

# Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 24 No. 1

Anthony Buzzard, editor

October, 2021

## The Charismatic Church

by Nigel Page-Jones, England

### Revival

Prophecies are common in the Charismatic Church. Some prophecies were spoken over me about my role in the forthcoming revival. That was 25 years ago. Young and impressionable at the time, I was excited at the prospect of being part of a movement which made a difference, but now, in retrospect, perhaps I just wanted to fit in and feel good about myself. The Charismatic movement appeals to such insecurities. The prophecies never came true. Perhaps it was my fault; perhaps I had not been stepping out in the right way and with enough faith.

The feeling of failure is surprisingly common in a church movement which claims to be based on positivity and freedom. Part of the attraction for newcomers is the promise of a more fulfilled life and, quite literally, a brand-new glittering career in the Kingdom of God with guaranteed job satisfaction. As time passed on however, it became apparent for us all that our initial hopes and dreams were more elusive than expected. Essentially, the Charismatic Church makes promises that it cannot deliver. It attracts many, but equally disappoints many as the promises inevitably fade over the years. The blame for this is placed at the doorstep of those who finally lose hope. It is a genius scheme, and one which reaps many financial rewards for some.

We had been part of the Charismatic movement for many years before starting to question its theology. This may be surprising to some readers but I suspect that it is not too unusual. Church is complicated. We are complicated. As needy humans we are often more concerned about a sense of belonging, rather than issues of biblical doctrine.

A friend had recommended a book to me, and in the hope of reigniting some of my old enthusiasm I bought a copy. I had read many books over the years. They made me feel good for a short period of time but were soon forgotten. Looking back, I shudder at some of the bad theology these books contained. I had not once checked a single book against the Bible, but instead was more concerned that it was a good read. Any book claiming to be Christian was good enough for me, especially when it came with a recommendation from the church. A good example was *The Shack* which sold millions of copies despite its emotional manipulation, mysticism and appalling theology.

This new book which had been recommended to me was about end-time revival. It was a topic which had captivated me but one which I was starting to find little evidence for in the Bible. I underlined parts of the book which were suspect, and soon many pages had ink on them. I had been taught that we were on the crest of the greatest revival of all time, which would ultimately usher in Jesus' second coming, and this book suddenly brought the absurdity of this belief into focus. The claims were speculative at best, and in fact the Bible speaks of a falling away rather than an end-time revival.

The expectation of a coming revival is deeply embedded within the Charismatic Church. It is an event which will see the same miracles demonstrated at Pentecost but this time on an even grander scale, where the Spirit of God will be poured out worldwide in such a way that multitudes will come to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. In the early 1990s most Charismatic Churches were embracing the exciting movement known as the "Toronto Blessing" which held out the hope of the final revival. Manifestations such as healings, deliverances and visions were reported. Churches from all over the world sent their ministers to Toronto to "catch the fire" and to bring it home. Soon we were listening to accounts from those who had recently returned from Toronto and had witnessed the events first-hand. When they related the manifestations which they had witnessed, an anticipation and hope arose in those of us listening. We were told that this was faith rising up from within us. Words can be incredibly persuasive. Most of us long to be part of something, especially when it is presented as a move of God which would change the whole world for the common good.

As the speaker drew to a close, we were eager to participate. We rushed to the front hoping that God was speaking to us personally as "words of knowledge" were given. Catchers were positioned behind the front row in order to avoid injury. We were urged to just turn our brains off and receive. Most of the first row fell as the minister swept by and exerted a little pressure on the forehead or stomach, and yet most of the pressure came from ourselves. To fall "in the Holy Spirit" said something of God's anointing upon our lives. Reputation is important. It never looked good to be the only one left standing.

On one particular occasion I persuaded a friend to attend a meeting. He described himself as an atheist although he also had a keen interest in New Age. He certainly knew nothing of the phenomenon of falling

backwards under supernatural power, otherwise known as being “slain in the spirit.” As soon as we arrived he was greeted enthusiastically as a newcomer. Within seconds I looked behind me and saw this friend on the floor surrounded by a crowd looking rather pleased with themselves. I was absolutely stunned. This was undeniable proof of a supernatural power at work. Let me reiterate that this friend knew nothing of such occurrences beforehand. Even the others seemed moderately bemused as there were no signs of consciousness. It was only after several minutes that my friend came to. Later on I asked him what had happened. He described the experience as a blanket which had enveloped him with “waves of love.” Ultimately the experience bore no fruit despite my subsequent efforts to explain the Gospel to him. He was left more confused than ever. As a witness to the event I was left more deceived than ever.

