dispensations” or arrangements for different periods of history. The Mosaic dispensation, for example, made demands on the faithful different from those required under the New Testament Gospel. But “dispensationalism” goes much further. It maintains that the Gospel of the Kingdom was preached by Jesus *to Jews only*, until they refused the offer of the Kingdom; whereupon a different Gospel, the Gospel of grace, was introduced by Paul. The theory then holds that the Gospel of the Kingdom will be reinstated seven years before the return of Christ, a time when, according also to dispensationalism, the Church will have been removed from the earth by the so-called “pretribulation rapture.”⁴

The dispensationalist system has been forced upon the text of Scripture in the interests of a theory quite alien to the Bible. As we have pointed out, Luke went to great lengths to show that Paul’s Gospel was *not* different from that of Jesus. Both men preached the Gospel about the Kingdom.⁵ Paul, contrary to dispensationalism, knew nothing about a difference between “the Gospel of grace” (Acts 20:24) and “preaching the Kingdom” (v. 25). He deliberately equates them.

As F.F. Bruce says, “It is evident from a comparison of Acts 20:24 with the next verse that the preaching of the Gospel of grace is identical with the proclamation of

the end of the age (Luke 21:28). Since Jesus instructed his followers to “flee to the hills” at the onset of the tribulation, it should be obvious that he had no departure to heaven in mind! Paul expected Christians to have to survive until the public manifestation of Jesus in power and glory (2 Thess. 1:7-9). He expressly warned against any system which taught that Christians would be gathered together before the appearance of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

⁵ Luke 4:43, etc.; Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31.

the Kingdom”⁶ This incontrovertible evidence is flatly contradicted by contemporary dispensationalism. Dr. Erwin Lutzer of Moody Church Radio Ministries states: “I believe that the gospel of the kingdom is different from the gospel of the grace of God... The gospel of the grace of God has nothing to do with the Kingdom per se.”⁷ But this confusing of the one saving Gospel was learned from tradition unexamined, not from the Bible. By positing “two forms of the Gospel,” dispensationalists have invented a most unfortunate distinction which does not exist in the scriptural text.

Dispensationalism formally cancels the Gospel as Jesus preached it. Could the Church have suffered a greater disaster than this systematic curtailing and canceling of Jesus’ own Gospel preaching? A.C. Gaebelein was a leading exponent of the “divided Gospel” theory. Referring to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:14, “This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world to all the nations,” he wrote:

“The preaching which is mentioned is that of the Gospel of the Kingdom, but that Gospel is not now preached, for we preach the Gospel of Grace... With the stoning of Stephen the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom ceased. *Another Gospel* was preached. The Lord gave it to the great Apostle. And Paul calls this Gospel ‘my Gospel.’ It is the Gospel of God’s free Grace to all who believe, the gospel of the Glory of God... Now during the time that the Kingdom was preached to be at hand the Gospel of Grace was not heard, and during the time the gospel of Grace is *preached the Gospel of the Kingdom is not preached.*”⁸

By this extraordinary exegetical blunder, Jesus’ Christian Gospel of the Kingdom was ruled out of court — dismissed as suspended, and decreed impermissible for the present time. The situation would seem to call for a profound repentance and the reinstatement of Jesus’ full Gospel at the heart of evangelism. Can there be such a thing as evangelism which does not hold in highest honor and emphasis the very Gospel heralded by Jesus and mandated by the Great Commission until the end of the age? If Paul had in fact preached, as Gaebelein says, “another Gospel,” he would have put himself under his own curse (Gal. 1:8-9). He would have been in violation of Jesus’ instructions that *his* teachings were to go to the entire world.