A myriad of scenes took place during these extended church services which were fascinating simply on a human level but even more so on a spiritual level. We never really knew what was happening but essentially assumed that God was on the move and used mysterious ways beyond our understanding. This exciting period lasted for perhaps two years before things eventually returned to normal. Many had already left the church by that time. This was perhaps not surprising because yet again promises were made but had not been delivered. All the talk of miracles which were to lead to Jesus’ second coming had dried up and meanwhile, nothing had actually changed. Those of us who still remained part of the church pinned our hopes on the next revival which would surely come soon and usher in Jesus’ return, this time for real.

Despite my now profound cynicism of the “Toronto Blessing,” I understand why church leaders ran with it. Their contemporaries were doing likewise. We find affirmation for our actions in those around us. Furthermore, as leaders and carers for the flock, they thought this so-called move of the Spirit held out the hope of great benefit to everyone involved. Leaders followed their intuition as best they could but ultimately lacked discernment. And those of us who blindly followed the leaders lacked discernment also. In the final analysis, God was not part of this so-called supernatural move and nobody was without blame. Deception is powerful.

### **The Gifts of the Spirit**

God still heals and performs miracles today, but I now believe that the gifts of the spirit as described in the New Testament are no longer available to the church. They started to fade towards the end of Paul’s ministry. There may have been some outbreaks since New Testament times but they have been rare and should be considered as exceptional.

The issue of tongues seems to be at the heart of this debate. The Charismatic Church teaches that the gift of tongues is still available today and is considered evidence of having received the Holy Spirit, or being “sealed” as a Christian. Consequently, there is always doubt over those Christians who do not speak in tongues. This is often unspoken but always inferred.

Although it was almost 30 years ago now, I clearly remember going forward following an altar call for a preacher to pray that I receive the gift of tongues. According to him this was necessary for salvation. The experience certainly felt supernatural. In fact, often during ministry times there were real sensations such as heat spreading through the body or shaking. In this case I remember new words coming into my mind. This continued over the next few days and soon I was able to string a sentence of strange words together with ease.

This may sound an odd confession to make when I now believe that the gift of tongues has ceased. It is possible that psychological factors or demonic activity were at work, but whatever the reason I do not believe that this experience was from the Holy Spirit. I mention this in the interests of honesty.

It was never promised that the gifts of the Spirit in evidence at Pentecost and shortly afterwards would be in operation for an indefinite period. Much is made in Charismatic circles of tongues being a heavenly language given for utterances of private prayer, but surely today’s absence of tongues in the form of intelligible languages should cast doubt on the gift for today as a whole. The Bible never equates salvation with the gift of tongues. Salvation is the free gift of immortality offered to all, made possible through Jesus’ obedience on the cross and belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom. Tongues is a gift spoken of in a few New Testament passages which do not ever suggest that it is a condition of salvation.

The initial excitement of tongues quickly faded; it became repetitive and dull. But the problem is that the Charismatic Church places a direct connection between the gift of tongues and one’s own spirituality. To admit that the experience has become jaded is to admit a poor spiritual state, or that even our salvation itself is hanging in the balance. This is yet another timebomb ticking away in the Charismatic experience. Once the initial excitement of the experience fades, it ultimately backfires, causing doubt and disillusionment.

Following tongues, people were encouraged to seek the more excellent gifts of prophecy and healing. The church taught that these gifts are imparted through touch and prayer, so whenever a speaker claimed to possess such gifts there was often a surge to the front in the hope that these same gifts would be imparted to us. Phrases such as “double portion” were often bellowed in reference to Elisha asking for double the anointing of Elijah. These gifts bolstered one’s sense of spirituality

and credibility. Those praying for us were often referred to as the “Holy Ghost bartenders,” a phrase originally given to the South African Rodney Howard-Browne who quickly earned an international reputation as one who operated under a powerful supernatural anointing.

My memory of prophecy in the church was that it was fairly general. Sometimes there were prophecies that God wanted to pour out a blessing on the city, or that God loved us all. Specific prophecies were given to me personally as a new Christian, which appealed to my need for validation. All turned out to be misleading.

During the time of the Toronto Blessing and soon afterwards there were many attempts to deliver people from demons. My personal experience of this “deliverance” is that it often led to confusion, especially for new Christians. There was never any recognisable fruit or improvement afterwards. It is only the truth found in Scriptures as revealed by the Holy Spirit which can truly renew our minds and bring lasting freedom. Unfortunately, many of us had only a very limited knowledge of the Scriptures.

We also spent many hours binding territorial spirits over our city, and this sometimes lasted until late in the evening. Popular books had been written about the significance of this, and it was generally believed that if such territorial spirits could be successfully bound (as alluded to in Matt. 16:18-19) then the city would be won for Jesus. At best, it was a waste of time and at worst, it was indulging in dangerous practices.

### **The Focus on Self**

The Charismatic movement promotes many of the same themes as the New Age movement, but couched in Christian language. Both movements focus on the individual and the potential “power within” rather than on God. In some of the more extreme Charismatic circles it is unashamedly taught that we are gods and that part of our Christian walk is to ascend to a higher knowledge of this truth. However, most teaching is content with a subtler approach of emphasising our ability to make things happen through personal faith levels. The language may have shifted from the “god within” to the “faith within,” but both messages play straight into the same New Age narrative of self-belief and self-empowerment.

In the long term the results are confusion, disappointment and resentment. Some church-goers battle on to the bitter end, unable to admit that the initial promises will never come true. Others are more honest and concede that they have been duped. A feeling of liberation follows. They feel also duped by a God whom they no longer trust. In reality though, God has been misrepresented right from the beginning. They are oblivious to the scale of Satan’s infiltration of the church and subsequently seek to re-define God on their own terms. Popular speakers such as Rob Bell have

encouraged this liberal approach with books such as *Love Wins*. The word “love” commonly becomes a substitution for “God” once this journey of liberation begins. The unsuspecting former Charismatic simply transitions from a church system with hidden New Age influences to a pagan system with obvious New Age influences. Both systems lead to the same false god of “self.”

Nowhere is this pattern made clearer than Barbara Brown Taylor’s book entitled *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Having spent years in the established church, she became disillusioned with the system. I sympathise. Barbara talks of her days of utter darkness as she was no longer able to believe in the God who was presented to her by the church every Sunday morning. She finally lost hope and felt lost in the darkness, even ashamed. She then began to embrace the “darkness of her soul.” Much of the book attempts to equate this darkness with something beneficial and comforting, even with something which should be worshipped in its own right. Barbara describes the church system as “solar,” that is to say relating to the sun which is seemingly bright and full of hope. It is the image of Christianity as portrayed by the Charismatic Church. Barbara then speaks of a “lunar” faith. This is one which has more in common with the moon as it waxes and wanes according to her mood and circumstances.

Barbara has lurched from one false belief system to an opposite one, from apparent light to extreme darkness, from the sun to the moon. She is unaware that these are two sides of the same New Age movement, both owned by Satan, whose schemes are more sophisticated than she can imagine.

The fact that we can choose between two sides is not necessarily an indication of freedom. It is often simply the false dichotomy which we see in many aspects of society but most notably in church and politics. Our freedom to choose a side may lead us to believe that we are self-determining, but in reality Satan steers both sides of the same narrative presented to us.

True freedom is only found in the Bible when read with fresh eyes and a humble heart, away from the church’s indoctrination and creeds. God never promised an easy life. Jesus died an agonising death on the cross. Many of the Apostles were martyred. Tens of thousands died at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 followed by many more deaths up until Constantine. The same pattern continued throughout the Dark Ages and afterwards with the persecution of the Waldenses and Albigenses. Next followed the martyrs of the Reformation and the sacrifices of those who took part in the Great Awakening.

It is the church which has failed us and not God. According to the Bible, Christians should expect to be rejected and hated by everyone, presumably even by the church itself sometimes. What right do we have to blame

God for calamities, depression, illness or even death itself? Such experiences should not lead us to redefine God, nor to explore “darkness” as part of a new “lunar faith.” As Christians, our only hope is to take Jesus at his word, that is if we repent then we will be participants in the future Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27) which God will award to Jesus and us one day as our inheritance. Let us pin all our hopes on this and in the meantime be prepared for hardships of any kind. ✧

## The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

“The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ...They went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand” (Clement of Rome, AD 97, *Letter to the Corinthians*, ch. 42)

“Since Christ said at the very outset of the preaching of the Gospel: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt. 4:17), it is most absurd to say that the Gospel of Christ is not the Gospel of the kingdom” (Thomas Aquinas, 1274, *Summa Theologiae*, Quest. 106, Art. 4).