The article on “Gospel” in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* represents the same common dispensationalist tendency to bypass the Gospel as Jesus preached it. This kind of thinking about the Gospel and salvation has had an immense influence particularly in America, but its effects are felt throughout the evangelical world:

“Forms of the gospel to be differentiated. Many Bible teachers make a distinction in the following:

“(1) *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. The good news that God’s purpose is to establish an earthly mediatorial kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:16). Two proclamations of the gospel of the kingdom are mentioned, one already past, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist, carried on by our Lord and His disciples, and *ending with the Jewish rejection of the Messiah*. The other preaching is yet future (Matt. 24:14), during the Great Tribulation, and heralding the second advent of the King...

“(2) *The Gospel of God’s Grace*... The good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as provided by our Lord and preached by His disciples (1 Cor. 15:1-4).”⁹

This very false and tragic suppression of the Gospel of the Kingdom is evident in the *Scofield Study Bible* at Revelation 14:6. The system of Gospel definition described in this note has affected the entirety of the evangelical presentation of salvation, even where Scofield is not specifically recognized. Scofield writes, “Absolutely essential to man’s salvation is the Gospel of the grace of God. This is the good news that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, that he was raised from the dead on account of our justification, and that by him all who believe are justified from all things.” Scofield then goes on to say that “another aspect of the good news is the gospel of the Kingdom.” We are informed that this was preached “by Christ in His first coming, and will be proclaimed during the great tribulation.” Scofield thus banishes the Gospel of the Kingdom from the present message of salvation by stating that the Christian Gospel *now is only about Jesus’ atoning death and his resurrection*. In this way Jesus is cut off from his own Gospel preaching.

We may well observe that Satan’s master trick is to separate Jesus from his teaching. One may proclaim “Jesus” with all earnestness, but is the real Jesus made known apart from his complete Gospel and teaching? Jesus well knew the danger of preaching “faith in Jesus” without actually telling the public about the “words of Jesus.” Only those whose faith is founded on the rock foundation of the teachings/Gospel of Jesus are on solid ground (Matt. 7:24-27; Mark 8:35-38; and see the whole Gospel of John with its constant insistence on the word/words/teaching of Jesus).

Uncertainty about the Christian Gospel is not surprising when such evident misreading of the Bible is built into a system with a massive influence in pulpits

⁶ *Commentary on Acts*, London: Tyndale, 1952.

⁷ From correspondence, Oct., 1996.

⁸ *The Olivet Discourse*, Baker Book House, 1969, pp. 9, 39, 40, emphasis added.

⁹ M.F. Unger, *Unger’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Moody Press, 1969, p. 420, emphasis added.

and Christian literature. Surely the words of Paul in Acts 20:24-25 should banish the artificial distinction proposed by the Bible Dictionary and the Scofield Bible. Paul looked back on his career and noted that he had “finished his course, the ministry which I received from the lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the **Gospel of the grace of God...**to all of you among whom I went about **preaching the Kingdom.**” *Clearly there is no difference between the Gospel of grace and the Gospel of the Kingdom.*

It is true, of course, that Jesus did not initially preach his resurrection as part of the Gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus were later critical elements in the proclamation of Paul. They did not, however, replace the preaching of the Kingdom, which remained as much the heart of Paul’s Gospel as it had been the center of Jesus’ own Message.

When Jesus embarked on his intensive evangelistic campaign in Galilee in about 27 AD, he summoned his audience to a radical change of heart based on the national belief that God was going to usher in the worldwide Kingdom promised by Daniel and all the prophets. Intelligent belief in the promise of the Kingdom is to be the disciple’s first step, coupled with a major U-turn in lifestyle. In this way men and women can align themselves with God’s great purpose for the earth (Mark 1:1, 14, 15; Heb. 2:3).

The nature of Jesus’ activity was that of a herald making a public announcement on behalf of the one God of Israel. The thrust of the message was that each individual should undertake a radical redirection of his life in face of the certainty of the coming Kingdom of God. This was, and still is, the essence of the Christian Gospel. How can it be otherwise, when it is the Gospel message which comes from the lips of the Messiah himself?