According to my deeply sincere “dispensational” background (for decades), the “kingdom/king” vocabulary of the four gospels was outdated doctrine, purely for ancient Israelites, but it had nothing to do with Christians. How terribly wrong I was!

“The lord said [to Saul of Tarsus], ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up on your feet. I have appeared to you for this purpose: to appoint you a servant and a witness, both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I **will reveal to you**. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the domain of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are made holy by faith in me’” (Acts 26:15b-18, OGF\*).

Among other realities (“the things which I **will reveal to you**”) which Jesus himself communicated to Saul (or Paul) must have been the one authentic Gospel of the Kingdom of God. As Paul wrote, “the Gospel I preached is not from people. I did not receive it from people, nor was it taught to me, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Messiah” (Gal. 1:11b-12).

Modern theologians tend to separate “the Gospel of the grace of God” from “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” but Paul strongly united such phrases as mutually reflective of the one true Gospel in Acts 20:24-25! The genuine Gospel is *one*, and forceful curses are pronounced on those who would distort or pervert “the Gospel as the Messiah preached it” (Gal. 1:6-9).

There is no Scriptural doubt whatsoever that Paul avidly preached the same Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31) which his lord Jesus, the Anointed One, had been the forerunner in proclaiming (Heb. 2:3; Mark 1:1, 14-15). Far from being a dusty relic from a previous “dispensation,” the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was extremely vital and pertinent (something about which to be urgently **persuasive**: Acts 19:8) for the thirty years or so which span the book of Acts. It is still **the vital standard** for true preaching!

Furthermore, it is this very Gospel which **must** be preached until the end of this current age: “This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached around the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). The “end” of course means “the end of the age” as in the context (v. 3, 6). If dubious, defective theologies have currently permeated all corners of the world, it is time to replace them with the **Gospel!**

Even though it is popular nowadays to sharply distinguish traditional interpretations of Pauline theology from Jesus’ own teachings, Paul himself never contrasted his understanding of the Gospel with the sound, wholesome words of our lord Jesus Messiah: “If anyone teaches other doctrines and does not agree with the health-giving words, namely the teaching of our lord Jesus Messiah, and thus with the teaching which promotes godliness, he is conceited, understanding nothing” (1 Tim. 6:3-4a).

The word “anointed” or “Messiah” (in Hebrew *Mashiach*; in Greek *Christos*) is used in the Old Testament of consecrated priests and also of **anointed kings** (like Saul and David). **Only three times** is it used prophetically of a special “Messiah” to come, or an “Anointed One” to come!

After Hannah wrestled in anguished prayers (and finally got pregnant) and began raising Samuel, her firstborn son, whom she dedicated to the service of YHWH, she poured out a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. A dynamic, prophetic picture emerges at the end of her powerful prayer!

“He raises up the poor from the dust [cp. Dan. 12:2]; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might does one prevail. The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD [YHWH] will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to **his king**, and exalt the power of **his anointed**” (1 Sam. 2:8-10, NRSV).

So at a time of future judgment when YHWH’s enemies “will be shattered,” “He will give strength to **His king** and exalt the power of **His anointed**.” This vivid picture, including the shattering of Yahweh’s adversaries, is later developed in much greater depth in

the first Messianic Psalm, Psalm 2, which paints a wonderful portrait of who the Messiah would be:

“Why have nations crowded together, and people murmur about something empty? Earth’s kings take a stand, leaders make plans together, against Yahweh and against his **anointed** — ‘We’ll break off their means of discipline, throw off their ropes from us.’ The one who sits in the heavens makes fun; the Lord ridicules them. Then he speaks to them in his anger, terrifies them with his rage. ‘But I myself installed **my king** on Tsiyyon [Zion], my sacred mountain!’ I shall recount Yahweh’s decree: he said to me, ‘You’re **my son**; **today I myself have fathered you**. Ask of me and I’ll make nations **your domain**, earth’s ends your holding. You’ll smash them with an iron club, shatter them like an object made by a potter.’ So now, show some insight, you kings; accept discipline, you people who exercise authority in the earth. Serve Yahweh with awe, rejoice with trembling, surrender sincerely, so that he doesn’t get angry and you perish as regards the way, because his anger will soon burn up; the blessings of all who take shelter with him!” (Ps. 2:1-12, The First Testament).

One can notice easily in Psalm 2 that Yahweh’s **anointed** is also His designated **king** on Zion, parallel to Yahweh’s **king** being His exalted **anointed** in 1 Samuel 2:10. In addition, Psalm 2 clarifies that this **king/anointed** one would be Yahweh’s **Son** — “**fathered**” by Yahweh “today.”

The third (and last) passage in which the prophesied **anointed** or the **Messiah** (who is also called “**the Prince**” here) is specifically designated as such is Daniel 9:24-27. The prophecy here includes the timing factor of seventy “sevens” (490 years), with past events involving the first 69 of those “weeks” or “**sevens**” (483 years). After seven “sevens” plus sixty-two “sevens” the Messiah would be “cut off” — the starting point being the restoring and rebuilding of **Jerusalem** (after its destruction by the ancient Babylonians). Anyway, with proper historical data, one can determine Messiah as having been “cut off” in the first century AD.

Of course, many other Old Testament prophetic passages correspond to this same Messianic picture (like Isaiah chapter 11) **without** the specific vocabulary of “anointed” or “Messiah” (or *Christos* [Christ] in the Greek Septuagint).

A brief note on vocabulary emphasis might be in order. The word “Christ” itself has become too commonplace in modern speech, so to mentally translate it as **the Christ**, **Messiah**, or **the Anointed One** is quite appropriate! Since it prophetically refers to an upcoming **anointed king**, one could even translate the term as “**King**” (as sometimes done in *The Kingdom New Testament*). Also, the term “fathered” or “begotten” used in Psalm 2:7 must be carefully understood. It means being **engendered** or produced biologically. One should not give in to the nonsensical jargon that Jesus was

“begotten, not made”! To be begotten **is to be made!** It is to be brought into existence! In the case of Jesus being “fathered,” it was through God’s miraculous intervention, not natural, sexual activity.

When Jesus himself spoke frequently of the “Kingdom of God” (or “Kingdom of Heaven” at times, only in Matthew), to what was he referring? He stipulated that it was a Kingdom to **come**, in which God’s **will** would be done perfectly on earth (as it is currently done in heaven, Matt. 6:10). He clearly pointed to a time when the meek (or gentle) **will inherit the earth** (Matt. 5:5, a quote from Psalm 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34). He even spoke directly to his murderous accusers about “the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64, citing Ps. 110:1 and Dan. 7:13, 18, 22, 27). The powerful, futuristic emphasis on God’s coming Kingdom and the glorious **return** of the “Son of Man” boldly permeates Jesus’ Kingdom focus in the records of the gospels (Matt. 25:31; Luke 18:8, etc.). It is most probable that Jesus’ very phrase “Kingdom of God” is a direct allusion to Daniel 2:44 (cp. Obad. 21; Mic. 4:7-8):

“In the days of those kings [the statue’s feet], the **God of heaven** will set up a **kingdom** that will never be destroyed, and this **kingdom** will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever. You saw a stone break off from the mountain without a hand touching it, and it crushed the iron, bronze, fired clay, silver and gold. The **great God** has told the king [Nebuchadnezzar] what will happen in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation certain” (Daniel 2:44-45, HCSB).

One should read Daniel 2:27-45 to grasp and appreciate the whole context of the details of the dream and its prophetic interpretation. The statue’s head of gold represents the kingdom of Babylonia, the chest and arms of silver represent the later kingdom of Media and Persia, and stomach and thighs of bronze represent the even later kingdom of Greece (at the time of Alexander the Great). The legs of iron represent a further undesignated kingdom in the Middle East (not Europe). Perhaps the Ottoman Empire fits the picture. The feet and toes (which would mean 10 toes; see Ps. 83), partly of iron and partly of fired clay, give a picture of the future situation right before the kingdoms of this world are crushed and the **Kingdom of God** arrives. It is interesting that there are **ten** hostile people groups of the Middle East (including Assyria) listed in Psalm 83:6-8 who are bent on wiping out Israel (Psalm 83:4). It is also interesting that in the outline of future events in the book of Revelation, there are **ten** horns (**ten** kings), seeming to correspond to the **ten** toes of the dreamed statue (Dan. 2:33-34, 41-43), who are to make a solid but temporary alliance with the beast (i.e. the future antichrist: Rev. 17:12-13).