It is a matter of common sense to recognize that by using the term “Kingdom of God” Jesus would have evoked in the minds of his audience, steeped as they were in the national hope of Israel, a divine worldwide government on earth, with its capital at Jerusalem. This is what the Kingdom of God would certainly have meant to his contemporaries. The writings of the prophets, which Jesus as a Jew recognized as the divinely authorized words of God, had unanimously promised the arrival of a new era of peace and prosperity. The ideal Kingdom would rule forever. God’s people would be victorious on a renewed earth. Peace would extend across the globe. Jesus would be on the restored throne of David in Jerusalem.

Thus to announce the coming of the Kingdom involved both a threat and a promise. To those who responded to the message by believing it and reordering their lives accordingly, there was a promise of a place in the glories of the future divine rule. To the rest the Kingdom would threaten destruction, as God executed

judgment upon any not found worthy of entering the Kingdom when it came. This theme governs the whole New Testament. In the light of this primary concept the teaching of Jesus becomes comprehensible. It is an exhortation to win immortality in the future Kingdom and to escape destruction and exclusion from the Kingdom.

Traditional systems of Gospel preaching are saddled with the unbiblical destiny of the believer described as heaven at death. The Abrahamic covenant which underlies the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom is then applied to Jews only! But it is the *Christians* who according to Jesus are destined to “inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) and the Kingdom. Christians are the true seed of Abraham to whom the promise of the inheritance of the Kingdom was made (Rom. 4:13). ✧

What Do You Think About This History?

Dr. H.A. Wolfson of Harvard: The “conception of the Trinity was looked upon by the [Church] Fathers themselves as a **combination of Jewish monotheism and pagan polytheism, except that to them this combination was a good combination**; in fact, it was to them an **ideal combination** of what is best in Jewish monotheism and of **what is best in pagan polytheism**, and consequently they gloried in it and pointed to it as evidence of the truth of their belief. We have on this the testimony of Gregory of Nyssa — one of the great figures in the history of the philosophic formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity — and his words are repeated by John of Damascus — the last of the Church Fathers.

“The Christian conception of God, argues Gregory of Nyssa, is **neither the polytheism of the Greeks nor the monotheism of the Jews** and consequently it must be true, for ‘the truth passes in the mean [middle] between these two conceptions, **destroying each heresy**, and yet, accepting what is useful to it from each. **The Jewish dogma is destroyed** by the acceptance of the Word and by belief in the Spirit, while the polytheistic error of the Greek school is made to vanish by the unity of the nature abrogating this imagination of plurality’ (*Oratio Catechetica* 3). As restated by John of Damascus, this ideal combination in Christianity of what is best in Judaism and paganism reads as follows: ‘On the one hand, of the Jewish idea we have the unity of God’s nature, and, on the other, of the Greek, we have the distinction of hypostases [in the Trinity], and that only’ (*De Fide Orth.* I, 7)” (*The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 1956, Vol. 1, p. 362-363).

Another among many expert observers, A.T Hanson notes this: “No responsible New Testament scholar would claim that the doctrine of the Trinity was taught by Jesus, or preached by the earliest Christians, or consciously held by any writer in the New Testament” (*The Image of the Invisible God*, 1982, p. 87).

“Many people today, even believing people, are far from understanding the basis of their faith — and how quite unwittingly they depend upon the **philosophy of the Greeks** rather than upon the Word of God for an understanding of the world they live in! An instance of this is the prevailing belief amongst Christians in the **immortality of the soul**...The Old Testament, which was of course the Scriptures of the early Church, has no word at all for the modern (or ancient Greek) idea of ‘soul.’ We have no right to read this modern word into St Paul’s Greek word *psyche*; for by it he was not expressing what Plato had meant by the word; he was expressing what Isaiah and what Jesus meant by it.

“In the Old Testament man is never considered to be a soul dwelling in a body, a soul that will one day be set free from the oppression of the body, at the death of that body, like a bird released from a cage. **The Hebrews were not dualists** in their understanding of God’s world. They believed that just as there is **one** God, and one alone, so there is only **one** world, and one alone, not a world of the spirit *and* a world of matter. Thus they believed that man, being part of the world, is necessarily but **one** also...**The popular doctrine of the soul’s immortality cannot be traced back to a biblical teaching.**”

— George A.F. Knight, *Law and Grace*, 1962, p. 78-79

Comments

• “I was brought up in a home that went to church every Sunday. I had strong faith from a young age. About 12 years ago I started to study the Bible seriously and realised that most of what I believed was wrong. I no longer believed the dead were in heaven and I realised salvation wasn’t given to those who asked Jesus into their hearts but rather those who obey Jesus. This was a shock to me. Eleven years ago I was challenged to study is Jesus God. I had always taught the people I evangelized to that he was God. After a short study in my Bible, reading the greetings from Paul’s letters and realising Jesus died and God is immortal, I knew the Trinity was not true. This was a very lonely time for me. The elders from our church came to visit me and told me I had no salvation. They told my wife that I was dragging my 3 children away from the Christian faith. I was reading my Bible more than I had ever read it and crying out to God for the truth. About 6 years ago I found Anthony Buzzard’s teaching online. I realised I wasn’t alone and others had similar understanding of the clear Scripture that I could see. I started street preaching 2 years ago. My life is Jesus. My 3 children, two of whom are now married, are all committed passionate Christians and all have a unitarian understanding.” — *New Zealand*

• “Reflecting on the Roman Catholic religion I was raised in, and studying the life of Jesus, I became curious about how Jesus lived and worshipped himself. As Jesus was a Jew I wanted to learn more about what he was taught as a learned rabbi, so I started to listen to modern orthodox rabbis. I would frequently hear how the most learned Jewish rabbis denounced modern common Christian doctrines, in particular the doctrines of original sin, atonement through human sacrifice, God coming down in human form and also the Trinity. It didn’t make sense to me that if Christianity followed from Judaism, how could Christians just come up with a completely different understanding of important religious doctrines? The rabbis would ask Christians to find clear and specific verses in support of these doctrines, which Christians couldn’t find and struggled to explain. As Jesus’ followers were adherents of the Jewish faith, I wanted to figure out how the earliest Jewish Christians could justify accepting what is being labelled as foreign and pagan idolatry by modern-day Jewish scholars. To my amazement I was about to start my journey to Unitarian Christianity without knowing it. I was about to discover that none of the followers of Jesus believed in any of these modern common Trinitarian Christian doctrines. I was going to learn that I could accept the God of Abraham and Jesus as a Messiah and prophet just like those earliest Christians, but it was not going to be in the religion I was born into. As I continued studying I came across a great Christian Unitarian preacher from the 1700s named Joseph Priestley who would be a game changer in my religious beliefs. Joseph Priestley, born in 1733 in England, was a respected scientist, historian, grammarian and theologian. He published *An History of the Corruptions in Christianity* in 1782. The book is now free online and just an amazing record of how the polytheistic Greeks and Romans contaminated the original form of Christianity which was strict Monotheistic (Unitarian) Judaism at its core along with the idea of accepting Jesus as the Messiah.” — *New York*

• “It’s been a pleasure to find your site. I started to wake up to these things around 1980 and to who the true Jesus the Christ is in 1990. So, I’m well versed in things pertaining to the Theocratic Kingdom of God, out here in the hinterland of Manitoba.” — *Canada*

• “I’ve recently (the last 2 or 3 months) come to understand the Gospel of the Kingdom, and spend every waking moment reading the scriptures that have come to life because of this understanding. I also understand that our Lord commanded baptism as an outward admission of faith. My only concern is to obey our Lord’s commands.” — *Georgia*

• “I’ve only recently discovered that the Trinity is a man-made doctrine. I’m in a process of re-learning God’s story with humanity and I believe that this magazine will be a great help in this journey. Thank you for standing up for truth!” — *Switzerland*