To close our cursory overview of “the Gospel of the Kingdom of God,” we will observe the prophetic words

of the angel Gabriel in chapter one of Luke. Without really exaggerating at all, one could say that Gabriel preached to Mary **the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!**

“And listen: you [Mary] will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great, and he will be called the **Son** of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will be **king** over the house of Jacob forever; **his Kingdom will never come to an end**...Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [two ways of referring to God’s miraculous, creative action]. For that reason precisely the holy child to be **fathered** will be called the **Son of God**” (Luke 1:31-33, 35).

The “today” of the **fathering** (begetting) of the **Son of God** (in Ps. 2:7) is thus precisely designated as being on the day of God’s miraculous **fathering** activity in Mary!

### Sufferings and Glory (from a Kingdom Perspective)

“For I am convinced that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worth comparing with the coming **glory** which is going to be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

“But we have this treasure [the light of the knowledge of the glory and Kingdom of God] in clay jars, so that the supreme greatness of the power will be from God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted from every side, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. We are persecuted, but not forsaken. We are struck down, but not destroyed. In our bodies we always carry the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies. For we who are living are constantly being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal bodies...So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer selves are decaying, our inner selves are being renewed day by day. These **light afflictions** last for a little while, but they are producing for us an incomparable **weight of glory** for the age to come. We do not look at the things which are seen now but at the things which are not seen, because the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen belong to the age to come” (2 Cor. 4:7-11, 16-18).

Quite clearly, to the degree to which we embrace the Kingdom hope of **glory** which will be revealed in us in the age to come, we are preparing to mature now in our attitude towards present **sufferings**: “It is through many trials that we enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

“My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and **the fellowship of his sufferings**, being conformed to his death, in the **hope** of attaining to the

**advance resurrection** from among the dead persons” (Phil. 3:10; see Lk. 14:14; Dan. 12:2).

Our identity with the Messiah Jesus involves suffering with him temporarily in the present while waiting patiently for the glorious, everlasting hope of the age to come!

“For it is better that you **suffer** for doing what is right, if it is God’s will, than for doing what is wrong” (1 Pet. 3:17).

One can slowly peruse all of 1 Peter to see how suffering for doing what is right (like Jesus) is a major theme throughout the whole letter. Jesus’ supreme model is magnificently highlighted, for he suffered greatly without an ounce of threats or retaliation ever coming out of his mouth!

“In fact, all who desire to live in a godly way in Messiah Jesus are bound to **suffer persecution**” (2 Tim. 3:12).

In a way, this entire issue of unjust suffering boils down to cleaving to Jesus’ early instructions in the Sermon on the Mount. It might be tempting at times to react to personal attacks with an edge of defensive pride, but if we are God-fearing toward Jesus’ teaching and example, we suffer with dignity and forgiveness (without bitter, sarcastic comments, etc.) while placing our sights squarely on his glorious return and the future resurrection of the age to come!

“Blessed are those who make peace, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for what is right, because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because of me. Be happy and full of joy, because your reward in heaven is great, because they persecuted the prophets who came before you in the same way” (Matt. 5:9-12).<sup>1</sup> ✧

“Scholars have internalized, de-temporalized, de-historicized, cosmologized, spiritualized, allegorized, mysticized, psychologized, philosophized and sociologized the concept of the Kingdom of God.”

— G.W. Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant*, 1970, p. 55

**\*The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation: New Testament with Commentary is now available free at [onegodtranslation.com](http://onegodtranslation.com)**

<sup>1</sup>For further reading on this topic, periodically reread three of Anthony Buzzard’s books: *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus*; *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah*; *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*. Also *The Gospel of the Kingdom* by

Wiley Jones (available free in electronic form); *The Kingdom of God* by John Bright; *Forgotten Gospel: The Original Message of a Conquering King* by Matthew Bryan (making many valuable points despite some theological inaccuracies).

## The Earth Renewed

“Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service... Without giving it much more thought we have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks...

“I’ve spoken with many people who believe that we become ‘spirits’ when we die; that we lose our bodies and float around. Some even believe we become angels. But I don’t want to lose my body; I very much want it to be renewed...

“We seem to have forgotten — or perhaps we’ve never been told — that we get the earth back as well. Too many of us have placed eternity somewhere ‘out there,’ in a wispy and ethereal ‘heaven’ that we cannot imagine; in the clouds perhaps. ‘I love the earth,’ wrote a friend, ‘and it makes me sad to think it will all be destroyed one day.’ We have all probably shared in this sadness. But we needn’t. ‘Behold,’ says the Lord, ‘I will create new heavens and a new earth’ (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1 NIV). When he says he is making all things new, he includes the earth...

“Peter pointed to the Flood of Noah’s day as an allegory [type] for the ‘day of the Lord.’ He said about the Flood, ‘By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed’ (2 Pet. 3:6 NIV). Now, we know that the earth was *not* destroyed by the Flood. **The earth remained; the ark didn’t land on Mars.** What was destroyed was all the wickedness and corruption of mankind (Gen. 6-7). The Flood *cleansed* the earth, renewed it. Noah stepped out with his family onto a **restored earth** to begin again.

“Fire is also used for cleansing throughout the Scriptures... ‘The earth and everything in it will be *laid bare*’ (2 Peter 3:10 NIV, emphasis added)... In other words, the world will be ‘exposed to judgment,’ and the earth will be cleansed of all unrighteousness. And a good scrubbing it needs.”

— John Eldredge, *The Journey of Desire: Searching for the Life We Always Dreamed Of*, p. 111-121

## Comments

• “Thank you so much for the inspiring and encouraging September newsletter. The story from a former JW was encouraging as I have experienced many of the same things. Please may the Lord continue to use you to encourage the brethren who are scattered across the globe.” — *Australia*

• “I want to take a minute to thank you again for all you do to bring God’s truth to the world. It was a little more than two and a half years ago that I read *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian* and it changed my life. I’d purchased

the book looking for information to help me combat other people’s belief in the Trinity, a doctrine I didn’t believe. I didn’t expect to have to adjust my own understanding, though! Yet that is what happened when I read that Jesus didn’t exist in heaven before his life on earth. Being an ex-JW I’d been taught that Jesus existed in heaven before his life was transferred to Mary’s womb. And even though that didn’t make sense of all that I read in the Bible, I didn’t think to question it. I figured God would help me understand in His good time. And that is exactly what he did! When I read your well-explained information, of a sudden, all that I didn’t understand in relation to Jesus and the Bible started to recalibrate in my thoughts and finally made perfect sense! I always say that truth has vitality where even the simplest lie shuts down growth, and this has proven true beyond anything I could have imagined. For me learning the truth about Jesus has been one of the most important life-transforming experiences and I continue to be amazed at how it expands and develops my understanding daily.” — *Illinois*

• “I just want to tell you how incredibly thankful I am to you. It’s through you and your teachings that I have been shown the truth. It is from your teaching that I have found myself with an unbreakable connection with Christ and a renewed love for God. I was lost in my faith before I heard the truth and as a young man, I feel like you’ve straightened my path, giving me a lifetime to explore our Lord and spread the word. It is because of you that my sons and daughters and their sons and daughters will grow up in truth. The truth is growing in your homeland.” — *England*

• “I live in India and am the leader of a mission organization which was founded in 1963. Though I studied with Baptists, I was touched by your wonderful messages online. You changed my life and I took a U-turn. When I started preaching about one God theory, all the people turned against me here. I have been all alone with the truth and fighting against Trinitarians. 99% of people and Christian leaders are preaching the Trinity and I am standing for the truth (1 Cor. 8:6).” — *India*

• “Happy to see that you carried an article on ‘hell fire’ and related doctrine (Sept.). This most heinous doctrine on a number of levels is just so obnoxious, every blow it gets has my applause.” — *Canada*

• “Thank you for the September edition. I’m sure my heart skipped a few beats when I read ‘My Story.’ Like the author, I’m from a JW background, and experiencing some of what he is going through. The reaction of the family member when she found the ‘apostate literature’ (book written by Anthony Buzzard) strikes a chord with me. The real truth will prevail. In the meantime, as sheep among wolves, we have to be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.” — *England*